MUSLIMS AND THE POLITICS OF LOVE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION

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Abstract

This thesis explores the connections between love, multiculturalism and the novel through a study of the figure of the Muslim as understood within secular Britain. I examine representations of love in British fiction published since the Rushdie affair, arguing that love is a crucial means by which novels reproduce, subvert and challenge dominant cultural and political discourses around Muslims and Islam. Selected literary texts include a wide range of subject matter, spanning varied authors and genres, but all are united by their inclusion of Muslim subjectivities and romantic relationships in Britain. In addition to studying literary texts, I also consider the critical reception of texts, exploring critics' negotiations of the discourses around Muslims and Islam pervasive in British media and politics after the Rushdie affair.

Drawing upon Talal Asad's notion of an 'anthropology of secularism', I explore love in the novel as a site of secular knowledge (Asad 2003: 1). I argue that contemporary novels which depict Muslims and Islam frequently use love as the basis for their inclusion within or exclusion from the nation. Love operates alongside and within formal literary strategies as well as concepts of gender, race, culture and class, to respond to popular debates which contest the presence of Muslims and Islam within Britain. Despite its ubiquity within popular culture, love is an under researched area which can shed light on the complex dynamics which construct and situate individuals and communities in relation to the British nation and the West more widely. Through a study of representation, this study originally contributes to an understanding of love's invisible power in political discourse.

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Introduction

Overview

Love is popularly considered to transcend culture, history and politics, occurring in a state of nature. In fact, love is tied to public negotiations of rights and responsibilities in multicultural Britain. In literary representations of Muslims and Islam post-Rushdie affair, love – romance, desire, intimacy and sex – are some of the most important and yet least analysed means of imagining and constructing multiculturalism. Through seemingly private, interpersonal relationships, novels imaginatively connect depictions of love to an affective discourse of multiculturalism. As Anne-Marie Fortier suggests of multiculturalism in *Multicultural Horizons* (2008), 'the very act of naming who and how to love, suspect, befriend, care for, embrace, welcome, and so on, performatively constructs racial, ethnic, cultural and national differences' (Fortier 2008: 89). In fictional texts which depict Muslims in Britain, love is mobilised similarly to 'performatively construct' contests around cultural, national and civilisational belonging.

In an interview about his novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Nadeem Aslam describes a fictional honour killing in Britain as 'the September 11 of this book' (Brace 2004). Sensational though it may be, this claim illustrates connections between literary depictions of sex, romance and intimacy, and contemporary multicultural discourse. I argue in this thesis that familiar tropes used in connection with Muslims and Islam in contemporary British novels – honour killings, violence against women, forced or arranged marriage, and taboo inter-cultural relationships, to name just a few – are shaped and informed by popular discourses which understand Muslims primarily in terms of their capacity to threaten the secular nation and its values. Attention to literary encounters with the figure of the Muslim reveals love's capacity to reproduce, subvert or complicate dominant perceptions of Muslims in contemporary Britain.

This thesis explores novels which seek to represent multiculturalism in Britain and the West more widely in the form of interpersonal relations, with special focus on their engagements with the highly contentious figure of the Muslim. According to Anne Norton and Arun Kundnani respectively, Muslims have come to be understood as a

'question' or a 'problem' for the West, posing significant threats to Western nations and civilisation alike (Norton 2013: 1; Kundnani 2014: 10). In the wake of events like the Rushdie affair, and more recently the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks in the US and UK respectively, conceptions of what is notionally defined as the private sphere have been altered, with Muslims facing continual demands to perform British or Western values in private and public, lest they face potential ostracisation or association with acts of terrorism.

Frequently, claims about Islam's threat to the West are made through appeals to the universal demands of love. In such arguments, love is associated with values and practices deemed British and/or Western, while Islam is seen to oppose these values and practices, thereby establishing its marginality, its illegitimacy. As a result of this, many of the novels considered in this thesis valorise transgressions of sexual and intimate practices and norms ascribed to religious and foreign sources, in favour of adherence to liberal secular modes of intimacy. By investing variants of monogamous, heterosexual, pre- or extra-marital intimate relations with the unique capacity to engender love, empathy, compassion and fulfilment in participating subjects, novels are able to naturalise British or Western values more widely as part of a universal project. Values attributed to Islam, by comparison, are seen as unnatural and irrational deviations from supposed natural and ahistorical priorities; in this way, Islam is regularly said to pose an existential threat to secular modes of living and loving.

The novels I examine have been selected on the basis of their privileging Muslim subjectivities and romantic relationships in Britain. The primary texts for this thesis are: Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *Love in a Headscarf* (2009) by Shelina Janmohamed and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2015). All of these texts are set primarily in Britain, with the exception of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which is not set in Britain but whose focus on issues around globalisation and the international "war on terror" are highly relevant to post-9/11 Britain. Shelina Janmohamed's memoir *Love in a Headscarf*, a work of non-fiction, is also an outlier which is included owing to its use of fictional tropes around romance and the chick-lit genre to articulate concerns similar to those found in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*.

In addition to literary texts, I analyse trends in literary criticism in order to understand how texts and critics alike negotiate pervasive discourses around Muslims in British media and politics after the Rushdie affair. A closer investigation shows that engagements with Muslims in literature and academic criticism regularly seek to define and direct the essential loyalties, sentiments and affiliations of both Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. I aim to question the (often implied) uses of love, desire and intimate arrangements in relation to Muslims to define who or what constitutes a legitimate British citizen, a Westerner, a European subject and so on.

Since the object of study in this thesis is the representation of Muslims in literature, my study is necessarily divorced from any actual living Muslims. Rather, this thesis is in line with Talal Asad's concept of an 'anthropology of secularism', which takes secularism as its object of study (Asad 2003: 1). My conception of Islam is therefore a necessarily discursive category: I interrogate secular representational practices locatable in Britain and the West more generally which imagine Muslims as acting, behaving and thinking in particular ways. I ask specifically how love feeds into these discourses, framing people and events in particular ways which determine what questions can be asked and what terms can be used in reference to Muslims. Violence against women, honour killings, forced and arranged marriage, taboo inter-racial and inter-cultural relationships, and other tropes form a crucial part of a repertoire which, when seen to involve Muslims, are understood within a category of "religious" violence. This category makes it possible, for instance, to publicly ask whether Muslims have a unique proclivity for violence, hatred and despotism, even at a time when the same question would be deemed highly offensive and unacceptable if directed at any other religious or ethnic group.

A renewed attention to the construction of Islam by predominantly secular literary, cultural and political discourses is imperative to this study. My methodology synthesises cultural and literary analysis, offering feminist, post-secular and historical materialist readings of literary texts. This methodology allows for the investigation of cultural and political processes – both historical and contemporary – that enable and limit specific methods and practices of representation. Furthermore, my conception of these processes establishes my argument that the history of the novel cannot be read

independently of the history of multiculturalism. This is evidenced most clearly in contemporary novels' repeated vilification of Islam and Muslims.

Representations of Islam as a threat to the West are, of course, nothing new. This trend is as apparent during the current war on terror as in 1981, when Edward Said wrote that '"Islam" has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred […] as part of what is presumed to be fair, balanced, responsible coverage of Islam' by the Western media (Said 1981: li). Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the understanding of Islam and Muslims as a problem, issue or enemy for the West to deal with is more widespread in recent decades than it has ever been, and has adopted a distinct set of features. A recent, popular strain of argumentation around Muslims is the idea of a "clash of civilisations", a phrase originally used in an article by Bernard Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' (1990) and subsequently Samuel Huntington's well known essay, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' (1993) and book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). While the concept of a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West has been applied to a host of contexts since it was first articulated, there are some important, defining traits of this argument (and others like it) we can point to: as Arun Kundnani notes, amongst competing models for understanding the dangers of 'Islamic culture or Islamist ideology' in the current climate, the overwhelming majority 'eschew the role of social and political circumstances in shaping how people make sense of the world and then act upon it' (Kundnani 2014: 10). Asserting rigid binaries around "us" and "them", removing Muslims and Islam from social and political context, and elevating culture or ideology as the sole determiner of actions are among the main features of this discourse.

One prominent trend in contemporary popular discourse about Muslims and Islam is the frequent resort to cultural/civilisational inheritance as the explanation for individual behaviour. Anne Phillips notes 'the selective way culture is employed to explain behaviour in non-Western societies or among individuals from racialised minority groups, and the implied contrast with rational, autonomous (Western) individuals' (Phillips 2007: 9). It follows that the disproportionate burden on the notion of culture as a determiner of behaviour in non-Western subjects lends itself well to overgeneralisation, group profiling and collective punishment. It further allows for the denial of non-Western subjects' individual agency and rationality, who are cast as "blind followers" of cultural dictates. By comparison, culture is erased, or simply not

seen as a factor in the actions of perceived British/Western subjects, with the working class arguably an exception.

Beyond (mis)constructions of Islam, my concern is with the implicit or 'implied contrast' which constructs British or Western values as 'rational' and 'autonomous'. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which culturally-specific notions of individualism and agency are popularly portrayed as universal truths. Immanuel Wallerstein writes about 'the jargon of the clash of civilizations, in which it is always assumed that "Western" civilization is superior to "other" civilizations because it is the only one that has come to be based on these universal values and truths' (Wallerstein 2006: xiv). How have values and practices associated with Britain and the West come to appear universal, while those associated with Islam are seen as culturally particular? What conditions can account for repeated designations of British or Western values as universally applicable, while Islam is dismissed and denigrated, not on the basis of what it states or mandates, but rather by the fact of its existence? Finally, what categories, concepts and discourses are available to contemporary writers who wish to refute, subvert or interrogate these processes and conditions?

History of multiculturalism

In order to properly understand the present context in which Muslims are represented as a troubled and troubling minority, we must account for a history of multiculturalism in Britain and its responses to the presence of Muslims in Britain, the majority of whom are migrants or the descendants of migrants from South Asia. What follows is not a comprehensive political history of multiculturalism, but rather a historical account of state multiculturalism that prioritises specific themes and events relevant to popular (mis)conceptions of Muslims since at least the Rushdie affair. Chiefly, I wish to emphasise Britain's historical uses of multiculturalism as a means of identifying and categorising groups within the nation, and managing relations between them. The history of multiculturalism is, in this reading, informed but not solely constituted by the gradual granting of political rights to various groups. Rather, I view multiculturalism as having wide implications for the management of the entire national populace, through key shifting concepts like race and attendant processes of racialisation. By highlighting continuities and breaks in the construction of race and minorities, I argue for an

understanding of Muslims as a racialised group in modern-day Britain with key ramifications for literary representations of Muslims. It is in this way too that I justify my use of the Rushdie affair as the starting point for this study.

According to Panikos Panayi, the history of multiculturalism in Britain can be traced back at least as far as 'the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which granted Roman Catholics equal rights to Protestants' (Panayi 2010: 261). From this time onward 'the rights of minorities have improved significantly and gradually since the beginning of the nineteenth century through a series of stages from the granting of equal rights and citizenship to an attempt to outlaw racial discrimination' (Panayi 2010: 261). By the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire's global reach saw small non-white communities settling in port towns and cities within Britain, as well as an influx of Jewish refugees from eastern Europe. Responding to public calls for action, the 1905 Aliens Act legalised state control and policing of immigration, and the deportation of citizens. This was the first move on the part of the British state to legally 'control the racial make-up of British citizenship and those who constitute the British population', and introduced race as a key concern of immigration policy (Panayi 2010: 213).

Race became a greater concern in Britain following World War II with the importation of Caribbean migrants to Britain to assist with reconstruction. Despite Irish outnumbering West Indian migration by a ratio of twenty to one in the 1940s and 1950s, the latter population was felt to be a provocative and disruptive presence, and the ensuing 'anti-black attacks on restaurants, hotels and individuals' around the country lead to riots by West Indian migrants in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958 (Witte 1996: 29-30). Riots and rising civil unrest ended the 'initial period' of post-immigration, 'when the existence of any problem was denied' by the government (Asad 1993: 254). The riots, and organised activism groups such as Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, eventually helped introduce the Race Relations Act in 1965, which made discrimination on racial grounds a civil offence (see Modood 2005: 114). Against a backdrop of further amendments to 1965 Act and race riots in the U.S., Enoch Powell gave the famous "Rivers of Blood" speech in Birmingham predicting largescale violent clashes if migrants were allowed to stay in the UK.

The following period, roughly from the 1970s onwards, saw the government limit further migration from former British colonies, whilst developing and instituting

multiculturalism as a 'goal for British society' (Asad 1993: 260). The changes arising from multicultural policies spanned a number of different institutions and fields, chief among them education and social services. In education, concerns around '"the problem of underachievement" by immigrant children […] led to increased attention being paid to institutionalized racism, including the negative attitudes of teachers toward the ethnic background of their immigrant pupils'; in social services, similarly, 'a concern to engage effectively (and equally) with a variety of immigrant communities' drove state reform (Asad 1993: 260). The Race Relations Act of 1976, which established the Commission for Racial Equality and tasked local authorities with preventing discrimination, created the first exemptions for racial and ethnic groups from laws deemed discriminatory: for instance, in 1976 turban-wearing Sikhs were exempted from the requirement to wear a helmet whilst riding a motorcycle, and a similar ruling in 1989 exempted Sikhs from the legal requirement to wear a safety helmet on construction sites. Shifting terminology, and emphasis on the concept of ethnicity as opposed to race, allowed for greater differentiation between non-white groups.

Modood provides the following analysis of the linguistic categorisation of non-white groups from the late 1960s onwards:

> In 1969 the favored term was "coloured," with "non-European" and "non-white" considered patronizing and "black" being "offensive and inaccurate" (House of Commons 1969, 7); the White Paper introducing the 1976 legislation speaks of "black and brown." When the matter of terminology was raised by the Home Affairs subcommittee in 1982, the then chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) informed it that despite the fact that the majority of Asians would not self-classify themselves as "black," this is "the conventional way now of regarding all those who suffer from the particular disadvantage related to colour" (House of Commons 1982, para. 391) (Modood 2005: 47).

As these shifts in terminology show, race has had a constantly changing identity, allowing for varying amounts of differentiation or heterogeneity beyond a binary racial divide in any period in recent history. What is more, the contests over vocabulary are telling of the interconnections between racism and anti-racism: as new and different anti-racist groups and trends emerged, so too did racism re-emerge in new and different forms. The vocabulary shift in the 1980s which emphasised a generalised black identity over ethnic or religious particularity, can be attributed to influential anti-racist campaigning and activism, which helped to shaped cultural and political reforms.

Modood suggests that by the 1980s, anti-racist activism had been able 'in effect, to create a new black identity or black political ethnicity' which subsumed other ethnic or religious categories, including South Asian (Modood 2005: 30).

This model of anti-racism was challenged however by the politics of representation, which emerged in left-wing politics in the 1980s and emphasised the representation or visibility of one's own collective identity in the public sphere. The growing prominence of identity politics, or the politics of recognition as it sometimes called, led activists to question whether the anti-racist assertion of 'ethnic blackness with all its powerful resonances and appeals to self-pride', could suitably accommodate the varied experiences and histories of non-white activists in Britain (Modood 2005: 44). The new emphasis on tradition, identity and cultural integrity in the 1980s, brought Asian as an ethnic categorisation to the forefront. The move from race to ethnicity did not mean that Asians were not or could not be encoded racially, nor did it preclude participation in anti-racist projects alongside West Indians, rather it is indicative of how cultural and geographical roots achieved prominence over skin tone in constituting a minority group.

Within the last twenty five years, Muslim identity has gradually come to be emphasised alongside (and arguably above) ethnic and racial descriptors. For some, displays of prejudice against Muslims, encompassing 'marginalisation, securitisation and sometimes violent physical attack, are such as to warrant comparison with previous forms of racism, such as anti-Semitism' (Morey, forthcoming). Nevertheless, as a religious minority as opposed to an ethnic or racial one, the ascription of racist and anti-racist labels to rhetoric around Muslims has been highly contentious. Islamophobia, a term denoting the particular suspicion or hatred of Muslims and Islam is contested in terms of 'definition, usage, meaning and ownership'; there are debates around whether Islamophobia exists, and, if so, whether comparisons with historically racialised discourses like anti-Semitism are justified (Allen 2010: 5).

This contentiousness, I would suggest, cannot adequately be attributed to the recency of the prominence and politicisation of Muslim identity. Rather we must consider also the 'general shift in the way the subject of race has come to be thought about and acted upon', which has seen the transformation of the 'state's antagonism towards those marked out as racially different […] into an awkward embrace' (Pitcher 2009: 33). For Pitcher, this move is epitomised in the project of integration initiated by New Labour in

the late nineties, which shows 'a qualitative change in [state] discourses of race', and 'a new logic of racial practice' (Pitcher 2009: 35). While it is useful to see New Labour as representative of this shift in the discourse of race, it can also be viewed as part of a broader trend, in which '[t]he discursive hegemony of certain kinds of multiculturalism and anti-racism has led to their "mainstreaming" and institutionalization' (Pitcher 2009: 170). Within a climate of anti-racism, it follows paradoxically that racist practices must publicly state their anti-racism. The move away from Asian as a minority categorisation and the prominence of Muslim identity is therefore conducive to particular forms of racism, since it appears removed from biological explanations of race. As Paul Gilroy explains, 'modern racism's emphasis falls on the wider dimensions of cultural and, thanks to [Samuel] Huntington and company, civilizational difference' (Gilroy 2004: 156). Gilroy further suggests that racism has, in recent years, 'acquired extra moral credibility and additional political authority by being closer to respectable and realistic cultural nationalism' (Gilroy 2004: 157). I will now examine in some detail the Rushdie affair which, as well as illustrating Muslim identity's newfound prominence, shows a convergence of nationalist, multicultural and racist discourses in state and media rhetoric and their treatment of the incident. My reading of the Rushdie affair assumes its place within a specific narrative about Muslims and multiculturalism in the UK, which links Muslims as a minority group in Britain to a series of subsequent events, both local and global, as well as setting a template of sorts for future controversies across Europe.

The Rushdie affair, the controversy around the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), marked a turning point in the establishment and prominence of Muslim identity, and served as a catalyst for the aforementioned "culture clash" or "clash of civilisations" debates which characterise contemporary debates around Muslims as a minority. The controversy started with the *The Satanic Verses*' publication in late 1988, when the novel received considerable acclaim and accolades from the British press. Within a few months however the novel had been banned by several countries with sizeable Muslim populations, and some Muslims in the UK organised protests calling for it to be banned, owing to its depiction of the Prophet. These protests were quickly followed in February 1989 by the Ayatollah Khomeini's infamous and widely condemned *fatwa*, which called for Rushdie and his publishers to be killed. According to Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, the initial '[s]mall, sober' protests in the UK generated a 'yawning indifference' from the media (Alibhai-Brown 2009). When a

protestor burnt a copy of the book at a Bradford protest in January 1989 however, media coverage condemning the protest began in earnest.

In the wake of the protests and *fatwa*, John Patten, the then Home Secretary, published an open letter in *The Times*, followed by a news release from the Home Office, the latter entitled "On Being British" (see Asad 1993: 239). Patten's rhetoric, like many media responses, emphasised the need for Muslims to better "integrate" and adopt British "core values". In both media reaction and rhetoric from politicians, there was consistent unease with the protests, or perhaps moreover, what they were seen to represent. Thus the Rushdie affair is important for it signalled questions around Muslims as a group, distinct from Asian or other ethnic/racial designations, and moreover established questions around the 'essential sentiments and loyalties' of Muslims (Asad 1993: 243).

The set of questions and debates which emerged during the Rushdie affair – around literature, Islam, cultural values, loyalties and legal rights – explains my use of the event as a watershed. For Anne Norton, primarily Western 'controversies surrounding Salman Rushdie, Theo van Gogh, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and the cartoons published first in the Danish press and later around the world' are united in their portrayal of Islam as a threat to the West's 'dearest rights – freedom of speech, freedom of the press, equality, even the pursuit of happiness' (Norton 2013: 6). These concerns form a part of the broader 'Muslim question', wherein 'Islam is marked as the preeminent danger to politics; to Christians, Jews, and secular humanists; to women, sex, and sexuality; to the values and institutions of the Enlightenment' (Norton 2013: 2-3). This is not to suggest that these concerns or contests are or were somehow new, or original to the Rushdie affair, rather simply that their articulation in terms of a Muslim (that is to say, religious, as opposed to ethnic, racial or any other) threat was arguably original.

Amidst the concerns around Muslims as a newly vocal and potentially threatening minority in Britain, the 'community-based approach to multiculturalism had begun', post-Rushdie affair, 'to be held at least partially responsible for allowing a situation of "parallel lives" to develop, which undermined social cohesion' (Weller 2009: 57). Doubts about state-driven multicultural reforms intensified in the early 2000s, with the Bradford riots in the summer of 2001 quickly followed by the September 11th tragedy in North America. The latter incident in particular instigated further upheavals for multiculturalism and racial practice in Britain, with increasing focus on Muslims during

the war on terror. In the years since the war on terror began, anxieties around both foreign and so-called "homegrown" or British-born Muslim terrorists have flourished, particularly so in the wake of the 7/7 bombings in Britain.

9/11 and the wars with Iraq and Afghanistan placed a renewed emphasis on Islam's role and responsibilities in regard to political violence. Muslims since have been burdened by what Ben Pitcher calls the 'tendency to over-extrapolate on the basis of religion and conceive of very specific political violence as characteristic of Islam in general' (Pitcher 2009: 146). Contestations over Islam's role in the 9/11 attacks saw 'two poles' become publicly available to Muslims in the UK: 'the first a consensus position defined and policed by the government […], and the second the province of extremism' (Les Back *et al*. 2002: 450). The government-defined distinction between Muslim moderates and extremists has established a widely prevalent notion of an 'evangelical battle "for hearts and souls", as emphasis is placed on Islam as essentially divided between support for terrorist fundamentalists and patriotic support for a nation under attack' (Pitcher 2009: 150-1). The impact of this binary has been dramatic and long-lasting, seeing the introduction of a host of controversial laws aimed at preventing terrorism, often before any violent act has taken place. State-funded counter-extremism programmes have emerged in the intervening years such as PREVENT, which aims 'to respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it' (Home Department 2011).

In the years since 9/11, British multicultural policies have increasingly come under fire for being overly sympathetic and accommodating of cultural difference. For Kenan Malik, a vocal critic of British multiculturalism, the 'emergence of multicultural policies helped create a more fragmented nation with little sense of a common identity and created the space for the growth of Islamic militancy' (Malik 2006). Responding to the backlash, and similar claims made the year before by Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, in 2011 David Cameron announced the demise of multiculturalism. And yet it has not been clear what this means in practice, if anything. As Pitcher points out, the

> rhetorical rejection of the concept does not mean that the state has foregone the advantages it continues to derive from a multicultural politics. Beyond its "death", multiculturalism alone is able to account for contradictory practices that simultaneously reject and exploit the economies of racial difference. […] The state does not have an interest in the resolution of this crisis [i.e. a racialised Muslim minority in conflict

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with a white British majority], but rather its careful management (Pitcher 2009: 166).

Critical concepts

As this brief historical discussion of multiculturalism demonstrates, multiculturalism should not be primarily viewed as a response to 'the "fact" of diversity' (Fortier 2008: 3). Rather the 'construction of diversity' is better seen 'as an *effect* of modern government' (Asad 1993: 260). Thus I contend that the discourse of multiculturalism allows for the state's creation and identification in the national space of a single majority and multiple minorities, be they racial, ethnic, cultural or religious. My conception of multiculturalism in the post-Rushdie affair period is primarily as a public debate, 'a point of contention and controversy around which a number of questions have organized themselves, [and] the focus of an incredible variety of social, cultural and political issues' (Pitcher 2009: 1). Within this debate '[t]he state serves of course as a point of focus around which other actors – the media, religious, campaigning and advocacy groups, and so on – interact and interrelate' (Pitcher 2009: 4).

I take the categories of majority and minority to be defining characteristics of multicultural discourse in Britain. As Asad notes, a discourse of majorities and minorities 'make[s] the implicit claim that members of some cultures truly belong to a particular politically defined place, but those of others (minority cultures) do not – either because of recency (immigrants) or of archaicness (aborigines)' (Asad 1993: 257). What is more, as Anne Phillips points out in *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, multicultural discourse has a

> tendency to represent individuals from minority or non-Western groups
> as driven by their culture and compelled by cultural dictates to be behave
> in particular ways. Culture is now widely employed in a discourse that
> denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and
> treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say or do
> (Phillips 2007: 9).

Following from this conception of members of minority groups is also the 'implied contrast with rational, autonomous (Western) individuals, whose actions are presumed

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to reflect moral judgments, and who can be held individually responsible for those actions and beliefs' (Phillips 2007: 9).

And yet, as we have also seen, categorisations of minorities has continual potential to change. Multiculturalism is therefore a fluid concept, or as Fortier puts it, 'something that is put to work, which is mobilized to produce desires, identities, anxieties, and so on, in the reconfiguration of what connects inhabitants of the national space to one another, as well as to the nation itself' (Fortier 2008: 3). Within this discourse or debate, Muslims are routinely framed as a unique "problem" or "question" for the British population and state to handle or manage. An interesting example discussed by Fortier is an article in *The Telegraph* which ranked various traditional items of Muslim female dress on a scale of 'moderate' to 'fundamentalist' (Fortier 2008: 96). This example, which differentiates on the basis of clothing between the bad model of Muslim Britain who shows 'signs of religious orthodoxy' and 'fundamentalis[m]', and the corresponding 'good model of Muslim Britain as moderately traditional and modern', is revealing less of concern for the Muslim reader situated between the poles of radical and moderate belief, and more for the 'aesthetic disciplining and normalization' of 'the non-Muslim onlooker who can tell the difference' (Fortier 2008: 96). Here we see how a news item participates in a multiculturalist discourse which produces knowledge about a minority group in Britain who can be accordingly assessed and validated by the majority.

In addition, this article is indicative of the (re-)emergence of gendered stereotypes and categories of Muslims since the Rushdie affair. Gender continues to be an important site within multicultural discourse, informing the roles and responsibilities apportioned to racialised and non-racialised subjects alike. Traditionally, Muslim women have been (and continue to be) stereotyped in terms of their submission and subjugation to the whims of Muslim men, with items of dress such as the hijab or headscarf, or niqab, serving as a visible indicator of patriarchal oppression. As feminist scholar and historian Leila Ahmed suggests, these stereotypes around Muslim women are the result of a 'presumption […] that Islamic cultures and religion are fundamentally inimical to women in a way that Western cultures and religions are not' (Ahmed 1992: 245). Amidst a climate of fear, gendered categorisation and stereotyping are also apparent in representations of the male Muslim fundamentalist, bearded and wearing traditional dress. While the most common image of the militant Muslim is male, more recently the

concept of the 'jihadi bride' has incorporated women to an extent as potentially dangerous agents (see Jacoby 2015). It should be noted that these historically gendered stereotypes around Muslims and Islam, even when they appear in feminist guises, are often 'constructed by the discourse of patriarchal colonialism in the service of particular political ends' (Ahmed 1992: 244). The gendered dimensions of racialised, colonial discourse are eloquently summarised by Gayatri Spivak's phrase, '[w]hite men are saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak 1988: 296).

One of the guises in which gender is used as a site of conflict for liberal values is love. The controversial writer and political activist, Ayaan Hirsi Ali publicly identifies organised religion, and Islam especially, as posing a unique threat to humankind, the West and Enlightenment freedoms. Moreover, Hirsi Ali is part of a much wider trend in academic and popular circles alike that presents Islam as a threat to liberal values, particularly in matters of the heart. Sensational anecdotes about forced marriage, honour killings, and thwarted relationships between Muslims (particularly Muslim women) and non-Muslims (usually men) appear in her essays as proof of Islam's (and Muslims') proclivity for violently suppressing love's attainment and expression (see Hirsi Ali 2004: 17-35). Interventions by family and religion into romantic relationships are to be firmly rejected, Hirsi Ali claims, since they constitute crimes against human nature. Islam is thus said to require largescale reform along the lines of the Enlightenment or the Reformation, to bring Islam in line with European or Western ideals.

As this example suggests, in recent years multiculturalism has become a highly emotive discourse. Returning to Fortier, multiculturalism is something which is used to govern affective bonds, 'naming who and how to love, suspect, befriend, care for, embrace, welcome, and so on' (Fortier 2008: 89). As we have seen, it is not simply racial, ethnic, cultural or religious minorities who are the recipients or beneficiaries of multiculturalism; rather it is the entire population who are subject to 'the prescription of sentiment […] for the nation, for the community, for the neighbour, for the Muslim, for the suicide-bomber, for minorities' (Fortier 2008: 89). Therefore, multiculturalism mediates between the individual and the nation, providing a way of imaginatively and emotionally dividing the nation along racial, ethnic, cultural and religious lines, as well as imaginatively constructing and defining the individual citizen's place within it – as majority or minority, as native or immigrant, as white or as other. Within this framework, emotions – typically thought to exist within the private domain of

individuals – are intrinsically bound up with political and social concepts such as rights and responsibilities.

Feminist critics have examined the politics of emotions and affect as they relate to multiculturalism, particularly the relationship between multiculturism, state governance and the management of love. In her highly influential analysis of colonial governance, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Ann Laura Stoler highlights the importance of love in colonial political arrangements, suggesting that 'the micro-management of sexual arrangements and affective attachments' is of 'critical' importance 'to the distinctions between ruler and ruled' (Stoler 2002: 8). In contemporary multicultural Britain, Fortier suggests similarly that '[l]ove, suspicion, fear, tolerance, pride, become markers of what multicultural intimacy is about' (Fortier 2008: 89). 'Multicultural intimacy' is a helpful term for recognising the emotional appeals inherent in political and cultural discourses, and moreover the prominence of questions around who loves and is loved. Taken as a whole, the case of multiculturalism is indicative of how racialised questions of belonging, trust, and love in the domain of culture are essential components of access to (and denial of) political rights in contemporary Britain. As Sara Ahmed puts it, '[i]t is "love", rather than history, culture or ethnicity that binds the multicultural nation together' (Ahmed 2004: 135). Furthermore, 'migrants must identify themselves as British by taking "the nation" as their object of love' (Ahmed 2004: 134). The notion of love as central to politics is one of my principal contentions in this thesis.

Popular conceptions imagine love to belong to the world of individuals, located principally in the private sphere, as opposed to public. However, I wish to historicise love as a hitherto unmarked discursive category. Theorist Zygmunt Bauman's monograph, *Liquid Love*, presents a detailed sociological analysis of contemporary romantic attachments, love, and relationships in what Bauman terms the 'liquid modern world' (Bauman 2003: xiii). While claiming that '[l]ove and death have no history of their own', Bauman's account nevertheless historicises and contextualises love and romance in the West as an evolving cultural phenomenon (Bauman 2003: 3). He notes, for example, that since 'the romantic definition of love as "till death do us part" is decidedly out of fashion […] the set of experiences referred to by the love word has expanded enormously. One-night stands are talked about under the code name of

"making love"' (Bauman 2003: 4-5). The 'one-night stand' denotes secular (and sexual) freedom beyond the powers of the state and beyond the judgement of wider society.

By making a particular model of love appear natural, universal and ahistorical, political actors in the West have used love as a yardstick with which to measure cultures, societies, nations and peoples; rewarding those who meet its standards and punishing those who do not. For this analysis I am highly indebted to Elizabeth Povinelli's *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006), which critically examines love as one of several 'moving targets developed in Empire and used to secure power in the contemporary world' (Povinelli 2006: 181-2). For Povinelli, it is precisely love's 'phantom nature' which gives it its political power, serving as a

> critical mechanism by which the history of the liberal present is written,
> liberal life constituted and distributed, liberal forms of evil apportioned
> and punished, the good figured; and against which experiments in
> progressive mutual obligations beyond the conjugal couple and
> biological family are formulated (Povinelli 2006: 182).

The adoption of love in this manner – as integral to justifications of political legitimacy – has been in use since at least the Enlightenment. In order to understand love's role in the contemporary context of multicultural Britain, it is essential to acknowledge how our contemporary conception of love has been shaped by a wider history, rooted in 'capitalism and empire' (Povinelli 2006: 202).

Enlightenment values, Povinelli writes, 'measure the worth of a life, and a society, relative to its capacity to constitute and vest sovereignty in the individual' (Povinelli 2006: 183). 'Many names have been given to this form of subjectivity across many languages', Povinelli states: 'the autological subject, the *pervenu*, the self-made man, *die Autonomie*' (Povinelli 2006: 183). The sovereign subject, the ideal of the (post-)Enlightenment, Povinelli suggests, enacts 'the *fantasy* of self-referential enclosure', in contrast with the subject who is constituted by or within 'external social constraints of familial, aristocratic, and religious power' (Povinelli 2006: 184). The Enlightenment, in other words, can be conceived of as enacting a performative break with identities seen to be imposed or determined by cultural, political or religious belonging. In so doing, Enlightenment values offered the potential for individuals to transcend social determination in order to acquire self-determination.

16

What is the significance of love for the Enlightenment subject seeking self-determination? As Povinelli argues, '[t]he subject-in-love is like the self-governing subject insofar as both are ideologically oriented to the fantasy of the foundational event. Both self-sovereignty and intimate recognition establish a new subject out of the husk of the old and reset the clock of the subject at zero' (Povinelli 2006: 187-8). Love is therefore a symbolic (re-)enactment of self-determination, through the simultaneous processes of self-discovery and self-creation. Thus love is an essential means by which 'liberal subjects' take the ability to 'hinge the most personal of feelings to the broadest currents of world history' (Povinelli 2006: 192).

One result of this according to Povinelli is that both the 'Enlightenment and intimacy are bootstrap performances, ruptural foundations, events that happened in a place but, because they broke with that place, therefore can be universalized' (Povinelli 2006: 200). European ideals around love between a consenting heterosexual couple and the nuclear family are seen to be universally applicable and can therefore be exported. There is reason to be sceptical of an unquestioning adoption of the consenting, monogamous couple as the universal symbol of freedom. For Povinelli, the use of this love narrative as a means for achieving freedom is a paradoxical one. This can partly be put down to the contradictions inherent in the narrative construction of love in Western culture: love 'is where I find myself and where I lose myself' (Povinelli 2006: 194).

We can expand on this by noting the tension in love narratives between agency and powerlessness. On the one hand, love is supposed to be a means of self-empowerment, yet on the other, love renders the participants as entirely passive, "falling". Thus, for Povinelli, the 'self-governing subject' who emerges through love 'is necessarily phantasmagorical for the simple reason that no one can pick herself up by her own bootstraps. The felicity of this foundational event depends on an entire host of conditioning social institutions and relations' (Povinelli 2006: 194; 202). Love is not free in any absolute sense, since all people are necessarily dependent on others.

Indeed, the freedom granted to individuals to enter partnerships freely independent of familial, cultural and religious constraints depends upon a particular conception of the nation-state, which guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals as opposed to families, cultures and religions. And yet even as the modern liberal states shape and

dictate intimate norms, these same states appear to uphold a division between public and private spheres which is said to allow for the development of the self-determining individual. As Povinelli writes, '[t]he maintenance of intimate sovereignty as a truth of liberal empire [...] works by casting some of the liberal dependencies on genealogical principles as "private" matters' (Povinelli 2006: 198). The demarcation between public and private spheres disguises, in other words, the interdependency between public and private, political and personal. And yet, while apparently free from control by the state, the 'imaginary of the intimate event is always disrupted and secured by the logic of the exception - "except, of course, in the case of..."' (Povinelli 2006: 192-3). The criminalisation of particular intimate practices such as polygamy, incest and paedophilia reveal the state's power to enforce intimate norms through the threat of imprisonment and violence, even as the state is tasked with preserving the distinction between private and public matters.

I wish to turn now to the history of the novel and its development as a form, which has a dialogic relationship with the processes described above: the emergence of a public and private sphere, the autonomous individual and love's attendant special status. Theorists of the novel have argued that the novel's rapid ascent was dependent on a host of factors, prominent among them capitalism, economic individualism, the new strength of the middle class in England which constituted it as a reading public (Watt 1957); and imperialism and empire (Said 1993). These dependencies which made the novel possible were also, in turn, impacted by the novel and its '[n]ew strategies of representation' (Armstrong 1987: 9).

As Ian Watt argues, the realist form, with its sustained attention to the 'individuality of the actors concerned, [and] the particulars of the times and places of their actions' constituted the novel's 'most original feature', distinguishing it from prior modes and forms of storytelling (Watt 1957: 35; 11). Realism, as the primary innovation of the novel, has been credited with rendering political dependencies invisible. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), for example, Armstrong argues that the novel led directly to the 'the formation of the modern political state' owing to early novels' revisions of 'the way in which an individual's identity could be understood' (Armstrong 1987: 9). The novel was essential for the creation of a 'private domain' which 'allowed diverse groups of people to make sense of social experience as […] mutually exclusive worlds of information' (Armstrong 1987: 10). Edward Said

makes a similar argument regarding the early English novel's relationship with imperialism, whereby the novel facilitated a particular conception of empire through its peripheral appearance in texts; empire was 'very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named, rarely studied […], or given density' (Said 1993: 75).

