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Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels

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CONTENTS

Abstract

Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels

The aim of the dissertation is to explore how Islam is depicted and Muslim identities are constructed in four representative works of contemporary British fiction: Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane,* Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*, and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is also discussed in terms of its crucial role in fostering what some Muslims might consider polemical and stereotypical positions in writing about Islam. The term 'Islamic postcolonialism' provides the theoretical underpinning to the thesis. Islamic postcolonialism is a theoretical perspective that combines two components which have up until now existed in a state of tension. As a secular theory, postcolonialism has notably failed to account for Muslim priorities; it has, for instance, had severe problems critiquing the anti-Islam polemics of *The Satanic Verses*, as is evidenced by Edward Said's support for Rushdie, in spite of his criticism of the stereotypical representation of Islam and Muslims in the West. Islamic postcolonialism applies the anti-colonial resistant methodology of postcolonialism from a Muslim perspective, exploring the continuance of colonial discourse in part of the contemporary western writing about Islam and Muslims.

Applying Islamic postcolonialism to the novels in question, the thesis tests the following questions: 1. How are Islam and Muslims depicted in the novels discussed? 2. Is the depiction of Islam similar to, and if so in what ways, its depiction in the literature of the colonial period? 3. Is there a connection between the writer's personal

religious commitment and the image of Islam and Muslims he/she inscribes in the novel? The four novels are then classified according to three categories: Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* depict Islam and Muslims stereotypically, from a partially colonial perspective. Secondly, Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* adopts a mixed colonial and postcolonial depiction of Islam and Muslims. While it depicts the centrality of Islam in a Muslim society (Hima, Jordan) stereotypically, the novel appears more sympathetic in imaging Islam in England under the conditions of the personal and the marginal. Thirdly, Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* is the one text that complies with an Islamic postcolonial perspective. The failure of secularism and re-emergence of Islam in the Arab world is, Waïl Hassan contends, the background to the achievement of Aboulela's fiction. Her image of Islam and Muslims is unique in British fiction as it provides a new depiction of these categories from the standpoint of a more authentic Muslim voice. *Minaret*, it is argued, is an Islamic postcolonial novel both because it celebrates Islam, and because Najwa adopts Islam as her first identity in metropolitan London, which once represented the colonial centre from which her native Sudan was colonised.

Introduction: Islam and Postcolonialism

It could be argued that Islam is among the first to benefit from postcolonial theory. The writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, which provide the solid foundation of postcolonialism, contain many of the themes and ideas that Islam calls for. Fanon's work is highly critical of racism and colonialism and calls for equality and freedom; he writes against colonialism, paying more attention to its psychological aspects. Edward Said, on the other hand, writes about Islam with specific focus on the cultural facets of colonialism. Fanon's psychologically and Said's culturally oriented writings aim at freeing the colonised people from the inside so as to enable them to feel and think independently. This "inside independence" is fully supported by Islam: the religion that has refused to be colonised by western Christianity in the past and by western secularism today. In the colonial period, Fanon writes: "the struggle for national liberty [in the Arab World] has been accompanied by a cultural phenomenon known by the name of awakening Islam" (Fanon, 1997, pp. 95-96). Hand in hand, Islam and the national struggle were fighting against colonialism.[1]

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[1] Islam plays an important role in the anti-colonial national struggle in many Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979. In some Muslim countries, the Islamists still struggle against colonial domination. In Algeria, for example, "the Islamists say that it is to free Algeria from the legacy of colonial domination, which they view as ongoing through the influence of [a] political and military elite that even now remains bound to French business and political interests" (Huband, 1999, p. 47). In the present day, the well-known Islamic organizations Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon are clear examples of Islam's influence on anti-colonial national movements. Fred Halliday, however, thought that historically Islam did not play a crucial role in the anti-colonial movements in the Muslim world. He reveals: "throughout the long history of colonial wars that the British fought, from the eighteenth century onwards the enemies were nearly always not Muslims ... rarely in this history of empire did the British face an insurrection from within an area under their control that was wholly or mainly composed of Muslims" (Halliday, 2010, p. xv).

However, this relationship between Islam and postcolonialism[2] was challenged after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. It seems that the Rushdie affair sparked the debate over this relationship for different reasons. *The Satanic Verses*, first of all, which is for many Muslims an unacceptable attack on Islam, is the work of an identified postcolonial writer.[3] Secondly, Edward Said, along with other postcolonial critics, supported Rushdie's novel and criticised Muslims' reaction against it. Writers like Said and Rushdie, before the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, were, in a sense, Islam and Muslims' defenders in the West; afterwards, they defended a discourse that attacked Islam. Disappointed by the new position of the postcolonial writers, certain Muslim writers, like Anouar Majid, attempted to delimit the scope of postcolonial theory and the reasons behind its support for Rushdie's book.

Amin Malak, Anouar Majid and Waïl Hassan have written about the complicated contemporary relationship between Islam and postcolonialism. Malak refers to the "oddness" of the relationship. And while Majid seems to prefer the Islamic alternatives to the postcolonial ones, Hassan calls for the theorising of the

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[2] Islam is the main or a major component of the Muslim world's native cultures that postcolonialism intends to secure. Therefore, challenging the misrepresentation of Islam in colonial discourse is a national and postcolonial action. When the Iranians, for example, struggle against the western and colonial cultural, political or economic domination in their country, they practise postcolonialism to save their Islam-coloured native culture. Postcolonialism in such countries is expected to stand with Islam due to its crucial position in native society. Like Muslims in the Muslim world, many Muslims in the West consider Islam as their first identity and/or an important part of their native cultures and postcolonialism, for them, is expected to challenge the colonial discourse that might still exist in the West currently.

[3] Edward Said, for example, describes Rushdie's writings as postcolonial when writing: "to read Rushdie is really to read something completely new [and] post-colonial" (Said, 2001c, p. 416). Feroza Jussawalla, however, posits a broader meaning to Rushdie's postcoloniality. She thinks that linking Rushdie's postcolonial identity with the post-British colonialism is "eurocentric and does not provide complete answers to Rushdie's complex works or the complicated response to his work. For the very hybridity that Rushdie manifests results from his being not only a 'post-British' colonial but also a 'post-Mughal' colonial" (Jussawalla, 1996, p. 51).

postcolonial limitations and horizons. Amin Malak, in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, writes, "it is odd that 'postcolonial theory' cannot offer insights about the activism of Islam, despite the fact that one of its seminal texts, Edward Said's *Orientalism* … is prompted and permeated by a challenge to the colonial representations of Islam as biased constructions whose corrosive corollaries are discernible today in multiple insidious fashions across diverse domains of power" (Malak, 2005, p. 17). In fact, Malak thinks that postcolonialism fails to take religion into account due to its secular stance. He believes that postcolonialism involves a "marginalization of religion as a force or factor with its own complex dynamics [which] reflects privileging a secular, Europe-American stance that seems to shape the parameters of postcolonial discourses" (p. 17).

The limitations of postcolonialism in relation to Islam are discussed by Anouar Majid in his article "Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair". From the beginning, it seems that the postcolonial support given to Rushdie's novel is the motivation behind his article. He informs us: "Gayatri Spivak, Akeel Bilgrami, and Edward Said were, for example, among the postcolonial critics who strongly protested Khomeini's fatwa on Rushdie, exonerated Islam from such 'bigoted violence,' and reaffirmed their 'belief in the universal principles of rational discussion and freedom of expression' in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* (17 Feb. 1989, A38)" (Majid, 1996, p. 8). He thinks that although Islam is a major part of the Rushdie affair, postcolonial critics' knowledge of Islam is limited. For example, "Spivak, who had defended Islam against intolerance, had not read the most central text of Islamic cultures [the Qu'ran]" (p. 9). In addition, Akeel Bilgrami appears no better: "take the case of Akeel Bilgrami's reading of the Islamic identity

[...] What Bilgrami [as a moderate Muslim] does philosophically is precisely what the modern Orientalist discourse has been doing and continues to do to this day" (pp. 12-13). The postcolonial critics' lack of Islamic knowledge accompanied by their expertise in western knowledge affects postcolonial theory. Majid believes that "postcolonial theory transforms itself into a discursive gesture that is simultaneously informed and co-opted by the very assumptions of western humanism it questions in the beginning" (p. 11). As a result, postcolonial critics like Spivak and Said, "appear unsettlingly unreliable to many Muslims" (pp. 9-10).