As well as imperialism and the rise of the middle class, realism has been linked to key developments in the history of sexuality. Armstrong argues that the early novel's enactment of a public-private split located the individual subject's sexual practices as existing 'outside and apart from social history' (Armstrong 1987: 10). It is arguably this factor, above any other, that has contributed the most to love's enduring symbolic power, since the public-private distinction is seen to guarantee love as a private, and thus politically neutral act as well as a historical constant.

In the English novel tradition, representations of love are regularly afforded the privileged position of universality. Armstrong describes how

> [m]ost fiction, which represented identity in terms of region, sect, or faction, could not very well affirm the universality of any particular form of desire. In contrast, domestic fiction unfolded the operations of human desire as if they were independent of political history. And this helped to create the illusion that desire was entirely subjective and therefore essentially different from the politically encodable forms of behavior to which desire gave rise (Armstrong 1987: 9).

The invisibility of politics, Armstrong suggests, is precisely what affords depictions of love political power. Just as love is capable of obscuring subjects' dependencies on the state and political arrangements, the novel also possesses a historical relationship with what Fredric Jameson calls the 'privatization of contemporary life' (Jameson 1981: 4). This relationship has contributed to a historical understanding of literature as one of several 'blind zones' which allows for 'pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation' (Jameson 1981: 5). The contemporary multicultural novel works similarly, intervening in a political landscape through representations of apparently apolitical love and romantic engagements between men and women.

Modern novels draw upon this history, by enlisting culturally-specific behaviours in service of narratives of romance, desire and love which are seen to exist and operate

outside of history, and therefore universally. In novels written and published in contemporary Britain which draw upon available discourses of multiculturalism, Muslims' adherence to Islam is frequently contested through love narratives which frame Islam as restrictive, oppressive and regressive in relation to love and intimate arrangements which are normalised in the West. In practice such deployments of love are often subtle, owing to the novel's aforementioned historical legacies around colonialism, the rise of the middle class and individualism, and the supposed universality of love.

Out of the texts this thesis will cover in-depth, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) serves as a paradigmatic example of post-Rushdie affair depictions of Muslims in relationships. Deedee, the protagonist's girlfriend, dramatises the protagonist's irreconcilable divide between secular liberal love and pious Islamic hate through an ultimatum: 'it's me or the enchanted aubergine' (Kureishi 1995: 221). This binary choice in the novel encapsulates the division between Muslim characters who hate or oppose universal love and their opposite, tolerant liberals who are capable and deserving of love. The Muslim's rejection of love is represented as irrational, hence 'the enchanted aubergine' symbolises Islam, as opposed to an apparently rational and natural act of liberal love. Love operates in this binary, I would suggest, to justify the limitations of the liberal's love. Rendering Muslims irrational is essential, in other words, for maintaining the universality of liberal logic. The motivation for an individual or collective rejecting a liberal conception of love cannot be on rational, intellectual or ethical grounds, since that would compromise the proclaimed universality of secular liberal love. Rather, a rejection of secular liberal values must be given exclusively psychological motives – rage, jealously, and so on. Kureishi's binary, in short, casts ideologies which regulate social interactions and relationships in different ways to Western liberalism as entirely undesirable deviations from self-evident truths. Other ideals and models of social and sexual conduct are therefore not viewed as merely competing with the Western liberal model, as even this concedes too much. Rather, it is claimed that Muslims deny self-evident, natural truths, and as such it follows that those who do this can be afforded neither sympathy nor protection in multicultural Britain.

By demonising those with competing conceptions of love, *The Black Album* suggests the limits of its own conception of love. Deedee's ultimatum reveals that Muslims,

viewed through the binary lens of the "clash of civilisations", cannot love nor become objects of love unless they uncritically abandon their own values in favour of those favoured by current secular liberal thought. We can see here how the representation of love, with its normalisation of particular behaviours plays a crucial role in constructing Muslims as representatives of hate in opposition to the loving, benevolent, secular British nation.

In subsequent published novels and memoirs by Nadeem Aslam, Monica Ali, Leila Aboulela and other writers, the treatment of Muslims in relationships may reproduce, subvert or complicate *The Black Album*'s conception of the Muslim subject who is incapable and undeserving of love. However, I argue they cannot be read apart from contemporary media and political debates about Muslims, which frequently rely on the notion of Muslims as inherently unreasonable, irrational and therefore closed to dialogue – in a word, unlovable. It is not a coincidence that both *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Brick Lane*, which depict a number of licit and illicit relationships within predominantly Muslim and Asian communities in the UK, present love as unattainable. The communities in these novels, materially and ideologically deprived, do not have the means to engender love. The happy ending, the coming together of two uniquely compatible individuals, is continually thwarted by insurmountable obstacles originating within the community, notably violence against and the forced seclusion of women. It is Muslims' inability to love, these novels suggest, which makes Muslim communities and lands hotbeds of conflict, violence and civil unrest. These narratives of love, be they tragic or romantic, are anything but politically neutral. In fact, they uphold a culturally and politically dominant narrative around Muslims as a dangerous, volatile minority in Britain who are to be continually assessed, scrutinised and validated by a morally and politically superior British majority.

Furthermore, in adhering to and adding to this dominant narrative, these texts justify and enjoin the liberal secular state's intervention into the affairs of communities deemed unfit to govern themselves, by virtue of a religion and culture which is apparently unable to produce loving, happy, and therefore loyal subjects. Finally, they offer, whether intentionally or not, complicit justification for Western-run military campaigns overseas in predominantly Muslim countries. Such military campaigns also frequently draw upon narratives about love being unnaturally restricted in the Muslim world by repressive belief systems, families, cultural practices and political systems. Lila Abu-

Lughod has written about how 'the Muslim woman in general, and the Afghan woman in particular' took on special significance in the aftermath of 9/11 and the announcement of the "war on terror": 'the question is why knowing about the "culture" of the region, and particularly its religious beliefs and treatment of women, was more urgent than exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history' (Abu-Lughod 2002: 784). Recourse to an 'imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims, cultures in which First Ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around silently in burqas' enables a self-imposed moral duty to impose and enforce liberal secular cultural and political norms worldwide (Abu-Lughod 2002: 784). Such accounts of history seek to monopolise moral superiority and benevolence – love – as intrinsic and exclusive to Western governments and people.

To summarise, this thesis is an attempt to critically intervene in understandings of culturally non-Western practices around love as exclusively motivated by cultural pressure rather than individual choice. Adopting dominant popular assumptions which distinguish between cultural and individual acts on the basis of cultural affiliation means there is a danger of reading texts that do not readily conform to the narrative trajectories and tropes employed in *The Black Album*, *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers*, according to those same reading and interpretative practices. By adopting limited and limiting conceptions of freedom which apply only to individuals as opposed to collectives, what alternative models of agency are excluded? Are there other freedoms and constraints which cannot be expressed through and contained by love and romance?

Methodology

Interrogating categories which are prevalent in mainstream discourses is integral to this study's engagement with literature and literary culture. In his analysis of Muslim writers, Geoffrey Nash describes how a 'supposed bifurcation between "Islam and the West" forces […] writers consciously or unconsciously, to make a choice between two competing narratives' (Nash 2012: 12). My research explores how the binary models available in contemporary British culture exert a wide influence across multiple interacting fronts. I would stress that the influence of "the clash of civilisations" cannot

be constrained to an author or critic 'mak[ing] a choice', as per Nash. I emphasise this because to call "Islam versus the West" a 'choice' risks downplaying the extent to which public expression in favour of "Islam" – in terms of an opposition to the West – is publicly demonised and even criminalised within Britain, the US, and beyond. That is to say that the term 'choice' may be overly generous in this context, given that 'the nation-state is not a generous agent and its law does not deal in persuasion' (Asad 2003: 6). My methodology necessitates an interdisciplinary approach which draws upon scholarship in literary studies, cultural studies, and social sciences, in order to adequately capture and work through some of these contradictions.

My study is in part a response to Talal Asad's call for an 'anthropology of secularism' (Asad 2003: 1). Asad's work seeks to understand how '"secularism" […] presupposes new concepts of "religion," "ethics," and "politics," and new imperatives associated with them' (Asad 2003: 2). This entails a recognition of how secular governance and the emergence in the West of outspokenly secular cultural movements – such as the New Atheist movement – have created a universalised category of "religion" which is identified as potentially dangerous. Moreover, Islam (and by extension its followers) are viewed in this way as arguably the most dangerous manifestation of religion in existence today. A methodology rooted in an 'anthropology of secularism' facilitates an understanding of agendas which frequently inform public discussions of Islam, as Asad shows when he questions prevalent readings of the Rushdie affair: 'the Rushdie affair in Britain should be seen primarily as yet another symptom of postimperial British identity in crisis, not – as most commentators have represented it – as an unhappy instance of some immigrants with difficulties in adjusting to a new and more civilized world' (Asad 1993: 241).

Authors, critics, and texts are viewed via this approach as shaped by a pervasive secular liberal culture *in some sense*. However, I do not hold that all authors, critics and texts are determined by culture in some arbitrary way akin to deterministic clash of civilisations rhetoric. It is simply to state that authors, critics and texts are informed by and interact with culture in conscious and unconscious, intended and unintended ways.

My methodology syntheses a wide range of approaches in order to achieve this goal, most notably historical materialism, post-secularism and feminism. This thesis includes close readings and literary analysis of a wide range of texts, in an attempt to 'connect

the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support' (Said 1993: 79).

My thesis is grounded in tenets of literary theory and an understanding of the particularities of the novel form. Literary strategies, including the use of genre, narration and temporality, are of the utmost importance in my readings of texts. These analyses prioritise the narrative depictions of relationships – intimate, sexual, companionate – and the models of multiculturalism they enact and/or subvert. Each of these chapters draws upon theories of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in order to analyse the conditions novels make available for Muslims' and Islam's inclusion within Britain, if any. Rather than rigidly or prescriptively impose sociological or political models on texts, I make selective use of these ideas to elicit original and complex understandings of these novels, and their uses of interpersonal relations to articulate multiculturalism.

I also offer feminist readings of texts in response to the enlistment of specific gendered tropes and roles – the man of letters, the domestic goddess, the abusive husband, the submissive wife – in order to narrate Muslims and Islam in Britain. As the preceding discussion has shown, feminist theory is a helpful tool for analysing interconnections between the political and intimate spheres, as well as playing a key role in histories of colonisation, race and multiculturalism. Gender is also central to intimate relations, informing and structuring the partnered subject's roles and responsibilities.

There are a few regrettable absences in this thesis which are nonetheless worthy topics of research in their own right. My thesis does not consider depictions of LGBTQ relationships – partly due to its limited application in the texts studied, partly also with consideration to the limited space afforded by the thesis. This is a topic that would readily lend itself to a thesis- or book-length study, as would an analysis of filmic representations of Muslims in love, which is also regrettably not included.

Critical perspectives

Now I wish to situate my study in relation to recent scholarly discussion of literary texts depicting Muslims and Islam. There is a tendency in such criticism to reinstate

dominant political and cultural narratives which view Muslims first and foremost in relation to their capacity to threaten Western nation states. Just as fiction depicting Muslims has been greatly influenced and shaped by the historical events related earlier in this introduction, so too has academic criticism.

The years since the Rushdie affair have seen the publication of a small but growing number of studies devoted to the new category of "Muslim writing", "literature by Muslims", or some variation. These studies vary in their approach to this category, with different methods of labelling writers and texts alike. The justification for grouping texts has proven to be contentious, particularly so when handling authors like Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie, who come from a Muslim background, speak and write on Muslims and Islam, and yet do not publicly identify as Muslim. One strand of criticism (notably Ahmed 2015; Chambers 2011; Clements 2016; Malak 2005) makes use of constructs such as "cultural Muslim" or "Muslim by heritage" to include works by these writers in their studies. Another method (see, for example, Nash 2012) simply looks at texts which give Muslims or Islam prominent roles in their narratives. In practice, my approach in this thesis conforms to the latter method, prioritising subject matter over authors' identities. This allows, for instance, for the inclusion of *White Teeth*, a text which depicts Muslims in relationships, but whose author Zadie Smith lacks any readily apparent connection with Islam.

Regardless of how such decisions are made, it is important to reflect on the adoption of Muslims and Islam as discursive categories, and the difficulties this presents. My theorising of these categories and their relevance to contemporary representations of multiculturalism and love is informed by Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin's work in *Framing Muslims*, which takes as its subject the 'limited and limiting conceptual framework surrounding Islam' locatable in the West, post-9/11 (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 20). This framework is, crucially, defined by the dominance of '[a] small, assumed repertoire of images, freighted with unquestioned cultural and moral implications' (Morey and Yaqin 2011: 21). As someone writing critically about the representation of Muslims, it is important to acknowledge that I am necessarily indebted to and informed by discourses which regularly represent Muslims and Islam as homogeneous threats to Britain and Western civilisation. While it is my goal to intervene in and reflect critically on contemporary debates around Muslims, I am also necessarily reliant to a large extent on the same limited assumptions, categories, and vocabulary which haunt them. My

hope is that this work will enable greater reflection on the agendas and purposes such categories invariably serve, by showing the extent to which Muslims proper are excluded from debates and conversations, even those which are ostensibly about them.

This exclusionary trend can be seen as long ago as the Rushdie affair, when Pnina Werbner argued for the newfound 'political utility' of literary criticism: 'Only by using modernist tools of analysis – coherence, unity, exhaustive explanation – can we arrive at an alternative interpretation of the vision of Islam intended by the novelist and the novel. In abandoning our own ethical and aesthetic canons, we have, by default, endorsed the Islamic interpretation of the novel' (Werbner 2002: 152). For Werbner, the 'Islamic interpretation' – arguably an oversimplification given the range of positions articulated by Muslims (see for instance Ahsan *et al*. 1991) – can and should be effectively overruled and disempowered through 'exhaustive' secular reading practices.

In other instances, Rushdie has been credited as an authoritative source and scholar on the subject of Islam. Indeed, Amin Malak in his chapter on *The Satanic Verses* notes at least two instances of literary critics citing Rushdie's novels as credible sources of information about Islam (see Malak 2005: 91-112). There is a risk, in other words, of scholarship taking authors and novels at their word. In certain cases, authors promote a particular image of themselves and their work, thereby encouraging this tendency. Hanif Kureishi's article in *The Guardian* describing his adaptation of his novel for the stage, for example, emphasises the prophetic qualities of *The Black Album*, claiming his 'pre-7/7 novel might shed some light on some of the things that have happened since' (Kureishi 2009).

The underlying claim in these examples, we might say, is that fiction can and does have anthropological value for readers; fiction reveals and never conceals. Works of fiction about Muslims, and the works of literary criticism that follow, often reveal the categories which readers are already familiar with from the British media – the figures of the Muslim migrant, Muslim woman, Muslim fundamentalist and moderate. Perhaps because of this – the intense familiarity of most readers with these particular categories – it is rare to find designations of British Muslims in contemporary fiction or criticism which go beyond these categories. There are few, if any, debates about the various *madhhab*, or schools of thought, which Sunni Muslims follow, or even distinctions between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Esra Mirze Santesso's analysis of *Maps for Lost Lovers* is a telling example in this regard, indicating the extent to which anthropological insight is sought in the case of novels about Muslims, along highly specific lines of inquiry. As she writes, in spite of the author's '"inauthentic" and outsider "male" position, Aslam is able to address various under-considered intricacies related to the Muslim woman's disorientation and provide a realistic depiction of the challenges experienced by mothers' (Santesso 2013: 179). Realism – in the sense of actual living persons – is the target of Santesso's study, which pursues the category of the 'Muslim woman', living in the West, through the prism of 'disorientation'. What concerns me here are the ways in which the category of the Muslim woman is conceived of as a neutral or inevitable category of person, which can justifiably be observed, studied and analysed through fiction.

Another oft-occurring category in criticism is that of the Muslim fundamentalist, who features heavily in many of the works I consider in this thesis. Various critics (see Santesso 2013; Hassan 2011; Abbas 2014) have identified Leila Aboulela or one of her protagonists as a fundamentalist. In attempting to define "fundamentalist Muslims", as opposed to "moderates", these critics speak in terms of a national security agenda. Such interpretive practices, even though often professing an anti-racist perspective and a distance from continually evolving state practices and rhetoric around Muslim-organised "terror", are in fact infused with a racial- and terror-inflected discourse. At the same time, it follows that the fiction in question, particularly in a post-9/11 context, is formed and published in relation to the very same discourses around Muslims.

An unwillingness to read novels about Muslims according to the context of their production comprises one of the most interesting paradoxes surrounding the critical reception of so-called Muslim writing. The case of Leila Aboulela demonstrates this ably. Aboulela's fiction, as several critics have noted, sidesteps many pressing questions discussed in this introduction about the treatment of Muslims in Britain today, and favours an inward-looking depiction of pious female protagonists. Conspicuously absent from the analyses of critics who characterise Aboulela as a fundamentalist is a meaningful recognition of the conditions in which Aboulela writes. But these conditions are such that expressions of Islam which appear to operate outside of the private sphere are typically demonised and even criminalised. Therefore the silence in Aboulela's fiction about overtly political topics related to Muslims in Britain and the West is

notable, since it is indicative of the narrow conditions in which an avowedly Muslim writer is able to publish. And yet, remarkably, Aboulela's novels, which clearly pre-empt any association with fundamentalism or radicalism – indeed any variety of what might be termed political Islam – are seized upon as fundamentalist. Paradoxically, the novels' silence around overtly political issues allows Santesso to read her protagonist as, on the one hand a 'fundamentalist', and on the other simultaneously as a 'stereotypical Muslim woman, expected to submit and hide' (Santesso 2013: 103). Santesso's analysis here I think exemplifies a particular reading of Muslims which unreflexively confines and restricts them to a rigid spectrum of moderate and extreme. Adopting such an approach, I would suggest, misses crucial questions about what purposes, agendas and trajectories such a spectrum may serve.

Chapter synopses

Each of the chapters in this thesis is dedicated to two thematically linked literary texts. Shared themes, interests or concerns related to multiculturalism and love, as well as formal similarities, influenced my decisions to group texts. Prioritising subject matter has created an effective divide between the first and latter two chapters: the first half of the thesis is given over largely to texts which reiterate and reify essential differences as per the clash of civilisations, while the second half considers texts which take ambivalent or oppositional approaches to this premise. One consequence of this decision is that while the texts in the first two chapters feature large casts of characters experiencing and enacting multiculturalism within British-, and often London-based communities, texts in the latter two chapters focus largely on individual protagonists' struggles to negotiate and reconcile competing transcultural loyalties and pressures. Historical context formed a secondary consideration in forming these chapters, and chronology largely dictated the sequence of chapters. A broadly chronological approach to texts helps to understand the shifting sites of investment and anxiety in multicultural discourse, most notably in relation to 9/11 and the ongoing war on terror. Only the first chapter covers texts published pre-9/11, but these are nonetheless revealing of key continuities and foreclosures in more recent engagements with Muslims and Islam.

My first chapter reads *The Black Album* (1995) by Hanif Kureishi and *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith as post-Rushdie affair texts. I begin by analysing and comparing

the different contexts in which the novels were published and set – *The Black Album* written in the mid-1990s and set in Thatcherite Britain in the late 1980s, and *White Teeth* written during the peak of New Labour and "Asian cool" in 2000, with a sprawling narrative encompassing much of the twentieth century. Of particular interest are these texts' portrayals of young Muslim "fundamentalists" in Britain during and in the wake of the Rushdie affair. In the process each text fictionalises an adolescent's discovery of liberal values and "fundamentalist" Islam's values, with sexual practices serving as prominent means of exploring the values of secular liberalism and Islam. This chapter includes an analysis of *The Black Album*'s conception of liberal ideology, and its definition through attitudes to sex, hedonism and literature, which contrasts with depictions of Islam as deviating from natural imperatives. I go on to discuss the figure of the female prostitute, and Kureishi's recurring investment in prostitutes as literary muses and targets of hatred for secular and religious characters respectively. In the second part of the chapter, I look at *White Teeth*'s valorisation of "everyday" multiculturalism over prescriptive political models, and its depictions of love and sexual practices as embedded in historical contexts.

My second chapter focuses on the post-9/11 depiction of migrant communities in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004). I argue that these texts' representations of dysfunctional, coercive and violent relationships within migrant communities offer tacit support to Western interventions at home and abroad into spaces populated by Muslims. In each of the two novels, those who deviate from English cultural norms, through practices such as arranged and polygamous marriages are associated with a hatred of Britain and a unique capacity for violence against the nation. The first section of the chapter, focused on *Maps for Lost Lovers*, argues that the novel's conception of freedom is contradicted by its didactic representation of the Muslim community and their intimate practices as incapable of engendering love. I also consider the novel's invocations of Sufism, questioning their potential to overcome the text's didacticism. In *Brick Lane*, I explore the novel's gender dynamics, and its debt to neoliberal feminism in depicting the protagonist Nazneen's journey from passive and confined to an active and liberated subject in post-9/11 Britain. Both novels, I argue, make inclusion – love – within the nation conditional on the disavowal of particular modes of religious belief.

My third chapter considers texts which look beyond Britain to the global, Western-led war on terror. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid and *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) by Zia Haider Rahman consider affective economies in Western nations in the wake of 9/11, which exclude the South Asian protagonists and render them homeless. I analyse the inter-racial relationships between the protagonists and upper-class Western women as allegories of national betrayal, which the cosmopolitan protagonists experience at the hands of the women they desire. Adopting women as symbols of the Western nation, these texts offer formally complex narratives of male radicalisation and violence, including sexual violence. My reading emphasises that, while these texts complicate categories and terms which inform the war on terror around radicalism, political violence and fundamentalism, the male protagonists narrate their pleas for (re-)inclusion in the nation through the marginalisation of women.

The final chapter addresses Leila Aboulela's second novel, *Minaret* (2005) and Shelina Janmohamed's memoir, *Love in a Headscarf* (2009), analysing their appropriations of the conventions of romance and chick-lit respectively for their own ends. Even as these texts recast the search for "the one" in terms of an overtly Islamic "the One", these texts nevertheless draw on these genres' strategies for rendering culturally-specific love as universal. This chapter thus engages with assertions of feminised cosmopolitan Muslim identities which seek to "have it all", in spite of a challenging secular context which regards Muslim women as at once suspect and oppressed. I argue that close engagement with literary genre and form is required to understand these interventions and move beyond reductive, anthropological models of interpreting texts by and about Muslims.

These chapters will explore and furnish an understanding of the importance of love in post-Rushdie affair depictions of Muslims. Far from a neutral or incidental aspect, I suggest love and relationships are crucial to current narratives around Muslims as a regressive, dangerous presence in Britain and beyond. I hope that this study will lend itself to a better understanding of multiculturalism and its mobilisations in literary texts through affect and representation. In addition, the following explorations of multicultural novels are intended to provoke greater critical reflection on the field of contemporary literature and its relationship with politics. I aim to show how representations of affect offer implicit (and occasionally explicit) support to the popular understanding of Muslims and Islam as unique threats to Western civilisation. At the same time, I show that there have been and are continued attempts to subvert and

undermine these seemingly ubiquitous narratives and the aims of division and discord they serve.

Chapter 1. Of Rushdie and Affairs: *The Black Album* and *White Teeth*

Introduction

This chapter will explore the contrasting approaches in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) to multiculturalism, through their depictions of sex and intimate relationships. However, I am interested in how these two "state of the nation" novels differ in their approaches to multiculturalism. My initial basis for comparing these two novels is their shared ambition as "state of the nation" novels, featuring a large cast of characters within multicultural, urban settings. These texts both explore teenage boys' initial exposure to, and conflict between, self-styled Islamic political activist groups and intimate relationships. The struggles of the young male characters to reconcile their love lives with their political activism raises key questions around political categories and discourses which seek to control or impose attitudes towards sex and love. This chapter will explore these texts' – and more broadly, the discourse of multiculturalism's – investment in intimate norms and love in post-Rushdie affair Britain. I argue that *The Black Album* and *White Teeth* are linked by an investment in the novel's capacity to locate the limits of empathy with people from differing backgrounds and cultural contexts within multicultural Britain.

It is worth recounting that the question of empathy is bound up in the political rights and responsibilities of minorities (be they ethnic, racial or religious), insofar as empathy denotes potential inclusion and accommodation. Depictions of multiculturalism in these two novels may endorse or refute the accommodation of minority groups and their demands in the UK, revealing the limits of empathy in their respective approaches. Empathy, of course, has a long history of association with literature, and is popularly used in arguments for the value of reading. Meghan Hammond and Sue Kim trace the link between empathy and literature back to at least the Romantic era, when William Hazlitt's praised Shakespeare and his contemporary Romantic writers for their 'sympathetic imagination' (Hammond and Kim 2014: 4). And yet caution is required when asserting a readily available connection between empathy and literature; Sophie Ratcliffe, for example, locates 'danger' in 'merging the idea of imagination and that of goodness, and, to a certain extent, between the upholders of the imagination – our poets and novelists – and the achievement of political peace and unity' (Ratcliffe 2008: 227).

Ratcliffe's warning is helpful as a reminder that the literary imagination is invariably shaped by the categories, discourses and narratives available in a writer's given historical and cultural context. These texts' self-described (in)ability to transcend their respective contexts is a key focus of this chapter. I will now trace some of the connections between the historical trends of identity politics within multiculturalism and each novel's approach to these themes.

The texts' fictionalised accounts of the Rushdie affair – a pivotal moment in the history of multiculturalism in Britain – are central to their commentaries on "the state of the nation". Despite a shared interest in charting multicultural trends within London specifically, each novel adopts a different approach and reaches different conclusions. These differing approaches and conclusions are, I argue, inextricably linked to the different contexts in which these texts were written and published. In the case of Kureishi, *The Black Album*, first published in 1995 but set during the Rushdie affair in the late eighties, speaks to a crisis within multicultural discourse at that time around the accommodation of a religious Muslim identity. By comparison, *White Teeth*'s sense of optimism about a more inclusive multiculturalism's potential to redeem Britain from its colonial history makes it, as Peter Morey states, 'an almost perfect literary document of its moment – the turn of the millennium' (Morey 2016: 472). With their shared references to the Rushdie affair, and public comments from Smith about the influence of Kureishi's writings on her own work (see Smith 2015), I suggest we can read these texts in dialogue with one another.

The Black Album's exploration of multiculturalism depicts an emerging culture war between secular liberals and religious Muslims over literature, crystallised in the events of the Rushdie affair. The novel echoes rhetoric circulated at the time, such as this quote from Rushdie: '"Battle lines are being drawn up..." one of my characters remarks. "Secular versus religious, the light versus the dark. Better you choose which side you are on." Now that the battle has spread to Britain, I can only hope it will not be lost by default. It is time for us to choose' (Rushdie 1989: 12). Most striking, in this quote as in *The Black Album*, is how a historical debate around a single book, *The Satanic Verses*, is expanded such that it stands in for literature and secular values in their entirety, while protestors against the novel are made to represent a supposedly eternal "essence of Islam", thus collapsing and conflating the views of all Muslims in Britain with those espoused by the Ayatollah Khomeini in his *fatwa*.

The Black Album's depiction of Muslims and secular liberals battling over, respectively, the blasphemous and sacred status of literature, draws upon cultural narratives around the sacred status and functions of literature. Arguing that 'the discourse called literature can fill the role previously performed by religious textuality' in Britain, Talal Asad gives the following assessment of the Rushdie affair: 'The remarkable value given to self-fashioning through a particular kind of individualized reading and writing is entirely recognizable to Western middle-class readers of literary novels but not to most Muslims in Britain or the Indian subcontinent' (Asad 1993: 287-8). The modern literary sensibility which views literature as sacred is prominent in Ashley Dawson's analysis of the Rushdie affair in his monograph on British multiculturalism, *Mongrel Nation* (2007). In his account, Dawson endorses *The Satanic Verses* as a new and radical 'theology' that is 'alive' to interpretive possibilities (Dawson 2007: 137). This is juxtaposed against those Muslims who side with the by implication dead theology of 'the agents of textual and political orthodoxy within Islam', which the protestors against the novel are seen to embody (Dawson 2007: 137). This characterisation effectively elevates the novel form to the same status and authority of a work of religious scholarship, albeit in a secular guise.

In another respect, *The Black Album*'s approach to multiculturalism is illustrative of Grace Davie's argument in her recent book, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*: since academic disciplines such as social sciences in Britain 'are underpinned by a markedly secular philosophy' deriving from the Enlightenment, there is a 'persistent – and at times damaging – reluctance to admit that to be seriously religious is indeed compatible with being fully modern' (Davie 2015: 234). For Davie, the inadmissibility of religion into modern secular discourses has had the effect of precluding modern secular expressions of solidarity and empathy with religious causes and identities (Davie 2015: 184). This dynamic was especially apparent in the Rushdie affair, which, as Tariq Modood states, 'for some liberals, […] meant an end to their support for the concept [of multiculturalism], as angry Muslims muscled in on something that was intended only for the likes of gay people or black youth. Their protests were supported as "right on", but a passionate religious identity was too multicultural for many' (Modood 2011). Given this context outlined by Davie and Modood in which religion poses a significant challenge to established, secular notions of multiculturalism, it is hardly surprising that *The Black Album* is concerned with, as Rehana Ahmed writes,

'shap[ing] British multiculturalism both by legitimising a new, culturally diverse Britishness, and crucially, […] articulating limits to this legitimacy' along religious lines (Ahmed 2015: 22). The novel thus grapples with the question: is empathy with religious Muslims possible, let alone desirable, from a liberal secular perspective? Or, as Kureishi has framed the question in his introduction to 2005's *The Word and the Bomb*, a collection of non-fiction and fiction writings, which includes, tellingly, an excerpt of *The Black Album*: 'You respect people who are different, but how do you live with people who are so different that – among other things – they lock up their wives?' (Kureishi 2005b: 8).

In my discussion of *The Black Album*, I will consider how the novel's arguments about the sacred role of literature and sex in society place limits on expressions of empathy for particular peoples and cultures, most notably Muslims. Alongside Muslims, I consider a wider trend in Kureishi's writing which sees female characters confined to roles that facilitate men's experiences of literary and sexual freedom. In interrogating the use of attitudes towards sex and literature as a yardstick to measure and assess the compatibility of Muslims with secular liberal ideology, I also argue against Kureishi's articulation of the novel as an inherently empathetic form, capable of transcending its own context.

By contrast, *White Teeth* captures a sense of celebration and hope for multiculturalism's inclusivity which is closely aligned with the renewed championing of multiculturalism by Tony Blair and the New Labour cabinet in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Additionally, the publication of Zadie Smith's heavily hyped, critically acclaimed novel broadly coincided with the mainstream success of numerous British-South Asian cultural products in the UK with films such as *East is East* (1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), TV shows like *Goodness Gracious Me* (1998), and music by acts including Cornershop and Asian Dub Foundation reaching wide audiences. Citing Rupa Huq's label of 'Asian cool', Sara Upstone has described 'the sense of a distinctly British, distinctly Asian, thriving scene' prominent in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Upstone 2010: 2-3).

White Teeth's critical reception also reflects multiculturalism's upswing in this period: Paul Jay describes the novel as 'a product of the new postcolonial and cosmopolitan London in which Englishness is undergoing profound transformations' (Jay 2010: 170).

Similarly, for Michael L. Ross, the 'collision and coalescence of cultures and ethnicities issue in laughter, but also in promise' (Ross 2006: 275). Although this take on the novel is not without its detractors (see for example Jakubiak 2008), nevertheless the majority of critics have tended towards viewing the novel as a celebratory take on what it calls 'the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white' (326). In short, as with *The Black Album* and the period immediately following the Rushdie affair, *White Teeth*'s subject matter and tone broadly reflects the New Labour context in which it was published.

One notable area in which *White Teeth* departs from Kureishi's work can be seen in its approach to the notion of a war between secular and religious ideologies. The novel's depiction of Millat, a young, angry Muslim who attends a protest in Bradford as part of the Rushdie affair, provides an effective example. By way of justification for his attendance at the protest, the omniscient narrator describes Millat's overdetermined status as a second-generation migrant: 'He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives' (233-4). Here the admission of religious identity into multicultural discourse is far less contentious than in Kureishi's novel, with Muslim identity performing the same role as ethnic or racial identification and affording Millat an opportunity to resist racism that would permit him 'no face in this country, no voice' (234). Similarly, the fact that a literary novel is at the heart of the controversy is nothing short of arbitrary for Millat and his friends who 'knew nothing about the writer, nothing about the book; could not identify the book if it lay in a pile of other books; could not pick out the writer in a line-up of other writers' (233). Finally, the explanation for Millat's protest extends backwards in time, as a symbolic repetition of the actions of his great-great grandfather, Mangal Pande, credited with inciting the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In short, the novel complicates the interpretation of the Rushdie affair, so central to Kureishi's novel, as the start of a war between religious Muslims and liberal secularists around freedom of expression and the status of literature. *White Teeth* does so through an attention to the shifting political, social and material conditions, as well as the individual and familial histories, which produce public identities at a given moment.

White Teeth's commitment in this regard is evident in the case of KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal Victorious Islamic Nation), the equivalent of Riaz's group of radical Muslims in *The Black Album*. Rather than view the adoption of Muslim identity as an

new and undesirable departure from previous multicultural identities, *White Teeth* emphasises the provisional nature of political identity by ascribing a wide range of motives for members joining KEVIN. These range from a reaction to racist attacks ('he had been a victim of serious physical attacks and robbery, without fail, three times a year') to a desire to impress women ('Not the KEVIN women, […] but all the women on the outside who had despaired of his wild ways and were now hugely impressed by his new asceticism') (472; 502). The admission of a multiplicity of voices eschews the singular, monolithic narrative of irrational religious hatred of the West featured prominently in *The Black Album*, and is symptomatic of *White Teeth*'s rejection of identity politics.

In favouring a more pragmatic, "common sense" or "everyday" approach to multiculturalism, *White Teeth* continually 'call[s] into question narratives that seek to […] regulate the unpredictable manifestations of "multiculture" in Britain' (Gunning 2010: 128). Following this approach, the novel rejects a religious versus non-religious division as an overarching explanation for multicultural interactions, relations and intimacies in both public and private spheres. In its place the novel offers a dizzying range of creative responses to historical and present conditions on the part of its first- and second-generation migrants, such that it is, the novel implies, impossible to capture them all.

My discussion in the second half of this chapter explores *White Teeth* as a counterapproach to Kureishi's conception of multiculturalism and the novel. Rather than conflate sex and sexual conduct with supposed ideals of citizenship and national belonging, *White Teeth* makes a firm distinction between the everyday, multicultural reality inhabited by its characters, and overdetermining narratives and discourses which seek to regulate the scope and nature of migrant and indigenous relations.

The open-ended narrative of *White Teeth* also resists the impulse to predict or prophesy the future of multicultural relations in Britain along didactic lines. *White Teeth* thus critiques the notion, central to *The Black Album* (and its reception), that literature is a sacred form capable of transcending its historical context while public identities and ideologies are fixed and limited. By leaving its conclusion open and giving over control to its characters (and by extension, the communities and ideologies depicted in the novel), *White Teeth* acknowledges its own limitations to represent national subjects

matter without in some sense overdetermining them. For Smith, in other words, the literary imagination is always necessarily reliant on others and cannot encompass, let alone exceed, the imaginations of migrants and their descendants.

The Black Album

I will now assess *The Black Album* in light of claims made within the novel for the value of literature. In doing so, I intend to show that the text falls short of claims it makes for literature as a unique vehicle for imagination and empathy. Rather than imagine and represent a complex interior life for Muslim characters, the novel rests upon stereotypes of Muslims as celibate, culturally illiterate and irrational. Despite ostensibly adopting a radically hedonistic and anti-racist perspective which sets itself against regimes and rules, *The Black Album* espouses a prescriptive model of cultures as mutually exclusive, as well making didactic claims about the humanity (or lack thereof) of peoples according to their relationship with literature on the one hand, and sex on the other. This brings the text in line with contemporary political narratives which posit Muslims' incompatibility with secular liberal values and culture.

While there are some references to Islam and Muslims in his previous novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Kureishi's output prior to *The Black Album* prioritised characters' experiences of racism with little regard for particularities of religion. Critical analyses of Kureishi's writing career have tended to view his oeuvre in phases, with *The Black Album* and the short story 'My Son the Fanatic' (1997) belonging to a single, short-lived phase in the mid-to-late nineties when Kureishi's writing focused primarily on Muslims and Islam.

We find a number of competing interpretations of this period of Kureishi's writing. Before coming to these however it is worth touching on the critical reception of Kureishi's earlier works. In particular, Stuart Hall's reading of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), scripted by Kureishi, describes the film as

> one of the most riveting and important films produced by a black writer in recent years and precisely for the reason that made it so controversial: its refusal to represent the black experience in Britain as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilized and always "right-on" – in a word, always and only "positive" (Hall 1996: 448-9).

Hall's reading of Kureishi's subversive depiction of South Asian characters is helpful for contextualising Susan Alice Fischer's glowing take on *The Black Album* and 'My Son the Fanatic', texts she sees as consistent with a 'political stance of refusing to be caught in a dichotomous conflict between East and West or between other entrenched ideologies. Artistically and intellectually, his work locates such a space by undermining overarching political and religious narratives' (Fischer 2015: 74). This view of Kureishi's later writing as consistent with earlier works' subversive qualities is contested by several other critics, including Ruvani Ranasinha, Bart Moore-Gilbert and Rehana Ahmed, who note a number of divergences. Most notably, Ranasinha claims early texts such as *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* are 'dialogic', contrasting with Kureishi's writing on Islam which is resolutely 'monologic' – 'less complex and nuanced and therefore weaker' (Ranasinha 2002: 90). To that end, she writes that '[u]nlike [*My Beautiful*] *Laundrette*, where conceptions of both white and minority communities are challenged and unsettled, this recent work ['My Son the Fanatic' and *The Black Album*] often simply reaffirms the values of the dominant group' (Ranasinha 2002: 82). Similarly, for Ahmed, Kureishi's 'valorisation of a secularist liberal individualism against religious collectivism leads to the emergence of a series of reductive binaries, at odds with the deconstructive thrust of his work' (Ahmed 2015: 22).

As a specific phase in his career, *The Black Album* and 'My Son the Fanatic' no doubt owe much to the prominence of the Rushdie affair, and in particular Kureishi's personal involvement: during this period, Kureishi publicly defended Salman Rushdie, presenting a petition to Margaret Thatcher in support of the author. In the years since, and especially so following the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks in the US and UK respectively, Kureishi has been an outspoken critic of Islam and extremism, with a number of published articles on the themes that appear in his fictional texts (see Kureishi 2005a).

The Black Album is narrated from the perspective of Shahid, a teenager arriving at college in London who becomes part of a group of radical Muslims headed by Riaz in the midst of the Rushdie affair. While the novel does not mention Salman Rushdie or *The Satanic Verses* by name, vague references like '[t]hat book' and 'that man' are coupled with overt references to Rushdie's previous novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981) as well as Ayatollah Khomeini's notorious *fatwa* which are consistent with the events of

the Rushdie affair (169). At the same time as Shahid is becoming embroiled with the Muslims and their campaign, he is also initiated into the hedonistic underbelly of London by his liberal college teacher, Deedee Osgood. Pushed and pulled between the two – both factions wanting 'to own him entirely', as Shahid says of the Muslim group – he eventually opts to stay with Deedee (128). Torn between his young Muslim friends and Deedee, Riaz's campaign to put a supposedly divine aubergine on display in the town hall forces Deedee to offer Shahid an ultimatum: 'it's me or the enchanted eggplant. […] Which of us d'you want?' (210). Deedee's ultimatum is significant because it captures the binary principle which underpins *The Black Album*, as well as the limited purposes served by the novel's characters outside of Shahid.

Gender is a notable absence in critical readings of this period in Kureishi's career. However, a footnote in Paul and Aparna Mishra Tarc's article on 'My Son the Fanatic' concerning the role of women in Kureishi's writing notes that 'women play a secondary role in the hyper-masculine drama of cross-cultural conflict. Women are often portrayed as cause for or as mediating warring masculine relations, as being the "provocateur" or "handmaiden" of combative culture wars waged between men' (Tarc and Tarc 2010: 313). Indeed, this critique is equally applicable to *The Black Album* in which Shahid's narrative of self-discovery and self-actualisation occurs at expense of characters like Deedee and Riaz.

In the above ultimatum Deedee is a metonym for Kureishi's particular strain of liberal secularism which values artistic and sexual expression above all else. Part literary muse, part male sexual fantasy, Deedee serves as a key inspiration for Shahid's own creative writing ('His typing fingers, sensing Deedee's body beneath them, danced on the keys') despite having no creative outlet of her own outside of teaching (76). Similarly, when Shahid wishes that Deedee would impress upon Riaz the 'humanity' in 'pick[ing] up a deodorant bottle and insert[ing] the top into her cunt', the same passage describes how 'without losing her soul she [Deedee] was turning herself into pornography' (119). As in Tarc and Tarc's formulation, this passage demonstrates Deedee's limited role as muse and provocateur, sexually empowering the male protagonist and simultaneously challenging sexually conservative characters and their values.

In the wider context of Kureishi's oeuvre prostitutes are recurring figures, often playing similar roles. Indeed, Deedee is the object of Shahid's affection and Riaz's ire

respectively thanks in part to her past 'escort work' (113). Kureishi's other texts dramatise a similar dynamic in a manner bordering on the absurd: in *Something to Tell You*, a prostitute studying for her MA relates her essay subjects while pleasuring the male protagonist, Jamal (Kureishi 2008: 334). These particular dynamics, coupled with the marginal position of prostitutes' narratives, means Kureishi's writing appears more concerned with legitimising the male protagonists' adoption of prostitutes as muses than with women as complex, multi-faceted characters in their own right.

More pressingly, these examples all point to the way in which *The Black Album*'s arguments about art and sexual relations are dependent on the dehumanisation of women, as well as Muslims. Notions of consent, coercion and power inequalities are glossed in a representative exchange between Shahid and Deedee on their first night out together in London: 'She said, "You know, I feel I forced you into this." "You did, but I'm grateful. You could say it's an education, right?"' (60). This utopian consensual vision of sexual hedonism contrasts starkly with the depiction of Muslims who are characterised by their coercive and antagonistic behaviours towards others. Thus a character like Riaz, despite being widely admired by Muslims, is reported as having been 'kicked out of his parents' house for denouncing his own father for drinking alcohol' (109). This minor detail of Riaz's backstory links him with Ali in the short story 'My Son the Fanatic', who similarly falls out with his secular father in part due to the latter's fondness for alcohol. In both cases, the demands made by religious Muslims on secular family members create divisions within the family which remain perpetually open and unresolved.

Kureishi's writing during this period demonstrates deep ambivalences about the adoption of Muslim identity over ethnic or racial categories. Thus for the protagonist Shahid, his flirtation with Muslim as opposed to South Asian identity is explained through a fear that 'ignorance would place him in no man's land. These days everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew – brandishing whichever features they could claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human. Shahid, too, wanted to belong to his people' (92). There is also, to an extent, an acknowledgement in the text that racism has adapted to this shift, and taken on religious fault lines: Zulma's white boyfriend talks in arcane terms about the threat of the 'militant Muhammadans', which Shahid dismisses as 'pompous crap' (190-1). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, we encounter Shahid's opposition to racism: Shahid relates his

fear of white working-class racist violence ('some white boy was going to plant a knife in him!') and his dislike of Thatcherism ('He argued that she was a dupe, explaining what racists the Thatcherites were') with conviction (140; 87). Shahid (and Deedee) are also deeply attracted to the civil rights movement in North America: 'she spoke of King, Malcolm, Cleaver, Davis and the freedom riders. […] The living, breathing history of struggle: how had he lived so long without this knowledge?' (27-8). Given Shahid's anti-racist credentials, it is unsurprising that the novel's Muslim characters are 'initially treated with sympathy' in their 'militant demands for greater "recognition" of the [Muslim] community' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 187).

Nevertheless the novel forecloses positive comparisons between the Muslim group lead by Riaz and the civil rights movement in the United States. This is done in part through the novel's critique of identity politics, a topic Bart Moore-Gilbert has explored in his discussion of the novel in connection with Charles Taylor's concept, 'the politics of recognition' (Taylor 1992; Moore-Gilbert 2012: 186). Moore-Gilbert cites Strapper's insult of Shahid ('You're too Westernized') along with Shahid's brother, Chili's, notion of the 'brown man's burden' as examples of the way 'Shahid experiences apparently positive "recognition" of his ethnic difference as coercive' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 187). This extends to religious difference too, as Strapper describes his affinity for 'Blacks and Pakis' alongside 'Muslims*'*, who are uniformly praised for practicing 'love outside the family' (142).

The novel situates this "positive" discourse from secular liberal characters alongside Shahid's frequently comical struggle to fit in with the religious Muslims he lives alongside. Misunderstandings abound in a representative exchange with Chad: "What a great city this is." "With many temptations for young men." "Oh yes!" Shahid agreed. "Thank God."' (15). In moments such as these the novel effectively critiques multiculturalism's potential to overdetermine identity: both inside and outside Riaz's group, multiculturalism is seen to set limits on individual behaviour, attitudes and outlooks – rendering Shahid incoherent and unreadable to others, or, as he states, 'in no man's land […] without a tag' (92). For Moore-Gilbert, the entrenched 'dynamics of "recognition"' depicted in the novel render Shahid a 'martyr' to multiculturalism, playing on the Arabic term *shahid* denoting martyr, or witness (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 190). This is true 'whether the gaze falling on him is that of the social dominant or the Muslim community claiming him' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 190). The novel poses the

question: how can you accommodate different perspectives, practices and cultures without being overly prescriptive about who or what constitutes "difference"? Is there an ethical way to handle the issue of authenticity – who judges the authenticity of claims to represent a given cultural or racial minority? Is it possible to recognise one minority without excluding other minorities, or other individuals who do not fit neatly into categories like "Muslim", "South Asian", "Black", or those who fall into several categories?

Although all of the above themes and questions are voiced in *The Black Album*, they are juxtaposed against the text's other dominant theme – namely, the depiction of Muslims as a threat to secular liberal values. After a measure of ambiguity in the early stages of the novel, by the end, the Muslims appear as threatening antagonists. This trend emerges gradually as the demands and threats made by Riaz's group against Salman Rushdie become increasingly violent in nature, climaxing in their plan to bomb a bookshop stocking the offensive novel. For Moore-Gilbert, Islam is represented 'as being akin to fascism' as Riaz becomes 'an increasingly authoritarian figure, demanding absolute obedience' from those around him (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 190). Ultimately, '[t]he inescapable inference […] is that the more complexly-drawn ("liberal") characters are more fully human, as well as being more worthy citizens, than their "fundamentalist" antagonists' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 191).

In order to understand how the novel achieves this effect with regard to its depiction of Muslims and Islam, it is essential to touch on the formal features of the novel around voice. Moore-Gilbert delineates a complex relationship between the various layers of narration: 'While primarily focalized through Shahid, there is an omniscient narrator whose ironic distance from his protagonist diminishes as the latter increasingly approximates to the authorial vision of what is appropriate to the identity and identifications he constructs for himself' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 190).[1] Moore-Gilbert's

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[1] Although this chapter does not directly engage with Kureishi's 'authorial vision' per se, Kureishi has nevertheless publicly expressed similar views to those of Shahid in the novel, as well as characters in other post-Rushdie affair literary works. In his 2008 novel, *Something to Tell You*, one of the main characters, Henry, echoes sentiments expressed in *The Black Album*: 'all this bullshit about the conflict between civilisations, Islam and the West, is only another version of the same conflict between puritans and liberals, between those who hate the imagination and those who love it' (Kureishi 2008: 414-5). The concept of imagination as the distinguishing feature of secular liberal culture is related to another character's assertion that Muslims possess 'no science, no literature, no decent institutions and only one book' (Kureishi 2008: 245). The same sentiments are captured in a 2007 public debate between Kureishi and scholar Tariq Ramadan in which Kureishi accuses Ramadan, a Muslim, of 'not wanting literature

take is helpful as a reflection of the often uncritical relationship between Shahid and the narrator, and the resulting hierarchy of voices within the novel. Within this hierarchy Shahid's thoughts, themselves often indistinguishable from those of the narrator, assume a greater force and resonance than other voices. Take, for instance, the observation that 'Shahid had taken it for granted that his [Riaz's] smile indicated humour, a love of humanity, patience. Yet if you looked closely, it was disdain' (98). The address to 'you' in the second person, as opposed to the expected third person ('if he looked closely…') is indicative of the slippage between Shahid and the narrator, as well as the tendency to dictate positive and negative readings of characters favoured by the novel.

Debates around literature are a recurring feature in the novel that form another crucial part of the text's didacticism. In particular the inconsistent application of 'imagination' guarantees the individual secular imagination against mass religious repression. To this end, Shahid's experiences with theatre convince him that he is capable of gaining the necessary 'experience, imagination and dedication' to keep an audience 'gripped, excited, disturbed' (74). After defining literature in similar terms – 'imaginative on matt' paper (186) – what are we then to make of the narrator's description of Pakistan as 'a country which couldn't accommodate intelligence, initiative, *imagination*, and in which most endeavour bogged down into hopelessness' (54; my emphasis)? The novel expands on the significance of the term 'imagination' with Shahid's assessment of his Muslim friends' beliefs: 'his friends would admit no splinter of *imagination* into their body of belief, for that would poison all, rendering their conviction human, aesthetic, fallible' (133; my emphasis).

Despite the imagination's supposed fallibility, in an argument about the value of the writing of '[o]ne man', Shahid nevertheless stresses that a 'free imagination […] ranges over many natures. A free imagination, looking into itself, illuminates others' (183). Earlier, when Riaz explains that his own writing 'always' contains 'a standpoint', which

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because literature terrifies you', to which Ramadan responds incredulously: 'I got a Masters in French literature and you are telling me I don't like literature' (Piccolo 2007). The recurring trend throughout is a division of secular and religious ideologies along the lines of literary production and consumption, in which literature acts of proof of the ethical superiority of secular Western society and culture. A second trend is Kureishi's conception of the secular imagination's presumed liberal attitude toward sex: in a non-fiction article, Kureishi describes the 'body hatred and terror of sexuality that characterise most religions' as an area requiring reform (Kureishi 2005a). Sex and sexual freedoms are thus central to Kureishi's conception of secular liberal values, which are encapsulated in his notion of 'imagination'.

is to say that he writes in support or defence of avowedly Islamic principles, Shahid is adamant on his own position: '"There is," said Shahid firmly, "no standpoint."' (174). In short, while both writers are in some sense engaging and articulating collective, shared values, the particular conception of 'freedom' and 'imagination' as the privilege of the individual writer is seen to elevate Shahid's secular conception of writing over Riaz's religious inflected poetry. In this case Riaz's decision to identify with Islam necessitates the exclusion of his writing from the category of literature. These contradicting assessments of literature and imagination selectively insist on these categories as denoting Shahid's fallibility and subjectivity, while also guaranteeing his objectivity. The use of literary debates to juxtapose literature's supposed unique capacity for empathy against Muslims' opposition to literature, thus enables the novel's claim that Muslims are unable to empathise with others.

Owing to the strong association of individuality and freedom with literature and literary forms, the novel's apparent inability to differentiate between individuals and cultures is particularly jarring. Thus, where Deedee expresses difficulty 'telling people that culture would benefit them', Shahid is less shy about the virtues of a liberal education (135). This comes through in his insistence on saving the white working classes through literature: 'How could they bear their own ignorance, living without culture, their lives reduced to watching soap operas three-quarters of the day?' (136-7). The easy conflation of white working classes with soap operas is indicative of the way in which the novel collapses distinctions between individuals, communities and cultures; there is seen to be a direct relationship between cultural products (soap operas), communities (the white working class) and individuals (who occupy their days watching television).

In upholding literature's superiority, *The Black Album* goes so far as to cast liberal arts as a complete way of life which precludes all other forms of identification and belonging. This aspect of the text is evident when Shahid takes his mother to see a Lorca play from 1945, *The House of Bernarda Alba.* Shahid, sensing his mother's 'gripped, excited, disturbed' reaction to the play, feels compelled to 'ask if the play reminded her of life in Pakistani families. She thought for a time before dipping her head' (74). Shahid's reaction – he feels 'triumphantly justified' at his mother's silent acquiescence – is indicative of *The Black Album*'s conception of liberal art, by which an engagement with liberal arts requires complete identification on the part of its audience. In this instance, Shahid's mother is required to admit Pakistani culture's inferiority

because, without this admission, the novel cannot entertain her 'gripped, excited, disturbed' reaction to the play.

It is precisely for this reason that the novel ascribes a moral dimension to Muslims' supposed resistance to literature, in which the notion of 'white elite culture as self-deceiving and hypocritical' can only be 'an excuse for laziness' or an unwillingness to 'find the culture that put them down profound' (134). The novel does this, as we have seen, by affording literature the monopoly on profundity; through this move Muslims are cast as an intransigent group living in denial, whose only hope for redemption comes in the form of literary culture which is avowedly secular and liberal.

Given the model of mutually exclusive cultures warring against one another, it is unsurprising that Shahid's identification with secular literary culture should make him a contentious figure within Riaz's group. Beyond the 'hostile' reactions to literature displayed by Muslims such as Chad, Shahid's frank discussion of sex in his writings is especially contentious (20). While these writings are never directly represented, nevertheless the novel illustrates Shahid's pornographic sensibilities through descriptions of an 'erotic story for Deedee, "The Prayer-mat of the Flesh"', and the sexually explicit re-writes of Riaz's poetry which offend the novel's Muslim characters (134). The association between Shahid's writing and pornography is not incidental; in fact it is crucial for understanding the weight afforded sex in this novel.

As with literature, sex serves to distinguish between individuals and cultures that possess empathy and imagination and those that do not. For instance it is significant that Muslim characters are offered little if anything in the way of functioning interpersonal relationships: Riaz, as the leader of the fundamentalist group, is said to possess 'little: no wife or children, career, hobby, house or possessions. The meaning of his life was his creed' (173). This trend extends beyond the novel's Muslim characters too; in fact, as Ranasinha has noted, a distinguishing feature of *The Black Album* is its 'irresolvable opposition between community and individual: there is no representation of the communal that is not fundamentalist' (Ranasinha 2002: 100). In a similar vein to Riaz, Brownlow's marriage with Deedee is ruined because of his dedication to communism. As Deedee opines, 'Brownlow's wretched face still depresses me most nights, though he claims to be moving out' (159). Like Islam, communism is seen to restrict sexual

expression: 'pleasure could only be provisional and guilty. […] [I]t was felt, implicitly, that only those striving for change could be good' (116).

This negative characterisation of '[s]triving for change' becomes clear when the overarching claims or goals of a given collective are overshadowed by its members' relationships with literature on the one hand and intimacy on the other. Even Shahid's brother Chili, who is associated with Thatcherite consumerism and entrepreneurship which the novel denounces, is redeemed through his willingness to read literary works by Gabriel García Márquez (43). His hedonistic lifestyle and conception of sex whereby 'somehow, sometimes, something sacred could exist in impersonality' only reinforces the point about the prioritisation given to literature and sex (125). These positive signs come to fruition in the novel's climactic moments, when Chili rescues Shahid from the Muslims' physical attacks (see 266-269).

As with literature, attitudes to sex and sexual behaviours signal the novel's hierarchy between those who possess empathy and those who do not. In this respect the novel simply reverses the binary logic of Riaz and his group who equate sexual promiscuity with 'filth' and moral 'bankrupt[cy]'; in The Black Album, sexual promiscuity *guarantees* morality (129). This is true even to the extent that when Shahid questions Riaz, '[b]ut aren't we a loving people, brother?', Riaz's refusal to answer reveals how the Muslims in the novel are not only denied love and empathy, but are even unable to articulate a different or competing idea of love and empathy (173). In other words, even the Muslim characters themselves are hardly able to contest, let alone deny their own lack of love. The only refutation of this comes at the end of the novel when Hat apologises to Shahid: 'Because Allah is forgiving and merciful, I will only show love and consideration for others' (271). Elsewhere, a claim by Riaz that his writing contains 'a message […] of love and compassion' is undermined by the title of his book, 'The Martyr's Imagination', with its play on Shahid's name (67). The implication of course is that Shahid is the martyr Riaz unwittingly associates with imagination, love and compassion. These traits and values, the novel suggests, are therefore the exclusive domain of literature which Shahid is synonymous with.

To conclude, I would like to reflect on Shahid's observation that, '[l]ike pornography, religion couldn't admit the comic' (150). Characters like Deedee, who 'turn[s] herself into pornography', and Riaz, unable to entertain '[f]olly' and wishing always to 'correct

it', are devoid of agency outside of their symbolic functions (119; 150). Never becoming more than supporting players, these characters guarantee Shahid's apparently unique capacity for empathy, imagination and humour. Furthermore, *The Black Album*'s formal collapse of the distinction between Shahid and the narrator reinforces the 'clear *hierarchy* of narrative voices and spaces' which marginalises competing perspectives and interpretations of the Rushdie affair (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 190; original emphasis). The circumscribed roles of the characters coupled with these formal traits contradict the content of the novel which argues for literature and sex as creative, open and free. This contrasts with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth,* which argues for the novel form's limited capacity to capture social reality in all its complexity. Instead, for Zadie Smith, the limitations of the novel form is evidence of the creative possibilities of "everyday" multiculturalism.

White Teeth

In *The Black Album*, Kureishi represents Islam and Muslims as antithetical to literature and modernity. As I have argued, the narrative sets up a binary between secular modernity and pre-modern religiosity through its characters and formal features. This is premised on a particular interpretation of freedom based upon a narrative of progress which culminates in the modern age epitomised by literature, sexual freedoms and the secular imagination. Paradoxically, this is enacted through the didacticism of the text and the caricatured representation of Muslims and women. When comparing *The Black Album* with *White Teeth*, it is important to state from the outset the different approach of the latter text. *White Teeth* rejects and satirises the concept of historical progress; history proceeds in a cyclical, rather than a linear manner. Though the novel posits cultural, political and familial legacies as inescapable to varying degrees, as can be seen through the intergenerational repetition of actions and events, *White Teeth*'s narration asserts a preference for chance and randomness as a way of experiencing freedom from history.

White Teeth accomplishes this goal first and foremost by staging contests between characters who are invested in purity and those who are not, which continually resolve in favour of chance. Paul Jay describes this conflict in terms of characters in the novel committed to multiculturalism and those committed to fundamentalism, whether secular

or religious in nature: 'the book's fundamentalist characters see a link between design, purity, faith, unity and tradition, while those who embrace some version of multiculturalism side with chance, corruption, multiplicity, and innovation' (Jay 2010: 172). In her attempts to break away from familial and cultural legacies, Irie, one of the novel's more sympathetically drawn characters, strives for a life in which 'every single fucking day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be' (515). To this end, the novel makes a crucial distinction between a given character's beliefs and their actions, which are often shown to be in tension if not outright contradiction. It is for this reason that it makes sense to speak about an "everyday" multiculturalism in *White Teeth* which resists simple categorisations and defies the conflation of individuals with their beliefs and/or culture.

As in *The Black Album*, sex and relationships form an important battleground in which conflicts between multiculturalism and fundamentalism play out. The fundamentalist desire for roots and an uncontaminated history is nevertheless described in sympathetic terms by the narrator as 'both the most irrational and natural feeling in the world' (327). Indeed *White Teeth* suggests it is especially understandable in families with migrant backgrounds: 'it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, *disappearance*' (327; original emphasis). As well as dealing with familial legacies and expectations, there is the important historical and cultural context of British colonialism that *White Teeth* connects to contemporary anxieties around sex and relationships.

White Teeth explores the idea of "everyday" multiculturalism in the urban setting of Willesden, London, charting the interwoven trajectories of three families from very different backgrounds: the Iqbals, who migrate from Bangladesh following World War II, the Jones family with working-class English and Jamaican roots, and the Chalfens, a middle class Jewish-Catholic family. The Iqbals' story begins with an account of Samad Iqbal's tour of duty with the British army in World War II, particularly detailing the friendship between Samad and Archie Jones. Their continued correspondence over the years eventually prompts Samad to settle with his young wife Alsana in Willesden close to Archie, where they raise the identical twins Magid and Millat. Alsana and Samad have diametrically opposed ideas about how to raise their sons, with Alsana emerging as a sympathetic character owing to her commitment to raising her sons without

imposing unrealistic cultural and religious expectations. The same cannot be said for Samad and his fraught relationship with their children, a theme I will return to later.

Another sympathetically drawn character is Archie Jones, Samad's best friend, who encapsulates the novel's quiet heroism. Following a failed suicide attempt at the beginning of the novel – thwarted in comedic fashion by a halal butcher who informs him, '[i]f you're going to die round here, my friend, I'm afraid you've got to be thoroughly bled first' – Archie's marriage to Clara Bowden, of Jamaican descent, gives him a new lease of life (7). As Nick Bentley argues, 'Archie's […] belief in chance, and in making decisions on the spot rather than referring to some grand system of thought or religion marks him off as a point of resistance to the various fundamentalisms with which the novel presents us' (Bentley 2007: 498). Foremost amongst these traits is his inter-racial fraternising, which enacts the kind of "everyday multiculturalism" prized in the novel. Archie is oblivious, for instance, to the offence his inter-racial relationships cause fellow English people: a work colleague opines over Archie 'always talking to Pakistanis and Caribbeans like he didn't even notice and now he'd gone and married one and hadn't even thought it worth mentioning what colour she was' (69).

Archie and Clara's daughter, Irie, is another of the novel's heroic characters. Growing up, Irie grapples with low self-esteem, body image issues and the complexities of growing up mixed race in contemporary Britain. She envies the middle class Chalfens for their self-assured manner, but eventually comes to reject their racist and paternalistic attitudes in order to explore her Caribbean roots. Her ongoing friendship with Millat and Magid Iqbal, and especially her infatuation with the former twin, resolves at the end of the novel with her becoming pregnant by one of the two; unsure of which twin is the father, Irie vows to birth and raise her child free of the cultural expectations that she experienced herself growing up.

The Chalfens, although less developed than the other two families in *White Teeth*, are nonetheless important for the influence they hold over Irie, Millat and Magid, and the ire this provokes in their respective parents. Marcus Chalfen is the head of the family and the FutureMouse project, an experiment involving genetically modifying mice, while his wife Joyce Chalfen is an accomplished botanist with a maternal streak. Their belief in the superiority of their own culture – '[i]n the Chalfen lexicon, the middle classes were the inheritors of the enlightenment, the creators of the welfare state, the

intellectual elite and the source of all culture' – sees Millat become an obsession for Joyce, while Magid serves as Marcus's protégé and partner in the FutureMouse project (435). The investment in the Iqbal sons, and Irie to a lesser extent, comes at the expense of their own children: their son Joshua joins a radical animal rights group, FATE, dedicated to sabotaging the FutureMouse project through violent means if necessary.

The irreverent depiction of the Chalfens serves as an important counterpoint to the depiction of secular liberal ideology in *The Black Album*. As Philip Tew suggests, the Chalfens' story 'interrogates the illusory nature of a liberal consensus that aspires to underpin and guarantee our lives' (Tew 2009: 68). One notable aspect of *White Teeth* in this regard is the lack of discrimination between religious and secular ideologies in their potential to alienate and oppress: 'Although Hortense's religious framework seems wholly at odds with Chalfen's scientific one, they are actually linked in their commitment to a kind of fundamentalist conception of purity and perfectibility, one that, intentionally or not, marginalizes characters like Irie and Millat' (Jay 2010: 172). This is to say that Marcus Chalfen's scientific approach in the FutureMouse project is, the novel implies, simply another manifestation of the search for cultural purity and predictability. Indeed, Marcus's FutureMouse project raises questions from a South Asian woman around its eugenicist implications: 'where are we going here? Millions of blonds with blue eyes? Mail order babies? I mean, if you're Indian like me you've got something to worry about, yeah?' (418). These concerns are brushed aside by Marcus in his desire to engineer the future and thereby 'eliminate the random' (366; original emphasis).

One of the central themes is the negotiation of familial legacies, most notably in the Iqbal family. Samad Iqbal obsessively cites the story of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande, credited with having started a large-scale rebellion against the British in colonial India; for Samad, this story mythologises his family's struggle against colonialism, providing an aspirational framework with regards to family, tradition and culture. However, Samad fails to live up to his own high standards, embarking on an extra-marital affair with his sons' music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, a young English woman who fetishises Muslim culture for what she perceives as its restraint and exoticism. Samad's prioritisation of sexual gratification with an English woman over his cultural and religious piety results in a crisis of conscience which sees him impose his anxieties over cultural purity and upholding tradition on his children. Samad's guilt sees him

wish to 'create for his boys roots on shore, deep roots that no storm or gale could displace', a goal he realises by sending his son to Bangladesh to be raised (193). While intending to send both sons, owing to limited funds Samad can only afford the airfare to send Magid to Bangladesh to instil Islam in him while Millat remains in London with his parents.

However, his attempt to rescue his sons from the contamination of Western values – epitomised by his affair with Poppy – backfires: Millat becomes a religious Muslim while simultaneously falling prey of the same temptations as his father, and Magid loses his religion altogether, becoming an atheistic rationalist guru-like figure in Bangladesh. Samad's conceptions of cultural purity and legacies are comically subverted; although the twins share identical genetic makeup and heritage, their opposing directions in life enact the narrator's comic phrase: 'there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English' (327). Here the novel turns on its head dichotomies which exclusively locate secularism and modernity in the West, and irrationality, religion and tradition in the non-West. Similarly, categories such as fundamentalism which are often used in the context of discussions of Muslims and religious belief more widely are broadened to include identifications with a diverse of set of traditions.

White Teeth directly engages with the trend of conflating Muslims with culture in a passage concerning Irie and Millat's impulsive sexual encounter. That this encounter takes place on a prayer mat – perhaps an intertextual reference to Shahid's short story, 'Prayer Mat of the Flesh' in *The Black Album* – lends this scene special significance. Unlike *The Black Album* in which sex and love are exclusively available to secular characters, *White Teeth* explores tensions and contradictions between beliefs and actions: following sex, Millat grabs 'his prayer mat […], prostrating himself in the direction of the Kaba' while Irie is 'embarrassed and ashamed because she could see how much he regretted' the encounter (461). The narrator goes on to explain Irie's belief that 'Millat didn't love her because he couldn't. She thought he was so damaged, he couldn't love anybody anymore. She wanted to find whoever had *damaged* him like this' before settling on Magid as the source of 'Millat's feelings of inadequacy' (462; original emphasis). It is worth quoting at length the narrator's reflection on Irie's reaction here:

What was it about this unlovable century that convinced us we were, despite everything, eminently lovable as a people, as a species? What made us think that anyone who fails to love us is damaged, lacking, *malfunctioning* in some way? And particularly if they replace us with a god, or a weeping Madonna, or the face of Christ in a ciabatta roll – then we call them crazy. Deluded. Regressive. We are so convinced of the goodness of ourselves, and the goodness of our love, we cannot bear to believe that there might be something more worthy of love than us, more worthy of worship. Greetings cards routinely tell us everybody deserves love. No. Everybody deserves clean water. Not everybody deserves love all the time (462; original emphasis).

This scene provides perhaps the strongest refutation of *The Black Album*'s didacticism. The narrator's interpretation of Irie's reaction actively rejects Kureishi's use of symbolism: where 'The Prayer Mat of the Flesh' dictates sexual relations as the correct object of worship and implicitly condemns Muslims' supposed inability to love, *White Teeth* criticises Irie (and perhaps, with her, the reader) for overburdening Millat's rejection as representative of all Muslims, all religious people even, and therefore devoid of individual agency and preference. In doing so, *White Teeth* allows Millat to transcend an overarching metanarrative in which Muslims are read as collectively 'damaged', or '[r]egressive'.

In fact, the narrator consistently makes jokes at the expense of characters who deny individual agency. There are numerous other examples in the novel which explore how sex and relationships are overdetermined in contemporary Britain. Notably, *White Teeth* connects this phenomenon with the legacy of colonialism. For instance, by way of a response to Millat's exclusive preference for 'size 10 white Protestant women aged fifteen to twenty-eight', members of KEVIN introduce an oblivious Millat to Aeyisha, 'an African goddess' from Clapham North in an unsubtle attempt to convince Millat to adjust his sexual proclivities (371; 369). The attempt to ascribe a kind of cultural purity to Aeyisha, and the imposition of the exoticised concept of the 'African goddess' as a means to 'purge oneself of the taint of the West' is, of course, comically undermined by the juxtaposition of Africa with Clapham North (444).

These examples shed light on some of the ways *White Teeth* differs from *The Black Album*. By representing individuals who are simultaneously constrained and freed by familial and cultural legacies, *White Teeth* effectively undermines two central aspects of Kureishi's work: firstly, the conflation of individuals with ideologies, and secondly, a teleological view of history which divides the world between modern and pre-modern.

Furthermore, a complex array of expectations and legacies deriving from individual, familial and cultural preferences bucks the trend of exclusively prioritising cultural-religious explanations of behaviour in accounts of Muslims in fiction. As we have seen in the case of *The Black Album*, caricatured representations of Muslims privilege culture and ideology to a point where individuals and culture are virtually indistinguishable. In *White Teeth*, examples of characters showing the inability or unwillingness to decouple individuals from culture and heritage are implicitly linked to Britain's colonial history and values, notably around the management of intimate arrangements.

The embedded narrative of Ambrosia Bowden, Irie's ancestor, explores the management of desire within a colonial context. The story of Ambrosia's relationship with Captain Durham in colonial-era Jamaica centres on the notion that '[a] little English education can be a dangerous thing' (364). The two lovers are separated after Captain Durham is called to 'control the situation in a printing company in Kingston, where a young man called Garvey was staging a printers' strike' (358). Then, following an earthquake, Captain Durham is powerless to find Ambrosia, having 'never asked' her surname amidst 'all that teaching' (362). The short story concludes by noting that it is not 'that he doesn't want to help her, or that he doesn't love her (oh, he *loves* her; just as the English loved India and Africa and Ireland; it is the love that is the problem, people treat their lovers badly) […]. Maybe nothing that happens upon stolen ground can expect a happy ending' (361). In short, any genuine affection between Captain Durham and Ambrosia is undermined by the exploitative practices of colonialism in which love between coloniser and colonial subject cannot overcome the unequal power relations whereby the former is always intrinsically superior to the latter. By historicising intimate relationships in the past as in the present, *White Teeth* radically challenges *The Black Album*'s notion of love as transcendent.

White Teeth's attempts to escape the burdens of history and the past reach a climax at the launch of the FutureMouse exhibit on New Year's Eve, 1999, where the trajectories of the three families collide. Various characters and groups conspire to sabotage the event, but in the end it is Millat, high on marijuana, who successfully disrupts the proceedings by firing a gun at Dr Sick, the former Nazi and eugenicist who assisted with the FutureMouse project. History repeats itself in this confrontation as Millat symbolically re-enacts Mangal Pande's mutiny against the British. As the closing image

of the novel, Archie cheers on the titular FutureMouse's escape from its display case to a future unknown.

White Teeth's celebration of attempts to escape from historical and cultural determinism is mirrored in its form. Internal contradictions and unpredictability are not confined to the characters alone; the novel is self-conscious about the (im)possibilities of the form to adequately capture the multiplicity of social reality, and the seemingly infinite configurations and possibilities individuals can take within it. For all its attempts to represent the unpredictable, expectation-defying turns of these characters' lives, the novel's open-ended conclusion is an admission of literature's limits in representing freedom. This must be seen as a radical departure from Shahid and Deedee's agreement at the end of *The Black Album* to remain together in perpetuity, or at least, '[u]ntil it stops being fun' (276). Irie's pregnancy at the end of *White Teeth* represents the freedom inherent in an unknowable future: the child, being of unknown paternity, 'can never be mapped exactly nor spoken of with any certainty' (527). Similarly, FutureMouse's escape from its display case means that, while its death is assured, its life is an open question which, crucially, the novel does not represent. The novel's form thus resists Kureishi's assertion about the unique power and ability of literature to embody individual freedom. In *White Teeth*, freedom and the novel emerge as contradictory concepts: only a future as yet unwritten is free.

Conclusion

This chapter considered two novels as illustrations of differing approaches to largely similar themes and subject matter. Contextualising these approaches within their respective historical moments – that of the mid- and late-1990s in *The Black Album* and *White Teeth* respectively – accounts in part for their divergent articulations of multiculturalism through depictions of love and relationships. Beyond their debts to contemporary understandings of multiculturalism and Muslims in the UK, I have argued these literary texts intervene in political debates through both their form and content.

In terms of form, *The Black Album* collapses distinctions between its narrator and protagonist, denying other voices the privileges of speech. The limited, caricatural roles afforded other characters, notably women, confirm Ranasinha's argument for the text's

'monologic' character (Ranasinha 2002: 90). I have argued further, with regard to content, that *The Black Album* takes specific attitudes towards sex and literature as necessary preconditions for Muslims' accommodation within multicultural Britain. Muslims' depicted inability to meet these conditions positions them beyond the limits of the novel's empathy. Ironically, *The Black Album*'s didacticism means the novel does not enact the empathetic values it ascribes to literature; rather, literature serves as a central means of identifying national subjects who are inadequate readers and are therefore not capable nor deserving of empathy. By drawing on pre-existing discourses which articulate literature and love as transcendent individual experiences, and thus outside of the domain of history, the novel works to disguise the political implications of its representation of the Rushdie affair.