By the same token Waïl Hassan, in his article "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application", focuses on postcolonial theory as western in its limitations, and claims this state of affairs needs to be theorised. He thinks that "postcolonial theory has developed out of four European traditions of thought: Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and feminism" (Hassan, 2002, p. 47). Being a European theory, postcolonial theory always runs the risk of being affected by neo-colonialism, colonial discourse and Eurocentrism. Regarding neo-colonialism, Hassan believes that postcolonial theory "seems to inscribe neo-colonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France" (p. 46). Stretching his analysis, Hassan goes on to argue that postcolonial theory sometimes becomes worse than colonial discourse. "Indeed, in its very attempt to challenge western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse itself" (p. 46). In addition, he accuses it of Eurocentrism: "postcolonial theory seems sometimes to deploy a sort of reverse-Eurocentrism. The almost complete reliance on the western tradition of antihumanist

critique of metaphysics - from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida - has meant that the 'non-western' Other remains inaccessible and unknowable" (p. 51). As a result, the role of postcolonial theory, for Hassan, is limited in the way it deals with issues related to Islam and the Arab World. He writes: "in its narrativizing of the 'postcolonial world', postcolonial theory - derived as it is from western secular anti-humanism - is in no better position to offer any deeper insights into the Arab world's 'cultural wars' than the western media, since those wars are fought over the interpretation of Islam, not its decentralization or its deconstruction" (p. 56). He concludes that: "postcolonial theory needs to theorize its own limits and its own horizons" (p. 60).

In short, it could be inferred from the criticism of these three writers that the limited recognition of Islam in postcolonial theory is due to the western secular perspective of postcolonial theory. While this is a serious criticism of postcolonialism, it should not prevent us from combining postcolonial theory and Islamic perspectives nonetheless. Here it is important to differentiate between postcolonialism as a literary theory and the cultural backgrounds of the intellectuals who practise it. Regardless of the western origin of postcolonialism,[4] it is a literary theory that is open to be critiqued and developed by generating new dimensions to its spaces of study. I intend to argue that the role of Muslim writers should not only be to critique postcolonialism's secularism,

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[4] Influenced by western culture and its philosophical schools, postcolonialism appears to follow the European way in dealing with Islam. Benedict Robinson notices that: "in a sense, Europe has always refused to treat Islam as a religion at all, preferring to inscribe it into theories of racial, political, and cultural difference" (Robinson, 2007, p. 5). However, as postcolonialism comes to serve, in one way or another, the nations that were once-colonised, Muslim nations should be able to "modify" the position of Islam in this theory in order to be able to challenge colonial discourse. What should encourage Muslims is that the position of the sacred in general is unstable in western culture even as it becomes more discussed and important. Bill Ashcroft and others write: "since the Enlightenment the sacred has been an ambivalent area in a western thinking that has uniformly tended to privilege the secular. [...] However, at the end of the twentieth century, debates about the sacred have become more urgent as issues such as land rights and rights to sacred beliefs and practices begin to grow in importance" (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p. 212).

but also to practise postcolonialism with the intention of stretching it so as to incorporate Islam, which is a major component of the identity and the native cultures of many countries in the non-western world. Indeed, in spite of their differences, Fanon the Marxist, the secular Said, and Spivak the feminist, each has their own cultural perspective by which he/she practises postcolonialism and develops it.[5] It could be argued that postcolonialism is a neutral theory which could be practised by secular or Muslim intellectuals, though at present it is secular because those who practise it are secular. Instead of critiquing postcolonialism or the secular postcolonial writers for neglecting Islam or marginalizing it, Muslim writers could practise their own form of postcolonialism – Islamic postcolonialism – in which they emphasis the centrality of Islam in their postcolonial practice. Islamic postcolonialism could provide a new and challenging space for both postcolonial and Muslim writers.

In addition, postcolonialism provides Muslims with an appropriate theory by which to critique the western colonialism which once dominated their countries and still does so today. Hassan believes that "the enduring significance of postcolonial theory, to my mind, is that it has propelled issues of colonialism and imperialism to the forefront of critical and intellectual debates in the West, and succeeded in changing the assumptions of several fields of inquiry within the humanities and social sciences" (Hassan, 2002, p. 59). By rejecting postcolonialism, Muslims might lose the space it provides for them to participate in the process of changing the colonial assumptions which affect the prevailing images of Islam and Muslims in the contemporary world.

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[5] It seems a positive aspect of postcolonialism is its facility to attract intellectuals from different backgrounds. However, Arif Dirlik in his article "The Postcolonial Aura" states that "it is also misleading in my opinion to classify as postcolonial critics intellectuals as widely different politically as Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha, Gyan Prakash, Gayatri Spivak, and Lata Mani. In a literal sense, they may all share in postcoloniality and some of its themes" (Dirlik, 1994, p. 338).

Multicultural London in Contemporary British fiction

In this section I want to establish how much contemporary British fiction is inflected by multicultural and postcolonial perspectives. Sukhdev Sandhu in his book *London Calling* explains how black and Asian British writers like V.S. Naipaul, Jean Rhys and Frederick Douglass imagine London. He states that they "have told stories about black and Asian London from the eighteenth century to the present day" (Sandhu, 2003, p. xx). Despite this long history, these stories, however, were at first "considered ancillary, of minority interest" (p. xxii). London for such writers is linked with difference. Back home they "were taught about London and its 'correct meaning' in tiny village schools thousands of miles away from the actual city whose reality proved to be rather different" (p. xxv). In addition, as a group of writers, they perceive London "in very different ways" (p. xxiii). In fact, "class, race, gender, historical context and personal psychology have all inflected their descriptions of the capital in large and unpredictable ways" (p. xxiii). Despite their differences, Sandhu sums up: "London has been good to people coming from the old Empire, just as they have been good for London" (p. xxvi).

Reflecting the diversity of contemporary British society, contemporary British fiction articulates different experiences and cultures. Since the 1970s, according to Peter Childs, "history and ethnicity have been the strong themes" (Childs, 2005, p. 278). Writing about history and ethnicity in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society leads to the exposure of different histories. Rod Mengham states that "it is one of the central paradoxes of contemporary British fiction that much of it – much of the best of it – is concerned with other times and other places" (Mengham, 2003, p. 1). The immigrant

writers in London mirror their own times and the places they live in and write about the world within the diverse cultural spaces that London provides. "Novels of London immigrants are never simply about London: they are also about the homeland that connects to, contrasts with, or otherwise frames the new metropolitan world" (Ball, 2011, p. 237).

Multicultural London has therefore developed an increasingly significant presence in recent and contemporary British fiction. Ball observes that "London has always been a world city, a cosmopolitan place containing a mixture of national and racial others, but it became more and more visibly so over the postwar decades" (p.237). This shift, from a less to a more visible *cosmopolitan* London, informs the position of multiculturalism in contemporary British fiction. The more visible multicultural London becomes, the more multicultural British fiction becomes. As a consequence, multiculturalism has shifted from its previous marginality to its present centrality in contemporary British fiction. John McLeod notes that while in the 1950s and 1960s "multicultural representations of the city [London] constituted a minority or marginal strand in a wider literary landscape", today "those writers or historians who have little or nothing to say about London's humdrum diversity seem increasingly out of touch with the city's history and fortunes" (McLeod, 2011, pp. 243-244).

In addition to multicultural diversity, a further dimension to contemporary British fiction is postcolonialism. If diversity centralises multiculturalism, postcolonialism challenges hegemonic superiorities. Postcolonial literature "has brought to the British novel **...** new styles and Englishes" (Childs, 2005, p. 280) as well as new "issues such as decolonization, diaspora, and cultural diversity" (p. 280) In fact, as Nick Bentley

observes, postcolonialism does not affect the literature of originally immigrant writers only: "Issues raised by colonial and postcolonial identity could… be extended to include the nations within the United Kingdom. To a certain extent, writers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have found themselves to be in a similar 'postcolonial' position in that distinct national literatures have sought to distinguish themselves from both English and the imposition of a homogenous 'British' culture" (Bentley, 2008, p. 19).

Is Rushdie a Colonial or Postcolonial Writer?

By writing *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie opened up a debate concerning the definitions of the colonial and the postcolonial writer. From an Islamic perspective**,** we might pose the question: is Rushdie himself a colonial or postcolonial writer? The answer is that in this postcolonial era, "a person can, and does, possess overlapping identities" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 263) and Rushdie is not an exception. By nationality he has been both Indian and British. Religiously or culturally, he is sometimes Muslim and sometimes not. These changing and unstable sites of identity are of course due to the conditions of possibility whereby they are invented. "Human identity", Edward Said thinks, "is not only not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright" (Said, 1995, p. 332).

Rushdie "was born an Indian and has grown to be an Englishman – by education, place of residence and work, and in terms of his national affiliation" (Trivedi, 2000, p 164). In India he dreamt of living in England and in England he missed India. As a child living in Bombay, he "wanted to come to England. I couldn't wait" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 18). But then, after spending many years in England, he still considers India

as his home: "It's my present that is foreign, and … the past is home" (p. 9). For him Bombay is his "lost city" (p. 9), and India was the inspiration for writing his celebrated novel *Midnight's Children*. Looking at his childhood house in Bombay, years after leaving it for England, Rushdie states: "that was when my novel *Midnight's Children* was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself" (pp. 9-10).