In addition to the aforementioned conditions around sex and literature, the novel draws on discourses of individualism and modernity to imply Muslims' incompatibility with Britain and its values. Questioning the merits or terms of these concepts – as in the case of Brownlow's support for communism – is associated with fundamentalism and an essential, unresolvable antagonism toward liberal, secular society.

By comparison, my reading of *White Teeth* reveals an alternative approach to representing multiculturalism. There are nevertheless a number of similarities: *White Teeth*, like *The Black Album*, establishes a good/bad binary, valorising proponents of hybridity and individualism against fundamentalist, collectivist opponents on the other. I have argued that, as in *The Black Album*, fundamentalists in *White Teeth* are associated with attempts to manage and direct the intimate relationships of others – depicted in *White Teeth* as attempts to preserve or re-create cultural traditions. These themes are elucidated most clearly in the novel's representation of colonial-era Jamaica and the relationship between Captain Durham and Ambrosia. This passage of *White Teeth* reveals a commitment to historicising love and multiculturalism, calling attention to power imbalances and histories of domination which may render love more of a 'problem' than a solution (361). In doing so, *White Teeth*'s division between liberals and fundamentalists resists simple assimilation into generalisations around essential racial or cultural differences which distinguish between "us" and "them". One result of this is that fundamentalist characters are neither precluded from empathy or inclusion within the nation – even as they serve as prominent targets of the novel's humour.

Humour is a means by which *White Teeth* depicts its characters playful and ironic attempts to escape the influence of the past on the present. *White Teeth*'s commitment to an unwritten future, free from the constraints of the past, is revealed through characters' failures that are equal parts humorous and tragic. The difficulty of escaping the weight of past expectations is shared in this regard by the form of the novel, which self-consciously struggles to represent the possibilities of an "everyday multiculturalism". By acknowledging its own dependencies on the literary imagination and the imaginations of British migrants, and representing the novel itself as a form struggling with its subject, *White Teeth* writes against *The Black Album*'s conception of the novel as a transcendent, sacred form.

Chapter 2. Romances of the nation: policing love in South Asian Muslim communities in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Brick Lane*

Introduction

This second chapter explores novels published in a post-9/11, war on terror context which depict South Asian diasporic communities in the UK as uniquely dangerous and/or troublesome, thus bolstering political narratives around the need for intervention (be it at home or abroad) and forced assimilation. The primary focus of this chapter concerns the use of tropes in *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali and *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam, including religious fundamentalism or extremism, honour killings, culturally sanctioned violence against women, a sense of cultural isolation from the British majority and a pervasive "gossip" culture which shames morally or culturally transgressive acts. I argue that the deployment of such tropes politicises love and intimate practices such that diasporic, predominantly Muslim communities are denied access to and knowledge of love, which British identity claims exclusively.

My analysis of these texts does not directly argue against the negative portrayal of Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Muslim migrants in these novels. While I do highlight negative portrayals and my analysis may lend itself to such conclusions, I do not argue the need for "fairer" or "more respectful" representations of such communities and their countries of origin; there are critiques already of this kind which have raised questions around negative representations and (ab)uses of stereotypes in these texts (see Lemke 2008 on *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Nash 2012 on both novels). Rather, this chapter will consider each novel's construction of British identity as largely antithetical to Muslim identity, and the investment in intimate practices as sites of essential difference.

In much of the critical literature, there has been scant attention paid to the role of love in structuring these texts, and the political implications representations of love possess. Thus in Sadia Abbas's reading of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, a description of the novel as 'conced[ing] nothing to power' excludes love from the domain of power, that is to say the public realm, relegating love to an apolitical, private space (Abbas 2014: 92). This ignores the increasing politicisation and policing of practices and affinities notionally

defined as private in contemporary Britain. More pressingly, it ignores the manner in which these novels secure culturally-specific intimate practices as natural, self-evident and universal truths in order to construct Muslim identity in opposition to British identity. By questioning love's exclusion from the political domain, this chapter aims to shed light novels' uses of love to re-inscribe the unbalanced terms that structure British-Muslim interactions and relations in diasporic, national and international settings post-9/11.

The starting point for this chapter is the shared depiction of South Asian diasporic communities (predominantly Muslim) in each novel. In these texts, individuals negotiate a wide range of conflicts between affiliations, loyalties and practices from "back home" (Bangladesh or Pakistan) and those deemed native to Britain, in the context of a diasporic community. Practices of intimacy – rites of marriage, dating and/or sex – are contested sites in these novels, through which characters are seen to be either "westernised" or "Islamic". A shared feature in each of the two novels is the depiction of individuals who transgress the intimate norms of the diaspora in order to adopt normative British practices, where they find love in one form or another.

Amidst questions around love and romance, these novels depict a host of other concerns around working class migrant communities, including economic deprivation, cultural and linguistic isolation, inter-generational conflict and a virtual absence of state institutions and public services. *Maps for Lost Lovers* is set in an unnamed, predominantly South Asian Northern town, whereas *Brick Lane* takes place in London's East End, entering a long literary tradition of representing the migrant experience in East London (see Valman 2009). Owing to the novels' close attention to the dynamics of working class diasporic communities, intra-communal tensions and conflicts are central to each narrative, with indigenous British subjects and communities infrequently appearing.

In these texts, certain individuals undergo a transformation from unloved and unloving members of an isolated and restrictive local community with ties to "back home", to loving and loved integrated national subjects. In other words, these narratives offer love as a defining feature of the integrated or assimilated migrant in Britain. This character gains access to love, in contrast with the remaining unassimilated, non-integrated migrant community who are seen to refuse love by obstinately clinging to cultural,

religious and political practices, rites and traditions seen to originate "back home". Used in this way, the newly assimilated migrant reflects a particular self-image of British identity defined by the presence of love within the nation as a collective. While it is often true that invocations of love are particularly effective at representing migrants' transformations as apolitical, natural and universal, it is important to stress the context in which these novels' claims for migrant communities as requiring integration and assimilation were produced, published and consumed.

The context of publication for these novels is a post-9/11 landscape defined by controversial British foreign policy as part of the "war on terror". This context is particularly important given public statements by Nadeem Aslam which market the connection between *Maps for Lost Lovers* and 9/11. In an interview for *The Independent*, Aslam describes *Maps for Lost Lovers* as being 'about September 11 […] the small scale September 11s that go on every day' (Brace 2004). Aslam suggests that his novel, which is ostensibly about the honour killing of an unmarried Muslim couple living together in Britain, will offer readers some form of insight into the terrorist attack that prompted the "war on terror". In positing a direct connection between his representation of a Muslim community in Britain and 9/11, Aslam champions a mode of reading which perceives the internal culture and actions of South Asian communities in Britain as directly relevant, perhaps even equivalent to the violence and destruction of 9/11. While the equivalence of the actions within the community of Aslam's novel and the atrocity of 9/11 is debatable in and of itself, more relevant for my purposes are the associations Aslam makes between cultural violence in the South Asian diaspora in Britain, and the political violence of 9/11.

Aslam is far from alone in drawing such a connection: in fact, his statement is consistent with what Mahmood Mamdani has termed 'culture talk'. For Mamdani, 'culture talk' in the post-9/11 climate is 'troubling for two reasons':

> On the one hand, cultural explanations of political outcomes tend to avoid *history* and issues. By equating political tendencies with entire communities defined in nonhistorical cultural terms, such explanations encourage collective discipline and punishment – a practice characteristic of colonial encounters. This line of reasoning equates terrorists with Muslims, justifies a punishing war against an entire country (Afghanistan) and ignores the recent history that shaped both the current Afghan context and the emergence of political Islam. On the other hand,

culture talk tends to think of individuals (from "traditional" cultures) in authentic and original terms, as if their identities are shaped entirely by the supposedly unchanging culture into which they are born (Mamdani 2002: 767; original emphasis).

The collapse of history and culture is characteristic of much post-9/11 discourse around Muslims as a collective, and I suggest that it is of great importance and relevance for reading these texts, engaged as they are with the culture of predominantly Muslim communities. This is true even of *Maps for Lost Lovers* – which does not explicitly mention or allude to 9/11 or the war on terror – given the readiness with which the text's content lends itself to 'culture talk'.

Against a backdrop of 'culture talk', authors including Aslam and Ali play a particular function. An important component of my argument is that these authors act as native informants or informers, a concept which Geoffrey Nash has applied to Ali and Aslam: Nash notes the tendency in their novels to 'construct Islam and Muslims […] by employing recycled Orientalist tropes cast in the insider's voice' (Nash 2012: 26). Hamid Dabashi's work *Brown Skin, White Masks* (2009) offers a polemical analysis of 'native informers' (his preferred term) in the context of the United States, post-9/11 noting 'the way grand strategies of domination become operational through the compradorial function of the native informers' (Dabashi 2009: 13). For Dabashi, native informers – by virtue of a background or history which connects them to a particular cultural background – are able to convincingly 'denigrate and dismiss' that culture, such that they invite and justify imperialist intervention and expansion (Dabashi 2009: 13). As unreliable witnesses, native informers 'are more effective in manufacturing the public illusions that empires need to sustain themselves than in truly informing the public' (Dabashi 2009: 13).

In short, an application of Dabashi's 'native informer' framework to these texts suggests that prominent negative depictions of South Asian Muslim communities within the context of the ongoing war on terror may offer some measure of moral justification to a British audience for controversial foreign and domestic policies and campaigns which disproportionately affect Muslims. Since 2001, Britain has introduced legislation to enhance the state's capacities to profile, monitor and discipline predominantly Muslim communities within its borders, alongside its active role militarily in various Muslim countries, most notably Iraq and Afghanistan. It is not surprising that in this context,

fear-inducing depictions of Muslims as backwards, regressive and cruel are widely circulated and readily saleable in the post-9/11 climate (see Lean 2012).

Aslam's comparison between 9/11 and the events of his novel is exacerbated by the authentic relationship Aslam implies between fiction and the community the text depicts. This anthropological impulse underlying Aslam's statement has been reproduced by some mainstream and academic critics in readings of these novels. The anthropological impulse produces readings which see *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* as having direct access to reality and an intimate, authentic knowledge of the communities they represent, neutrally representing a "true" or "real" community even as it simultaneously earns the label of "fiction". This tendency is evident in many reviews of these texts: a representative example from the *New Statesman* claims that 'Monica Ali's first novel, *Brick Lane*, exposes a hidden world and allows the reader a detailed and fascinating glimpse into British Bengali culture. […] I certainly feel more informed about the people who are my next-door neighbours than I did before I read this book' (Gilbert 2003). In a similar fashion, it is worth questioning the need for a work of literary criticism to assert that 'moderate Muslims […] do in fact make up the majority of the British Muslim population' (Santesso 2013: 20). The resulting study is premised upon the use of literary materials to investigate whether Muslim communities in Britain are sufficiently integrated or dangerously radical.

My readings of these novels challenge the conception of literature propounded by these critics, by emphasising the function of love in these narratives to offer specific values and acts as self-evidently good or bad. This chapter is written with an awareness that truth claims in realist fiction are products of ideological persuasions, and are not neutral or objective truths which the discerning reader can interpret. Thus the novels' twinned engagements with love and a discourse around South Asian Muslim communities prominent at the time in the British media is not neutral. Crucially, the apportioning of values in these texts occurs not through argument, discussion or debate, but simply through opaque claims that love – and a particular set of affiliations, values and acts associated with it – exists in a state of nature.

Love's presence in these novels, and all that goes along with it, is vague and shadowy, with explicit definitions of love rarely if ever voiced directly. Despite this vagueness, these novels strongly proscribe who, how and where love can occur, and suggest a

stringent set of requirements necessary to find love. Love acts as a kind of universal currency in the novels, transcending local or particular factors such as time and location in order to create comparisons between Bangladesh or Pakistan and Britain which finds societies in the former lacking in love compared with the latter.

Alongside love, these texts enlist other discourses that further bolster their ideological claims and calls for migrant assimilation. Sufism in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and neoliberal feminism in *Brick Lane* provide specific terms Britain and British people should demand of diasporic communities deemed in need of intervention. Sufism, in *Maps for Lost Lovers,* is an exception to the negative depiction of Islam in the text, being supposedly compatible with secular liberal individualism and allowing for a measure of resistance to the normative values of the community. Here Aslam allows for a lesser degree of transformation or assimilation in the community he depicts than an outright rejection of religion. Likewise, neoliberal feminism operates in *Brick Lane* as a model of acceptable transformation, forming the basis for undermining and opposing existing community edicts and culture.

Maps for Lost Lovers

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Nadeem Aslam strongly engages with the central premise of an isolated and impoverished diasporic community. The community depicted – known as the Dasht-e-Tanhaii or Desert of Loneliness – contains a mixture of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from India and Pakistan. Both the specific location and time are not made clear, although a chronology of the community's relations with wider British society is given:

> It was a time in England when the white attitude towards the dark-skinned foreigners was just beginning to go from I *don't want to see them or work next to them* to *I don't mind working next to them if I'm forced to, as long as I don't have to speak to them*, an attitude that would change again within the next ten years to *I don't mind speaking to them when I have to in the workplace, as long as I don't have to talk to them outside the working hours*, and then in another ten years to I *don't mind them socializing in the same place as me if they must, as long as I don't have to live next to them*. By then it was the 1970s and because the immigrant families had to live *somewhere* and were moving in next door to the whites, there were calls for a ban on immigration and the

repatriation of the immigrants who were already here. (11; original emphasis)

There are a number of reported incidents which suggest a racist attitude towards Muslims, including as a pig's head left outside a mosque, and a white woman burning her husband's Qur'an, which confirm the ongoing tensions (14; 61).

Beyond these incidents, the novel's omniscient narrator focuses predominantly on the South Asian community, whose members are overwhelmingly and didactically represented in opposition to Britain and its values. Thus we see that the racist distrust and outright dislike for the South Asian community from the outside is easily matched by the same community's animosity towards Britain, and white people generally. Kaukab, one of the novel's main characters overhears a group of South Asian women talking: 'One is cursing the inventor of the wheel and ruing the day she came to England, this loathsome country that has stolen her daughter from her' (45). A grandmother complains of 'depraved white men doing unspeakable things to little children', and calls Britain 'this deplorable country, […] this nest of devilry from where God has been exiled' (30).

The strongest fear and anger is reserved for inter-racial sexual and intimate relations. Kaukab complains about having 'lost one son to a white girl' (37). For Kaukab, as for many other characters, sexual licentiousness is denoted as a uniquely English, Western or white trait. Terms like 'wanton shameless English whore' are also used to describe Muslim or South Asian characters seen to reject their heritage, or who have been contaminated through contact with Britain/the West/white people (97). These concepts regularly take on a paranoid, even hysterical quality, so that a daughter's request to attend university in London is interpreted by her mother as the desire 'to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smeared life' (111). These examples confirm that the investment in intimate relations is one of the primary means by which the Muslim South Asian community in *Maps for Lost Lovers* conceives of itself in relation to others. English licentiousness is opposed to the piety of the community, which must be guarded and maintained at any cost.

Intimate relations are thereby overdetermined in the novel, such that they are seen to stand in for the whole of identity – all other affiliations, beliefs and ideas are secondary to the demands of intimacy. Despite the fact that the novel seems poised to offer a

critique of a particular investment in intimate relations and practices within a diasporic setting, the novel in fact reinforces the viability, indeed desirability, of such an investment. Intimate relations can and indeed should serve as the basis for individual and collective identity. *Maps for Lost Lovers* simply reverses the binary enjoined by the novel's Muslim South Asian community – Muslim piety versus British licentiousness – by valorising the intimate customs and practices deemed licentious by the depicted Muslim South Asian community, and denouncing the intimate customs and practices of the Muslim South Asian community as unnatural, perverse, cruel and inhumane. To these intertwined ends, love permeates and structures every interaction in the novel.

The novel is set during the aftermath of an honour killing of a co-habiting unmarried couple, Chanda and Jugnu. The story of this couple provides the backdrop for much of the novel, with details filled in gradually through the recollections of various characters. Prior to meeting Jugnu, Chanda is reported to have been forced by her parents from the age of 16 into a string of failed marriages to two male cousins in Pakistan and an illegal immigrant in the UK. The third and final marriage ended after the husband disappeared, however 'Chanda remained married to him because there had been no divorce' (54). When she falls in love with Jugnu, the lack of divorce becomes problematic: 'Jugnu had said he would marry Chanda but since she had not been divorced by her previous husband, Islam forbade another marriage for several years – the number differing from sect to sect, four, five, six' (55). Despite this apparent setback, the couple decide to move in together regardless, since their consultations with imams were only done in order 'to gain favour with Chanda's family and with Kaukab', Jugnu's sister-in-law (55). The novel proceeds to explain the workings of Islamic law within the community: 'If only she [Chanda] could obtain a *Muslim* divorce and marry Jugnu *Islamically* – they could cohabit then, regardless of the fact that she was still legally married to someone under British law' (55; original emphasis). The felt need to explain and literally emphasise practices deemed Islamic suggests that the novel's intended reader is British and non-Muslim, and the comparison with British legal practices implies the same reader should see Islam as an unwelcome aberration or exception within Britain.

Chanda and Jugnu's decision to co-habit in spite of the community's hostility, and their eventual deaths as a result is highly significant in the novel. As a plot point, it is not only the catalyst for the events of the novel, but it also establishes an opposition between the demands of love and those of Islamic law which underpins the novel. It is

telling that Chanda justifies her decision to Kaukab by explaining that she and Jugnu 'love each other deeply and honestly' and, because of this, '[t]here is no alternative' (62). Although Kaukab admits the importance of 'what it is', that is to say love, she also makes clear the importance of 'what it looks like' (62). The orthodoxy and customs of the community become, therefore, opposed to love, an opposition which underlies the entire novel.

The majority of the novel follows Jugnu's brother, Shamas, a Marxist and committed activist in the local community and his wife Kaukab. As the details of the honour killing are gradually revealed, the perspective shifts between various people in the community, including Shamas and Kaukab's three children. A central thread of the plot revolves around Kaukab's unhealthy, overbearing relationship with her children, and their subsequent rebellion and alienation from her, with Islam the main point of drama and contention throughout. The novel depicts Kaukab thrusting a knife at her daughter, with other incidents including a conspiracy with the local imam to reduce her son's sex drive by putting bromide in his food, endangering her newborn baby's life by making him fast through the day during Ramadan, and coercing her daughter into marrying an abusive cousin in Pakistan. The story concludes with the revelation that the local imam is sexually abusing local children, and Shamas, a witness to the abuse, is murdered by supporters of the imam after refusing to keep the crime secret. The final section of the novel depicts the murders of Jugnu and Chanda through the alternating perspectives of the killers – confirmed to be Chanda's brothers – and the victims.

Alongside the central plot are various anecdotes, sub-plots and events at the periphery of the text which elaborate on the character of the local migrant community and their interactions with others. Love is just as central to these smaller plots, as are themes of migration, arranged/forced marriage and the unequal treatment of women, with an overriding tragic tone. As with much of the novel's plot, these incidents offer examples of the community's unremitting attempts to control the intimate relationships and practices of its involuntary members. A representative example of is the peripheral story of an unnamed Muslim woman and a Hindu man whose sexual relationship, begun in secret, is deemed an affront to the community. The story culminates in the death of the woman after the community attributes her resistance to arranged bridegrooms to her possession by djinns. The community call in an imam who, in an exorcism which lasts for several days, beats her to death. The novel describes how she was forced to marry a

cousin from Pakistan, who quickly divorced her after obtaining British citizenship. Struggling to locate a new husband for 'a girl who was not a virgin', the parents 'could only find an older man for her, who it has now turned out has three other wives' (87-8). This anecdotal story, narrated in summary fashion, concludes with a discovery by the Muslim woman's mother: learning that her daughter 'had refused to consummate the marriage with her cousin after sharing a bed for almost a week, she took the bridegroom aside and told him in a whisper, "Rape her tonight."' (88). In this example, as in many others in the novel, sexual and intimate practices are considered a communal responsibility to be governed and authorised by the community's interpretation of Islamic law and customs, which display at best indifference for individual preferences and decisions, and at worst a sadistic, violent opposition.

Here, as elsewhere, the novel creates a strictly delineated set of (im)possibilities for its characters according to their beliefs and practices. Thus, for characters who opt or are coerced into adopting Islamic norms, love is an impossibility, while tragedy and dysfunction are all but inevitable. Furthermore, those who voluntarily follow Islamic edicts and encourage others to do the same, the novel suggests, are motivated by cruelty, resentment, jealousy, and other emotional responses to a reality which does not and will not conform to their beliefs. There is no possibility of a rational or intellectual motivation for those Muslims who are '[t]rapped within the cage of permitted thinking' (110). Those characters who openly reject Islamic norms of intimacy and reside in the community, are in constant danger for their lives; only those who flee the community and reject its edicts and values entirely find the possibility of happiness and fulfilment, as well as safety from the community's violence. Characters in the latter two categories, the novel suggests, are uniquely capable of experiencing love and compassion, while their actions are not necessarily bound to result in a tragic outcome.

Arguably, the novel does gesture towards a possible middle ground. As Esra Mirze Santesso argues, 'Kaukab is frozen by the pressure of trying to decide whether to take Islam only as a repressive set of codes or as a guiding philosophy based on compassion' (Santesso 2013: 176). This conflict emerges in the novel as a contest between the Saudi Arabia-derived Wahhabism prevalent in the community which emphasises rules, and a Sufistic conception of Islam which emphasises love. An internal monologue by Kaukab clarifies the importance of love to the 'True Faith': 'Islam said that in order not to be unworthy of being, only one thing was required: love' (64). However, while love is

consistently upheld in this manner throughout the novel, and is said to reflect a pure and natural state within Islam – 'The very stones sang of love. Allah Himself was a being in love with His own creations' (64) – in practice, Kaukab's actions are never seen to reflect this idealised love, a love which is naturalised exclusively within the domains and practices the novel offers as British.

Maps for Lost Lovers distinguishes between British and Islamic norms and practices through frequent contrast. In the process, it solidifies a notion of natural or free love possessed and practiced by English people. For example, when Mah-Jabin, Shamas and Kaukab's daughter, falls in love with a young man and imagines that he feels the same way about her, she mistakes his lack of enthusiasm for caution,

> because in this neighbourhood, and in the way they had been brought up, the things that were natural and instinctive to all humans were frowned upon, the people making you feel that it was you who was the odd one out. Everyone here was imprisoned in the cage of others' thoughts. She and he were born here in England and had grown up witnessing people taking pleasure in freedom, but that freedom although within reach was of no use to them. (117; my emphasis)

'[F]reedom', 'natural' and 'instinctive' – all three are inferred to consist of culturally English norms. This is strongly emphasised in an encounter between Shamas and a Hindu man, Poorab-ji, involving a group of drunk youths: 'the still-drunk boys had chased the loud girls […]. No doubt, Poorab-ji had just seen sordid promiscuity on display, debauchery, lewdness, whereas for Shamas there was hardly anything more beautiful than those young people […] finding comfort in their own and others' bodies' (144). Shamas's interpretation of events elevates the 'Saturday-night revellers' beyond culture, their actions the fulfilment of natural (secular) design (144). The caged, repressive community and the freedom outside of it are interdependent in the novel, with the latter not possible without the former. As both of these examples demonstrate, glimpses of "freedom" in the novel are fleeting, and contain no drama or plot that might complicate the idea of the intimate practices and rituals of English people as free.

One of the most revealing articulations of freedom the novel champions can be seen in the illicit relationship between Charag and Stella. The novel emphasises the naturalness of their meeting and sexual encounters through a host of natural imagery: 'The smell of his armpits was on her shoulders – a flower depositing pollen on a hummingbird's

forehead' (127). As lovers, Stella instructs Charag to abandon his chemistry degree and instead take up art, against the wishes of his mother, Kaukab: 'How light the burden of one's life became in the hands of a lover! She [i.e. Stella] told him what he had to do and made plans for contingencies, showing him he was several moves away from disaster' (128). The novel contrasts these glimpses of a caring, companionate intimacy with the dysfunction Charag grew up around. His mother Kaukab, for instance, 'didn't know […] what it meant to have a girlfriend, that a relationship was replete with subtleties through which intimacy and commitment were demanded and demonstrated' (128). Indeed, by comparison Kaukab's marriage with Shamas is marked by a profound sense of alienation and isolation, with the couple sleeping in separate beds (see 193), and Kaukab resisting Shamas's rare sexual advances on the pretence 'that it was not a sexual advance […] and therefore remain[ing] relatively free of guilt, and free of the fear of Allah's retribution' (259). It is only through intimate arrangements deemed illicit in the community that traits of compassion, reciprocity and care can emerge.

What is most interesting in this case is how, just as Charag's own personal development depends on a private repudiation of the values and ideas he grew up with, his livelihood as an artist also depends upon a public repudiation of his upbringing, religion and ethnic customs. It is particularly telling that a newspaper article detailing Charag's success as an artist – his inclusion in a 'Young British Artists exhibition' in London, with the work commissioned by a prestigious 'art collector' – highlights a particular painting, 'The Uncut Self-Portrait', and reproduces it in the paper (320). Charag explains the intention behind this nude self-portrait in which he is painted uncircumcised: 'What I am trying to say is that it was the first act of violence done to me in the name of a religious or social system' (320). This statement effectively summarises much of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, which reads as an exposé of religious violence. And yet, at the same time, in representing Charag as a successful artist, the novel inadvertently depicts a public culture of artistic production and reception in Britain which favours the (re)production and consumption respectively of narratives of violence carried out in the name of religion.

In fact, the novel's exposure and rejection of religious violence bolsters and secures a particular conception of British identity which is seen to be free of violence (racism notwithstanding), conforming instead to the higher dictate of love. The perceived success of Charag and Stella's relationship and the perceived failings of relationships

within the Muslim community are largely interdependent, serving a shared goal: the consolidation of a narcissistic fantasy of virtuous innocence on behalf of the largely absent indigenous British population. More specifically, the novel is invested in securing a universalised, natural form of love which the population and institutions outside of the community have access to.

It is therefore ironic that the novel represents Kaukab's investment in intimate practices as a perverse act of self-denial. We can see this most clearly in a moment when Charag informs his mother about his decision to become an artist. Kaukab's passive-aggressive expression of disappointment with him reveals her own investment in her daughter's fulfilment through a set of intimate practices deemed "Islamic": 'At least Allah is smiling on me as far as my daughter is concerned. Her husband loves her and she's happy' (129). This hope, as with all of them, is revealed to be delusional when a letter from Mah-Jabin's husband arrives at the house, filled with threats and reminders of his physical abuse towards her (see 306-8). Indeed, it is telling that the letter is introduced by the ex-husband as 'a story of love', since it conforms with the novel's idea of what an Islamic love looks like: a highly coercive relationship filled with threats and hate (306).

While the letter conclusively shows the failure of her daughter's marriage to be down to an abusive husband, Kaukab questions the letter's veracity: 'Could this letter be a trick of Mah-Jabin's? A forgery to torment her? A plot hatched by Mah-Jabin and Ujala and Charag and the white girl Stella and Shamas to humiliate her, to ridicule her faith?' (308). The inability to accept uncomfortable truths is indicative of how *Maps for Lost Lovers* confines religious characters to a state of denial, blindly and narcissistically sure of their own innocence. The process of shifting guilt onto others is established in a description of a recurring dream Kaukab has, in which she is executed by a double of herself:

> "I can't help wondering it's all my fault [sic]," said the corpse. "Stop wondering," said the executioner-self. But during the waking hours, as usual, she could find no one other than the old culprits for this new disaster that had befallen her. Shamas. Jugnu. England. The white race. The vasectomy was a Christian conspiracy to stop the number of Muslims from increasing. Her parents were responsible for marrying her to an infidel. Her in-laws were Godless. Afflicted with loneliness and maddening fury, she finally accused Shamas of not being a Muslim at all, the son of a Hindu, whose filthy infidel's corpse was spat out

repeatedly by the earth no matter how deep they buried it the next day (59).

This excoriating passage speaks to a paranoid refusal of responsibility and an inability to perceive Muslims as anything other than perfect.

These same traits are true even of Suraya, a Muslim divorcee newly arrived in England from Pakistan, where her abusive husband divorced her accidentally whilst drunk. Suraya comes to Britain to find a temporary husband before she can return to Pakistan and remarry her former husband, since in accordance with Islamic law, she 'cannot remarry […] without first marrying and getting a divorce from someone else' (42). Even as a divorcee, she cannot gain custody of her child, as she reminds Shamas: 'they'd never let me see my boy out of vindictiveness. […] You've forgotten what Pakistan is like' (228). Suraya is cast as a victim, a refugee who is lucky to be alive: 'Pakistan is not just a wife-beating country, it's a wife-murdering one' (226). Within this role however, she grapples with a mixture of self-doubt and self-denial which the novel construes as dangerous. Thus Suraya is filled with doubt and questioning about an incident in her childhood when she fell in love with a Sikh boy at school and her mother moved her to a girls' school: 'Suraya had resented being sent to the Muslim girls' school, but that was just a young person's petulance, she knows now. She is glad her mother […] sent her to a place where they taught her to fear and love Allah' (203). Later however, she describes being 'corralled up in that wretched third-rate Islamic school for most of my learning years, committing to memory the names of all the Prophet's wives. I know how pedestrian my intellect and my understanding of life really are' (225). This moment is followed by resentment towards Shamas for 'mak[ing] it possible for me to think and talk like that': 'My Allah, Shamas, why didn't you stop me just now when I was talking so disrespectfully of Islam?' (226). Suraya occupies a double position, at once a hapless victim and cruel oppressor. The Muslim woman questions her circumstances, and the system which places her there, but guilt and fear of God forces her to blame others, for fear of blaming God, Pakistan or other Muslims.

According to the novel, believers, although they themselves may struggle with doubts about their beliefs, become resentful and even violent when confronted or challenged about their own beliefs or actions, including those of other Muslims. A confrontation between Mah-Jabin and Kaukab, in which Mah-Jabin forcefully questions her mother's decision to send her to Pakistan to marry her cousin at the age of sixteen – 'How dare

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you throw questions at me like stones!' – ends with Kaukab thrusting a knife at her daughter (114). Mah-Jabin's reaction implicates the entire community ('all of you') in the murder of Chanda and Jugnu:

> Here we have proof [in the thrusting of the knife] that Chanda was murdered by her brothers, that a family can kill one of its own. I wonder if this will stand up as evidence in court so that those two bastards can be put away for life. My god, for all of you she probably didn't die hard enough: you would like to dig her up piece by piece, put her back together, and kill her once more for going against your laws and codes, the so-called traditions that you have dragged into this country with you like shit on your own shoes (114).

The fantasy of innocence is an emotional necessity, the novel suggests, which makes the Muslim community complicit in the crimes of its individual members. Pakistan too is guilty of abetting murder, since 'the laws and the religion and the customs reinforced their [Chanda's brothers'] sense of having acted properly, legitimately, correctly' (348).

I wish to stress here that the commitment to depicting Muslims as inherently irrational and incapable of empathy justifies the novel's conception of British superiority and objectivity. We see this, for instance, when a jury concludes (correctly, as we discover at the end of the novel) that Chanda's brothers killed Chanda and Jugnu. The local newspaper's accurate interpretation of events is contrasted against that of the community: '*They* [Chanda's brothers] *thought the world revolved around them* […] they would begin to shout in the court, the litanies including words like "racism" and "prejudice". The judge's remarks would be deemed to have "insulted our culture and our religion."' (348; original emphasis). The newspaper's accurate interpretation of the brothers' narcissistic viewpoint is at odds with the responses of the local community who, like Chanda's brothers, are incapable of accepting responsibility. One woman hopes the brothers 'are found not-guilty' at trial despite her awareness of their crime, and blames Chanda alone for the murders: 'She not only had poor Jugnu killed by moving in with him, she also ruined the lives of her own poor brothers who had to kill them' (42). The British media's objectivity and neutrality are guaranteed here, with the exposed false claims of racism and Islamophobia within the community providing moral support for interventions and investigations.

This theme of morally justified intervention extends to the novel's own native informer practices of depicting religious violence for a predominantly non-Muslim audience. The

community's morally repugnant practices around marriage and gender segregation are sources of inspiration for the secular artist, even as he refuses all association with them. The most relevant point of the novel in this regard is the subplot concerning Suraya. In one of the novel's most telling moments, Suraya meets Charag and, explaining her dilemma, asks him to marry her temporarily. Rejecting her proposal without explanation and a sense of 'acute' embarrassment, Charag narrates: '[t]he culture she shares with him is based on segregation, and on the denial and contempt of the human body, and in all probability this is the very first time she has "propositioned" someone' (132-3). A request from Suraya follows Charag's silent refusal: '"You are an artist," she says. "Tell me, can you paint this." He knows that by "this" she means the humiliation she's just suffered, the despondent clumsiness to which her circumstances have reduced her' (133). In this bizarre scene, Charag acts as a surrogate for the novelist, as the novel attempts to justify its own representational practices. The Muslim woman asks to be depicted as a victim of her culture whilst simultaneously accepting the artist's rejection of practical help and support. The artist/novelist is hereby absolved of responsibility for his own representational practices, pre-empting any suggestion of exploitation. In fact, the artist transforms what could be construed as a selfish refusal to support a woman in accordance with her beliefs into an honourable act of kindness through bearing witness, representing her shame in an artistic medium for a presumed non-Muslim audience. Our attention is directed away from Charag's rejection of Suraya in this scene, to judging her as an irredeemable victim figure whose only freedom can be articulated at the hands of a secular, male artist. These dynamics, as the novel strives in earnest to highlight, are solely attributable to South Asian culture which has perverted female and male relations, as opposed to an aforementioned British cultural trend which places a high value on artistic and literary works that disavow Islam.

The following example shows further that the novel's narrow and didactic conception of love contradicts its avowed commitment to freedom. Later in the novel, Suraya embarks on an affair with Shamas in the hope that he will marry (and then divorce) her. Once he learns of Suraya's intent to enter a polygamous marriage with him, Shamas refuses 'on principle' despite having fallen in love with her: 'one of things I find repulsive about Islam is the idea of a man being allowed four wives', he explains (226). There is no further justification given and later, dwelling on the affair, Shamas concludes '[t]here is *nothing* he can do to help her' (230; original emphasis). Shamas's conclusion is highly questionable however, given that both Shamas and Charag do have clear practical

means to assist Suraya. Having distanced themselves to a large extent from the culture and practices of the community, these characters are unwilling to entertain community-sanctioned practices on principle, even for the purposes of helping Suraya escape abuse. This "no tolerance" policy is paramount to *Maps for Lost Lovers'* extreme notion of collective responsibility and guilt. It is not feasible, the novel suggests, for someone to entertain Islamic practices without being implicated in oppression, gender segregation, misogyny, hatred of the body, fear, jealousy and rage – the violence of 9/11, even. Participation in a marriage ceremony means complicity with a system which inevitably and exclusively perpetuates misery, seemingly regardless of individual intentions, circumstances and positionality. The sole positive qualities that exist in Muslim communities, according to *Maps for Lost Lovers*, revolve around food and cooking.

And yet for the novel's monolithic, damning representation of the Muslim community and its culture as it exists in the UK and Pakistan, there is no equivalent notion of culture applied in the case of indigenous people, practices or culture. The 'young white man' who steals and buries his dead mother's heart 'from the hospital just because he didn't want it to be transplanted into a black man's body', for example, is portrayed less as the product of culture than as a deviant individual (153). In this manner, the objectivity of the British press, the legal system and the art world is imagined and sustained, with institutions exempted from collective responsibility for the actions of British subjects. To borrow a formulation used by Wendy Brown to summarise post-9/11 discourse around Muslims, 'we *have* culture while they *are* a culture' (Brown 2006: 151; original emphasis). *Maps for Lost Lovers* systematically adheres to this binary, interpreting actions of individuals in the South Asian migrant community as if they were representative of all South Asian Muslim migrants in the UK, and beyond that, of Pakistan and Islam.

There is one caveat to this formulation which must be considered here, namely, the novel's presentation of Sufism as a viable alternative to Islam as practised by the community. This has been seen by some critics to mitigate against charges of racism and Islamophobia. My approach in this chapter, and that of some critics (notably Nash), favours the "native informant" model, a term which explicitly denotes (neo-)colonial power structures which these novelists and novels are imagined to operate within. An alternative reading espoused by Dave Gunning (2010) and Sadia Abbas (2014),

however, proposes that *Maps for Lost Lovers* transcends a colonial power structure and obtains agency through an affinity with Sufism.

For Abbas, the novel 'recover[s] and update[s] a classic confrontation in Muslim history: the confrontation between the mullah and the antinomian religious poet' in order to transcend colonial categories (Abbas 2014: 196). While the novel's '[i]nternal critique' of a Muslim community in a Northern English town is 'always in danger of being taken to endorse an imperialism or racism that has seized the language of opposition for its own', *Maps for Lost Lovers* overcomes the danger of being co-opted into imperial and racist practices:

> By turning to the Sufi poetic tradition, by incorporating it into his own literary practice, Aslam makes it clear that he is claiming a critical position that comes from within Islam's history and that this is first and foremost an internal fight. Muslims have their own historical resources for dealing with such social challenges; Empire does not need to gallop to the rescue. (Abbas 2014: 197-8)

Abbas suggests here that Sufism offers the novel its agency, allowing it to escape complicity and coercion with 'Empire'. Like Abbas, Gunning states that the novel 'finds critique within the religion's own traditions' (Gunning 2010: 86). For Gunning, this is best represented by the Sufistic images of love which affirm the 'compatibility between earthly and divine love […] that Aslam wants to preserve in the novel, against the restrictions imposed by religious authorities, and more importantly, by the morals of the community itself' (Gunning 2010: 92). However, as this chapter has sought to show, *Maps for Lost Lovers'* conception of love – 'earthly love' as Gunning describes it – is defined through narrow and didactic terms. Therefore the compatibility between 'earthly and divine love' is contingent upon a particular conception of Sufism as endorsing the same narrow stance with regard to intimate practices.

Moreover, I am sceptical about the notion of Sufism rescuing or excusing the novel within the context of the war on terror. In a discussion of discourse around Sufism in the war on terror, Linda Sijbrand suggests that in recent years 'Sufism is often portrayed as universalist and tolerant, as an antithesis to jihadi Islam' (Sijbrand 2013: 107). As well as labelling an apolitical reading of Sufism a 'misrepresentation' from both a contemporary and historical point of view, more relevant here is that the championing of Sufism as an apolitical and non-violent mode of Islam is in keeping with 'the practice

of co-optation that many colonial (and postcolonial) rulers used' to subjugate colonised populations and undermine rebellious political activity (Sijbrand 2013: 107-8). It is not enough then to state simply that because the novel articulates an "internal" or "authentic" voice – incorporating Sufi aesthetic elements – that it necessarily rejects racism as Gunning suggests or escapes complicity with imperialism as Abbas states. In fact it may do the opposite, reinstating racism and upholding imperialism. Gunning's position on *Maps for Lost Lovers* is particularly surprising given that the introduction to his chapter specifically cites the promotion of Sufism as apolitical by Western states within the war on terror as an overtly political move (see Gunning 2010: 66). Regardless, it seems to me that the invocations of Sufism play a troubling role in reinforcing the authenticity and legitimacy of the novel's 'Orientalist tropes' (Nash 2012: 26). To clarify, I do not take issue with the endorsement of Sufism per se, but rather what concerns me is how Sufism is proffered as the standard to which all Muslims should aspire, premised on the conception of a non-violent and apolitical Sufism that is uniquely compatible with secular modes of governance and living. Most notable, as well as the charge that non-Sufistic modes of Islam are violent or tend towards violence, is the implied association of secular thought, actions and governments with peace and non-violence.

In practice, *Maps for Lost Lovers* reiterates and reinstates binaries that demonise predominantly Muslim communities in the UK and their culture post-9/11. Thus I wish to suggest that love in the novel, even when presented in Sufistic terms, serves a particular conception of British or English identity which claims the monopoly on love, freedom and non-violence. This identity is constructed in large part through the privileging of intimate practices as key to identity, and the adoption of a narrow and highly specific set of specific intimate practices held to create or foster love. This British or English identity is obtained at the expense of Muslim identity and practices associated with it, which are cast as being inherently motivated by hatred, as well as the near-exclusive source of oppression and tragedy in contemporary Britain. By contrast, English or British identity is constituted as having unique access to love and loving modes of being. The novel also naturalises the notion of Britain and British culture "rescuing" Muslims from their "backwards" and "regressive" culture and religion. Charag's trajectory in the novel is indicative of the ways access to Britain's public sphere and institutions becomes conditional on the rejection of various aspects of

religious or cultural identity seen to originate outside of Britain. In this formulation, love is thereby dependent on the correct identification of those who should be hated.

Brick Lane

Brick Lane bears a number of similarities with *Maps for Lost Lovers* in its depiction of a working class, South Asian Muslim community coping with racism and poverty. The novel's protagonist Nazneen undergoes similar experiences and lives in similar conditions to those found in Aslam's novel, thanks to her isolation from contact with the indigenous population, and immersion in South Asian cultural and religious traditions. As in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Brick Lane* features tropes around the communal policing of intimate norms and a gossip culture used to shame individuals who deviate.

While the two novels contain similar themes, *Brick Lane* achieved bestseller status upon release in 2003 and reached a much wider audience. Amidst general critical acclaim there were some less enthused reactions to the novel. These included, notably, a number of complaints from a Sylheti readership regarding the novel's treatment of Sylhetis, an ethnic group within Bangladesh (for a detailed account of the novel's reception and controversy see Benwell *et al.* 2011). These complaints were given prominent – and largely negative – appraisals in media accounts, which compared the complainants with Muslim campaigners in the Rushdie affair. Three years later, in 2006, local opposition to the filming of *Brick Lane*'s cinema adaptation in Brick Lane itself prompted a heated broadsheet debate between Germaine Greer and Salman Rushdie amongst others about the legitimacy of the protestors' complains, and the (in)appropriateness of comparisons with the Rushdie affair (see Lewis 2006).

In the wake of the novel's high profile reception, critical writing by academics about the novel has tended to engage with questions of authenticity and legitimacy in relation to the novel's formal realism or its basis in a sociological study, Naila Kabeer's *The Power to Choose* (2000). Kabeer's study of women garment workers in Bangladesh and London is an important source for the novel, and lends credibility to the novel's strong emphasis on temporal and geographical realism (for a discussion of *Brick Lane*'s connection to Kabeer's study, see Perfect 2008: 116-9). For Ali Ahmad, the novel's realism is successful: as he writes, one of the novel's 'most striking features is its power

as a work of sociology' (Ahmad 2004: 201). The sociological component is also emphasised, albeit negatively, by Yasmin Hussein in her discussion of the novel. Citing among other things the lack of weddings and religious festivals in the novel, Hussein claims that *Brick Lane* 'lacks that essential verisimilitude as a novel about a South Asian community that would authenticate it for a South Asian audience' (Hussein 2005: 92). Other critics including Jane Hiddleston, have argued for the novel's postmodern leanings, noting a metatextual undercurrent which 'unsettles its representational goals by foregrounding its own artifice' (Hiddleston 2005: 71). Refuting Hiddleston, Michael Perfect perceives a form of literary apologetics at work: 'That a realist novel such as *Brick Lane* has been so prevalently read as a postmodern, metatextual work is symptomatic of the profound unease which many have felt regarding its apparent complicity with stereotypes' (Perfect 2008: 119).

What is more, as Nadia Valman argues, a postmodernist reading,

> must perforce ignore the novel's far stronger insistence on conventionalities such as a linear narrative drive, the coherence and development of the central character's selfhood, and a dismissal of the broader and more demanding contexts of radical politics and religion in favour of the more limited theme of individual redemption (Valman 2009: 3).

But while Valman describes the novel as a *bildungsroman*, these features are also consistent with the popular romance genre. Indeed, *Brick Lane*'s narrowly focalised third person narrator is similar in tone and feel to the romance novels of Leila Aboulela (see chapter four). By contrast, the features of popular romance are absent in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, which invokes love within an unconventional narrative structure associated with a high literary style, and some murder mystery elements.

Writing about a new form of popular transnational romance fiction in the British South Asian context, Marian Aguiar notes that the traditional romance genre's 'narrative functions affectively through suspense and catharsis as the plot revolves around a heroine overcoming obstacles to ultimately achieve love' (Aguiar 2013: 192). This allows us to speak of a 'discourse of romance' which *Brick Lane* mobilises to produce particular expectations, meanings and readings (Aguiar 2013: 193). Fittingly, then, ideals of love and romance are embedded into the world the characters inhabit as well as the central drama. The protagonist Nazneen's walk through East London reveals a film

poster which proclaims '[t]*he world could not stop their love'* (55; original emphasis), as Nazneen continually dwells on 'what it would be like to fall in love' within the context of her own loveless arranged marriage (40). Even her teenage daughter interrogates her repeatedly, '[a]re you in love with him?' (303).

Despite *Brick Lane*'s debt to the tropes of romance fiction, the novel's conclusion is marked by the absence of an unambiguously romantic partner. Instead, the ending of the novel depicts a shift in Nazneen's behaviour and attitude, and the breaking off or loosening of ties with her lover and husband respectively. Such a move can still be accommodated by a discourse of romance however, which does not confine narratives to interpersonal relations. Aguiar argues that in popular romance, the 'object of desire is transferable, and in the context of the transnational popular cultural texts […], the transfer moves from the interpersonal (wanting the girl to get the guy), to the cultural, producing a romance of national belonging' (Aguiar 2013: 192). *Brick Lane*'s concluding sentences are particularly notable in this regard, affirming Nazneen's newfound affinity with England: '"But you can't skate in a sari." Razia was already lacing her boots. "This is England," she said. "You can do whatever you like."' (492). These sentences symbolically link love and desire produced within the romance paradigm with freedom bestowed by the nation-state, as Nazneen emerges from paralysis and passivity ('But you can't skate in a sari') into the role of an agent ('You can do whatever you like').

Preceding this newfound freedom is Nazneen's former existence as a predominantly passive character, beholden to the gendered demands of her family and culture. The novel opens with Nazneen's birth and early life in rural Bangladesh, which establishes the theme of passive fatalism versus agency. The midwife explains to Nazneen's mother after she gives birth that her daughter 'lives but she is weak. There are two routes you can follow, […] [t]ake her to the city, to a hospital […] [o]r you can just see what Fate will do' (13-4). The decision to leave the baby's welfare to 'Fate' and not take Nazneen to the hospital has implications for Nazneen herself, who adopts this very principle: '[w]hat could not be changed, must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne' (16).

The novel's focus then shifts to Nazneen's arranged marriage with Chanu, an older man who brings her to London's East End, where Nazneen experiences the death of her

newborn son, followed by the birth of two healthy daughters. In the second half of the novel, Nazneen embarks on an affair with a young man called Karim, who has a keen interest in radical Islam and chairs a local activist group called the Bengal Tigers. At the end of the novel, the Bengal Tigers organise a march against a local white working class group, the Lion Hearts, culminating in a riot. After a tense moment when one of her daughters gets unexpectedly caught in the riot, Nazneen decides to break off the affair with Karim. The novel concludes with Chanu and Nazneen mutually agreeing to remain married, albeit long distance, with Chanu in Bangladesh and Nazneen with the children in London.

The theme of Nazneen's passivity continues through much of the novel. For instance, her affair with Karim is offered as a primarily passive experience. She describes the passionate affair in terms of giving 'herself up to a power': 'When the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? She gave in to fate and not to herself' (299-300). She also wishes her husband would discover the affair: 'Can't you see what is going on under your nose, she demanded silently every day' (384). By the end of the novel however, Nazneen recognises the affair as shallow for all its intensity, an intensity Nazneen relates to her friend Razia in terms of being 'lift[ed] up inside' (428). Nazneen's seemingly opposing positions on the affair can be reconciled and read through the trope of the mind-body split in romance fiction. Catherine Belsey describes this split and how true love promises to overcome it:

> True love as the romances portray it promises to bring mind and body back into perfect unity, to heal the rift in experience which divides individuals from themselves. Physical sensation, the overwhelming intensity of erotic desire, is to be brought into harmony with rational and moral commitment, a shared life of sympathy and support, freely and confidently chosen. True love, we are to understand, transcends the dualism of passion in conflict with morality (Belsey 1994: 23).

The passion Nazneen experiences with Karim is brought into conflict with the rational and moral commitment required in the romance's conception of '[t]rue love'. Female agency is a necessary precondition for the love Nazneen seeks – and is ultimately deemed worthy of – as the story of Nazneen's sister, Hasina, implies.

Hasina's story, which acts as a foil to Nazneen's, facilitates comparisons between the sisters' respective searches for love in the UK and Bangladesh. Hasina's story is related intermittently through the novel in epistolary form, narrating her tragic misfortunes in Bangladesh following her elopement with a man she loved at sixteen, which takes place just before Nazneen is married off to Chanu. The contrast between their behaviours remains stark for much of the novel, although Nazneen cannot help but admire her sister's courage and impulsiveness even as she worries for her safety. At the close of the novel, Nazneen recognises that Hasina 'isn't going to give up' in her search for love in spite of her overwhelmingly negative experiences in Bangladesh (490).

The parallel stories of Nazneen and Hasina play crucial roles in the production of a particular feminist reading of the novel. Agency within the novel is an inherently gendered construct, as Nazneen's frequent grappling with her upbringing makes clear. She recalls her mother's words: '[i]f God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men' (80). Indeed, as Nash suggests about Nazneen, '[w]e are intended […] to naturalize her as part of a universal female consciousness' (Nash 2012: 38). Similarly, Hasina's 'fate is to be conquered by Third World poverty and patriarchy' (Nash 2012: 37). The implicit parallels and comparisons in the stories of these two women are not neutral, and in fact serve a particular narrative in which Britain is seen as uniquely kind to women while Bangladesh and the diasporic community in Britain (or at least, those who retain affiliations and links with Bangladesh) languish behind in women's rights.

There are further implications for the novel's feminist leanings. Specifically, the model of feminism the novel articulates has a neoliberal character. This is particularly prominent at the end of the novel, which depicts Nazneen's transition from employee to entrepreneur, as she starts her own business designing and selling garments to retailers in the local area with her friend Razia. Catherine Rottenberg describes neoliberalism as a wide-ranging and broad phenomenon, which works toward 'undoing notions of social justice, while usurping the concept of citizenship by producing economic identities as the basis for political life' (Rottenberg 2013: 4). Neoliberal feminism embodies these concepts within a feminist guise. Rottenberg explains:

> Using key liberal terms, such as equality, opportunity, and free choice, while displacing and replacing their content, this recuperated feminism forges a feminist subject who is not only individualized but entrepreneurial in the sense that she is oriented towards optimizing her

resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative and innovation. Indeed, creative individual solutions are presented as feminist and progressive, while calibrating a felicitous work-family balance becomes her main task. Inequality between men and women is thus paradoxically acknowledged only to be disavowed, and the question of social justice is recast in personal, individualized terms (Rottenberg 2013: 4-5).

Brick Lane relies on the discourse of neoliberalism for its feminist credentials. A particularly telling moment occurs when Chanu telephones from Bangladesh: '"How are things with you? Shall I send money?" "No," she said. "We are all right."' (487) There is the sense of a moral as well as economic triumph here, in Nazneen's ability to support herself financially and refuse money from her husband, further emphasised by the ensuing scene which depicts Nazneen wildly dancing to a Lulu song on the radio (488-9).

John Marx's economic reading of the novel concludes that the narrative is embedded 'within what amounts to a narrative assessment of the productivity and flexibility of different kinds of social arrangements. What the nuclear family and the extramarital couple cannot do for Nazneen […], the friendship network and the business community can' (Marx 2012: 213). While it is clear that economic arrangements play a substantial role in the novel – Nazneen's refusal to pay Mrs Islam the money-lender is instructive – critics of neoliberalism and neoliberal feminism make clear that neoliberalism is by no means confined to an abstract economic domain. Indeed, in the North American context, Rottenberg warns of the dangers of an emergent neoliberal feminist culture in which '[e]ach woman's success becomes a feminist success, which is then attributed to the USA's enlightened political order, as well as its moral and political superiority' (Rottenberg 2013: 3). This is consistent with the narrative in *Brick Lane*, which concludes with Nazneen's successful and celebrated social and economic integration within Britain as a Muslim migrant and, at the same time, Hasina's distressing alienation and poverty within her native, predominantly Muslim society.

There are, however, a number of important disavowals which occur concurrently with Nazneen's entrepreneurship that help position her as an idealised Muslim migrant within a neoliberal feminist framework. Given the trajectory of the novel (from unloving and unloved, to loving and loved subject, as well as the economic trajectory of rags to riches) I am broadly aligned here with Sara Upstone, who calls *Brick Lane* a

work of 'utopian realism' (Upstone 2012: 168). Upstone suggests that in the novel's conclusion, Nazneen's 'freedom comes by strategically performing or learning the game of Britishness', as she realises the 'possibility of religious devotion *within* secularized Britain' (Upstone 2012: 173-4; original emphasis). Albeit to a lesser extent than *Maps for Lost Lovers*' depiction of Charag the artist, *Brick Lane*'s utopian conclusion depends on the disavowal of certain various cultural, religious and political tenets which are recognised and cast as inherently cruel and unjust, and are in turn deemed foreign and alien to Britain and British identity. We should therefore acknowledge the contradiction of a neoliberal agenda in the novel which proclaims Britain in glowing terms as a place '[w]here you can do anything you like' even as it demonstrably dictates which affinities, behaviours, priorities and modes of living are (un)acceptable in contemporary Britain (492). Thus, for instance, a public or political assertion of Muslim identity or Islam is deemed unacceptable for British subjects since this results, according to *Brick Lane*, in inevitable, endemic and irrational violence carried out by Muslim men, typically directed towards women.

In effect, *Brick Lane* disavows the presence of misogyny or gender inequality from a normative British identity. By enacting 'the tired project of saving brown women from brown men', and focusing on Muslims and Islam in a (neoliberal) feminist light, readers 'learn to look upon Western models of sex and sexuality as liberating, universally valid, and exempt from criticism' (Norton 2013: 67). It is not coincidence that Nazneen's own capacity to act of her own will and her newfound identification with the British state occurs only once the novel's Muslim male characters are physically absent. Nazneen's transformation functions exclusively through an abandonment of the patriarchal cultural pressures exerted by the community: pressures to work exclusively from home, to marry Karim or to return to Bangladesh, to pay off her husband's ever-increasing debt to Mrs Islam, and so on. Each of these imperatives are recognitions of the community's authority, an authority with a decidedly Islamic – and therefore gendered – tone, as opposed to the seemingly gender-neutral British state.

The depiction of the Bengal Tigers and its successor group demonstrates the gendered aspects of Nazneen's shifting affiliations. She moves from involvement with and deference to a local community defined through gendered Islam to that of a community defined through gender-neutral secular nationalism. The tone of the former group's meetings is a comedy of errors, with a mixture of macho posturing, discussions of jihad

and inane interactions among speakers and audiences reminiscent of *White Teeth*'s comedic Islamic group (see chapter 1). A typical passage reads:

> "If it's violence you're advocatin', I shall have to renounce me vows to Allah."
> Nazneen turned around to see the black man on his feet. […]
> Someone shouted, "Apostate!"
> "Who you callin' a postate?" He had a finely sculpted head, black as Nazneen's cast-iron frying pan, and in his white garb he looked like a king. "I ain't no postate," he grumbled.
> "Brothers," said the Questioner, "let's keep our heads."
> The two girls in burkha rose. "And sisters," they said.
> The Questioner glared at them. "The Qur'an bids us to keep separate. Sisters. What are you doing here anyway?"
> In defiance, they remained standing.
> "There is always the Quakers," said the black man (285).

The two veiled girls here, who have only recently 'upgraded to burkhas', are treated dismissively as intruders in a decidedly male political realm (279). By contrast, the close of the novel sees the formation of a secular political group. The organiser describes his disapproval of the Bengal Tigers: '*I* wouldn't go for jihad in some faraway place. There's enough to do here. […] You know, I never approved of allowing women in the Bengal Tigers. It was supposed to be an Islamic group!', promising in turn that his group is, by contrast, 'a political organization. Local politics' (486). Nazneen accepts the organiser's invitation to their first meeting, noting that her involvement with the Bengal Tigers was 'before I knew what I could do' (486). Nazneen's awareness of her own agency as a woman and its recognition by others is essential to the novel's distinction between the realms of secular local politics and religious politics. It is the same for Islam more widely, which is seen to regard women as an afterthought at best: 'There was a special dispensation for pregnant women. If she chose to, Nazneen could do namaz from her chair. […] Mind you, if any imam had ever been pregnant, would they not have made it *compulsory* to sit?' (69; original emphasis).

By the end of the novel, Nazneen's former ties to the local community are transformed. The community's exclusively Muslim (and predominantly Bengali) population is replaced by an inclusive, secular local community constituted by and within the nation. Thus a secular local political activism replaces the "glocal" ummah championed by Karim: 'What are we for? We're into protecting our local ummah and supporting the global ummah' (241). Nazneen's acceptance and incorporation into the nation is

conditional on her rejection of Karim's political activism that criticises Israeli atrocities against Palestinians and the casualties in Iraq as a result of the West's invasion. When the founder of the secular political group promises at once to work on a local level exclusively and to incorporate women fully – goals which are apparently inappropriate or impossible in an "Islamic" context – we are given to understand that the novel's emancipatory narrative celebrates highly individuated notions of gender equality and entrepreneurship, in which Nazneen assumes full responsibility for her own well-being as well as that of her daughters and sister, Hasina. Britain and the West are thereby exonerated from the consequences and implications of a warring foreign policy with a global reach, and accountable only to the demands of local politics.

In fact, a close examination of Nazneen's relationship with Karim is telling of the novel's conception of engagements with Islam and transnational politics more broadly as exclusively motivated by personal failings. As Dave Gunning notes, Karim's 'politics are seen as a quest for the definite identity he feels has been denied him' (Gunning 2010: 101). We might add that Karim's sense of homelessness, and lack of national belonging within Britain and the compensatory politics he adopts, also pervert or distort love within the romance discourse of the novel. For instance, Karim describes his feelings for Nazneen in terms of a set of expectations of her as an '*unspoilt girl. From the village*': '*You* are the real thing. […] You can arrange for a girl from the village. […] But then there's the settling-in hassle. And you never know *what* you're going to get' (385; original emphasis). Nazneen comes to represent a particular cultural authenticity to Karim, in a context in which he feels he has little or none. Nazneen even comes to pity him for being 'born a foreigner' in England (448). His desire for Nazneen, a 'girl from the village' despite his never actually having been to Bangladesh, is implicitly linked to his sense of the global ummah, as well as apparently Islamic ideals of a pious, devoted wife.

The riot at the end of *Brick Lane* is the culmination of Karim's alienation, and is indicative of the apparent cruelty and barbarity that transnational affinities inevitably lead to. The planned protest descends into 'a mess', as Karim explains: 'It's not even *about* anything any more. It's just about what it is. Put anything in front of them now and they'll fight it' (475; original emphasis). As one of the Bengal Tigers members asks in the midst of the chaos: 'Is this what happens when Islam goes on the march?' (473). As readers, the answer seems to be a self-evident yes. For Gunning, the riot reveals and,

ultimately, fails to contain or manage the 'figure of the political Muslim', who is forced 'outside of the recuperable space of tolerance':

> *Brick Lane* can only present a positive ending for Nazneen through disavowal of the legitimacy of the forms of protest espoused by the Bengal Tigers, but the force of their occupancy of public space remains as a powerful and conflicting trace even as the novel offers its improbable conclusion. The crisis of the state is reproduced in the text's instability (Gunning 2010: 103).

We may then ask what, if any, alternative the novel provides in the absence or rejection of the politically active, male Muslim who cannot love or be loved. Is there an acceptable form of religious male subjectivity?

In contrast to *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Brick Lane* affords its male Muslims characters like Karim and Chanu the privilege of being naïve yet well-intentioned, and even perhaps capable of change. *Brick Lane* suggests that the kind of gender parity which fosters love can only exist given a male subject who has accepted a private conception of Islam. This notion of Islam is rooted in the liberal secular imagining of religion as private, or, as Hasina states, 'in the mind': 'Pure is in the mind. I keep purdah in the mind and no one can take it' (153). This operates of course in contrast to the Muslim men who adhere to communal or political forms of Islam in the novel – whether based in Britain or Bangladesh – who passively licence or actively carry out violent acts towards women.

These include Mr Chowdhury in Bangladesh, a corrupt, abusive and powerful man whose sole distinguishing feature is a birthmark which flares up in concert with his sexual excitement. Initially, Mr Chowdhury poses as a father figure to Hasina, promising to 'break ten thousand sticks' on any men who harass her at her work (158). After a mullah organises a protest outside the factory calling it 'sinful for men and women working together' and casts suspicion about the women in the factory however, Mr Chowdhury assaults Hasina, falsely accusing her of sleeping with the male workers at the factory (152). Mr Chowdhury conforms to the novel's model of the hypocritical and ill-intentioned Muslim male, a caricature whose motivations are reducible to the swelling birthmark which Mr Chowdhury scratches until finally it 'really look like bleeding' (152). Mr Chowdhury is juxtaposed against male characters such as Karim and Chanu, who appear simply as immature and naïve.

Chanu's notion of respectability emphasises his naïve understanding of the world. In Chanu's mind, Mr Chowdhury's class is a guarantee of Hasina's security: 'A man with property will be respectable' (70). Chanu's deference to the class-based mores of the community morally condemns him, given that respectable status in the novel is – as in the case of Mr Chowdhury – linked to corruption and violence. Despite this, Chanu and Karim are relatively admirable as Muslim men simply for the fact that they refrain from physically abusing the women close to them. This is continually emphasised when female characters in the novel remind Nazneen how fortunate she is: 'If husband allow to do shopping it is good', suggests Hasina (162). Razia tells Nazneen, 'your husband has not made you a co-wife. You have something to be grateful for' (72). When Nazneen repeats this to her daughter, saying she was 'lucky in […] marriage', her daughter's response is '[y]ou mean he doesn't beat you' (303). For all Nazneen's apparent 'luck' in her arranged marriage, a stifling domestic existence with Chanu is enough to provoke intense unhappiness and a sense of almost overwhelming isolation: at one point Nazneen contemplates suicide, an act which would defy 'everything and everyone' (40). Instead, she acts out her resentment at the marriage through passive aggressive behaviour: 'she chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. […] All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn' (63).

In conclusion, although *Brick Lane* does afford the possibility of reconciliation between Chanu and Nazneen, as with *Maps for Lost Lovers,* practices deemed acceptable by the Muslim community such as arranged marriage are cast predominantly in terms of gender-driven conflict and coercion. Nazneen's embrace of British identity (and Britain's implied embrace of her) is conditional upon Nazneen's economic independence and entrepreneurship, as well as her rejection of her former transnational community's intimate, cultural and political norms. *Brick Lane* implicitly adopts the model of neoliberal feminism to reify a privatised and personalised version of Islam which does not conflict with Nazneen's existence in the UK.

In relation to the question of saving the Muslim woman, *Brick Lane* depicts the Muslim woman saving herself through and because of love, via the discourse of romance. This love is constituted for and by the British nation. By way of exchange for the limited notion of "freedom" which the novel wholeheartedly endorses, in the context of the war

on terror Muslim women must accept complicity with imperial, global violence against Muslim men carried out in her name. The notion of Britain as a place where you 'can do whatever you like' is not, therefore, as straightforward as it first seems. In practice, such freedom cannot be decoupled from the necessary recognition of an inherent gender divide in Islamic communal practices which fosters endemic abuse against women and renders meaningful relationships between Muslim men and women impossible.

Conclusion

Both *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Brick Lane* are romances of the nation, romances which authenticate and legitimate particular migrant experiences and ideologies as desirable within Britain. In doing so, these narratives effectively allow their authors to pose as spokespeople for Muslim communities and countries. The selective inclusion of authentic and even desirable migrant identities into the British cultural mainstream is, however, premised on the denigration and exclusion of those same Muslim communities and countries the authors and novels are seen to represent. The resulting novels speak to a number of anxieties around British identity, particularly in relation to discrimination against Muslims in diasporic communities within Britain itself and military campaigns against Muslims overseas. While these particular, controversial issues are most readily associable with nationalism – a desire to secure Britain and/or British interests – in the post-9/11 warmongering climate, the native informant is enlisted in elevating nationalism to a global or universal mission, assuring the relevant population 'that they are a good, noble, and superior people' (Dabashi 2009: 18).

To this end, I have explored in this chapter the varying ways in which love is deployed to naturalise or universalise particular views, agendas and ideologies. Most notably, in the case of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, invocations of love by characters and the omniscient third person narrator attributed to British cultural norms are used to justify various forms of active intervention in the affairs of Muslim communities. As well as guaranteeing the moral imperative of the British media and legal apparatuses to intervene, the novel secures its own moral duty to represent crimes against love found within Muslim communities. While the novel's sympathetic outlook on Sufism may appear at first glance to protect it from charges of racism and Islamophobia, in fact

Maps for Lost Lovers co-opts Sufism to substantiate its agenda-driven claims about the West's unique monopoly on love, peace and truth.

Brick Lane, on the other hand, welds love to the narrative using a discourse of romance which emphasises individual self-discovery and self-mastery. Unlike *Maps for Lost Lovers,* with its overt, didactic signals to a British non-Muslim audience about the undesirability of Pakistani migrant customs and Islamic norms, *Brick Lane* incorporates and applies similar tropes less systematically. Nevertheless, the latter text is underpinned by neoliberal feminist rhetoric that justifies its representation of communally practiced Islam as violent and regressive. In doing so it upholds Britain and the West as bastions of freedom and equality, and successfully obscures continuing violences which uphold distinctions between "us" in the West and "them" outside the West.

Chapter 3. Cosmopolitanism, belonging and affective economies in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *In the Light of What We Know*

Introduction

If the texts studied in the first half of the thesis can, as I have argued, be seen as generally representative of trends which affirm and reify essential differences between Muslims and non-Muslims within multicultural Britain and the West more widely, then these two latter chapters constitute ambivalent and oppositional responses respectively to these trends. Furthermore, the texts analysed in the following two chapters, unlike those studied prior, forego a focus on national or local community relations in favour of narrating individuals with international, cosmopolitan outlooks. In this chapter specifically, I am examining a strand of recent fiction one critic has termed the 'Muslim Man's Guide to Civilisation'. These two formally complex, largely masculine novels, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014; hereafter *In the Light*), allegorise global post-9/11 politics through inter-racial relationships between South Asian men and Western women, articulating their male protagonists' grievances with and exclusions from the West's upper-class echelons through unreliable, self-narrated stories of unrequited love and lust.

In their narration of deceitful and/or incapable Western women who embody the traits of their respective nations, these texts critically examine global shifts in what Anna Agathangelou *et al*. term 'affective economies' – 'the circulation and mobilization of feelings of desire, pleasure, fear, and repulsion utilized to seduce all of us into the fold of the state' which serve to exclude the male South Asian protagonists (Agathangelou *et al*. 2008: 122). The symbolic inter-racial relationships serve as catalysts for the protagonists to shed a naïve, cosmopolitan understanding of the world and their place within it, thus paving the way for violence against the West, and the West's possible reprisals.

Despite these texts' critical representations of global exclusions and inequalities created and perpetuated by the West, the texts' critiques create new exclusions through their handling of female characters. Relegated to symbols of (by turns inviting and

withdrawn) Western nations, women are excluded in the course of the male protagonists' assertions of their own humanity and appeals for political inclusion. Women come to occupy the space of exclusion that these texts seemingly wish to eradicate, as the protagonists perform their own humanity in front of a privileged male audience.

These texts thus embody particular difficulties associated with belonging at once to everywhere and nowhere: the protagonists' assertions of their own worth – articulated in terms of their global intellectual and economical potential – leaving them open to a common criticism of cosmopolitanism as 'recklessly, deludedly and perhaps even selfishly indifferent to the travails and responsibilities of those who are confined, through choice or necessity to the local sphere', the space occupied in the texts by women (Spencer 2011: 2). Rather than read the problematic exclusion of women and their experiences in the novels as a result of characters' (or authors') inheritance of what might be considered "patriarchal Muslim values", I aim to show instead how the erasure of complex female subjectivities is the logical conclusion of affective economies within Western nation states post-9/11, which are manipulated to guarantee the male protagonists' humanity, but only at the expense of others.

Agathangelou *et al*. explain the term affective economies as a series of processes by which individuals and groups can 'actively court a limited and precarious equality in exchange for leaving the fundamental antagonisms of capital liberal democracy unscathed' (Agathangelou *et al*. 2008: 122). They consider negotiations for equality through an analysis of prominent successful campaigns for gay and lesbian rights in the United States in early 2000s, and their connections with ongoing military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the war on terror. Drawing on Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity – 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' – these critics locate the '"good feeling" strategically deployed through homonormatization' alongside 'the pleasure and glee that we were all compelled to perform in the wake of Saddam Hussein's execution' (Duggan 2003: 50; Agathangelou *et al*. 2008: 122). Affective economies thus denotes processes of new or renewed national inclusivity that coincide with new or renewed exclusions at home or abroad. For these critics, in other words, affective economies refers to a

'process of seduction to violence that proceeds through false promises of an end to oppression and pain. It is precisely these affective economies that are playing out as gay and lesbian leaders celebrate their own newfound equality only through the naturalization of those who truly belong in the grasp of state captivity' (Agathangelou *et al*. 2008: 122).

While Agathangelou *et al*. articulate the concept of affective economies in the context of the struggle for gay and lesbian rights, I wish to expand on this application of the term, reading it in relation to the inter-racial relationships depicted in *In the Light* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. My understanding of affective economies comprises, primarily, the 'tenuous promise[s] of mobility, freedom, and equality' made by Western states to disaffected or oppressed individuals or collectives that are conditional on their support of (and potentially, participation in) the exclusion of others (Agathangelou *et al*. 2008: 123). This concept is highly relevant in these novels' explorations of the shifting limits of national inclusion and belonging in Western countries through the trope of inter-racial love. The success of an inter-racial relationship thus represents the protagonists' symbolic transcendence of history and its power imbalances. In both novels however, the inter-racial relationships fail, and the protagonists' naïve concept of the West as a meritocracy gives way to the harsh realities of class-ridden, racialised and insular societies. For the male South Asian protagonists, the reciprocated love of upper-class Western women is the ultimate proof of acceptance, inclusion and cultural purchase in the West – a guarantee of the male protagonists' homeliness and affirmation of economic and class mobility, and, in Changez's case in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the American Dream. For all the men's attempts to ensure the success of their relationships, the women are presented as either unable or unwilling to reciprocate their partner's love, and instead betray their male partners, thereby denying them the privileges, status and security they desperately seek. In the wake of these betrayals, each male protagonist experiences a sense of profound and traumatic homelessness, loss and disillusionment which renders them capable of violence.

The sense of homelessness is particularly well-realised in the frame story in each novel, which both depict conversations between the male protagonists and another male who serves as an internal audience. As James Wood suggests in his review, *In the Light* 'novelizes th[e] dynamic of homelessness by dividing the privilege and obscurity' between these two men (Wood 2014). In these conversations the protagonists present

themselves as globe-trotting, intellectual, urbane – cosmopolitan gentlemen, in short. Nevertheless each frame story carries a strong sense of foreboding. Much of the tension in each novel hinges upon the protagonists' potential to transform into or embody the threatening figure of the Third World terrorist prevalent in the post-9/11 landscape as a result of their newfound homelessness. The most obvious example of this invocation is the title of Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. (For a detailed exploration of the tension and ambiguity around the term "fundamentalism" in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, see Gay 2011.) These are brief albeit representative examples of the way these texts posit masculinity as a choice between Third World terrorists and cosmopolitan gentlemen in a global conflict. Invoked in this fashion, the terrorist figure is thereby associated with a profound and disturbing homelessness, or exclusion from the nation, which produces perpetual conflict with his surroundings and antipathy towards people and collectives in possession of power.

For the protagonists of these texts, their self-presentation as cosmopolitan gentlemen does not come naturally. Rather, these texts present belonging in the West as necessitating a form of secular conversion – a shedding of former affiliations, values and identities (national, religious, ethnic) in favour of adopting Western values (transnational, secular, diasporic). Although typically narratives of conversion are reserved for overtly religious or spiritual experiences, the protagonists in these novels enlist religious terminology and conversion as metaphors for their achievements in the West and adoption of its values. In this regard, these texts recall Timothy Brennan's contention that bridging cultural differences in the service of a cosmopolitan outlook involves a form of 'conversion': 'The effort to understand cultural differences is not merely a matter of historical "boning up," the learning of terms and figures or even of foreign languages, although these things are required; it is not an accretive process, but a liminal one' (Brennan 1997: 27). Thus the representation of secular Western knowledge, values and standards as a necessarily transformative project – a project which does not involve simply shedding inherited cultural baggage – destabilises the apparent neutrality of the West, as represented in previous texts analysed in this thesis.

In order to explore these dynamics, I draw upon theories of cosmopolitanism. My use of the term cosmopolitanism is informed by a 'privileged sort of U.S. experience', and that country's 'famous, highly celebrated mixedness of population, which has created a repertoire of troping', as well as a culturally-specific 'rhetoric of communion achieved'

(Brennan 1997: 9). The question of cosmopolitan's attainability is continually questioned in both novels, each drawing attention to the limits of Western nations' inclusivity in the wake of 9/11 and the war on terror.