Rushdie's religious identity is even more complex. His Indian family is Muslim, "but while both my parents were believers" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 376), "I was never brought up as a believer, and was raised in an atmosphere of what is broadly known as secular humanism" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 430). At this stage Rushdie is a secular Muslim. He was brought up to be so without, seemingly, any intent from his side. However, when he moved to England, he was able to re-invent his own identity. He reveals:

> God, Satan, Paradise and Hell all vanished one day in my fifteenth year, when I quite abruptly lost my faith. I recall it vividly. I was at school in England by then. The moment of awakening happened, in fact, during a Latin lesson, and afterwards, to prove my new-found atheism, I bought myself a rather tasteless ham sandwich (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 377).

After being a secular Muslim in India, he is happy now to welcome his "new-found atheism" at the age of fifteen in England. "From that day to this, I have thought of myself as a wholly secular person, and have been drawn towards the great traditions of secular radicalism" (p. 377). Rushdie then clearly acknowledges: "I am not a Muslim" (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 405) "living in the aftermath of the death of god" (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416).

Yet in spite of his atheism and radical secularism,[6] Rushdie was at this time apparently aware of the importance of keeping a balance between the freedom he needed to write fiction and the freedom Indians and Muslims needed to live equally in a society affected by racism. In other words, he, as a writer, needs the freedom to write about anything – even Indians and Muslims; and Indians and Muslims, in their turn, need him to help voice their problems. He chooses at this point to perform the two tasks simultaneously. He practises his freedom in his own fiction and, on the other hand, struggles against immigrant discrimination publicly. Then come his two major novels, *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*; these were not written from an exclusively Indian or Muslim point of view although they were coloured by them. *Midnight's Children* was written from a secular, not an Indian,[7] point of view: "*Midnight's Children* enters its subject from the point of view of a secular man" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 16). Likewise, *The Satanic Verses* was written from a secular, not a Muslim point of view: "*The Satanic Verses* is, in part, a secular's man reckoning with the religious spirit" (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 396). Although this secular point of view in writing fiction might spark confrontation with devout Indians or religious Muslims, Rushdie insists on his individual freedom as a writer, at the same time as he tries to play his role of helping Indians or Muslims in the public sphere. He states: "Over the last fifteen years I have in fact shown myself to be an ally of Muslims, whether in

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[6] It is striking to notice that this radical secularism of Rushdie in Britain was essentially a mere "safeguard" for him in India. Rushdie has been secular since he was in India where he was one of the "most Indian Muslims" who found in secularism "their best safeguard as a minority group in a predominantly non-Muslim country" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 430). Some Muslims might argue that the secularism that saved him and his Muslim brothers in India became his tool to attack them in Britain. If secularism saves Muslims in India from radical Hindus, it does not save them from Rushdie's radical secularism in Britain.

[7] For some Indian scholars the celebration of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* comes at the expense of the Indian literature which is written in Indian languages. Rushdie himself describes the Indian literature written in English in "the first postcolonial half-century" as "the true Indian literature", neglecting all the Indian literature written in the Indian native languages in the same period. For more details on Rushdie and Indian literatures, see Arnab Chakladar's article "The Postcolonial Bazaar: Marketing/Teaching Indian Literature" (ARIEL, April 31, 2000, pp. 183-201).

Kashmir, or the rest of India, or Palestine or in Britain, where I have frequently written and broadcast against all forms of discrimination" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 431).

The Satanic Verses and Khomeini's fatwa forced Rushdie to invent, again, another religious identity by declaring his affiliation to Islam. As the fatwa was based on his apostasy from Islam, he thought, after meeting six Muslim scholars in London, that returning to Islam would protect him from being killed. In December 1990 he affirmed his entry "into the body of Islam after a lifetime spent outside it" declaring that "I am able now to say that I am Muslim" (p. 430). Just a year later, he changed his mind: "Rushdie was forced to realize he had made a mistake – incurring criticism on both sides. Almost inevitably, he had to renege on this 'conversion', which he did in an address at Colombia University on 12 December 1991" (Grant, 1999, p. 90). As a way of protecting himself from the rigorous criticism from both the western and the Muslim sides, he seemed to prefer not to be thought of as atheist or Muslim, but rather, as a secular Muslim.

These four identities (secularism, Islam, India and England) shape, though at different levels, the hybrid identity that eventually colours Rushdie's fiction.[8] Writing about the Indian writers in England, he explained: "We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result [...] we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 15).

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[8] The hybrid identity of writers like Rushdie makes it quite difficult to predict their cultural positions sometimes. As a result, their writings might satisfy this group of people but might, on the other hand, disappoint that group because each group expects a certain position. Rushdie, in this matter, is like other postcolonial writers such as Edward Said and Spivak. Spivak acknowledges: "I am viewed by the Marxists as too codic, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to western theory. I am uneasily pleased about this" (Spivak, 1990, pp. 69-70).

As one of the "Muslims who eat pork", Rushdie now is a practitioner of Indian secular Islam. In addition to conservative Islam, there is a traditional secular Islam in India. Feroza Jussawalla suggests: "Islam in India has historically been 'secularized' in ways in which it has never been secularized and reformed anywhere else. This 'tradition' of reforming or secularizing Islam, which has become synonymous with the practice of Islam in India, goes back to the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1606)" (Jussawalla, 1996, p.57).

This hybrid identity gives Rushdie the right to speak as a westerner at some times and as an immigrant at others. Dealing with the issue of racism in Britain he writes to the white man as one of the immigrants: "British racism, of course, is not our problem. It's yours. We simply suffer from the effects of your problem" (Rushdie, 1991f, p. 138). However, after the attacks in America, he adopts another voice.

> The fundamentalist believes that we believe in nothing. [...] to prove him wrong, we must first know that he is wrong. We must agree on what matters: kissing in public places, bacon sandwiches, disagreement, cutting-edge fashion, literature, generosity, water, a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, movies, music, freedom of thought, beauty, love. These will be our weapons. Not by making war, but by the unafraid way we choose to live shall we defeat them (Rushdie, 2002d, p. 393).

However, Rushdie's hybrid identity does not mean that all his writings are inevitably hybrid. The topic of his writing is essential here. When writing against racism in Britain, for example, he writes from an Indian or an immigrant point of view and not from a hybrid one. When writing about "kissing in public places [and eating] bacon sandwiches" as "our weapons" to defeat fundamentalists, he writes as a western not hybrid writer. Therefore, despite the fact of Rushdie's hybrid identity, he might write from a specific perspective which privileges one identity over the others. In writing

about Islam and Muslims, Rushdie's hybrid identity is superseded by an extreme western and secular identity.

The Satanic Verses is Rushdie's most controversial novel and, for many Muslims, the work that re-invented the priorities of those identities[9] which constitute his hybrid identity. Before the novel, he was a secular Asian Englishman writer inspired by Bombay, his lost city, and was happy to write about his imaginary homeland in *Midnight's Children*. Before *The Satanic Verses*, he was one of those Indian immigrant writers in England who tried to accommodate to the new cultural environment. He showed himself as an ally to Indians, Muslims and Asians who were subjected to racism and discrimination. After *The Satanic Verses*, however, "Regrettably, Rushdie is no longer the voice of 'third world' agonies and an activist for persecuted minorities. Now [he is] a celebrity lavishing in elite lifestyle" (Malak, 2005, p. 109). This transformation occurred as "Rushdie subordinates the real anguish of Muslim believers to the titillation of his western readers" (Mazrui, 1990, p. 136). [10]

Ben Okri thinks *The Satanic Verses* "refuses to be read from a single angle" (Okri, 1990, p. 78), and Muslims themselves read it differently. Some Muslim intellectuals

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[9] In fact, Rushdie's novel and Khomeini's fatwa against him not only reshaped Rushdie's identity, in the eyes of Muslims at least, but they reshaped the identity of British Muslims and the position of native Britons. The novel affects Muslim identity. After being previously identified as Asians, "in a very short space of time 'Muslim' became a key political minority identity, acknowledged by Right and Left, bigots and the open-minded, the media and the government" (Modood, 2006, p. 42). On the other hand, the fatwa affected the position of many western and British readers. "The Ayatollah's incitement to murder turned what had been seen by western readers as a cheerful, anti-Thatcherite polemic and comic postmodern novel into a beacon of freedom of expression against religious intolerance" (Ranasinha, 2007b, p. 47).