I use the term cosmopolitanism to refer to the sense of being at-home, and more specifically a notion of identity which transcends national borders and achieves a condition of 'belonging to all parts of the world' ('Cosmopolitan' 2017). There is also, in my use of the concept, a sense of cosmopolitanism empowering an individual to belong *in* all parts of the world. My consideration of home and homelessness in this chapter is indebted to Homi Bhabha's usage of the uncanny – an extension of Sigmund Freud's theorisation of the term – to articulate contradictory or ambivalent feelings of being both at-home and homeless, which encompass the diverse political experiences of individuals, groups and nations affected by colonialism, globalisation and displacement (Bhabha 1992).

Both novels attest to the unhomeliness of the post-colonial world and depict the effort and cost involved in pursuing a cosmopolitan lifestyle in the West. Indeed, Kwame Anthony Appiah describes cosmopolitanism as a 'challenge', comprising on the one hand, a drive to respect 'obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship'; and, on the other, an acknowledgement that not 'every person or society should converge on a single mode of life' (Appiah 2006: xv). As in Brennan's theorisation of cosmopolitanism, '[l]oyalties and local allegiances determine more than what we want; they determine who we are' (Appiah 2006: xviii). In the novels of Hamid and Rahman, the protagonists' balance of local obligations and global responsibilities is brought into direct conflict with the stoking of tensions in South Asia and invasion of Afghanistan by the US and the UK respectively following 9/11. These events leave the characters resolutely unable to 'determine who [they] are' and, at the same time, owing to their divided loyalties, suspect within their host nations. Cosmopolitanism serves an important role, therefore, in articulating the protagonists' grievances with historical discourses which intersect with class, racism and nationalism in order to exclude the protagonists and their respective pasts. Based in the West, the protagonists with their South Asian backgrounds recognise and respect the West, its people and its values, and in turn request the same recognition and respect be afforded to them and their ancestral homelands.

These texts depict their protagonists excelling in the obligations incurred by their host nations in an appeal to prevalent ideas around the "good" or "model" immigrant: prestigious education, high salaried employment, intellectual mastery, and strong work ethic are recurring themes. Drawing upon this discourse, and repeatedly demonstrating success in areas which denote model citizenry, the protagonists seek recognition, inclusion and absolution from their male audience. In effect, these conversations play out as confessions, with the protagonist appealing for some form of redemption or repentance for actual or intended violence through the act of narrating their story. The frame narratives serve also to establish the unreliability of the protagonists' stories, and also, potentially their (ab)use of narration as a means of justification for various crimes which, in the case of *In the Light*, is implied to be sexual violence.

The gendered dynamics of these encounters – both in the conversation and in *In the Light* specifically, the confessed crime – are important for establishing who the protagonists are targeting in their appeals. As both novels stage their discussions of the limits of cosmopolitanism through conversations between men, the question of who has mastery over discourse around citizenship and belonging is gendered. The texts' gender dynamics, unlike those of race and class which are highlighted and critiqued, are left largely implicit and unexamined.

There are at least two ways in which these novels represent female characters problematically. The first of these is their use of female characters as ciphers, personifications of a stereotypical "national character" and therefore symbols of the nation, and the severe contrast with the generally sympathetic, complex and worldly renderings of the male protagonists and other male characters. The aforementioned aspirations of these characters with their 'celebrations of the "cosmopolitan"', go hand-in-hand with a 'an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial' – a space occupied almost exclusively by women (Appiah 2006: xiii).

The second of these concerns arises from the contradiction between the texts' critique of the exclusions created and perpetuated by Western nations in the wake of 9/11, and the same texts' adoption of exclusionary discourses along gender lines, most notably through a denial of women's voice and agency. The adoption of white, Western female characters as solely allegorical figures not only means they are subject to violence in the

texts, but more importantly that they are unable to speak or narrate and therefore, in the context of these novels, are incapable of redemption. These exclusions are even more strongly pronounced in the case of non-Western women and women of colour, whose absence in these texts is striking, thereby replicating the marginalisation and silencing of these groups in Western societies. In this respect, the texts reinstate the intimate economies they ostensibly critique, asserting their male protagonists' humanity at the expense of women's.

Nevertheless, the unconventional and often fragmented interplay between the frame story and the main narrative allows for a more sympathetic interpretation. Unlike texts covered in previous chapters with more conventional, realist narratives, the formal complexities and ambiguities of these two novels suggest unease and ambivalence around questions of "rightful belonging" and the possession of humanity. Ambiguity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for instance, obscures not only the outcome of the contest between the protagonist and the American agent, but also their intentions. This defiance of the thriller genre's conventions signals an aesthetic which strives 'to keep the situated rather than the universal subject in the foreground' (Pollock *et al*. 2000: 583). The novels emphasise the subjectivity of knowledge and experience by foregrounding a self-conscious literary style; in doing so these novels contest the relationship between masculinity, cosmopolitanism and mastery.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was an international best-seller, published to critical acclaim. The novel's frame story sees Changez, a university lecturer, telling his life story to an unknown stranger in a café in Lahore. Effectively a monologue, the reader is privy only to Changez's words as he relates his undergraduate education at Harvard, after which he is recruited into the elite financial company Underwood Samson. After excelling in his job for a time, Changez becomes disenchanted with the company's ethos that emphasises profit and productivity above all else. Amidst international tensions between India and Pakistan post-9/11 that are apparently fuelled by the United States, Changez decides to leave the company and the country to return to Lahore.

Alongside Changez's tale of formal education and employment is interwoven the story of Changez's relationship with Erica. After a promising romantic start, 9/11 occurs. In the aftermath, Erica is seen to withdraw from Changez into nostalgia for her deceased ex-boyfriend, Chris. Erica is eventually institutionalised before Changez returns to Lahore. The novel closes with Changez's recounting his recent life as a university lecturer in Lahore in which he speaks about the possibility of being assassinated by the United States for his publicly anti-American stance. The novel ends ambiguously as Changez walks with the American stranger, with the suggestion that one of the pair is about to be assassinated by the other.

Responses to the novel by critics have been numerous and varied. There is a general trend for reading the novel alongside historical/sociological accounts of post-9/11 attitudes towards migrants in the West, particularly those from Muslim-majority countries. For instance, Bart Moore-Gilbert juxtaposes social theorists and philosophers of liberal multiculturalism alongside a reading of the novel. Noting the allegorical significance of characters like Erica (or Am*erica*) and Chris (or Christ) and their interactions with Changez, Moore-Gilbert considers how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 'suggests the […] problematic nature of both effectively promoting the "politics of recognition" according to "liberal" models and of "policing" it in the wake of 9/11, associated events like 7/7 in London, and the West's reaction to them' (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 191). To show this, he considers the contrast in the novel between America's 'almost medieval' post-9/11 outlook, represented by Erica's mental breakdown and rejection of Changez, and the ideal of a cosmopolitan, globalised world which America is credited with shaping (Moore-Gilbert 2012: 194). Far from a multicultural utopia, the novel depicts America's regression into a crusading empire incapable of respecting its migrant population or the sovereignty of other nations. 9/11 undoes what is, from Changez's perspective at least, a cosmopolitan and multicultural society in which Changez can easily claim to be a proud New Yorker (see 51, 99). For Sarah Ilott similarly, the novel's ambiguous ending in which Changez may be murdered by an American agent, 'serves as a corrective to constructions of terror that are centralized around 9/11 and sees citizens of the west only as victims on the receiving end of terror' (Ilott 2014: 571).

I intend to take a somewhat different approach in this chapter by discussing the narrative voice used in the novel to critique a lost ideal of cosmopolitan belonging that

Am*erica* is seen to embody. As Stephen Chan's review suggests there is a sense in which Changez's critique of post-9/11 America is legitimised through his own cosmopolitan credentials. For Chan, '[t]he entire book, while slowly unveiling the hero's Islamic revulsion with things Western, is a litany of how practised, nuanced, polished and at ease are the hero's Western manners and affectations, English grammatical constructions, subtleties and conceits' (Chan 2010: 829). Chan attributes the novel's commercial success to its Westernised protagonist, noting that 'Hamid's Other, dangerous enough, perhaps, to warrant assassination, is someone capable of negotiation, of discourse, of politesse and protocol' (Chan 2010: 830). Beyond habits and mannerisms, I would add desire and love as a crucial factor in Changez's self-presentation, a means of asserting his humanity. And yet the same love story which guarantees Changez's own humanity, and is indeed premised on his "openness to the other", necessitates various disavowals and absences, particularly in the case of Erica, whose agency is denied.

The love story's function in the novel is to condemn America for its incapacity to embrace otherness in the form of Changez. We see this clearly through Changez and Erica's romance. Their first meeting occurs in Rhodes, where 'cities were fortified, protected by ancient castles; they guarded against the Turks, […] part of a wall against the East that still stands', giving Changez an acute sense of having 'gr[own] up on the other side' (26). This early sense of Changez as an interloper is reinforced with the introduction of Erica's dead ex-boyfriend Chris, who is defined first and foremost by his '*Old World* appeal' (30; original emphasis). Even as Erica claims to enjoy Changez's company, acknowledging his vitality – 'when you talk about where you came from, […] you become so *alive*' – her obsession with Chris only heightens after 9/11 as she enters a period of extended mourning and is eventually committed to a mental institution (93; original emphasis). This goes hand in hand with the 'dangerous nostalgia' gripping America as a nation in the wake of the atrocity which similarly excludes Changez (130).

This perverse intimacy is perhaps best captured in Changez and Erica's sex scene. The roleplay that occurs during sex is particularly interesting. Changez proposes that, for her comfort's sake, Erica imagine him as Chris rather than himself, with the effect that Changez feels almost '*possessed* […] I did not seem to be myself' (120). Despite the involuntary feeling of possession, Changez is also depicted as an active participant in

his adoption of Chris's persona: he describes the love between Erica and Chris as 'a religion that would not accept me as a convert' – implicit here is Changez's ability and readiness to convert to a symbolic faith distinguished by its aforementioned '*Old World appeal*', that is to say European credentials (129).

The metaphor of religious conversion is especially striking in this context owing to the title of the novel: as Gay notes, the application of the term "fundamentalist" to followers of a religion, particularly Islam, 'intensified' after 9/11 (Gay 2011: 58). By contrast, Changez's lament for the love between Erica and Chris, the 'religion that would not accept me as a convert', takes reciprocal heterosexual love – with an emphasis on inter-racial relations – as the rightful object of religious devotion and sacrifice, and simultaneously distancing him from a potentially threatening Islam (129). The investment in inter-racial love, to the point of it being the exclusive site of devotion and belief for Changez, is reinforced through the exclusion of other religious and belief systems throughout the novel. These absences serve to locate inter-racial love as a universal standard propagated by the West, a standard by which the West is nevertheless condemned. Changez's critique is legitimised through his identification as a product of the West and a model citizen, meriting inclusion and status as "one of us".

I wish to turn now to the unique dynamic of the frame story and consider its broad implications for the limits of the United States' cosmopolitanism. As well as these topics, the frame story provides a means for understanding the novel's symbolism: as well as Am*erica*, these include the abbreviation of Underwood Samson to U.S., Chris's similarity to Christ and Changez to changes. It is worth quoting Peter Morey at length:

> Such over-determined symbolism at first seems like a flaw: a grossly simple foreclosing of the reading experience forcing us to understand the novel as an allegory. However, viewed another way – and remembering the shifty nature of our focalizer – it can be read as consistent with the novel's constant attention to fiction-making: what Changez describes as "the confession that implicates its audience" (70), just as he himself draws in his putative adversary sitting across the dining table ahead of the "kill" (Morey 2011: 140).

Morey is right here to direct our attention to the frame narrative and its implications for reading the main plot. As he notes, there are moments that suggest the unreliability of Changez's account: 'there is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you', Changez assures the American agent

seated opposite in a café in Lahore, as well as the reader (173). The implied tailoring of the narrative for an American agent is significant given its implication that the text is invented to appeal to a male, Western audience. The overt performance of cosmopolitanism which Changez deploys – a sense of being "at home" even in a tense, dangerous situation – is heavily ironic, given the circumstances under which the two men meet. The historical dimensions of the confrontational encounter between the American agent and Changez, on the basis of the latter's anti-American university lectures in Lahore, testify to the limits of cosmopolitanism and America's inability in a post-9/11 era to accommodate difference, to the point of acting as a kind of global police force. Thus the American agent is a figure of failed cosmopolitanism, and an unwelcome presence who continues the rejection Changez's story narrates.

Despite his rejection, and the implicit coding of Changez as a terrorist or fundamentalist, Changez's performance of being "at home" undermines and disarms these othering discourses and works to tie him to the West. Although his narrative charts his move from a 'lover of America' and an adherent of the American Dream, to a spurned lover and enemy of American society, both of these roles, Changez suggests, are the result of his experiences with various aspects of American culture (1). For example, Changez's routine observations which suggest similarities between himself and the American agent he dines with question the notion of America as a sovereign, bordered nation. Changez compares himself and the agent to bats, 'urban dwellers, like you and I, swift enough to escape detection and canny enough to hunt among a crowd', in stark opposition to more rural creatures, 'incompatible with the pollution and congestion of a modern metropolis' (71-2). Despite the American's apparent unease, the two men are depicted as the products of globalisation, at home anywhere in the world: in Lahore, 'New York – or even in Manila, for that matter' (72). As two sides of the same coin, the men share a deep familiarity with a uniquely American brand of globalisation. The struggle for and against American hegemony is not, therefore, a clash between civilisations – rather it is an internal clash, with sides emerging out of varying experiences of Am*erica*.

Reinforcing this stance is the naturalistic presentation of American corporations as adaptable parasites with a vast, global reach: Changez's position at Underwood Samson is offered as the supposedly inevitable result of 'blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need anymore' (110). Suspicions around precisely who the

'species' consists of is confirmed by Changez's discomfort that 'the place I came from was condemned to atrophy' (111). In no small part, Changez's discomfort stems from the fact that Pakistan's status as a Third World country is a result of external American policy as opposed to a lack of internal resources. And yet the evolutionary rhetoric employed by Underwood Samson casts nations like Pakistan as 'resist[ing] change', a stark contrast with America's supposed embrace of change (110).

What emerges here is a conception of cosmopolitan identity, at home anywhere, which can only exist through the continued domination of others. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores these affective economies through the diverse make-up of Underwood Samson: Jim, Changez's mentor, is gay and comes from a working class background while another male colleague, Wainwright, is black. The depiction of Underwood Samson is consistent with the novel's allegorical tone insofar as these colleagues are the symbols of American diversity and inclusivity. For the company's supposed diversity however, its inability to accommodate Changez is symbolic of how the apparent tolerance and acceptance of some factions of society is premised upon the correct identification and rejection of others. The inclusions of some can only be made at the expense of others, thereby rendering any sense of societal or civilizational "progress" illusionary. While critics of the novel (see, for example, Munos 2011) have rightly identified this dynamic, that is to say the false promise of diversity, there has been scant critical attention paid to the way Changez re-deploys a similar strategy in the novel in order to present himself as "one of us" and assert his own humanity.

Changez's narrative, with its investment in making the West "home", is premised upon a problematic use of women's bodies and their sexual availability to the protagonist as an allegory for modern global politics. The novel achieves this through the reduction of women to symbols of the nation. Women act as gatekeepers to national identity, resistant obstacles that must be conquered in order to gain access to the nation's privileges. This is most clearly seen in Erica, the embodiment of the American nation. Her obsession with her deceased ex-boyfriend Chris to the exclusion of Changez marks her as an unhealthy anachronism in the new, global order. Her passivity is emphasised even in this regard: her part in the 'strange romantic triangle' between Changez, Erica and Chris is so slight that Changez experiences humiliation during sexual intercourse with Erica due to 'the continuing dominance' of Chris, 'my dead rival' (121). The dynamics of this rivalry between Chris and Changez sees the latter's desire for Erica in

terms of a desire for recognition, acceptance and a degree of access to the American elite – Changez's entrance to 'the very same social class that my family was falling out of in Lahore' (97). And yet there is no sense of what Erica gains through her relationship with Changez. Nevertheless, her inability to love Changez over Chris results in her institutionalisation.

By contrast, although reliant on Erica for a sense of homeliness and other privileges, Changez is not tethered to the nation in the same way. Rather he is depicted in a state of constant transformation, signalled by his name, Changez or changes. Consider for instance how a 'flirtatious flight attendant' en route to the Philippines – the transformation in mid-flight, literally border-crossing, is significant – has the effect of transforming Changez 'in my own eyes, [into] a veritable James Bond' (72). In the same way that Jim's metaphor offers the atrophying body as a guarantee of the brain's continued adaptability and survival, Changez's agency is guaranteed through the stability of other characters.

The dichotomy offered here distinguishes between several different forms of knowledge, and genders them. The male characters in the novel embody a transnational, global, historical and political perspective which female characters lack. As well as Changez and the American agent, we might also point to Jim, Changez's mentor at Underwood Samson (who offers the aforementioned analogy of the animal drawing resources from atrophying parts of the body), and the men who contribute to Changez's political and intellectual development, eventually leading to his move away from Underwood Samson and North America by way of protest. The most notable character in this regard is the Chilean publisher Juan-Bautista, who invites Changez during his trip first to visit the home of Pablo Neruda, the notable Chilean poet and political activist (166), and second to consider himself as a modern-day janissary (see 171-2). Another male character who plays a brief yet substantial role is that of the jeepney driver in Manila, who glares at Changez in disdain. The effect is unsettling for Changez, forcing him to reflect on his relationship with the Third World and making him feel 'I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home' (77).

Forms of knowledge that are feminised, by contrast, are of the local, or national variety. In Lahore for instance, jasmine is described as 'so rare in New York, so common here' (96). Earlier, jasmine is tied, literally, to a Pakistani woman, in the form of a 'fluffy

bracelet' (88). Women are tethered to the nation in a way that men are not. The novel also suggests a connection between liberal arts institutions and the novel's female characters: Erica's novella manuscript is handled by 'an agency that represented a family friend' (99), and she has connections with art galleries (59). Changez is a disruptive presence in a parochial artistic and literary landscape, an interloper on account of his 'Third World sensibility' (77). Thus he (silently) compares Chris's Tintin inspired drawing with a Pakistani miniature (60), and contradicts Erica's father's impression of Pakistani culture by noting the prevalence of intoxication in Pakistani literary culture (62). Nevertheless, Erica's emotional attachment to her novella manuscript and her surrounding family contribute to Changez's sense of being 'at home' with Erica (57).

The final absence in the text I wish to mention is that of non-white women, whose silence is absolute. In an article which analyses the novel's inter-racial relationship between Erica and Changez, Delphine Munos cites an important shift in the late twentieth century in which

> "America" came to signify not only immigrant mobility and whiteness, but also multiculturalism. […] [T]his paradox of sorts was only made possible through a slippage in the meaning of "white", within which whiteness still connoted Anglo-America, yet extended its meaning to include a more heterogeneous group that passed as white through the endorsement of culturally specific consumerist practices and middle-class norms of behaviour. Posing as multicultural, yet covertly fastening whiteness to an ideal Americanness, these so-called new versions of the American Dream […] thus help[ed] to rationalize the idea that a relative whiteness could somehow be acquired by non-white minority groups (Munos 2012: 396).

The fixation on whiteness as an idealised trait is helpful in viewing Changez's attachment to Erica as mediated by a combination – we might say intersection – of racial and class-based discourses. Changez's investment in becoming white and thereby completing or guaranteeing his incomplete conversion is described by Munos as the primary means by which 'dominant white identity guarantees its centrality and invisibility *through* the racial other' (Munos 2012: 397). Within these strictures, the silence of non-white women amounts to a refusal to consider what, if any, alternative forms of identity-formation are available beyond the paradigm of whiteness in determining self-worth. Like religious Muslims, non-white women are potentially

threatening presences insofar as they might trouble the politics of desire which govern the text and offer Changez potential redemption.

These absences and disavowals – Islam, complex female characters and non-white women – reveal one of the central tensions of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez's apparent opposition to America and its society, politics and people is consistently undermined by the novel's unwillingness to depict Changez's life following the demise of his relationship with Erica and his departure from America and arrival in Pakistan. There are even, as Munos suggests, signs that Changez continues to mourn Erica in Pakistan: 'the protagonist confesses to his American interlocutor that he engages in the same kind of mental conversation and daydreaming with Erica as she used to pursue with Chris. To this extent, Changez's final turn to fundamentalism leaves the lost ideal of whiteness unchallenged' (Munos 2012: 404). While I would dispute locating the novel's 'fundamentalism' at the end of the novel as Munos does here, her main point is convincing; far from rejecting the class- and racial-ridden values of the American elite, Changez's story betrays his continued investment and dependency on those same values.

Most notably therein, we can speak of how Changez's elevation of love, specifically the love of an upper-class white woman, serves as the basis for his secular redemption. Love is a pre-requisite for empathy with Changez, a means of recognising his humanity and understanding his anti-American sentiments. His unwavering belief in cosmopolitanism, his upper-class upbringing, his elite American education, are all further tragic-ironic embellishments of his story. At the same time, the mobilisation of these same factors provide evidence of love's invisible, political dimensions. Love is thus key in determining whether or not Changez is, deep down, one of "us".

Nevertheless the lack of critical engagement with the role of women in this novel is, I think, telling about certain aspects of the "war on terror" that have become naturalised in cultural or literary depictions. First is the idea that men are afforded access to discourses around history-making on a global stage, via the twin poles of the cosmopolitan, Western gentleman, and the Third World terrorist. Second is to do with women's exclusion, and the manner in which women are excluded from global discourses and are instead seen or depicted exclusively as inhabitants of domestic, local and national space.

In the Light of What We Know

In the Light is another example of the complex intersection between postmodern and postcolonial literary experimentation. In the novel we find deeply troubled interactions with Englishness and English privilege which, while in many ways similar to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s exploration of a specific moment in American history and culture, nevertheless invoke the uncanny through literary techniques rife with ambiguity, ambivalence and obscurity. Like Hamid's novel, *In the Light* is structured as a dialogue between two men from very different backgrounds. In this case the two men discuss topics ranging from the history of mathematics and philosophy to literature and history. The novel is presented as the work of the unnamed narrator who claims to have compiled the story from a set of notebooks and recorded conversations with an old friend, Zafar. The resulting text is sweeping in scope, with large portions of the book reading less like a novel than a Socratic dialogue or non-fiction essay, complete with images, diagrams, citations, epigraphs and other intertextual references. Although *In the Light* differs from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in that it is an explicitly high literary novel, it too has a thriller-like mystery at the heart of the text. The novel builds towards an anti-climax, as the tremendous violence perpetrated by Zafar is represented only paraphrastically. Despite this, the main narrative contains a strong confessional tone, and it is increasingly evident throughout that Zafar's story of personal and political homelessness is utilised as a means to explicate or justify the (absented) violence in his story.

The text begins with the enigmatic Zafar's unexpected appearance at the unnamed narrator's Kensington house, promising to tell all about the events of the past several years. The narrator is the grandson of a former Pakistani ambassador and the son of an Oxford physicist; he attended Eton and was born into money and privilege. His childhood in America guarantees his place, as James Wood notes in his review of the novel, as a 'comfortable global citizen' (Wood 2014). By contrast, Zafar's origins are more humble. Born in rural Bangladesh, Zafar came to England when he was five; his parents, as he tells the narrator, eked out a working class living in London, his father working as a bus conductor then a waiter. A scholarship enables Zafar to attend Oxford University, where he and the narrator strike up their unlikely friendship while studying

mathematics. The narrator is comfortable in this South Kensington home, ensconced in a stable but loveless marriage. Zafar by contrast appears on his doorstep without a place to stay. It is from this unequal footing that they begin to converse. We discover in the course of the novel that the narrator owes Zafar an explanation for his betrayal, a betrayal which is both personal but also, for Zafar, has political and historical dimensions. Initially however, the discussions between the men revolve around the events of Zafar's recent life.

The story, insofar as there is a conventional narrative, concerns Zafar's life after graduating from Oxford. Zafar finds work in the financial sector and courts Emily, an English friend of the narrator who is also from a privileged, old money background. Their dysfunctional relationship results at one point in Zafar's admittance to a mental institution, apparently the result of his (mis)treatment by Emily. This is immediately followed by a double betrayal: Emily becomes pregnant and has an abortion without consulting Zafar. The abortion is devastating to him, since he wanted children with her. It is several months before Zafar deduces that, in fact, Emily had an affair with the narrator while Zafar was hospitalised and the narrator is actually the father.

Some years after these events, having cut off all contact with Emily, Zafar is based at an NGO in Bangladesh working to combat government corruption. He receives an invitation out of the blue from Emily to join her with the UN in Afghanistan, advising the new, post-invasion government and international rebuilding effort. He accepts, and en route to Afghanistan, meets a Pakistani general who asks him to investigate some suspicious happenings at the UN compound in Kabul. After some time investigating in Kabul, Emily unexpectedly asks him to marry her. Zafar accepts despite finding Emily as reserved and closed to him as ever. As his concerns about Emily's intentions grow, the political intrigue within the UN compound comes to a head when Zafar covertly learns of what appears to be a conspiracy. Agreeing to meet one of the conspirators at a Kabul café the next morning, Zafar receives a surprise message the same morning from Emily (who he believes is on a flight to London) insisting he wait inside the UN compound for her. Bafflement and frustration about why Emily would send this message only to not show up turns to fury after he learns of a targeted bombing in the city that killed the conspirator he was due to meet. Suspecting that Emily had foreknowledge of, or even planned the conspirator's assassination, Zafar finds and confronts her. The outcome of their final confrontation is ambiguous, although there are

strong suggestions that Zafar rapes Emily. Subsequently we learn that the Pakistani general who hired Zafar had foreknowledge of the bombing; posing as Emily, he sent the message which saved Zafar's life. Narrated in the aftermath of these events and in a non-linear fashion, the main plot is surrounded by other loose strands and sub-plots concerning the narrator's questionable involvement in the 2008 financial crisis, Zafar and the narrator's friendship and experiences together at Oxford University, and the narrator's own loveless marriage.

As with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, my argument concerns the implications of the novel's unconventional form for its problematic depiction of women. With regard to the latter, one of the key differences between Hamid's and Rahman's novels is the centrality of sexual violence to *In the Light*. Although the novel culminates with Zafar's inability to 'speak the unspeakable' about his own sexual violence at the end, for its silence, rape is nevertheless crucial to the narrative Zafar tells and the reasons behind the narration (548). For Zafar, as well as the unnamed narrator, the act of narration serves to justify, explain and perhaps redeem their past crimes and betrayals. As the narrator concedes, 'I am implicated. Indeed, it may be that the reason I view our conversations [the narrator's recorded conversations with Zafar] as a search for absolution […] is that I have a hand in it all' (511). This is true even, or perhaps especially, when the crime(s) go unspoken. To this end, the narrator summarises 'Zafar's story as a kind of defence', despite the fact that 'Zafar held off for as long as he could what it was exactly that this defence was for' (511).

In this dialogue between apparently worldly men, the question remains as to whether their knowledge and mastery of culture justifies forms of misogyny and criminality. This is foregrounded in the novel through various exchanges about the role of education: 'Education isn't about gaining power. It's about opening our eyes', as the narrator maintains (202). Nevertheless, the narrator recognises that Zafar's story, with its erudite 'digressions, the tangents, the close analyses, and broad reflections' is intended as a form of manipulation: 'If I am left with the sensation of being manipulated, then it also appears to me that there was a method, and behind that, a purpose' (38-9). Much of the novel's unreliability can be put down to the disconnect between the educated and cosmopolitan Zafar of the frame story and the pitiable, excluded and victimised Zafar who his story depicts.

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Alternating between inviting and alienating, Zafar's conversion from penniless immigrant to cosmopolitan gentleman is rife with trauma. His resulting perspective is that of a double vision or double consciousness which is both at-home and not-home. One section of the novel which casts light on Zafar's double perspective takes place in Kabul. Here, Zafar is angered at the sight of an NGO worker drinking whisky in front of Emily. When the NGO worker 'accidentally dribbles' his drink, Zafar watches on as '[h]e glances at Emily – first and only at Emily – to see if she's noticed. He's embarrassed' (245). This prompts a rant by Zafar about the conspicuous presence of alcohol – and in turn, the West – in Afghanistan: 'But has he any shame about drinking whisky in Kabul? Do these people believe it was only Talibs who held to the faith of their fathers? These fucking people. By what right?' (245). At this point the novel returns to the frame story in London which sees Zafar immediately take 'out a bottle of whisky and two glasses' for himself and the narrator (249). There is additional significance in this act with its implication of being at-home, given that Zafar is a guest in the narrator's home. What is more, when the text subsequently returns to the same bar scene immediately after the aforementioned event, it transpires that Zafar is drinking whisky in Kabul too, apparently without embarrassment or hesitation (402). Zafar is implicated by his own criticism, both in the present at the moment of narration, and in the past of the narrated events. Indeed, the matter of time and chronology is ambiguous since it is not clear whether Zafar's condemnation of drinking whisky in Kabul occurs in the past or present. In either case, the passage is telling of Zafar's instability and ambivalence. The legitimacy of Zafar's critique of a particular neo-colonial attitude is undermined by his own complicity in the "personal" preferences, taught behaviours and desires which according to his own analysis, symbolise the neo-colonial state. Despite his professions of empathy for the Afghanis, Zafar is evidently unable to reconcile his sense of moral outrage on their behalf with his own English perspective which is comfortable and at-home with alcohol, past and present.

Another example of Zafar's double perspective is invoked through Edward Said's conception, detailed in *Orientalism* (1978), of the relationship between the Orientalist and the Oriental subject. In a critical exchange about the West's invasion of Afghanistan and its neo-imperial qualities, Zafar speaks at length about how the 'Western reader […] has been taught to fear the Orient. This state, a mix of charm, mystique, and danger – the ingredients of riotously good sex – is the guarantor and licence of military, economic, and cultural enterprises that reduce the Orient' (246). The irony here is how

Zafar's critique of the West's imagining of the Orient cites examples that unmistakably recall his own childhood as told in the novel: 'the night train over a chasm, children with eyes of moon, silk roads, and the derring-dos of Burtons and Lawrences' (246-7). Early in the novel, Zafar narrates at length a childhood adventure – a 'passage to the north-east', in which he travels on a night train through Bangladesh only for the train – along with the bridge it is crossing – to collapse into a chasm while he is fetching snacks from a nearby stall (59). As in the above description, the moon is prominently featured, with a river at the bottom of the chasm 'throwing up white arcs of reflected moonlight' as Zafar gazes down into it (82). Zafar here is portrayed as the very Orientalist he criticises. As with alcohol in Kabul, Zafar's criticisms are underwritten by an uncanny sense that his childhood memories belong to him while his narration or recitation of them in South Kensington simultaneously renders them distant, exotic and part of an English, Orientalist tradition.

Zafar's fraught relationship with time, belonging and the uncanny are also demonstrable in connection with women. Rahman's novel is deeply concerned with interactions between South Asian men and English women, with a similar dynamic to the relationship between Erica and Changez, or America and Pakistan. Like Erica, Emily is established as a national cipher by the narrator, who notes that Zafar's 'relationship with Emily was never a relationship with one person, nor was it an engagement with only one family. But in this relationship with a particular family, I think Zafar encountered a version of England, and even of *the West* […] – a version that haunted him' (92; original emphasis). Likewise, in Zafar's account, 'Emily was England, home, belonging, the untethering of me from a past I did not want, the promise through children of a future that was rooted, bound to something treated altogether better by the world than my mother, the girl who loved me' (477). Here we see how Zafar ties a sense of belonging with Emily/England to his attempt to escape his own history.

Although Zafar describes Emily/England as enabling a clean break from his own past, in fact in his story the nation is heavily implicated in the violence of his past and present. Zafar learned as an adult that, contrary to what he was told growing up, 'his father, his true father, was a Pakistani solder who raped his mother' during the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence (137). What is more the militaries involved in inhumane acts and crimes in Bangladesh, including the sexual violence against Zafar's mother,

were all educated in the same military college founded by the British […]. I've heard this before and […] everyone makes so much of this diversity in the Indian Army, when really they are focusing far too much on religion and race and not seeing the reality, which is that these officers come from the same class. Good Lord, all the generals, even the Pakistani ones, went to military college together, under the British. In the most important respect of all, they weren't remotely diverse (220-1).

This passage is also significant for its engagement with one of the central themes of the novel. The reference to competing interpretations of the Indian Army (the presence of 'diversity' versus a lack thereof) is indicative of the novel's preoccupation with collective memory. Competing versions of "what we know" and the subjectivity of knowledge are key, particularly in the context of the novel's frame narrative.

Far from a single occasion, the novel is concerned throughout with cultural forgetfulness as a central facet of English, or cosmopolitan identity, and its accompanying sense of belonging. As the narrator makes clear, Zafar's '[n]otebooks […] show an old and recurring interest in the subject of rape in war and rape in Bangladesh during the liberation struggle' (137). Such ruminations, alongside epigraphs by postcolonial and feminist historians and theorists on rape, are typical of the novel's foreshadowing method. The novel's style in this regard is fitting, given the aforementioned emphasis on the role of education. Here as elsewhere, the articulate conversational style performs Zafar's innocence by identifying him with English upper-class norms, ideals and a tradition which is founded on the forgetfulness of crimes committed by English men overseas. It is interesting to note the differences between Zafar's journey and Changez's in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* here. The latter text depicts Erica rejecting Changez in America, followed by Changez's symbolic exit of the country to Pakistan. By contrast, *In the Light* depicts Zafar's violent rejection of Emily in Afghanistan, followed by his unexplained re-appearance in affluent London at a later date. *In the Light* articulates here the historical relationship between England and its former colonies which sees a distinction between the world "out there" (and crimes committed "out there") and England itself, each with its own different rules.

Forgetfulness is thereby key to Zafar's agenda and, similarly, to that of the narrator. When Zafar first appears on his doorstep, the narrator 'had not recalled any aspect of that episode [his betrayal of Zafar]. If anything, I'd supressed it' (26). Indeed it is only

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through this performance of innocence – justifying whilst simultaneously supressing – that these characters experience and achieve a sense of homeliness, mastery, privilege and redemption. At the heart of the text, in other words, is a troubling question around whether rape, and its attendant implications of political violence, is ever justifiable as part of a "civilised", secular project.

In the penultimate chapter, Zafar's sexual violence against Emily is not directly represented, but there are significant undercurrents indicating his guilt. For one, the chapter's epigraphs contain, amongst other quotations, a legal definition of rape in the UK and an excerpt from Susan Brownmiller on the prevalence of rape as a means of war in the Bangladesh war of independence (see 510-11). Another hint is Zafar's suggestive statement that '[m]ost people have no need to break free of their inheritance. But those who need to break free of their past and have the means to do so will not escape the requirement of violence' (526). Zafar's construction of continuities between the act of sexual violence which conceived him and his own violence is used here to deny his own agency and responsibility in the face of his 'inheritance'. This is a recurring theme throughout the text which returns us to the notion of Emily as a symbol of England and the site of anxieties around national belonging.

From the very beginning of their relationship Emily is unapologetically ashamed of Zafar, ensuring for instance that the couple did 'things together but never with others', a fact Zafar is apparently aware of but too insecure to confront: 'My insecurity had destroyed the certainty I should have had in what was plain to see' (227). Furthermore, Zafar sees others' perception of him as 'the scholarship boy', and has the sense of Emily and her peers looking down on him because 'they saw the workings of design, the sweat of labour, and not the effortless charm of superior origins' (233). His insecurity about his working-class background – here invoked as the insecurity of the Third World in the face of upper-class snobbishness – justifies his continuing fascination with her. Thus Zafar perceives Emily as 'a gentle English flower, this model of restraint, the very embodiment of moderation and measure, projecting an image of calm judgement and good sense', a stark contrast with his own competing descriptions of her as jealous and manipulative (419-20). In the contradictory manner which typifies the novel, Zafar claims Emily 'rescued me and condemned me in the same gesture' (477).

There are notable moments in Zafar's story that utilise some combination of casting Emily as England and invoking history which we might question. One such moment is when Zafar first encounters Emily in a church while they are studying at Oxford together. Here Zafar explains his sense of alienation in the Oxford church: this was 'a very local rendering of a religion that had come from a part of the world that the proud Englishman could only look down upon. The Christianity before me was English' (187). Significantly, Zafar links his experiences in the church with the narrator's education at Eton: 'Little wonder that schoolboys at Eton could sing of Jerusalem being builded in this green and pleasant land' (188). Here Zafar weaves a tapestry of political and personal histories – colonialism and its historical relationship with Christianity memorialised in the songs and culture of Britain's elite institutions – as a way to account for his desire for Emily. Specifically, this chapter shows that Zafar's experiences of formal education at Oxford taught him to perceive the world through English, upper-class eyes. This is succinctly related in an anecdote concerning a claim that the 'Holywell Music Room […] was the oldest purpose-built music hall in the world':

> It had struck me that the claim was the height of presumption – might there not be a music hall in the Middle East, in India or somewhere that was older? – until I was forced to concede my own presumption to think that the author of the claim had meant to say Europe and not the world. Most human disputes, one might speculate, ask us to choose not between arguments proceeding from empirical observations about the world but between competing sets of bare assumptions (180).

The suggestion here is Zafar's recognition that 'the author of the claim' about the music hall conflates Europe and the world, deeming other continents, peoples and cultures unworthy of consideration. Zafar's 'presumption', in other words, is simply a conception of himself and his ancestors, his origins, as fully human, meriting inclusion in 'the world' of others.

The obsession with achieving a particularly English sense of belonging and mastery inspires a depiction of religion not dissimilar to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. When Zafar describes turning to religion for comfort, he seeks in 'the love of God […] what I could not find in Emily, what I had not found in England, in my home there, but what I had known once as a child in my village in Sylhet' (183). This passage illustrates a similar conception of religion to that found in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Secular

and religious love are interchangeable in function, one and the same for all intents and purposes, with both seen to provide a degree of stability and a sense of rootedness. Given their interchangeability, it is worth noting that, much like in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, religion is denoted as a feminine construct tasked with conferring stability and/or status on Zafar. The function of this move, as in Hamid's novel, is to preserve the universal character of cosmopolitanism – albeit in an exclusionary, masculine guise – by which Zafar is redeemed and Emily/England is condemned.

The supposed inevitability of his desire for Emily, given his English education and his undignified status, is emphasised by Zafar's lament: 'Can you choose *not* to love a person?' (193; original emphasis). Zafar's rhetorical question presents that he had no choice, whether it be his love for Emily or his love for England. Continually collapsing Emily/England as the cause for his own actions, he points to his Oxbridge education, the difficulties of being Bangladeshi boy growing up in England, Emily's own betrayals, as well as a longer, colonial history to signal the inevitability of his violence. He is, in short, a pitiable victim, stripped of individual agency in the face of history and the English class system.

The unreliability of Zafar's account of his relationship with Emily produces perhaps the novel's greatest tension, namely the discrepancy between Zafar's complexity and Emily's simple allegorical status as the symbol of the nation. As in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, there is a division between the male and female characters which endows the male characters with full, rich and complex lives while denying female characters the same privileges. Access to the privilege of narration is central here, and the lack of unmediated speech from female characters is striking. Similarly, in the context of discussions around exclusionary cultural practices such as racism and class politics, gender's absence is notable.

For example, the narrator's wife, Meena, is consistently used by Zafar in support of his arguments about social mobility and class. Meena, who is of South Asian descent and from a lower middle class background, is denied the acceptance Zafar so desperately seeks, as he chides the narrator about his failing marriage: 'Do you look down on Meena? […] You don't want children with *her*, do you?' (214; original emphasis). Zafar's insider-outsider perspective, finely attuned to his own exclusion along class lines, is nevertheless unable or unwilling to admit analyses pertaining to gender. In

effect he erases any differences between himself and her, rendering her voice irrelevant. As in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the silence and exclusion of women is essential to the novel's exploration of the nuances and subtleties of the male characters, who for all their faults and contradictions are indisputably the heart of the novel. Thus, even if we interpret Zafar's chides at the narrator as a criticism of the latter, the novel's scarcity of insight into Meena's character or experiences reinforces her marginal status.

The novel's often scathing critique of English class norms and racism is undermined by this inability to allow for other critical voices to emerge, coupled with the burden of violence and silencing forced onto the novel's female characters. It is telling in this regard that Emily bears the violent force of Zafar's resentment and anger, a stark contrast to Zafar's cordial if somewhat cold treatment of the narrator. Stephen Chan's description of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is apt for the interactions between the narrator and Zafar, the latter similarly 'capable of negotiation, of discourse, of politesse and protocol' (Chan 2010: 830). Within their exchanges the threat of violence is distant, past, while the narrator's present burden it seems is simply to listen to Zafar's story and occasionally be made conscious of his own privilege and complicity.

To conclude, *In the Light* offers a complex and ambivalent take on questions of belonging through the story of Zafar and Emily's relationship. Two unreliable narrators attempt to forget their own violence, betrayals and criminal activity, which they achieve by excluding their crimes from the narrative, and denying the victims the same privilege of narration. Instead, Zafar's personal search for a sense of homeliness overrides everything, and the resulting absence of female voices in the text and flattening of religious discourses make the male narrators' erudition and intellectualising all the more forced. In an interview included in the paperback edition of the novel, Rahman admits that the novel reflects 'the soft misogyny that pervades the society these men inhabit', and expresses hope that the unreliability of the narration and the first-person perspectives effectively negate the novel's reproduction of sexist norms and values (563). As in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, however, the absence of meaningful alternatives of self-identification is striking, with both texts affirming the authority of their privileged internal male audiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to analyse inter-racial love and desire in these narratives of Western conversion through an expanded conception of affective economies. It is evident that the exclusion of female characters from the privileges of narrative signals women's broader exclusion from conversations and the express preference for women to act as symbols (symbolising the "free" West as much as the "contained" East) in conversations around the "clash of civilisations" and other mainstays of mainstream, post-9/11 discourse. As noted in the introduction, the exclusion of women in these texts seems not to be the result of an imbibed "Islamic" cultural norm but rather an extension of Western affective economies which necessitate exclusions to allow for inclusions into the nation. The lack of critical engagement with notions of masculinity in these novels is telling in this regard, and I would suggest the relationship between masculinity, Islam and globalisation as a topic which warrants further research. Nevertheless, I have attempted here to sketch relations between male and female characters in these novels in order to consider the way the male protagonists' justify their violence to other men in order to obtain inclusion, utilising literary strategies which signal their humanity and complexity. Through inter-racial intimate and sexual interactions between men and women, the protagonists strive to narrate the wounds inflicted on them by the West's neo-imperial adventures. These narratives are told, as we have seen, at the expense of the female characters, who are made to suffer violence as the price for the protagonists' exclusions in the West's post-9/11 affective economies.

The power of narration in these texts is also the power to exclude and forget. The complete exclusion of voices other than Changez's in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the shared narration of Zafar and the narrator in *In the Light*, guarantee the characters' ability to represent themselves in the best possible light. By strategic association with cosmopolitanism, intellectual mastery and other markers of masculine privilege, the protagonists of these texts strive for their own inclusion in the West. In doing so, these characters also dissociate themselves from Islam and women – violently in the latter case – as proof of their deserving status. Owing to the formally complex nature of the texts, the lines between the exclusions, absences and silences presented for the benefit of the narrators and those for presented for the benefit of readers are highly ambiguous and fraught.

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This violence against women occurs silently and, in the protagonists' accounts, paraphrastically. I would suggest that the consistent unwillingness or inability for these texts to extend their expressions of marginalisation and dispossession to other groups, notably women, is telling of the constraints and power dynamics of a post-9/11 world order characterised by neoliberal scarcity, inequality, and ongoing war.

Chapter 4. Can (Muslim) women have it all? Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Shelina Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*

Introduction

This final chapter considers Shelina Janmohamed's chick-lit memoir *Love in a Headscarf* (2009) and Leila Aboulela's literary romance novel, *Minaret* (2005), texts that share several commonalities with those analysed in the previous chapter. As in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *In the Light of What We Know*, these texts depict cosmopolitan individuals and their efforts to achieve a sense of belonging within the secular West. While the exploration of belonging as cosmopolitan postcolonial subjects in the West are similar, there are substantial differences in the way the novels have articulated these contentious issues. In particular, these women writers make use of feminised forms and genres – romance and chick-lit – to express and explore cosmopolitan identity. They also differ in their depictions of avowedly religious subjects. Islam and Islamic values in Britain are represented as conducive to love and affection, and are associated with individual fulfilment. In this way, both novels challenge the idea that Islam is wholly at odds with life in the West. They depict urbane Muslim female protagonists searching for love and belonging, thereby exploring the limits and possibilities of Muslim belonging in Britain.

This chapter owes its title to the popular and contested idea of women "having it all". As discussed in relation to *Brick Lane* (see chapter two), neoliberal feminism valorises female self-management around raising children as well as capital for the nation, within an idealised idea of the nuclear family. *Love in a Headscarf*'s and *Minaret*'s uses of traditionally feminine genres enmeshes them in debates around women's duties and roles within Britain and the West more widely. In addition, as Muslim women, these writers also navigate an increasingly Islamophobic political context which also informs literary modes of production, consumption and reception. In other words, as well as contending with the romance's involvement in debates around the roles and responsibilities of women in society, Aboulela and Janmohamed have the added difficulty of answering questions around whether being a practising Muslim women is in conflict with idealised secular values.

Although these texts draw upon different literary genres and forms, they are both attenuated to the possibilities and limitations that love and romance present as a universal category. The writers use the chick-lit and the romance genres respectively to stage their literary interventions, creating space for a Muslim identity which can be reconciled to varying extents with popular (secular) representations of love and romantic relationships. Shared use of romance affords these authors and their texts access to audiences with particular expectations and concerns; as Catherine Belsey notes, the features of popular romance 'are eminently familiar, even to people who have never read one before' (Belsey 1994: 11). Strategic uses of, and departures from, particular generic features thus enables these Muslim writers to assert agency in a post-9/11 climate where their speech and agency are regularly subject to regulation and monitoring.

My understanding of these literary strategies is indebted to John Frow's conception of genre, which stresses that 'texts – even the simplest and most formulaic – do not "belong" to genres but are, rather, uses of them; they refer not to "a" genre but to a field or economy of genres, and their complexity derives from the complexity of that relation' (Frow 2006: 2). It is precisely the 'open-endedness of generic frames' that allows for my comparison of texts which may not traditionally be brought together: *Love in a Headscarf*, a memoir informed by chick-lit conventions, and *Minaret*, a literary novel with romance elements (Frow 2006: 3).

Furthermore, my understanding of the contested forms, contexts and spaces that these texts operate in is informed Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the 'cultural field', which Randal Johnson summarises as follows: 'Literature, art and their respective producers do not exist independently of a complex institutional framework which authorizes, enables, empowers and legitimizes them' (Bourdieu 1993; Johnson 1993: 10). Within this framework, texts are viewed as neither wholly self-sufficient nor as mere by-products of wider cultural or political forces. Rather, Bourdieu enables a discussion of literary works that 'takes into consideration not only works themselves, seen relationally within the space of available possibilities within the historical development of such possibilities, but also producers of works in terms of their strategies and trajectories, based on their individual and class habitus, as well as their objective position within the field' (Johnson 1993: 9).

A relational view of the literary field allows for an analysis of the dynamics between authors, texts, contexts and reception. There are, in fact, several trends which serve as potential or actual obstacles to Muslim women's successful publishing and reception: anthropological and biographical readings of fictional texts; characteristics of works taken to be monolithic or representative of all Muslims or Muslim women; readings which view Muslims as inherently suspect; and a good-bad Muslim dichotomy. More than this, stereotypes particular to Muslim women occupy a special place in the public imagination, most notably owing to literary and (auto)biographical depictions of Muslim women as oppressed, silent and submissive. As described in chapter two, texts such as *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* are unequivocal about the need for Muslim women to be saved through secular narratives of female empowerment. One result of the ubiquity of these narratives, as Rehana Ahmed notes, is that 'certain (secular) minority experiences are privileged over others – arguably by the publishing industry as well as by aspiring writers themselves – so that positive or even nuanced or complex religious experiences are marginalised' in the current climate (Ahmed 2015: 217). In this context, complex or unconventional engagements with religion may be viewed as provocative, suspicious, or even hostile to secular values.

This is to say that novels are formed by and through a secular political context and literary field in which the depiction of politically acceptable Muslim identity incurs certain costs. These costs – erasures, silences – signal the limits of representations of Muslim identity in contemporary life-writing and fiction, and denote areas in which Muslim women are unable to "have it all". I am interested in examining how these writers navigate and resist conflicts that arise in writing romances with practising Muslim characters, thereby articulating Muslim women within the fold of the nation.

In *Minaret*'s case, use of the realist mode necessitates the incorporation of 'strategies and resources that facilitate the transition of the particular experience of protagonists into the realm of universal realities' (Morris 2003: 145). *Minaret* draws upon a wide range of genres and modes for its first-person narrative in service of this goal. Alongside features commonly found in the *bildungsroman* and postcolonial literature, the romantic narrative between the protagonist Najwa and the young Tamer connect the text to the romance tradition. Together, these uses of genre produce a set of expectations around the novel's trajectory and outcomes, which Peter Morey summarises as 'active self-realization, through material or social integration and reward' in the *bildungsroman*

and 'emotional and erotic fulfilment' in the case of the romance (Morey 2017). These are further coupled in *Minaret* with 'tropes of postcolonial literary arrival and […] immigrant trauma, culture shock, and references to the inadequacy of English in rendering bicultural experience' that are currently 'favored' in postcolonial literature (Abbas 2014: 84). Genre, understood as a contest over meaning, requires close attention to *Minaret*'s adherence to or transgression of formal conventions, narratives and expectations. Prioritising genre and formal characteristics therefore allows us to move beyond anthropological understandings of texts written by or about Muslim women.

Similarly, this chapter considers the aesthetic features of *Love in a Headscarf* alongside its historical or autobiographical aspects. This text's aesthetic features are emphasised by its use, not only of the memoir – as opposed to autobiography – form, but also the selective inclusion and appropriation of chick-lit tropes and conventions. As Smith and Watson note, compared to an autobiography, the form of a memoir is 'characterized by density of language and self-reflexivity about the writing process, yoking the author's standing as a professional writer with the work's status as an aesthetic object' (Smith and Watson 2010: 4). As an aesthetic work, *Love in a Headscarf* should therefore not be taken to offer unmediated access to its autobiographical subject.

In fact, Smith and Watson's analysis of life writing suggests that all autobiographical texts should be seen as comprising at least four distinct subjects. Smith and Watson classify these subjects as follows: the "real" or historical "I", the narrating "I", the narrated "I", and the ideological "I" (Smith and Watson 2010: 72). These distinct layers correspond with, respectively, the "I" who 'is assumed from the signature on the title page […] a flesh-and-blood person located in a particular time and place'; the narrating "I", the 'persona of the historical person who wants to tell, or is coerced into telling, a story about the self'; the narrated "I" represented, usually 'a younger version of a self'; and, finally, the 'ideological "I"', constructed by social categories, including (although not limited to) 'identities marked through embodiment and through culture; gender, ethnicity, generation, family, sexuality, religion' (Smith and Watson 2010: 72-77). Although my engagement with *Love in a Headscarf* does not systematically differentiate between these four subjects, in acknowledgement of life writing's specific dynamics I use the name Janmohamed to refer to the writer of *Love in a Headscarf*, and Shelina to refer to the narrator and subject of the text.

Beyond generic features which are common to all life writing, *Love in a Headscarf* specifically adapts chick-lit tropes. The presence of certain generic features – including, but not limited to its cover illustration, tonal similarities with popular magazines targeted at women, and romantic notions of "the one" – lend the memoir a distinctly "fictional" flavour. A comparison can be made with another literary memoir, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), which uses pseudonyms and other devices to give the text a novelistic feel.

Alongside these writers' interventions in secular political and literary fields, these texts also share similarities in their protagonists' struggles to negotiate secular society and its values whilst retaining (or adopting, in *Minaret*'s case) religious beliefs and values. One of the core tenets shared by these texts is their protagonists' articulation of a cosmopolitan, middle-class female identity. Whereas the passive Muslim woman in need of rescue from oppressive men is a universal stereotype which shapes both critical and commercial fields; the independent, cosmopolitan, upper-middle class Muslim woman, by contrast, is highly particularised – exceptional, even.

A chapter on memoirs written by and about Muslims post-9/11 by Rehana Ahmed is helpful for its description of *Love in a Headscarf* as depicting 'obstacles "everywoman" encounters in her search for romantic love *as well as* the vicissitudes of the arranged marriage system that she negotiates' (Ahmed 2015: 185; original emphasis). Ahmed's reference to an 'everywoman' archetype illustrates the memoir's reliance on a universal notion of womanhood which deems Muslim women and the specifics of their experiences as equal to those of non-Muslim women.

Here, the language of chick-lit – as opposed to the language Muslim 'misery memoirs' – challenges dominant representations of Muslim women as a homogeneous collective, and the potential for such narratives' co-optation for geopolitical ends. Gillian Whitlock describes, in *Soft Weapons*, how 'autoethnographies about Afghan women in 2003 […] are almost entirely collective and pseudonymous' (Whitlock 2014: 18). Similarly, popular memoirs such as *Mayada: Daughter of Iraq* (2003) by Jean Sasson and the aforementioned *Reading Lolita in Tehran* present nested testimonies and narratives of so-called 'shadow women' which tell of 'terrible oppression under […] dictatorship' in Iraq and Iran respectively (Whitlock 2014: 89-90). The stories of anonymous or pseudonymous Muslim women, collected and presented in a single work, are often

coupled with appeals to 'Western women readers […] who find both a reminder of their power and an invitation to intervene on the behalf of women who are silenced and oppressed' (Whitlock 2014: 118). These practices in the memoir or life writing form operate to separate women into two distinct, polarised worlds – that of the Muslim woman who is a victim, devoid of agency, and that of the Western woman who is free and has political and personal agency. By contrast, *Love in a Headscarf* is narrated by Janmohamed exclusively, and her articulation of a universal womanhood is mobilised less around the geopolitics of the war on terror that inform Muslim misery memoirs, than shared experiences of women searching for a romantic partner and falling in love.

The protagonists' identification as cosmopolitan, upper middle-class, well-travelled, and (in the case of *Love in a Headscarf*) highly educated, also serves to distinguish these texts from representations of Muslim women found in other works of fiction, such as *Brick Lane* and *Maps for Lost Lovers*. The depictions in these female-authored texts also clash with the texts explored in the previous chapter, which relegate women to the margins of the text, reducing them to symbols of domestic, local and/or national life. In *Love in a Headscarf*, for example, Janmohamed depicts a sports car purchase and climbing Kilimanjaro as a disruption of the diasporic community's norms around womanhood. In *Minaret*, Najwa's wealthy family background and privileged upbringing in Sudan inform an upper class sensibility which is aligned with the Arab families she finds employment with as a domestic servant in London.

The signals of class in these texts are significant for these texts' uses of genre, romance specifically. Economic prospects (actual or potential) signify desirability and compatibility, playing an important role in romance stories since their inception. Associations of the hijab, which both Janmohamed and Najwa wear, with working- or lower-class origins are obstacles to the protagonists' recognition as middle-class, and therefore, loved and loveable subjects. As Ahmed argues, this positionality 'unsettles some of the assumptions about veiling […] – namely, the association of the practice with either a working-class cultural traditionalism or a subaltern resistance cum radicalism born of class- as well as race-marginalisation and disaffection' (Ahmed 2015: 208). Privileges based on class may afford Muslim women access to love and romance, but it is a struggle, as evidenced by the texts analysed in chapter three in which Muslim women were far removed from the romantic ambitions of the male cosmopolitan narrators.

Love in a Headscarf

In this section, I will analyse *Love in a Headscarf*'s use of chick-lit and romance features to create a Muslim love story. In particular I am interested in the memoir's use of chick-lit tropes to intervene in debates around Muslims' rights and responsibilities in the UK, particularly around Muslims' compatibility with the secular liberal state. By blurring conventionally-held distinctions between modernity and tradition, *Love in a Headscarf* casts Islam as wholly compatible with chick-lit's consumer-driven lifestyle and values around choice. However, the use of the chick-lit form complicates the question of female agency, owing to the genre's contested status. I argue that tensions between the demands of the form and attempts to subvert and refute conceptions of Muslim women as lacking agency limit the memoir's ability to "have it all".

As in prior texts analysed in the thesis, romance is a key site in which contests over political rights and recognition play out. In *Love in a Headscarf*, rhetoric of personal, individual choice is used to legitimise practices associated with Muslims and Islam, such as arranged marriage. Through the successful enactment and fulfilment of cultural and religious traditions around marriage – including, perhaps most notably, abstinence from pre-marital sex and physical intimacy – *Love in a Headscarf* distances itself from popular representations of Islam and Muslims including, although not limited to, "forced" and overly restrictive intimate norms, and the oppression of women.

It should be noted that Janmohamed's text is a self-aware intervention into such representations, as the 'Author's Introduction' clarifies: 'Hidden behind the often misleading headlines of terror and destruction that are said to be in the name of Islam are Muslims: ordinary normal people who share that one thing that exalts human beings and connects the sublime within us to our mundane lives – that thing called Love' (xii). This section will consider Janmohamed's use of chick-lit to represent the search for love as universal, while nevertheless allowing for cultural variation: 'Civilisations do not clash over whether love exists or not. They may differ about what or who should be the object of love. They disagree about how love should be conducted', she states (xi).

The compatibility between divine and secular forms of love is affirmed as Janmohamed states the need for public debates about Muslims to better reflect the universal aspirations for love found in private spaces – most notably, '[b]eneath the translucent veils of Muslim women' (xii). The promise of insider access to a world of Muslim women is clear, although this is coupled with a broader claim to represent 'the human passions and hopes of many Muslims, both men and women, and of human beings of other faiths and no faith at all' (xiii). Ahmed, in her chapter on British Muslim memoirs, argues for Janmohamed's 'borderline status': being 'socially and spatially mobile' allows Janmohamed 'to cross between inside and outside, community and context' (Ahmed 2015: 188). Her positioning in the 'Author's Introduction' as well as her identity as a 'British East-African Asian Muslim' woman, enable a sense of play with ideas of universality and particularity, of at once belonging to and existing outside of the diasporic Muslim community (34).

Janmohamed's liminal position is helpful for understanding the complex field she navigates in her writing: as Lucinda Newns puts it, 'Janmohamed allocates to Muslim women living in non-Muslim societies the task of changing (what counts as) religious practice from the inside, particularly when it comes to gender norms and codes. At the same time, by insisting that her text is "British", Janmohamed is also contesting the current terms on offer for full citizenship of the nation' (Newns 2017). Making space for herself in both British and Muslim communities – and challenging the binary which holds these to be separate – is handled in a variety of ways throughout the memoir, many of which are enacted through tropes and features associated with the chick-lit genre.

Citing *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) by Helen Fielding, and the 1998-2004 television series *Sex and the City* (adapted from Candace Bushnell's 1996 book of the same name) as foundational texts, Stephanie Harzewski describes chick-lit as 'urban period pieces offer[ing] parodic commentary on significant demographic shifts in the United States and the United Kingdom. New social phenomena – the rise of serial cohabitation, the increasing age for first marriage, the phenomenon of the "starter marriage," and declining rates of remarriage – have led to the emergence of what chick lit authors call "singleton" lifestyles' (Harzewski 2011: 3). By 'capitalizing on a particular kind of feminine angst, fictionally rendered humorous or, as some readers have claimed,

archetypal', chick-lit broadly 'provide[s] an ethnographic report on a new dating system and a shift in the climate of feminism' (Harzewski 2011: 3-4).

Love in a Headscarf's cover clearly signals its connection to the chick-lit genre, as well as its departure. The Aurum Press edition features both 'chick lit's signature pink' and its title rendered 'in loopy cursive script', both hallmarks of the genre (Harzewski 2011: 7; 2). Likewise, the cover's depiction of its autobiographical subject wearing sunglasses and driving a sports car against a silhouetted London skyline, 'inscrib[e] it into a world of fashionable female consumption' (Newns 2017). The presence of a hijab, blowing in the wind, and the book's subtitle, "Muslim woman seeks the One", work to naturalise the religious Muslim subject's presence in chick-lit. The skyline is a distinct shade of pink, a reflection of Shelina's pink hijab: 'the colour of an April sunset or a dusky summer rose', as the text's prologue romantically puts it (1). The particularity of the design aesthetic here counters dominant representations of Muslim women post-9/11, a trend critiqued within the memoir: 'The prevailing imagery of Muslim women showed us covered from head to feet in black. […] The photographs were taken to make the women look eerie and inhuman, alien to Western eyes. But underneath each one was a life, a story, a heart, which was denied by those who saw them just as a ghost covered in black cloth' (158).

Chick-lit's influence is also readily apparent in *Love in a Headscarf*'s narrative, which charts Shelina's life and her search for the perfect marriage partner (34). As part of her 'mission […] to understand love in all its facets and to define it on my own terms', we are privy to recollections of the best and worst prospective suitors from Shelina's time as an undergraduate at Oxford to her days in an office job at a technology company, culminating in her eventual happy marriage (253). For its cultural and religious specificities, the memoir's narration of matchmakers, 'buxom Aunties', online marriage sites, and Shelina's own initiatives are readily assimilable into the chick-lit tradition, with its study of adult 'singleton' life and its accompanying indignities.

Other aspects of Shelina's story which articulate chick-lit tropes include an emphasis on middle-class aspirations around 'a career, a home, a husband, children' (162), and strategic deployments of a 'James Bond-style model [car] with *va-va-voom*' (140; original emphasis) and 'a Coco Chanel-style dress' which is credited with attracting Shelina's eventual partner (254). A section dubbed 'the Six Stages of Self-Pity'

dedicated to a recurring pattern of conversation with female friends about singledom warrants comparisons with *Sex and the City*'s 'regular brunch scenes with Carrie and her friends', thereby 'ground[ing] the text in the same glossy magazine culture that pervades chick lit works' (see 120-8; Newns 2017).

Despite its participation in chick-lit's normalised materialism, *Love in a Headscarf* cannot be read exclusively through this paradigm. Marian Aguiar's study of representations of arranged marriage in South Asian diasporic and indigenous contexts uses the term 'ladki-lit' (*ladki* meaning "girl" in Hindi) to denote a South Asian variant of chick-lit (Aguiar 2013: 186). As she notes, ladki-lit protagonists, including Shelina in *Love in a Headscarf,* face 'many of the same relationship "problems" as the protagonists represented in Western chick-lit: married men who hide the fact, gay men who are not out to their families, and men who don't call back after a date' (Aguiar 2013: 186). Nevertheless, crucial differences emerge in ladki-lit texts' representations of arranged marriage. As Aguiar persuasively argues, 'arranged marriage is frequently represented as a possible solution to the pitfalls of more liberal relationships' (Aguiar 2013: 187).

Indeed, *Love in a Headscarf* implies that there is no paradox between traditional practices around marriage and religion and the modern lifestyle associated with chick-lit. While Shelina's eventual match is not arranged, her willing participation in courtship processes associated with arranged marriage support Aguiar's argument about ladki-lit. Throughout the text, Shelina intersperses her reasoning for eschewing the 'priorities and criteria for selecting a partner' preferred within 'modernity' in favour of more traditional practices (252). Pre-marital sex and 'high adrenaline, short-term romantic excitement' are downplayed in favour of 'long-term companionship': 'Adrenaline meant instability – breaking relationships off before the beginning of the End, picking bad boys, having affairs because they were exciting. Why not make stability and contentment fashionable again?' (252). 'Like other Muslim women, I was interested in love, but not the kind that forced me to define love only and exclusively as being sexy' (253).

In addition to affirming arranged marriage, some of Shelina's "war stories" further distance her narrative from chick-lit owing to their naturalisation of the practice of wearing hijab. We learn of various suitors who either reject Shelina outright for wearing

hijab, or, in one case, ask that she not wear the hijab for the first year of marriage (see 175). The men in these stories, such as Hasan, who 'never knew that Muslim women went out or travelled or worked or could dress fashionably and still look attractive' (167), are given an equal footing with other unsuitable prospects like Karim, who excuses his failure to contact Shelina by claiming his 'house was struck by lightning' (115), or Syed, who shows up two hours late for a meeting because of a cricket match on television (97), or Khalil, who is 'stingy' with money on a date and refuses to marry a tall woman (101). A positive response to the hijab is one of many factors – such as respect for others' time, good communication, realistic expectations of a partner, selflessness – that combine to make up the ideal partner. As these examples suggest, *Love in a Headscarf* strikes a balance between culturally specific and more "universal" experiences.

The same is true of the tone of text, which balances a humorous and light-hearted tone with more serious subject matter. However, the balance struck throughout the text is noticeably absent in the text's opening. The initial 'Author's Note' has a serious tone and addresses the wider religious, political and cultural concerns and implications of the work. The following section, the 'Prologue', frames the body of the memoir as an intimate chat or 'cookie moment' between friends over coffee – 'mine is a cappuccino, please, no sugar. We'll already be laughing far too much, and the sugar will only encourage us' (1). The juxtaposition of these two sections tonally is striking, as the text as a whole sits inside these two extremes, never fully recapturing or embracing either's wholly serious or lighthearted, intimate tone.

Shelina's trips to the Middle East for *hajj* and holidays, climbing Kilimanjaro, and 9/11 and its aftermath are among the passages which disrupt the light, humorous tone characteristic of chick-lit. The former two events in particular play on common features of chick-lit – travel as a means of "finding yourself", notions of international desirability and glamour – by subtly subverting them. These passages continue the trend of blurring distinctions between sites of modernity and tradition, provoking questions about spirituality, global interdependencies, deterritorialisation of Islam and perceived Western superiority.

Love in a Headscarf explores and subverts imagined cultural and geographical borders through global encounters, emphasising a shared, cosmopolitan 'global village' to

which we all belong (121). For example, Shelina's positive experiences during *hajj*, re-enacting the search by Hagar for water amidst great cultural diversity, prompts her to wish: 'That's how we need to live in Britain' (245). Elsewhere, in Jordan, Shelina and her friends are perceived by a fellow French tourist, Anne, as uncultured and backwards when, in fact, 'we were educated at one of the most prestigious universities in the world, we spoke probably ten languages between us, had read a wide variety of literature from numerous cultures and languages, and had also travelled through many different countries' (191). That this encounter takes place in Jordan is significant, as it reveals the 'absurdity of her [Anne's] passion to travel through the Middle East if she thought it had nothing to offer and was only full of barbarians' (191). These are portrayed as the contradictions of an interconnected world of international travel and tourism, in which the incongruities between what people imagine Shelina (and by extension all Muslims) to be – 'barbaric people who threaten to kill people who don't become Muslims' – and Shelina's self-identification as an educated 'European' are made apparent (190-1). The symbolic and literal crossing of national and civilisational boundaries in *Love in a Heasdscarf*, as Md. Mahmudal Hasan notes, 'seeks redemption and fulfilment through Islam which is not confined to any geographical boundary', thereby confirming its compatibility with British identity (Hasan 2015: 96).

As well as distancing herself from a geographically bounded conception of Islam, Shelina also distances herself from conventional chick-lit protagonists through her representations of spirituality and travel. Tourism, as a trope of chick-lit with accompanying notions of "finding oneself", is another space in which Shelina subverts generic expectations. Unlike the aforementioned Anne, Shelina's 'awe of the creation of the Divine' whilst climbing Kilimanjaro – enables her to transcend 'the superficialities of work, clothes, social whirl, shopping, giggling, worrying, planning, stress, tears' (139; 195). Creating critical distance between herself and the features that characterise the chick-lit form thus rejects the emphasis on 'women fashioning public identities through consumption' found, for instance, in *Sex and the City* (Zieger 2004: 98)

Other moments in the memoir are subversive of chick-lit's normative values which privilege consumer culture and, as a result, the metropolitan centres of London and New York and its residents. A shop assistant in Cairo who proposes to Shelina is at first regarded with suspicion: 'We were sceptical: we assumed that they found our passports more beautiful than us. In this context, we thought love was being played as a game'

(181). A longer discussion and an attempt to move beyond a view of the men as mere 'caricatures' reveals a different motive, as the suitor expresses his sympathy and admiration for her wearing hijab in the UK, where it 'must be very hard' to do so (181-2). This is said to force Shelina to re-examine her initial assumption that 'we were somehow superior because we were from the "West"' (181). Refusing to exoticise her encounters with men outside of the West, nevertheless enables a culturally sensitive variation on the archetypal chick-lit protagonist who "finds herself" through travel.

The aforementioned passages and examples all speak to the priorities of *Love in a Headscarf* beyond a reiteration of chick-lit tropes. For some readers, the text's numerous overt, and at times extended confrontations with stereotypes affecting Muslim women, may run the risk of overwhelming the text. A review of *Love in a Headscarf* on 'A Muslimah Writes', a blog featuring reviews of books relevant to a Muslim readership, notes that

> [T]he book had tangents into discussions about Islam and womanhood that seemed a bit elementary and intended for non-Muslim audiences who are not familiar with Islam. I could see how it was intended to frame the author's experience of being a British Asian Muslim woman who wears the hijab, but to me they were just wearisome distractions, parts to be skimmed through just so I could get back to her story of how she finally meets her husband ('On Reading Love in a Headscarf' 2012).

This review raises an interesting question around the need for books by and about Muslim women to negotiate the concerns and anxieties of many non-Muslim readers. This is especially apparent, as this review suggests, in the context of passages that deviate from the romance narrative, and the chick-lit form's other characteristic emphases on humour and material acquisition.

One notable section of the text in this regard is a discussion of the 9/11 attacks and their immediate aftermath. Following several pages dedicated to the event and the furore surrounding it, Shelina concludes that as a Muslim, to apologise for 9/11 has the effect of creating 'a link that didn't exist […] I was as little involved as anyone else' (146). There is a striking contradiction here, between the felt need to address the topic in *Love in a Headscarf* at length (thereby creating a link to the event) and the passage's conclusion which dismisses it as unnecessary and irrelevant. What are we to make of this discrepancy between what the text states and what it does in practice?

I would argue this discrepancy is explainable, first and foremost, through constraints imposed on Muslim writers by Western cultural and market pressures which posit a link between Muslims as a collective and acts of terrorism such as 9/11, even when there is none. These pressures – which are also apparent in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s and *In the Light of What We Know*'s knowing invocations of religious fundamentalism and the spectre of political violence (see chapter three) – are especially incongruous in *Love in a Headscarf* owing to the autobiographical subject's repeated stated desire to distance herself from the 'expectations and labels' applied to Muslims generally, and veiled Muslim women specifically as 'oppressed and abused' (150-1).

Competing expectations and demands between form and content generate further tensions in regard to gender. For Newns, the competing demands of writing back to dominant representations of Muslims and the West as incompatible, and the conventions of the chick-lit genre, are not fully reconciled. As she notes, the memoir's overriding 'primary objective' – an intervention in 'the perceived incompatibility between Islam and "the West"' – means that 'other binaries sometimes become re-encoded in the process, including that of gender' (Newns 2017). Specifically, stereotypes around 'the oppressed Muslim woman' are said to conflict with chick-lit's presentation of '"finding a man" as necessary for female completeness'; for Newns, this formal tenet of chick-lit is not adequately 'problematized' in *Love in a Headscarf* (Newns 2017). In other words, the demands and expectations generated by the chick-lit form, particularly around the fulfilment of the romance narrative, clash with the memoir's attempts to disrupt narratives representing Muslim women as lacking independence or agency.

This formal conflict can be seen, for example, in a chapter entitled 'Semiotic Headscarf', with Shelina's response to the hypothetical question, 'DOES YOUR HUSBAND MAKE YOU WEAR A HEADSCARF?': 'I sighed wistfully, "If only I had a husband." It seemed the greatest irony that as a Muslim woman it was assumed I was under the thumb of my husband, and yet here I was, unable to find my Mr Right' (156). This 'greatest irony' is, of course, undone at the end of the memoir when Shelina eventually marries her long sought partner.

Love in a Headscarf is self-aware about the expectations created by choices of form:
'Hollywood and Bollywood rom-coms would write into my script an unexpected
fairytale ending with Prince Charming arriving to sweep me off my feet. Or, in a more
cerebral genre of film, the story would wind down and I would accept that I was not to
find love. I would *submit to my destiny* and move towards productive spinsterhood'
(251; my emphasis). The reference to accepting fate in the context of a 'more cerebral
genre' implies chick-lit's potential, by contrast, to depict agency through romance, and
represents a departure from prevalent ideas about chick-lit's formulaic and regressive
depiction of women (see Harzewski 2011: 7)

Close attention to *Love in a Headscarf*'s ending reveals a complex engagement with
questions of fate and destiny, and an intervention into the dynamics characteristic of
romantic discourse which typically narrate independent women surrendering to fate in
the process of falling in love, thereby compromising female agency. There is a careful
balancing act in the depiction of the meeting with her eventual husband, as Shelina
attempts to move her story's conclusion beyond easy categorisation and thus "have it
all". The resulting resolution is a compromised, or partial fulfilment of genre
expectations.

While chick-lit texts may employ humour and irony in romance plots, recurring central
elements such as "the one" or "Mr Right" – denoting the one, irresistible romantic
interest – nonetheless draw upon dynamics of fate and agency particular to the romance
novel. What is striking then is how Shelina disavows the romantic ideal of "the one" as
fatalistic, endorsing the possibilities of some of the suitors she rejected earlier on: 'I
could not help but think that had I got married younger, shown more interest in Ali at
the very start – then I would have had a very happy life on that path too. […] Waiting
for love to strike "when you least expect it" is a wonderfully fatalistic cliché' (250).