[10] By publishing his *Satanic Verses*, Rushdie disappointed the British Muslims in particular who had been subjected to racism and discrimination. They lost him as an ally. Ruvani Ranasinha writes: "the most vociferous protest was voiced by the British Muslims anxious to separate themselves from the intellectual hitherto constructed as their representative. Some felt particularly betrayed by the very person they had once admired as an ally" (Ranasinha, 2007b, p. 46).

wrote in support of Rushdie and their writings were collected in the book, *For Rushdie*. In addition, Akeel Bilgrami, for example, in his article "Rushdie and the Reform of Islam" seems to see the conflict over *The Satanic Verses* as a conflict between Islam and progress: "recent history has shown Islam's public profile to be a real threat to genuine and long-term progressive efforts" (Bilgrami, 1989, p. 175). Bilgrami was clear in stating that Khomeini, who issued the fatwa against Rushdie, is "the single most anti-Islamic person alive on this earth today" (p. 170). On the other hand, there are many other Muslim intellectuals who read Rushdie from another angle. Ali Mazrui in his article: "Satanic Verses or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair" thinks: "Salman Rushdie has been perceived by many Muslims as being guilty of cultural treason for writing *The Satanic Verses*. They consider that Rushdie has not merely rejected or disagreed with Islam: almost unanimously Muslims who have read the book have concluded that Rushdie has abused Islam" (Mazrui, 1990, p. 118).

Many Muslims have criticised or attacked the novel for the distorted image of Islam it presents; in addition some non-Muslim critics have foregrounded the Orientalist stereotypes used in the novel. Stephan Morton, for example, in *Salman Rushdie: Fiction of Postcolonial Modernity*, states that the novel attacks Islam and reinforces Orientalist stereotypes. He argues that "parts of the novel can be read as a thinly veiled, if ambivalent, attack on Islam and the Prophet" (Morton, 2008, p. 29). He also believes "for many critics of *The Satanic Verse*s what was particularly offensive about the text was its tendency to rehearse Orientalist caricatures of Islam" (p. 62). The novel, then, "seems to reinforce Orientalist stereotypes of Islam rather than challenging them" (p. 64). According to Richard Lane in his study *The Postcolonial*

Novel, "The chapters [*Mahound* and *Return to Jahilia*] utilize colonialist and, derogatory names: for example, 'Mahound' being an archaic way of referring to the Prophet Mohammed (derived from the sixteenth-century French Mahun) and 'Jahilia', the Arabic word for 'barbarism', being used by Rushdie with reference to Mecca" (Lane, 2006, p. 86). Moreover, along with many Muslims, Morton and Lane are not inclined to exonerate this attack on Islam as an exercise in literary fiction. For Morton, such justification is underwritten by secularism and colonialism. He writes: "to read *The Satanic Verses* as a work of literary fiction would thus seem to be to read the novel in terms of a secular cultural tradition, which is imbricated in the history of European colonial modernity" (Morton, 2008. P. 67). Lane, however, reads the issue from a postcolonial perspective. He states:

The crude western journalistic answer to Muslim readers – which can be reduced to the formula or statement: 'it's just a novel' – shows how there is a concomitant lack of awareness of the postcolonial novel as a vehicle for ideological and political resistance and change. In other words, if *The Satanic Verses* is 'just a novel', some kind of hermetically sealed purely self-referential device, then, bizarrely, that means that it can have no impact upon ideas and processes of being in the world (Lane, 2006, p. 84).

From an ideological perspective the novel is an attempt to discuss the issues of belief and unbelief, Islam and secularism, and by challenging Islam indirectly to privilege secularism. Islam is depicted as the negative other to positive secularism. The two historical characters, Salman the Persian and Baal, lose their faith (Islam for Salman and Al-Lat for Baal) and become atheist and secular. In addition, the two contemporary characters, Gibreel Farishta and Salahuddin Chamcha, were formerly Muslims who have lost their faith and become atheists. The point being promoted here is that apostasy and atheism are as old as Islam itself. Secularism is strongly linked with atheism in the novel. When Gibreel Farishta decides to leave Islam, "he loaded his plate with all of it [pork, hams, bacon] with the gammon steaks of his

unbelief and the pig's trotters of secularism" (Rushdie, 2006a, p. 29). Similarly, after his decision to embrace the secular, Salahuddin Chamcha feels that there is something inside him which "would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type" (p. 43). The negative depiction of Islam in the novel provides the justification for both to reject Islam.

Focusing on binaries between Islam and secularism is one of the techniques used in the novel, especially in the characterization of Salahuddin Chamcha. After becoming secular, Chamcha thinks: "I am a man to whom certain things are of importance: rigour, self-discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch, God. The ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind" (pp.135-136). Islam and secularism are opposites here. While Islam is "old", the newness and modernity of secularism could be inferred. In addition, while secularism appreciates "beauty", "reason" and "the mind", it is implied that Islam does the opposite. Elsewhere in the novel, Islam is depicted as superstitious and secularism as the only viable option for the real world. On Chamcha's way to London we are told: "this was precisely the type of superstitious flummery he was leaving behind. He was a neat man in a buttoned suit heading for London and an ordered, contented life. He was a member of the real world" (p. 74). The different ways of life of the secular Chamcha and his Muslim father are quite significant too. While Chamcha lives an active life by being a modern and civilized individual who graduated from London University and works as an actor, "his father's preoccupation with the supernatural had continued to deepen, until finally he had become a recluse, perhaps in order to escape this world in which demons could steal his own son's body, a world unsafe for a man of true

religious faith" (p. 48). Islam destroys the life of Chamcha's father and this outcome justifies Chamcha's leave-taking from Islam and his embrace of secularism.

The conflict between Islam and secularism (or atheism) is represented by the conflict between the Prophet and Baal in addition to the conflict between the Imam and Ayesha. The conflict between Islam, represented by the Prophet himself, and Baal the atheist poet, is from the foundation years of the faith. At his trial, "Baal stood face to face with the Prophet, mirror facing image, dark facing light" (p. 391). Jailed and sentenced to death Baal still insists on his freedom to think and speak. "I recognize no jurisdiction except that of my Muse; or, to be exact, my dozen Muses" (p. 91). Writing "Muses" with capital "M" signals the holiness of muses for Baal in comparison to the holiness God represents for the Prophet. Before dying Baal tells the Prophet, "'whores and writers, Mahound. We are the people you can't forgive.' Mahound replied, 'Writers and whores. I see no difference here'" (p. 392). It is clear from this exchange that Islam here stands against the freedom which writers and whores try to practice in Mecca and which is of such great importance in a secular society. Moreover, Baal the poet is not the only person who fights for these freedoms; Hind, the well-known whore, does the same. To resist the attack of the Prophet and his followers, Hind "herself is prepared to fight beside [the people of Jahilia] and die for the freedom of Jahilia" (p. 371). Her relationship with the writers is exceptional as she "had slept with every writer in the city" (p. 361).

The conflict between Islam and secularism is not just historical; the conflict between the Imam and Ayesha is its contemporary version. Living in exile in London, "the bearded and turbaned Imam [is] frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied

motion" (p. 205). Ayesha, however, is an "icon [...] of a woman of exceptional force [...] a powerful woman, his enemy, his other [and] they plot each other's deaths" (p. 206). They cannot live peacefully together. Ayesha has her own state and her own crimes and the Imam calls his people to rise against her state. It is:

A revolt not only against a tyrant, but against history. For there is an enemy beyond Ayesha, and it is History herself. [...] History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of the lies -- progress, science, rights -- against which the Imam has set his face. History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al Lah finished his revelation to Mahound (p. 210).

The Imam and Ayesha, Islam and secularism, are opposites. The Imam, who could be seen as a fictional version of Khomeini and his revolution, are not against the Shah and America only; they are against history, too. Islam here is shown as the Imam who "denied motion" (p. 205) and revolts against "progress, science [and] rights" (p. 210).

One of the techniques used in the novel to undermine Islam is to challenge and insult its sacred and holy pillars: God, the Prophet and the Quran. The depiction of God in *The Satanic Verses* is influenced by two ideas. First, "the death of God" (p. 16) and second, "where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy" (p. 380). Here there are two stages: the novel tries to undermine the idea of the very existence of God in the first stage. It sometimes describes God as only "thin air" (p. 30) and sometimes as "a ghost" (p. 368). At this stage, there is no God, or, as mentioned above, it is the stage of "the death of God" (p. 16). In the second stage, however, the novel tries to trivialise the idea of believing in God as a way of justifying or calling for the idea of unbelief. The focus here is not on God's existence; it is on the descriptions of God. Blasphemy, in the novel, is a result of unbelief and as there is no belief in God, so there is no need to show respect to God or religion. However, blasphemy could be seen as a technique

used to confiscate the belief of the believers by depicting what the novel shows as negatives of God. In other words, imaging God negatively is not just a result of unbelief; it is an indirect way of calling the believers to embrace unbelief by trivialising their belief in God. According to the novel, God is "cruel" and "vicious". When Mishal is suffering from cancer, "the location of the cancer had proved to [her] the cruelty of God, because only a vicious deity would place death in the breast of a woman whose only dream was to suckle new life" (p. 232). In addition, God is described as a God of "vengeance" and "revenge". When Gibreel Farishta is ill, he thinks "enough, God, his unspoken words demanded, why must I die when I have not killed, are you vengeance or are you love?" (p. 30). And after losing his faith in God, "Mr. Gibreel Farishta on the railway train to London was once again seized as who would not be by the fear that God had decided to punish him for his loss of faith by driving him insane" (p. 189). This kind of negative depiction of God in fact goes back to the first days of Islam. God at that time was described as "the Destroyer of Men" (p. 373) and Hind told the Prophet "Yours is a patronizing, condescending lord" (p.121).