Despite acknowledging her prospective compatibility with other partners and the
potential divergent paths her life may have taken, the final meeting with her eventual
husband is narrated in a recognisably romantic form. As Aguiar notes, ladki-lit, even as
it affirms arranged marriage, shares many commonalities with romantic stories: they
regularly 'include a series of accidental meetings, impediments to love that must be
overcome, and misunderstandings that create narrative tension' (Aguiar 2013: 188). In
the memoir, similarly, the discovery of Mr Right is replete with nervous tension and

excitement, and social faux pas: 'I dared not think he might be the One'; 'I thumped myself on the inside of my head for making that last comment'; 'Now he admits he had spent the previous days in a heightened sense of anxiety, worried he might never see me again' (257).

There is also, though, a sense in which these romantic elements are downplayed and even dismissed, which some readers have expressed disappointment with. For example, the 'A Muslimah Writes' review states that 'for a story that is so centred on finding deep, enduring, romantic love, I feel that the book is strangely devoid of it' ('On Reading Love in a Headscarf' 2012). Indeed, while the language of Shelina's and her husband's meeting does include the idea of 'the One', *Love in a Headscarf* does not embrace familiar romantic metaphors or clichés which depict desire as 'elemental, beyond control, majestic, thrilling, dangerous' (Belsey 1994: 27). Instead, Mr Right is said to inspire 'innocent pleasure', 'a feeling of hope', and 'optimism for humanity' (256-7). The popular romance's associations with submitting to fate are opposed through Shelina's insistence that '[h]e was the one because I was going to make him be my one' (258). Just as striking is the brevity of our encounter with Shelina's future husband in the text. His appearance, limited to the final four pages of the memoir, breaks from romance conventions around 'a series of accidental meetings' – he plays a significantly smaller role than Mohamed, for example, a potential partner for eighteen pages (see 255-9 and 198-217 respectively). Love is thus deferred beyond the scope of the memoir, or, as Shelina's local imam puts it: 'Only when you wake up in the morning and you smell his breath and you see her with her hair standing on end like a *jinn*, only then can you know what love is' (53; original emphasis).

Standing in for love (and attendant ideas of destiny) in these final pages is Shelina's partner's easy assimilation with the various categories, discourses and debates *Love in a Headscarf* engages with. We learn little about Shelina's eventual partner in his brief appearance except that he meets the essential criteria for South Asian, British and Islamic conceptions of love – affirming all and troubling none. As a religious South Asian man holding 'a career outside of the typical Asian portfolio' in the charity sector, and possessing a sense of romance, he satisfies Shelina's desire for cultural reconciliation (256-7). Her feeling that '[t]here was definitely something special about him' is confirmed following 'a full and extensive vetting' by Shelina's parents, the arrival of 'a huge bouquet of flowers' at Shelina's office, and her realisation that 'we

could become companions and partners, "garments for each other" as the *Qur'an* described a married couple' (258). Beyond these qualities and facets of his identity, Mr Right appears only as a 'tall dark handsome stranger', a spectral presence who reflects Shelina's values and hyphenated identities (255).

The conclusion of *Love in a Headscarf* – in which Shelina finds a partner who is compatible with secular and religious discourses, South Asian and British culture as well as Islam – is thus absolved from any potential conflict. On the one hand, this brings the romantic plot in line with the text's affirmations of the broad compatibility of cultures and civilisations – refuting, for example, Shelina's 'mistaken belief that there were contradictions in […] different perspectives about love that came from faith or tradition, from popular or Asian culture' (22). On the other hand, it distances the text from some of the more culturally challenging practices the text ostensibly endorses, such as inter-racial marriage – 'marrying a Bilal' is an 'almost unheard of' event in her South Asian community (135) – and arranged marriage arrangements that eschew romance altogether, like that of Shelina's grandmother (see 105-9).

For its insistence on agency, *Love in a Headscarf* shows in practice many of the constraints placed on Muslim women in this contested time, and the narrow bounds within which they are "empowered" to write (and write back). The text signals profitable sites and strategies with which to contest and subvert the supposed incompatibility of the author's religious identity and discussions about love – and through this, 'the perceived incompatibility between Islam and "the West"' (Newns 2017). A close analysis of *Love in a Headscarf*'s use of the chick-lit form, however, reveals the compromises mandated by the text's competing priorities. The memoir's struggle to "have it all" is most clearly revealed in the memoir's resolution, which is notable for its deferment of love. Love's narration in terms of surrendering agency to fate or destiny necessitates its absence, in order to preserve Shelina's agency. Through this move, the memoir struggles to maintain the Muslim woman's sovereignty in defiance of discourses which deny Muslim women's agency, whilst simultaneously conforming to the expectations created by the genre around love's fulfilment.

Minaret

This section analyses *Minaret*'s use of the romance genre to negotiate the contested secular literary field. To an even greater extent than *Love in a Headscarf*, *Minaret* largely avoids direct engagements with topics like multiculturalism, terrorism and fundamentalism. Rather, according to Rachael Gilmour, 'British Islamophobia' is 'a constant if unemphasized presence [...] in Aboulela's writing'; the same is true of other recurring themes, including Sudan as a postcolonial nation and Western liberal academia (Gilmour 2012: 212). As a result, *Minaret*'s engagement with themes around female agency, Islam and secularism occur primarily in and through the novel's romance plot. Like *Love in a Headscarf*, *Minaret* also selectively breaks from genre conventions in a number of ways. Most notably, the ending of *Minaret*, while affirming the protagonist Najwa's agency, abdicates the search for romantic love altogether in favour of spiritual fulfilment.

As in *Love in a Headscarf*, the uses of and deviations from the conventions of the romance should be seen as an attempt to assert female Muslim agency, and to counter the effective exclusion of women's voices outside of extremely narrow confines from contemporary discourses around Muslims. In other words, a selective use of the romance genre affords *Minaret* the opportunity to circumvent – if not to reform and reshape – the limited, gendered cultural field in which Muslims write and are written about. Acknowledging the specific formal features of *Minaret* as, primarily, stylistic choices – as opposed to inevitable results of Leila Aboulela's adherence to Islam – can account for aspects of the text that may otherwise appear contradictory, paradoxical or irreconcilable.

The plot of *Minaret* concerns Najwa, the protagonist, and her spiritual, material and romantic journey. Brought up and educated in Khartoum, where her father was a senior minister in the Sudanese government, Najwa finds herself largely unprepared for life in London after her father is arrested and executed following a military coup. Her mother's death and her brother's imprisonment after a fatal drug-related stabbing leaves her with little direction or money as an adult, forcing her to become a domestic servant for wealthy Arab families. In the midst of these events Najwa, formerly secular, begins to practise Islam.

In London, Najwa is torn between two potential romantic partners with very different values, Anwar and Tamer. Anwar, a secular Marxist from Khartoum, is juxtaposed

against the young and naïve Tamer, a religious Arab Muslim uninterested in politics. Both relationships have socially transgressive elements: Anwar's unwillingness to commit to marriage involves transgressing Sudanese (and Islamic) norms and values around premarital relations. At the same time, his relationship with Najwa, owing to her upbringing in Sudan's social and political elite, is a betrayal of his Marxist values. In the case of Tamer, his relatively young age, coupled with Najwa's status as a domestic servant, transgresses the wishes of Tamer's secular family. The love triangle, which puts the two men in an indirect competition for Najwa's affections, is notable and unusual for the inclusion of a religious Muslim as a romantic "lead".

One of the most subversive elements of *Minaret* is its ending. Najwa's decides to accept a bribe from her prospective mother-in-law and abandon her romantic relationship with Tamer. This refusal of the traditional romantic narrative is one of many ways that Aboulela modifies the traditional romantic narrative. In an interview, Aboulela describes Najwa's decision to strike out on her own, without a man, as a feminist act (Chambers 2009: 99). Indeed, by opting *not* to fight for love, the protagonist, Najwa, defies the conventions of the Western romance tradition, and therefore gains a measure of agency. Yet, *Minaret*'s unusual focus on Islam – and its pointed critique of secularism – has provoked negative attention from some critics who question Najwa's, and Aboulela's, agency. However, this section argues that to ascribe agency to one action (fighting to marry Tamer) and not the other (accepting the bribe and going on *hajj*) is questionable. By only acknowledging agency in relation to secular liberal traditions and norms of behaviour, critics show a willingness to label behaviour as dictated by culture, except when it conforms to an allegedly "free" choice. In *Minaret*'s critical reception, an implied distinction between cultural or religious acts which are constrained, and individual acts which are free positions love and those who prioritise it as transcending the influence of culture.

It is worth looking at Sadia Abbas's and Waïl Hassan's individual critiques of *Minaret* and Aboulela's writing in some depth here, since these critics take similar questions around form and content as their starting point, and yet reach very different conclusions to my own. Despite Abbas's and Hassan's respective acknowledgements of the 'ethical vacuity' of the 'binary simplicity of the discourse of good and bad Muslim', and the 'resurgence of Islamophobia' comprised of 'old Orientalist stereotypes' in the wake of '[t]he collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001', I

would suggest that neither critic is able to move beyond these discourses in their readings of *Minaret* (Abbas 2014: 4-5; Hassan 2011: 27). Instead, their analyses both work to deny Aboulela's agency on the basis of her religiosity.

In Abbas's case, she reads *Minaret*'s form as informed by Islam, and therefore, devoid of individual agency. Although Abbas does credit Aboulela with a 'knack for converting literary strategies of secular provenance to religious purposes', in practice Abbas treats her texts with suspicion, arguing, for instance, that they should be read as works of 'didactic anthropology' rather than as imaginative writing or literature (Abbas 2014: 82; 89). According to Abbas, Aboulela's use of postcolonial literary tropes and conventions around hybridity and cultural translation are misuses of the form:

> The cunning of the fiction lies in that Aboulela takes what was already committedly transformative about this literature and subjects it to a systematic series of further conversions. […] The aim is not just the burbling mélange of hybridity, but a deep absorption into a different universalizing teleology [Islam], smuggled in under the cover of one of postcolonial theory's most popular concepts (Abbas 2014: 87).

'[C]unning', with concepts 'smuggled in' – Aboulela's use of genre is represented by Abbas as a form of literary espionage that, nevertheless, denies any agency to the author and her writing; these are cast instead as representative of a 'universalizing teleology'.

The same logic is applied to Aboulela's adoption of the romance genre. Contests between passivity and agency, private and public, form and content, are resolved through recourse to a monolithic conception of 'Islamism': 'Aboulela's is a vision that refracts Monica Ali through Syed Qutb, a vision that takes traditions of domestic multicultural romance and filters them through contemporary right-wing Islamism' (Abbas 2014: 84). Earlier in her chapter, similarly, Abbas characterises Aboulela's texts as 'space[s] where Protestantism, Salafism, and the fantasy of happily consensual ("companionate") marriage can merge' (Abbas 2014: 81). The relevance of these disparate invocations of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi thought to Aboulela's writing is unclear, but the effect, nonetheless, is to establish the impossibility of individual agency within an ideological framework informed by Islam.

Similar moments re-occur throughout Abbas's and Hassan's analyses, both of whom at times employ misleading references to Islam (and Islamism) in the context of the unique

dynamics of *Minaret*'s love triangle between Najwa, Anwar and Tamer. For Abbas, *Minaret*'s romance story allegorises 'the Left's defeat: they offer Marxists who are vanquished by Islam, […] Najwa's first lover because he is presented as obviously inferior to the younger Islamist and replaced by him' (Abbas 2014: 84). While this is an accurate (if cursory) summary of events, Abbas's repeated characterisation of Tamer as an 'Islamist' is highly questionable given *Minaret*'s repeated signals against this reading, and Tamer's disinterest in politics. Upon questioning Tamer's 'commit[ment] to the Islamic movement', Najwa is reassured by a close friend, Shahinaz, that he lacks the '"attitude" that so many of these young brothers at the mosque have' (106). Elsewhere, Tamer's concern about 'anti-American feelings' in Britain – presumably in response to the war on terror and American foreign policy – is answered with a reflection on his personal experience: 'It bugs me. My American teachers were really nice' (117). Finally, information about his best friend, 'Carlos, from Bolivia […] a devout Catholic' serves to even further distance Tamer from dominant narratives around radicalisation and Islamism (209).

In spite of such signals, according to Hassan, Aboulela's 'fundamentalism' is readily identifiable in the depiction of gender relations: '"freedom" and "modernity" come to represent to her [i.e. Najwa] an empty space devoid of the jealous and sometimes violent protectiveness of male relatives, which nonetheless guarantee […] life-long security and a sense of belonging' (Hassan 2011: 197-8). Similarly, Abbas's insistence on Tamer as an Islamist is balanced against Aboulela's depictions 'of women who seek their own subjection' (Abbas 2014: 83). Both critics over-reach in their accounts of Tamer, ascribing political radicalism or a 'violent protectiveness' to him while simultaneously downplaying agency on the part of the author and her texts' female protagonists.

My concern here is the consistent recourse to arguments that make formal features of *Minaret* appear inevitable as a result of the author's public identity as a practising Muslim. This contest over form and ideology is also apparent in critics' discussions of *Minaret*'s confessional, earnest tone, which Hassan attributes to 'Aboulela's episteme of faith' which has 'neither room nor use for irony' (Hassan 2011: 193). As Morey argues, however, 'irony's absence is a stylistic choice, not – as Hassan implies – an organic expression of a spiritual outlook' (Morey 2017).

In fact, in its earnest narration of romance, *Minaret* is indebted to the English romance tradition, and in particular, foundational texts like *Jane Eyre* (1847). *Minaret*'s earnestness is out of keeping with the ironic and light tone of *Love in a Headscarf*, for instance, which adheres to the norms of chick-lit and more widely, post-feminist writing. Aboulela has spoken to this difference in an interview, noting her difficulty in 'relat[ing] to this attitude to romance' (Chambers 2009: 98). According to Aboulela, *Jane Eyre* is 'a very Christian book […] in that the conflict is specific to Christianity' – that is to say that Rochester cannot be married to two women at the same time; this is said to have inspired Aboulela's use of the romance form to explore 'a specifically Muslim dilemma' in *The Translator* (1999), her debut novel (Chambers 2009: 98).

The same is true of *Minaret* which, unlike prior texts studied in this thesis, depicts the secular cultural norms of the Arab community in London as antagonistic to the growing romantic bond between Najwa and Tamer. The relationship is directly opposed by Tamer's secular family, who look down on Najwa for her lowly class status and disapprove of the age gap between the couple: 'You're old enough to be his mother even if you don't look it', Doctora Zeinab, Tamer's mother, protests (264). By contrast, the couple's partnership is religiously sanctioned, as Doctora Zeinab laments: 'And he [Tamer] tells me the Prophet, peace be upon him, married Khadijah and she was fifteen years older than him. Is this an argument? We live now, not then' (263). The consummation of Najwa and Tamer's relationship through marriage is thus presented by the latter as a way to 'go back in time', re-creating the past and thereby escaping the demands and pressures of their respective presents (255).

In lieu of political engagement, Tamer and Najwa bond through their shared interests in Islamic history and the desire to 'go back in time. A time of horses and tents; swords and raids' (255). These wishes are implied in Najwa's case to be the result of trauma following her parents' deaths and brother's imprisonment – 'I circle back, I regress: the past doesn't let go. It might as well be a malfunction, a scene repeating itself, a scratched vinyl record, a stutter' – and youthful immaturity on Tamer's part (216).

For Najwa, Tamer assuages her fears about ageing and the decline she associates with it, as well as representing potential access to God's grace and redemption for herself and her family through his youthful innocence and the 'smell [of] Paradise' that accompanies it (3). The promised redemptive power of love and the correct partner here

is consistent with the norms of the romance genre, in which love frequently represents the possibility of reinvention and renewal.

Tamer's youthful innocence and earnestness is juxtaposed against Anwar's hypocrisy and the accompanying feelings of abjection he elicits in her. On his arrival in London and the rekindling of his and Najwa's brief courtship in Khartoum, Anwar pushes Najwa to sleep with him. In doing so, he chooses to eschew Sudanese cultural norms which prioritise marriage in favour of the secular West's normalisation of pre-marital relations. When Najwa feels guilty after their first sexual encounter, Anwar reminds her of the 'double standards for men and women' in Sudan (175). He goes on to reassure her: 'I know you're Westernized, I know you're modern', and claims to like her for her 'independence' (176). Najwa is temporarily relieved knowing 'I was in the majority now, I was a true Londoner now', with its characteristic individualism and notions of self-sufficiency (176).

Anwar justifies his sexual, financial and emotional exploitation of Najwa on the basis of her elite background. A self-serving intellectualism and uses of rhetoric around agency undermine his attempts to reassure her: 'What's between us is love. It's nothing to feel guilty about' (244). For example, when Najwa is sexually harassed by Anwar's flatmate, Anwar's response is indicative of his unwillingness to take responsibility for her wellbeing, using rhetoric rooted in individual responsibility: 'You're sophisticated enough to deal with this, Najwa' (242). In keeping with this line of thinking, Anwar also refuses to proffer marriage: 'If he had proposed marriage there and then, I would have accepted and gone back to him' (244). Anwar's refusal to marry Najwa and his insistence on following a cultural script of pre-marital love sanctioned in the West is revealed as hypocritical when he later marries his Sudanese cousin despite claiming not to 'feel any strong inclination towards her' (228). Anwar's willingness to follow traditional marital arrangements contradicts his strong feelings about Islam, which he considers resolutely 'backward' (241). Here *Minaret* signals Anwar's self-serving manipulation of the British cultural script around relationships to exploit Najwa all the whilst knowing that 'he didn't want my [Najwa's] father's blood in his children's veins' (201).

There is also the trope, utilised in *Minaret*, around class and romance. Tamer is able to look beyond his first impression of Najwa as a maid or domestic servant, and view her

as a prospective partner despite their economic disparateness. Anwar however is unable to get beyond Najwa's socio-economic background, and cannot read her as anything other than her class background, and furthermore borrows (and does not repay) money from her without regard for her present situation. *Minaret* plays around with the trope of "hidden" economic and class power present in a text like *Jane Eyre*, where the titular character, unbeknownst to her, stands to inherit prodigious wealth. In doing so *Minaret* affirms the sense of romance's independence from financial concerns, whilst subtly employing wealth and class status as markers of compatibility, with Najwa's wealthy upbringing confirming her and Tamer's ultimate suitability.

It would be a mistake though to regard Najwa as entirely passive in her relationships. There is a sense, for example, of Najwa wilfully misrepresenting her relationship with Anwar to Tamer in order to solicit feelings of jealousy and possessiveness from him. This takes the form of Najwa subtly manipulating Tamer: when Tamer speaks highly of Najwa's marriage prospects – 'you've just had bad luck. I bet so many men wanted to marry you!' – she confirms his wish and misrepresents her previous relationship with Anwar, suggesting that she rejected him rather than the other way round. 'He was an atheist so I didn't marry him' hides the truth, that 'Anwar didn't want my genes' (201). Najwa's guilt over her illicit relationship with Anwar is partially alleviated, 'because I see a gleam of jealousy in his [Tamer's] eyes, sense possessiveness' (202). The associations of love with divinity here serve to offer a measure of comfort to Najwa in her search for forgiveness. More than this, this passage depicts Najwa playing into a romantic conception of her relationship with Tamer, consolidating the idea of them together as a couple rejecting and renouncing secular values.

This section of the text appears to confirm Hassan's reading of Minaret and its gender dynamics to a degree, with Najwa's sense of validation at Tamer's (non-violent) feelings of jealousy. However, *Minaret*'s surprising ending, in which Najwa chooses not to pursue her relationship with Tamer, is indicative of her newfound maturity and agency which does not seek redemption from male attention. In fact, *Minaret* employs postcolonial tropes around trauma to hint at Najwa's unreliable narration, her poor judgment and the unsuitability of her romance with Tamer. The relationship between Tamer and Najwa, does not, for example garner universal support from the novel's fellow Muslims. Najwa's friend at the mosque, Shahinaz, has misgivings: 'When I think of a man I admire, he would have to know more than me, be older than me. Otherwise I

wouldn't be able to look up to him' (215). Najwa's further admission that she wishes to be a 'slave' and a 'concubine, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*' for Tamer's family, forces her to reflect on her 'warped self and distorted desires' (215). Najwa's desires – comprised of a romanticised and fantastical exoticism – are implied to allow her to overlook issues with her prospective partner, such as his 'childish and nagging' behaviour around his mother (207).

This ideological and formal rejection of romance holds significant implications for interpreting *Minaret*. For one, it challenges Hassan's reading of *Minaret*, which problematically collapses Najwa and Aboulela in the above passage concerning *The Arabian Nights*, which Hassan denounces as an 'absurd preference for slavery' (Hassan 2011: 197). Hassan goes on to collapse this moment within 'Aboulela's ideological project', which is said to possess 'all the elements of a fundamentalist rejection of a "West"' (Hassan 2011: 197-8). This is to ignore the text's own internal critique of such fantasies, part of the text's wider critique of the secular romance form and its emphasis on love's unquestioned supremacy and attendant tropes around fighting for love at any cost. Hassan's aforementioned argument concerning religious writers' lack of irony may in fact reveal more about secular criticism's difficulties coming to terms with religious subjectivities than Aboulela's "fundamentalism".

As alluded to earlier, *Minaret*'s most striking departure from the romance form is its conclusion, in which Doctora Zeinab offers Najwa money to break off contact with her son. Najwa accepts, putting the money towards the *hajj* pilgrimage, but also requests Tamer be allowed to transfer to an American university to study Islamic history instead of his current business programme. As Morey states:

> The controversial ending, where Najwa accepts a payment from Tamer's mother to give him up – along with the avowedly religious tenor of the novel's valorized viewpoints – may prove disquieting for readers steeped in the tradition of secular romance with its normative expectations. The presence of monetary exchange – in effect a bribe – in parting the two lovers, stands in striking contravention of what would ordinarily be considered a satisfactory romance resolution. The news that she will use the money to pay for a pilgrimage to Mecca, while consistent with her burgeoning spiritual sense, denies the reader the consolation either of "true romantic love" or enhanced social agency (Morey 2017).

As well as depicting a secular culture's opposition to religiously-sanctioned marital and

relationship norms, *Minaret*'s final twist abandons the norms of the romance genre altogether. The priority given to the relationship between Tamer and his mother over that of Tamer and Najwa, and the desire to fulfil specific goals around *hajj* and education in Islamic history subvert the romance's conventional use of love as a transcendent, singular event. In stressing Najwa's willing consent to the bribe, *Minaret* also resists a reading of its failed love story as tragic, in which life without romantic love is not worth living.

Subordinating love and romance to a higher dictate distinguishes *Minaret* from, for instance, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *In the Light of What We Know* (see chapter three), in which the (potential or actual) violence perpetrated by cosmopolitan South Asian men is articulated and justified through tragic feelings accompanying failed or "toxic" romances. The obstacles to romance and Najwa's sacrifices, far from begetting violence and retribution against secularism, are met with a combination of passive acceptance and active negotiation.

Crucial in this regard is that the negotiation with Doctora Zeinab places Najwa in a position approaching equality: Najwa aims to 'show her that I am attractive, that there is more to me than being a maid. When she speaks, I realize that she knows' (258-9). Beyond this initial recognition, the bargain struck with Doctora Zeinab also affirms Najwa's and Tamer's cosmopolitan religious identity, and their rightful belonging in the West. Tamer's desire to study Islamic history in the secular context of the American university is met and, similarly, Najwa's resolve to undertake *hajj* with her money is a temporary excursion out of Britain, rather than the permanent relocation favoured by Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. By comparison, *Minaret*'s conception of a transnational Muslim identity strikes a compromise of living in the West without necessarily embracing all of its given values. Tellingly, Najwa's relationship with Doctora Zeinab at the end of the novel is described in terms of 'admir[ation]' for 'a goodness in her, not the metaphysical kind that her son has but one that is solid, rooted in pragmatism' (258-9).

As I have argued, the use of the romance form to selectively engage with questions around belonging, secularism and multiculturalism should be seen as a creative response to the terms permitted within the secular literary field, which itself is shaped by discourses which Hassan and Abbas themselves participate in around religion – and

Islam in particular – as a unique threat to secular values. Their assessments reveal a shared investment in popular conceptions of Muslim men as politically dangerous, violent, irrational, and oppressive, and Muslim women as passive, domesticated, oppressed and submissive. In the case of the latter category, Muslim women are denied agency, rendered either as oppressed (and therefore silent) or complicit in their own oppression (and therefore vocal on behalf of men).

In fact, *Minaret*'s exploration of trans-cultural values and ideologies through the romance genre problematises the simplistic binaries available to critics in the secular West, and their usefulness (or lack thereof) for explaining the text's distinctive narrative. By contesting cultural scripts of intimate behaviour, and playing into genre conventions only to break from them, *Minaret* achieves a sense of quiet defiance. According to my reading, Najwa's unwillingness to pursue a romantic narrative at any cost does not simply represent an admission that Najwa and Tamer were not suitable in the first place – in fact, it signals a subtle use of Islam in contravention of, and opposition to, secular cultural values, which is resolved through negotiated compromise.

Conclusion

Ultimately, a greater attention to genre, and the conditions of literary production and reception – the literary field – as opposed to a preoccupation with the anthropological Muslim subject can account for features of *Love in a Headscarf* and *Minaret* that may otherwise appear contradictory, paradoxical or unexplainable. In *Love in a Headscarf*, popular romance tropes around "the one", an idealised romantic partner, are successfully reconciled with an Islamic ideal of "the One", through the text's refashioning of the chick-lit genre. Blurring distinctions between tradition and modernity, and arguing for the compatibility of loyalty to family, cultural tradition and religion with discourses around romance, facilitates an understanding of the memoir's autobiographical subject as equally compatible with the secular nation and Islam.

In *Minaret*, by comparison, Najwa struggles to find acceptance within Britain, with her desire to be with Tamer opposing the values of his secular family. It is only through acceptance of the compromise presented by Tamer's mother – a compromise acceptable within Islam, but not within the secular romance genre – that Najwa is able to feel at

home in the secular nation. Active renunciation of the terms and concepts afforded by secular romance allow *Minaret* to find a middle ground in which Muslims, while they may not "have it all", nevertheless find dignity and fulfilment in and through a deterritorialised Islam.

In each of these texts, the conventions of the romance genre are selectively deployed in order to articulate cosmopolitan Muslim identities which assert agency and subvert the dominant categories used to classify Muslims and Islam in the contemporary moment. My engagements with these texts show the possibilities afforded by women's writing for articulating Muslim women inside the fold of the secular nation in terms which do not conform to, respectively, the conventions of the Muslim 'misery memoir' and the multicultural novel in which religion and religious subjects are demonised.

Conclusion

My argument throughout these chapters has centred on love as a contested site in which debates about Muslims in Britain play out despite common assumptions about love as a private, apolitical sphere. Love allows, as Elizabeth Povinelli has argued, for those who experience it to 'hinge the most personal of feelings to the broadest currents of world history'; I have argued that this holds true for love or romance narratives in predominantly fictional texts (Povinelli 2006: 192). Far from a neutral or incidental aspect of cultural (mis)conceptions of Muslims and Islam, love is mobilised in texts to authorise and justify political inclusions and exclusions of individuals and collectives along lines of race, religion and gender. There are also reasons to suggest that Muslims may be especially susceptible to the power of such narratives, owing to Mahmood Mamdani's concept of 'culture talk', which takes Muslim individuals as representative of their culture, 'as if their identities are shaped entirely by the supposedly unchanging culture into which they are born (Mamdani 2002: 767). The combination of these two, seemingly disparate processes – love's importance in connecting individuals to cultural identity, and the tendency to take a single Muslim's experiences and values as representative of all Muslims/Islam – may account for the recurring investment in Muslims' (in)capacity to love and be loved. In fact, the prominence of these themes in texts by authors of varying political and cultural persuasions, and texts written in a range of forms and genres with divergent subject matter, provides evidence of their widespread use.

In the first two chapters, I opted to focus primarily on texts which establish or adhere to dominant trends in depictions of Muslims in Britain. The first chapter, which compared Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, looked at post-Rushdie affair – but also, crucially, pre-9/11 – depictions of Muslims and Islam. I argue that these texts provide evidence of the terms and tropes around Muslims and Islam available to writers and texts in the years following the Rushdie affair. Published in the mid-1990s and set in the late 1980s, *The Black Album* figures the Rushdie affair as a watershed event for an emerging militant Muslim presence in the UK, but as I have argued, *The Black Album* itself can also be read in similar terms as a watershed text of sorts, establishing a trend of casting Muslims as incapable of empathy as understood through a discourse of secular love.

The Black Album achieves this by taking attitudes towards sex and literature to be a sole measure of compatibility with British values around individualism and modernity. Sex and literature are reified through Kureishi's specific use of the term "imagination" such that they transcend historical and cultural particularity. In this way, Muslims' opposition to the sexual content in *The Satanic Verses* is cast in all-encompassing terms, as an opposition to literary and sexual freedom and expression. This interpretation of the Rushdie affair thus renders Muslims undeserving of accommodation within multicultural Britain. The conclusions drawn around Muslims as threats are dependent on formal techniques used within *The Black Album*: the formal collapse of narrator and protagonist imposes specific readings of the novel's Muslim characters, and compromises claims about literature's objectivity, and unique capacity for empathy. Beyond the protagonist, Shahid, women and Muslims are subject to caricature, playing narrowly proscribed parts as muses and irrational opponents respectively.

White Teeth, by comparison, suggests a greater set of possibilities available for representations of Muslims in the late 1990s, capitalising on the optimism of New Labour's term of office and 'Asian cool' to present a largely celebratory take on British multiculturalism and its potential to heal the traumas of the colonial era. As in *The Black Album*, fundamentalists of secular and religious persuasions attempt to enforce and control the intimate relations of others. *White Teeth* departs from *The Black Album* in its historicisation of intimate relations in Britain. Most notably, tracing Britain's colonial legacies undermines generalisations about Britain's monopoly on love. Likewise, a focus on individuals with complex and specific family histories (as opposed to embodiments of national or collective histories) represents the possibilities of "everyday" multiculturalism in Britain.

In the second chapter, I analysed two texts published in the wake of 9/11 and the war on terror which adhere to many of the features and tropes established in *The Black Album*: *Maps for Lost Lovers* by Nadeem Aslam and *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. I argue that these two texts continue the trend for representations of Muslims and Islam which invest in love and intimate relations as the primary source of essential differences between "us" and "them". These texts differ from those in the first chapter owing to their near-exclusive on Muslim, South Asian diasporic communities within the UK. I have referred to these texts as romances of the nation, in acknowledgement of the ways in which they reiterate many of the themes of Kureishi's work whilst additionally

eliding conflicts and tensions within British identity which might complicate its depiction as universally aspirational.

Aslam's claim that *Maps for Lost Lovers* depicts 'everyday 9/11s' accurately summarises the tone of these texts, with their shared focus on mundane, domestic tragedies perpetrated by Muslims in Britain. These texts narrate the impossibility of obtaining or locating love within South Asian diasporic communities or their nations of origin. Instead, *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Brick Lane* generate support for interventions in Muslim communities, citing love's presence in indigenous British culture as proof of moral superiority. The ability of individuals to assimilate into British culture is made dependent on the disavowal of specific intimate, economic, religious and cultural ties with the subcontinent and an uncritical endorsement of secular British identity. These texts' association of love with implicitly or explicitly denoted British cultural norms and customs, reiterate popular notions of an inherently free and natural British culture informed by secularism, versus a restrictive and unnatural South Asian culture informed by Islam. I have argued that such depictions, in the context of the war on terror, lend themselves to arguments about the war on terror as justifiable owing to Islam's purported negative effects worldwide.

To substantiate their arguments beyond the uses and invocations of love and romance, these texts draw on other select discourses prominent in the wake of 9/11. *Maps for Lost Lovers* co-opts Sufism to substantiate its claims about Wahhabism's widespread negative influence, and to offer a single narrow conception of Islam as compatible with secular norms and values. *Brick Lane* – in characteristically subtler fashion – draws on neoliberal feminist ideas around economic independence and women's ability to "have it all" in Britain to bolster its representation of communally practiced Islam as uniquely antagonistic and violent towards women.

The third chapter, and the second half of the thesis more widely, saw a shift in the terms of representations of Muslims and Islam, with increasingly ambivalent and oppositional engagements with prior trends from writers. As in the preceding two chapters, love and romance are utilised for specific ends, however the texts covered in these final two chapters utilise very different literary forms in their individual approaches to multiculturalism.

In chapter three, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *In the Light of What We Know* by Mohsin Hamid and Zia Haider Rahman, the protagonists articulate their grievances with (among other topics) the international war on terror and discrimination against Muslims and other minorities in Western nations in overtly political language. These concerns are articulated from secular, cosmopolitan perspectives – the South Asian protagonists demonstrate scant interest in Islam, despite hailing from Muslim backgrounds. Unlike prior texts which offered love and romantic narratives as largely implicit condemnations of Muslims and Islam, these formally complex, postmodern texts deploy unsubtle political allegories of the West's betrayals on an international playing field which reflects the global remit and scale of the war on terror following 9/11.

The most important trope these texts engage with is that of the Muslim terrorist, capable of exacting retaliatory violence on the West, albeit quite unlike of the young male fundamentalist figures encountered in the first chapter rallying against Salman Rushdie and the moral failings of Western culture. As formally complex narrations by individual men, these texts allegorise inter-racial intimate and sexual interactions as the protagonists narrate the wounds inflicted on them personally by the West in the war on terror. The adoption of women as symbols of Western nations in both texts narratives makes their "playing hard to get" tactics instrumental to the male protagonists' frustration and (potential or actual) violence against the West. Women's agency is the price incurred for Western nations' repeated denials of the protagonists claims to full humanity.

The investment in failed inter-racial relationships as proof of the West's lack of empathy and inclusion in a period of crisis is compelling and salient, and serves as a rebuttal of the naturalised assumptions encountered in prior texts around migration, integration and national belonging. Nevertheless, I have argued that these texts' calls for political inclusions are in some respects rather problematic, even misogynistic; the repeated appeals to an internal Western male audience or reader reaffirm affective economies which necessitate inclusions into the nations be coupled with exclusions. In these novels, women's consistent reduction to caricatures and symbols of the nation renders them notable only by virtue of their sexual and romantic (in)availability to the male protagonists.

In the fourth and final chapter, devoted to Shelina Janmohamed's chick-lit memoir, *Love in a Headscarf*, and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, I analysed texts' uses of feminised genres which prioritise romance and love over direct engagements with multiculturalism and other political topics. These texts are especially notable for their depictions of avowedly religious Muslim women, and the authors' self-identification along similar lines. I argue that use of genre facilitates these writers' critical interventions into secular discourses around Muslims, and Muslim women in particular, which restrict their ability to speak outside of the narrow categories apportioned to them in the post-9/11 climate. These texts, in their respective forms and to differing degrees, subvert the dominant narratives of Muslim women as either silent oppressed victims or outspoken and therefore complicit, co-opted.

As well as using the conventions of romance and chick-lit respectively to narrate stories of cosmopolitan Muslim women within Britain, these texts both reject or problematise the expectations around romantic love's fulfilment at the end of each text. In *Love in a Headscarf*, this refusal is justified through Shelina's discomfort with the loss of female agency and the fatalism implied in tropes of finding "the One" and "falling in love". By comparison, *Minaret*'s rejection of romance is presented as the protagonists' disillusionment with secular ideals around romance and its necessary fulfilment at any cost. I also considered *Minaret*'s critical reception, with a focus on (mis)readings of the novel's form as the exclusive product of religious ideology. A closer examination of *Minaret* illustrates the extent to which literary criticism is shaped and informed by limited and limiting secular discourses which deny the agency of religious subjects, particularly in the case of Muslim women.

The final two chapters offer examples of ways in which dominant representations of Muslims and Islam have been, and continue to be contested in the wake of events including (but not limited to) the Rushdie affair, and the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. Although it makes no claims to be definitive, this thesis has attempted to shed light on the dynamics which structure and animate contemporary encounters between Islam and literature in Britain. As I have argued throughout, representations of love, sex, romance and intimacy are inextricably enmeshed in negotiations of political rights and responsibilities in multicultural Britain. I have argued, equally, that the novel is particularly well suited to hiding inter-dependencies between the political and the

private, thereby facilitating love's unique potential to intervene in contemporary political and cultural debates around Muslims and Islam.

My focus in this thesis on the literary novel, however, belies the range of creative responses to current understandings of Muslims. Art, theatre, poetry, film, photography, sculpture, to name just a few, are all forms which have been deployed in ways which demonise Muslims and Islam. At the same time, each of these mediums affords its own unique potential as a site of resistance, capable of undermining and subverting the relentless reiterations of "love crimes" committed by Muslims.

Often missing in such narratives is an acknowledgement and acceptance of alternative priorities amongst peoples who do not readily conform to secular liberal norms. In the case of Muslims, this is not to presume my ability to speak for what Islam "is", or what its, or Muslims' priorities are (or should be). However, I do not accept the idea that Muslims who forego particular British cultural norms around courting or marital arrangements in favour of alternative arrangements are necessarily doomed to a life without fulfilment and happiness. If love in the West can indeed be called a 'secular religion', then there is a clear need to accept and allow for the presence of peoples who do not follow it (Povinelli 2006: 191).

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