In addition to the secular/atheist attack on religion Rushdie mounts against Islam, he also deploys Orientalist denigration of the Prophet in the novel. He is "Dajjal" (p. 371) and a "false prophet" (p. 371) and the way he is depicted amounts to proof of this insult. His not being a proper prophet justifies dealing with him like any other person without feeling the need to accord him respect. In fact, the mere employment of insult is, in itself, a technique used to show the Prophet is false. The Prophet here is denied respect because he is not a prophet. From the beginning, the Prophet was unable to differentiate between revelation and insanity. "When he first saw the

archangel [he] thought he was cracked [and] wanted to throw himself down from a rock" (p. 92) and it was Khadija, his first wife, "who convinced him that he was not some raving crazy but the Messenger of God" (p. 321). Khadija's viewpoint is crucial and without it the Prophet would not have thought himself a prophet – in fact the whole religion would have been false if Khadija's viewpoint had been incorrect. In addition, at times the Prophet cannot differentiate between the Devil and Gibreel the archangel. One day "he [is] tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel" (p.123). In addition, apart from the revelation, the Prophet's belief in God is depicted as weak. Gibreel says: "Mahound comes to me for revelation, asking me to choose between monotheist and henotheist alternatives" (p.109). And as a result of his failure to convince people to follow Islam in the beginning, "misery infects [him and he] has been shaken" (p. 107). A true prophet cannot operate with such a weak personality and this low level of belief. The Prophet is described as "a magician - nobody could resist his charm" (p. 367) and, as Salman the Persian puts it: "the closer you are to a conjurer, [...] the easier to spot the trick" (p. 363). Not only is he a false prophet or a magician, "he is not to be trusted" (p. 371) and without honour too. While the Prophet was preparing to attack Jahilia (Mecca), Hind wonders "Can honour be expected of a man who is preparing to storm the city of his birth?" (p. 371)

Though the so-called 'Satanic verses' appear in a few early Arabic sources the term was revived by western Orientalist scholars, notably the missionary William Muir in his biography of the Prophet (1858). The incident of the Satanic verses functions in the novel as proof of the ability of the Devil to insert his own verses into the Quran which eventually question the holiness of the whole Quran itself. To resolve the conflict between the believers and the unbelievers in Jahilia (Mecca), Abu Simbel, the

leader of the unbelievers, suggests that the Prophet admits the goddesses Al-Lat, Manat and Uzza. The Prophet discusses the issue with his close friends and clarifies that "It is not suggested that Allah accept the three as his equals. Not even Lat. Only that they be given some sort of intermediary, lesser status [and in return] all Jahilia's souls will be ours" (p. 107). His friends suggest that he asks Gibreel. In a gathering consists of the believers and the unbelievers, the Prophet brings the answer:

At this point, without any trace of hesitation or doubt, he recites two further verses. 'Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?' -- After the first verse, Hind gets to her feet; the Grandee of Jahilia is already standing very straight. And Mahound, with silenced eyes, recites: 'They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed.' As the noise -- shouts, cheers, scandal, cries of devotion to the goddess Al-Lat -- swells and bursts within the marquee (p. 114).

After a while, however, the Prophet discovers that "he has been tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly, but satanic" (p. 123). The main point here is that the Prophet could be tricked by the Devil. This means that the Quran is not fully sacred and there might be some other satanic verses which are not yet discovered. The infallibility of the holiness of the whole Quran is therefore challenged here.

In addition to the satanic verses, the role of Salman the Persian in writing the Quran provides another possibility of tricking the Prophet. In the novel, Salman is the writer of the revelation, another example of Rushdie deploying an idea of Orientalist provenance. However, "when he sat at the Prophet's feet, writing down rules rules rules, he began, surreptitiously, to change things. [...] Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language" (p. 367). In short,

as Salman confesses, "I was writing the Revelation and nobody was noticing" (p. 368). Although the Prophet eventually discovers what Salman has been doing, the incident, as mentioned in the novel, gestures toward several different points which together tend to challenge the holiness of the Quran. The first is that the Devil is not the Prophet's only enemy or challenger; that his close friends could do what the Devil could not. Secondly, the revelation is undermined from beginning to end by the Devil and Salman. Thirdly, if Salman could insert his own words into the Quran while being with the Prophet himself, then anyone could insert their own words after the death of the Prophet.

In addition to its attack on the sacred in Islam, the novel presents Islam as women's oppressor following and confirming Orientalists' claim on this issue. The position of women in Islam is depicted in the novel through the relationship between the Prophet and his own wives or other women. Sitting with Baal, Salman the Persian relates what happens between the Prophet and his wife Ayesha one day:

That girl couldn't stomach it that her husband wanted so many other women. He talked about necessity, political alliances and so on, but she wasn't fooled. Who can blame her? Finally he went into -- what else? -- one of his trances, and out he came with a message from the archangel. Gibreel had recited verses giving him full divine support. God's own permission to fuck as many women as he liked. So there: what could poor Ayesha say against the verses of God? You know what she did say? This: 'Your God certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you.' Well! If it hadn't been Ayesha, who knows what he'd have done, but none of the others would have dared in the first place.' Baal let him run on without interruption. The sexual aspects of Submission exercised the Persian a good deal: 'Unhealthy' he pronounced. 'All this segregation. No good will come of it' (p. 386).

This conflict between the Prophet and his wife summarises the complicated position of women in Islam according to the novel. There are two perspectives here: the male and the female. From his perspective, the Prophet wants to marry a lot of women for "political" reasons. For Ayesha, however, this is unacceptable and unjustifiable. Until

now and before the divine support, the conflict is imaged as a normal one between a man or a politician and his wife. In other words, these are the normal or the natural positions of a man and a woman. The divine support for the Prophet's viewpoint, then, comes at the expense of the natural position of women as represented by Ayesha. Ayesha's angry reaction against the divine support could be read as an expression of the inability of Islam to understand her natural viewpoint as a woman. As Salman said, Islam in this depiction is accused of "segregation". Moreover, the divine support for the Prophet's viewpoint might signal that God, over the issue of women, supports what males prefer without interfering to bring change. In other words, God supports the Prophet when the Prophet should be the one who follows the divine decrees. The position of women in Islam, then, is essentially established by the Prophet who receives "permission to fuck as many women as he liked". Another point is that Ayesha, despite being one of the Muslims' mothers according to the Quran, could not accept the Prophet's viewpoint which means that even devout Muslim women are against their position in Islam. As a result, it could be inferred that the issue of women in Islam is not linked with devoutness; it is linked with being women. In short, women, regardless of their level of belief and their closeness to the Prophet, are against the position of women in Islam.

In contrast to Ayesha's clear (theoretical) resistance, some Muslim women have no choice but to accept polygamy, especially given that the Prophet uses God to justify his stand on women and to make them submit. Salman the Persian explains: "The point about our Prophet [...] is that he didn't like his women to answer back, he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves. He didn't like to pick on someone his own size" (p. 366).

Therefore, when the women in Mecca begin to be more independent like the women in Yathrib, "the angel starts pouring out rules about what women mustn't do, he starts forcing them back into the docile attitudes the Prophet prefers [...] the faithful women did as [the Prophet] ordered them. They Submitted: he was offering them Paradise, after all" (p. 367). In addition to the Prophet Mohammed, the novel mentions that the Prophet Ibrahim employed God in a similar way with his wife Hajar. "In ancient time the patriarch Ibrahim came into this valley with Hagar and Ismail, their son. Here, in this waterless wilderness, he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God's will? He replied, it is. And left, the bastard. From the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable" (p. 95).

Following another Orientalist idea, the novel presents Islam as an aggressive and threatening religion. Khalid, one of the close friends of the Prophet, is the significant character here. He is described as the "military chief of staff" (p. 375) and "the General" (p. 391) who implements the orders of the Prophet. After losing his faith, Salman the Persian fled, but finally Khalid caught him and brought him to the Prophet. "Khalid, holding him by the ear, holding a knife at his throat, brings the immigrant snivelling and whimpering to the takht. [...] The Prophet begins to pronounce the sentence of death" (p. 374). In addition to Salman, Baal and his twelve wives are other victims of the aggressiveness of Islam. Baal's wives, in particular, "had been sentenced to death by stoning to punish them for the immorality of their lives" (p. 391). Khalid is described as "a fool" by the Prophet himself, when one day he "loses his temper. "'You're a fool,' he shouts at [Khalid]. 'Can't you ever work things out without my help?' Khalid bows and goes" (p. 375). This statement demonstrates several significant points. Firstly, it proves that Khalid's aggressiveness

is linked with the Prophet himself as Khalid cannot "work things" without the Prophet's "help". Therefore, it is not only Khalid who is aggressive; it is the Prophet and Islam which he comes to represent. Secondly, described as a "fool", Khalid here could be seen as representative of those Muslims who just follow Islam without thinking. It could be inferred that Muslims cannot discuss or refuse; moreover they cannot be peaceful because their religion asks them to be aggressive. Thirdly, Khalid's reaction towards the Prophet's insult is significant; he just "bows and goes". He is very weak here and this weakness with the Prophet contradicts his aggressiveness towards non-Muslims. Khalid, probably, attempts to hide his real weakness by showing his aggressive side to others in order to gain some respect from the people or from the Prophet himself.

It could be argued that the different reading of *The Satanic Verses* among Muslim intellectuals is due, partly, to the position they adopt towards secularism in their Muslim identities. Generally speaking, secular Muslim intellectuals seem to support Rushdie more than those Muslim intellectuals who do not consider secularism as part of their identity or who make 'Muslim' their first identity. The novel sparked a debate among Muslims themselves on the issue of defining the meaning of Islam and being Muslim in the West in general and in Britain specifically. Muslim and secular Muslim intellectuals interpreted Islam differently as they read the relationship between Islam and the West from different perspectives. While Muslim intellectuals read the West from an Islamic perspective, the secular Muslim intellectual read Islam from a western secular perspective. Arguably, one of the reasons for the differences in reading *The Satanic Verses* among Muslims in general is to be accounted for by the different perspectives they employ.

We might have expected postcolonialism to have been helpful here as it offers a further perspective to *The Satanic Verses*. Apart from the debate over Islam and its relationship with the West between Muslim and secular Muslim intellectuals, postcolonialism might have provided some common ground and agreed terms of reference as colonialism and its aftermath neo-colonialism are largely agreed threats to Islam and Muslims. In Edward Said's *Orientalism*, one of the foundational books for postcolonialism, Islam is a major theme. Reading the allegations of misrepresentation of Islam in *The Satanic Verses* from a postcolonial perspective requires us to return to the core of postcolonialism.

Postcolonial writers, and Rushdie himself, think that colonialism still exists. In his article "The Empire within Britain" in his book *Imaginary Homeland*, Rushdie describes Britain as "the new colony"[11] (Rushdie, 1991f, p. 138) and "the new Empire" (p. 138) as the "attitudes [of the colonial period] are in operation right here" (p. 130). He believes that "British thought, British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism" (p. 131) and "Britain is now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin" (p. 134). In addition to racism and depending on it, "the stereotyping goes on" (p. 138). He finally warns the British white people that unless they eradicate "the prejudices within almost all of you, the citizens of your new, and last, Empire will be obliged to struggle against you. You could say that we are required to embark on a new freedom movement" (p. 138).

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[11] If Rushdie thinks of Britain as a "new colony", some Muslims might see in him some of its colonial attitudes. Ahmed in his book *Postmodernism and Islam* believes that Rushdie's position is "an inferior one in dealing with the West, and a superior one with the Muslim community" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164). In spite of Rushdie's criticism of this colony, his knowledge of Islam does not seem different from the colonial one. Ahmed states that Rushdie's "knowledge of Islam is limited and usually derived from a cursory reading of the Orientalists" (p. 164).

This clear depiction of the supposed colonial attitudes that still exist in Britain[12] strengthens the need to read the current British cultural discourse from a postcolonial perspective.

There are indeed many reasons that encourage Muslims to read *The Satanic Verses* from a postcolonial perspective. The first is Rushdie's description of Britain as a "new colony" and of himself, being one of the Indian writers in England, as "partly of the West". Secondly, postcolonial critics read colonial literature and even the literature that might seem to be without any connection to colonialism. *The Satanic Verses* does not appear colonial since its author is a postcolonial writer. However, "Postcolonial re-readings of literary works have in some instances focused upon texts that might seem hardly to deal with colonialism" (McLeod, 2000, p. 145). Thirdly, Rushdie's negative personal experience of Islam, especially when he left Islam at the age of fifteen to belong to "secular radicalism" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 377), perhaps became the source of his understanding of Islam. For Rushdie, it seems, became a non-believer because he did not find Islam deserved following. He therefore developed his own negative point of view towards Islam and through this wrote *The Satanic Verses*. He acknowledges: "*The Satanic Verses* is a serious work, written from a non-believer's point of view…. Let believers accept that, and let it be" (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 413). In addition, what encourages Muslims to read Rushdie's controversial novel postcolonially is that there are writers like Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies who in their book *Distorted Imagination* describe the novel as a one which "fits neatly

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[12] Hamid Dabashi, for example, in his article on the Danish cartoons "Islam and Globanalization", thinks that colonial attitudes are still in evidence in Europe and the United States. He believes that "the current anti-Muslim plague, running loose throughout Europe and the United States, [posits] racist prejudices in colourful colonial Enlightenment shades" (Dabashi, 2006). These attitudes become more visible whenever a controversial issue appears, in relation to Islam and the West, such as the Danish Cartoons and the Rushdie Affair.

into, indeed in a logical culmination of, the well-known tradition of Orientalism" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 3).

In fact, Islam for Rushdie, particularly as concerns controversial issues between the West and the Muslim world like terrorism and the Danish Cartoons, is mainly negative unless there is a need for him to consider it as positive. To begin with the exception, Rushdie defends Islam, arguably, when there is a threat or an accusation. Under the threat of being killed after Khomeini's fatwa, Rushdie wrote his unique article "Why I Have Embraced Islam" in which he declared his Islam and praised Islam by stating that "what I know of Islam is that tolerance, compassion and love are at its very heart" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 432) and the Muslim community's "values have always been closest to my heart" (p. 430). In addition, he defends Islam when he finds himself accused of being Muslim, such as when "he encounters a statement from the Jewish Defense League, a journalist who tells British Muslims to move to Tehran, or an Indian professor of literature who quotes Sanskrit without translation and insists on calling all Muslims 'Moghuls'" (Almond, 2003, p. 1147).

Apart from that, Islam for Rushdie, especially after writing *The Satanic Verses*, is mostly negative.[13] In the beginning, Rushdie writes about Islam as he writes about issues in relation to India and Pakistan. "As for religion, my work, much of which has been concerned with India and Pakistan, has made it essential for me to confront the

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[13] In addition to Rudyard Kipling and V.S. Naipaul, Rushdie for Sardar and Davies is another brown sahib whose role was to justify colonialism in the past and to justify "secularism and the ascendancy of Europe into a global and universal civilization" today (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 82). They think that Rushdie's "perspective as it unfolds through the entire course of his writing is best described as an angle of attack formed by the Orientalist view of Islam. His portrayal of the religion, his worrying at ideas, his speculative thinking about Islam are shaped not by the world of Muslim ideas but those imposed upon it by Orientalists" (p. 127).

issue of religious faith" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 376). But then he begins to write about Islam and the West from his secular perspective. Rushdie is well aware of the polemical image of Islam in the West. He acknowledges: "what 'Islam' now means in the West is an idea that is [...] merely medieval, barbarous, repressive and hostile to western civilization [...] Not much has changed since the Crusades" (p. 382). However, his image of Islam in his fiction and non-fiction works seems not to be any different. "Throughout his novels, Rushdie's characters and narrators express rejections of Islam" (Almond, 2003, p. 1139). He "is happy to expose the cruelties, blindness, and errors of Islam" and "content to paint Islam as backward, intolerant, medieval, and aggressive" (p. 1147).

In his non-fiction works, Rushdie is more strident in voicing his rejection of different elements of Islam. As unbeliever, he thinks that "faith must, ultimately, be a leap in the dark" (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416). Rushdie's position towards Islam becomes clearer after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, the attacks in America and with the publication of the Danish cartoons. After the conflict over *The Satanic Verses*, he accuses Islam of being against freedom of thought. "Human beings understand themselves and shape their futures by arguing and challenging and questioning and saying the unsayable; not by bowing the knee, whether to gods or to men" (Rushdie, 1991b, pp. 394-395). In his article "In God We Trust" which he wrote in the early nineties, Rushdie criticised the western idea of Islam as "united, unified, homogeneous, and therefore dangerous [...] whereas [...] any examination of the facts will demonstrate the rifts, the lack of homogeneity and unity, characteristic of present-day Islam" (Rushdie, 1991a, pp. 382-383). Strangely, however, when America was attacked in September 2001, Rushdie criticised the West for not accusing Islam, as a

religion, of terrorism: "to maintain its coalition against terror [the US] can't afford to allege that Islam and terrorism are in any way related. The trouble with this necessary disclaimer is that it isn't true. [...] of course this is 'about Islam'" (Rushdie, 2002c, p. 395). In addition, he welcomed the American occupation of Afghanistan in spite of widespread western public disapproval. He wrote: "America did, in Afghanistan, what had to be done and did it well" (Rushdie, 2002a).

By the same token, the Danish cartoons published in 2006 revealed further animus against Islam. In discussing Rushdie's reaction towards these it might be helpful to remember two of Rushdie's ideas regarding the Prophet. Talking about Islam in the West, he said: "we are back in the demonizing process which transformed the Prophet Muhammad, all those years ago, into the frightful and fiendish 'Mahound'" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 382). In "Is Nothing Sacred?" his answer to the title's question is "no, nothing is sacred" (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416). As a compromise, it could be said that Rushdie is against dealing with the Prophet as a sacred person and, at the same time, against portraying him as "the frightful and fiendish 'Mahound'." However, when the Danish cartoons outraged Muslims by portraying the Prophet as "the frightful and fiendish 'Mahound'", Rushdie accused Muslims of supporting Islamism, a movement that for him was like fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. In addition to other writers and intellectuals, Rushdie signed a statement published in the French Newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* accusing Islam of totalitarianism: "After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new global threat: Islamism". Those outraged Muslims, according to the statement, believe in "religious totalitarianism" and are "theocrats" as "it is not a clash of civilisations nor an antagonism of West and East

that we are witnessing, but a global struggle that confronts democrats and theocrats" (BBC News, 2006).

From these different incidents Rushdie's position towards Islam can be summarised as follows: from his early years in England he appeared to develop according to the climate in which he was writing. It is striking that his sympathetic anti-racist position of the 1980s was superseded by the hard-line anti-Islamism of the 1990s and 2000s. In fact, Rushdie in the 1980s, as a subject of racism himself, was against racism in general whether practised on Muslims or Blacks. He was not merely sympathetic to Islam or Muslims; he was sympathetic to all racism's victims. On the other hand, we can say that residually he was always critical of Islam, but his critique needed the appropriate climate to appear. His relation towards Muslims changed. In the 1980s he showed himself as sympathetic to them because of racism. But then, in the 1990s and 2000s, he becomes one of those writers who justify, culturally and militarily, wars against Islam and Muslims under the guise of freedom.

From a postcolonial perspective, Rushdie's position towards Islam is similar, in a sense, to Conrad's position towards Africa. Both Conrad and Rushdie are immigrant writers and "mastered English and used it to write about the relationship between culture and imperialism" (Yacoubi, 2005, p. 202). Reading Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from a postcolonial perspective, Chinua Achebe in his important article "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" provides an example of a postcolonial reading which could be applied to Rushdie's works in general and *The Satanic Verses* in particular. One of the main tasks of postcolonial reading is to look "at writers who dealt manifestly with colonial themes and [argue] about whether their

work was supportive or critical of colonial discourses" (McLeod, 2000, p. 23). Reading Rushdie from the same perspective, following Achebe's treatment as a model,[14] might shed a light on the relationship between Rushdie and colonial discourse and whether it is supportive or critical.

Achebe, impartially, praised some aspects of Conrad's writing: "I do not doubt Conrad's great talents" (Achebe, 1997, p. 120). However, he criticises any estimation of the novel as a great work because of its racism. "The question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalises a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot" (p. 120). Achebe clearly, from a postcolonial perspective, judges *Heart of Darkness* using his African eyes, not the western ones which could see the greatness of the novel. Postcolonially, then, the novel should be read through the previously colonised, not the coloniser's, eyes. This approach could be applied to the two well-known works of Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*.

Although there are Indian readers who like it and British readers who do not like it, *Midnight's Children*, which portrays Rushdie's version of India, was generally celebrated in Britain and criticised in India. Rushdie described his writing of this novel as follows: "what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 10). In spite of Rushdie's acknowledgment that "his India" is just one of millions, his

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[14] Chinua Achebe as an African and postcolonial writer is frequently used as a model. Amin Malak in his writing about the Indian writer Ahmed Ali in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* and Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad in their article "The "Unhomely" in Fadia Faqir's Pillars of Salt", for example, use Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a model. However, Achebe's article "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" is the model used here.

India has made such a dominant impression as to block others and that is why "his version of India is often taken to be the 'real'" India" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 156). Rushdie's India, which meets western expectations, does not seem to meet Indian ones. He writes: "the book [*Midnight's Children*] has been criticised in India for its allegedly despairing tone. And the despair of the writer-from-outside may indeed look a little easy, a little pat. But I do not see the book as despairing or nihilistic" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 16). Here, there are, generally, two main groups of people consisting of the British or the westerners who were previously colonisers; and the Indians who were previously colonised. Being a hybrid writer, Rushdie's western-welcomed books seem to indicate to which group he belongs more. It is widely-known that Rushdie's "books have been differently (and generally better) received in the West than in India. For example, while *Midnight's Children* has been read by many in the West as an affectionate celebration of India, *India Today* described it as 'one of the most ferocious indictments of India's evolution since independence'" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 164). This dispute between the British and the Indians over reading Rushdie's books resembles the dispute over some novels which were written in the colonial period. As Ralph Crane points out: "British and Indian readers may well approach novels like *Kim* and *A Passage to India* with different attitudes, and the novels may well mean different things to each" (Crane, 1992, p. 10).

Rushdie's success in the West after the publication of *Midnight's Children* may have encouraged him to portray India and Islam, the religion of millions of its citizens, in a similar way. Welcomed in the West, *Midnight's Children* was criticised in India. *The Satanic Verses* was banned there. It is worth noticing that the government ban was supported by Indian intellectuals of different religious persuasions. As Mazrui writes:

The Indian government's ban on *The Satanic Verses* has been supported by a large number of distinguished Hindu, Sikh, Christian as well as Muslim intellectuals of the country. A letter to *The Indian Post* was signed by J P Dixit, Nissim Ezekiel, Jean Kalgutker, Vrinda Nabar, Vaskar Nandy, V Raman and Ashim Roy. Was India's ban of the book a case of building a repressive society? *The Times of India* answered: 'No, dear Rushdie, we do not wish to build a repressive India. On the contrary, we are trying our best to build a liberal India where we can all breathe freely. But in order to build such an India, we have to preserve the India that exists. That may not be a pretty India. But this is the only India we possess' (Mazrui, 1990, p. 130).

The celebrity of Rushdie's books in the West[15] is similar, in a sense, to Conrad's. In spite of Conrad's colonial portrayal of Africa, Chinua Achebe noted that Conrad's contribution "falls automatically into a different class – permanent literature – read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics. *Heart of Darkness* is indeed so secured today that a leading Conrad scholar has numbered it 'among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language'" (Achebe, 1997, p. 114). Rushdie, similarly, is widely respected in Britain. He received, in addition to many literary awards, the Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight's Children* and in 1993 he was selected as the Booker of Bookers. His writings, awards and the media focuses on him made Harish Trivedi opine that: "Salman Rushdie is perhaps the best-known contemporary writer in the world" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 154). For Akbar Ahmed, in his book *Postmodernism and Islam*, Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie played a role, "after the fatwa, anything Rushdie did would be major news … It was not surprising, then, that Rana Kabbani's lonely criticism … was savaged by the literary

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[15] The celebration of Rushdie's books in the West is due, partly, to its match with western expectations of the images of Islam and Muslims. In addition, Muslims' outraged reaction against their negative depiction proves, again, the primitiveness of Muslims in western eyes. The burning of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford is a striking example. Rana Kabbani in her book *Letter to Christendom* notes that "the book-burning in Bradford was something of a desperate attempt to get media attention after less sensationalist protest went unnoticed. Up to this point British Muslims had been largely invisible, but when they resorted to outrageous demonstrations in their attempts to get the government to act against Rushdie's book, they matched the traditional western image of them, making it easy to label them as primitive fanatics not civilised enough to appreciate the value of free speech" (Kabbani, 1992, pp. 8-9).

establishment" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 167). Using Achebe words, Rushdie is, like Conrad, "so secured today".

Achebe argues that Conrad did not create his own image of Africa; he simply brought "the dominant image of Africa in the western imagination" to his novella and explored it (Achebe, 1997, p. 123). Akbar Ahmed thinks that Rushdie's "knowledge of Islam is limited and usually derived from a cursory reading of the Orientalists" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164), while Amin Malak comments: "Rushdie's utilization of Orientalist fabrications seems to the ordinary Muslim reader [...] flattering to those prepackaged stereotypes about Islam" (Malak, 2005, p. 109). From a postcolonial perspective, this accusation of using Orientalist images is serious as Orientalism has a suspect link with the discourse of the colonial period. Rushdie cannot justify the negative image of Islam in his fiction by insisting on the difference between fact and fiction because, from a postcolonial perspective, this is not valid as Achebe's reading makes clear. "It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow"; but "it would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary" (Achebe, 1997, p. 118). Although it is a work of fiction, Achebe insisted that *Heart of Darkness* is "an offensive and deplorable book" (p. 121).

Bearing in mind the negative depiction of Islam in Rushdie's writings[16] on one hand, and Edwards Said's writings against the polemical writings which portray Islam

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[16] Malak states that: "Rushdie's utilization of Orientalist fabrications seems to the ordinary Muslim reader not only flattering to those pre-packaged stereotypes about Islam, but also to signal the burning of bridges between the author and his own cultural roots" (Malak, 2005, p. 109). Regarding his newspaper articles in particular, Sabina and Simona Sawhney notice that: "in several op-ed pieces and short essays published in *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, and *The Guardian*, Rushdie seems to accede rather easily to the most prevalent stereotypes about Islam" (Sabina and Simona Sawhney, 2001, p. 433).

negatively on the other hand, Said's strong support of Rushdie's writings is a great surprise. After the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and the fatwa against Rushdie, Edward Said praised the novel in spite of the expectation that he would be against its polemical image of Islam as the writer of *Orientalism*, *Culture and Imperialism* and *Covering Islam*, works which apparently provide a critique of the way Islam is depicted within much western discourse. Said's position was not only a surprise for Muslims or Islamists, but even some of those who belong to the Left and write against imperialism were surprised. Aijaz Ahmad, for example, in his book *In Theory*, criticises Said's position:

> The odd thing, of course, is that Edward Said, who had given us such a powerful narrative of literary representations as integral to the imperialist systems of power, and who in writing *Covering Islam* had been so sensitive about the coverage of Islam in the western media as to have ignored the domestic criminalities of Islamic regimes in the course of his denunciations of those media, now championed, because the superior sanctity of literature was involved, the novelist's absolute right to write as he pleases, regardless of the novelist's own location in relation to the corporate world of global representations and the British imperial state (Ahmad, 2000, p. 214).

More surprisingly, Edward Said had argued that the Orientalist image of Islam, which he criticised while reading the literature of the colonial period, still exists till today and he himself called some of those intellectuals affected by it as "native informants" (Said, 1995, pp. 323-324). He proposed that we still live in the age of "the new imperialism" which is affected by Orientalism. "The fact is that Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism" (p. 322). The medieval fear and hostility towards Islam still existed. "The earliest European scholars of Islam, as numerous historians have shown, were medieval polemicists writing to ward off the threat of Muslim hordes and apostasy. In one way or another that combination of fear

and hostility has persisted to the present day" (p. 344). Said had suggested that the Oriental student who studies Islam in the West would be able eventually "to repeat to their local audiences the clichés I have been characterizing as Orientalist dogmas" and "in his relations with his superiors, the European or American Orientalists, he will remain only a 'native informant'. And indeed this is his role in the West" (pp. 323-324). Muslims throughout the world, expressing their outrage toward *The Satanic Verses*, have applied Said's ideas to Rushdie, and that is why, in a sense, Said's supportive stance on Rushdie was difficult to understand.

Naturally, there were reasons behind Said's support for Rushdie, such as their old friendship in addition to the many common ideas they both believed in and wrote about: "Salman Rushdie is an old friend of mine whom I have known for about ten years. I first met him in 1980-81 in London. I'm a great admirer of his writing especially *Midnight's Children*, which I think is one of the great novels of the twentieth century" (Said, 2001b, p. 382). In reciprocation of this praise, Rushdie considered Said as "the most incisive and visible Palestinian intellectual of the last quarter-century" (Rushdie, 2002b, p. 318). According to Jacoubi, "it is imperialism, the question of Palestine, and the creative strategies of hybridity and irony that Said has found of great interest in Rushdie's work" (Yacoubi, 2005, p. 203). Rushdie, for Said, is a great postcolonial writer and did not deserve what happened to him (Said, 2001b, p. 383). "Salman Rushdie is after all the same distinguished writer and intellectual who has spoken out for immigrants', black and Palestinian rights, against imperialism and racism, as well as against censorship" (Said, 1990, p. 73). Rushdie's writing is as new as Kipling's and Forster's, but it is postcolonial: "To read Rushdie is really to read something completely new. I mean it has connections with the world of

Kipling and Forster, but it is transformed, it is post-colonial" (Said, 2001c, p. 416). And as a postcolonial writer, Rushdie "can write in a world language and turn that language against its own sources of authority and consolidation" (Said, 2001d, p. 65).

Thirdly, to understand Said's support for Rushdie it is very important to shed light on Said's point of view about Islam. As a result of his writing about the representation of Islam and Muslims in the West, Said became a crucial defender of Islam in the eyes of many Muslims. However, this was not the full picture. Said had his own ideas about Islam and Muslims which might be unacceptable to many Muslims in the Islamic world in particular. It could be argued that Said has two discourses. The first is the discourse he addresses to the western reader and the second is the one he addresses to the Muslim reader. When addressing the West, he seems to be a defender of Muslims, and when addressing Muslims, he appears as a westerner. Known for his writing about the West, he is widely thought of as a defender of Islam, although he has his own less popular ideas about some of the issues relating to Islam. Indeed, in his article "Orientalism and After", Said declared that he was not a champion or a defender of Islam. "In the Arab world I'm read by many people as a champion of Islam, which is complete nonsense. I wasn't trying to defend Islam. I was simply talking about a very specific form of activity: representation" (Said, 2001e, p. 220). In addition, Aijaz Ahmad believes that Said's major book *Orientalism* was written for Palestine not for Islam. He said: "the writing of *Orientalism* had been in some ways a preparation for the writing of that essay [*Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims*] on Zionism and its victims" (Ahmad, 2000, p. 161). This does not undermine the importance of Said's books in rearticulating the image of Islam and Muslims. However, Islam, as a religion, clearly was not the first motivation for Said.

Indeed, Said had his own critical ideas about religion in general and Islam in particular. Religion, for him, does not support human investigation and criticism. He states that religious discourse "serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly" (Said, 1984, p. 290). Moreover, religion ultimately causes disastrous results in some societies. "Religion therefore furnishes us with systems of authority and with canons of order whose regular effect is either to compel subservience or to gain adherents. This in turn gives rise to organized collective passions whose social and intellectual results are often disastrous" (p. 290). Arguably, Said considered there were different readings of Islam. While Khomeini represented one reading, Rushdie represented another. "There has also been a return in various parts of the Middle and Far East to nativist religion and primitive nationalism, one particularly disgraceful aspect of which is the continuing Iranian fatwa against Salman Rushdie" (Said, 1995, p. 347). Khomeini's reading was widely spread in the Middle East, and the fatwa against Rushdie was one of its "disgraceful" manifestations.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, on the other hand, belongs to another reading of Islam. Rushdie's Islam, for Said, is not pure; its culture is mixed with other cultures. "There is no pure, unsullied, unmixed essence to which some of us can return, whether that essence is pure Islam, pure Christianity, pure Judaism or Easternism, Americanism, Westernism. Rushdie's work is not just about the mixture, it is that mixture itself. To stir Islamic narratives into a stream of heterogeneous narratives about actors, tricksters, prophets, devils, whores, heroes, [and] heroines is therefore inevitable.

Most of us are still unprepared to deal with such complicated mixtures" (Said, 1990, p. 74). In short, belief in the purity of Islam, according to Said, is an essential difference between Khomeini and Rushdie's readings of Islam. Those who believe in the purity of Islam, like Khomeini, are many; Muslims "in various parts of the Middle and Far East" are "still unprepared to deal with such complicated mixtures" and only some Muslims, like Rushdie, are prepared enough to read Islam as a "complicated mixture". As a result of their belief in the purity of Islam, many Muslims did not accept Rushdie's novel and, within this environment, the fatwa was issued. The solution, then, is not to reject the novel, but to refuse the fatwa and the purity of Islam.

Looking at the issue of *The Satanic Verses* from Rushdie's Islam perspective, Said accused Muslims of not understanding Islam and its civilization and described their outrage as "unacceptable hullabaloo". He wrote: "personally, I don't myself believe that it is in the nature of Islam or a part of the best traditions of Islamic civilization to suppress the writings of an offending dissenter, let us say. So, the hullabaloo about him has been deeply regrettable and, in many ways, unacceptable to me" (Said, 2001b, p. 383). In addition, he condemned Muslims for not reading the book themselves and just following their religious leaders, describing this as "garbage". "I can understand that a lot of Muslims are offended by *Satanic Verses,* even though, I must say, I am not sure if very many of them have even read the book. That's one of the great comic events of all times. [...] they just take the word of some ulema who claims this or that is what he says. That's garbage. It's terrible" (p. 383).[17] He

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[17] Ali Mazrui in his article "Satanic Verses or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair" refutes Said's point. He writes: "there are millions of believing Christians who have read only a few pages of the Bible. There are also Muslims who can read the Koran without understanding it. There are also believing Jews who know only a few quotes from the Torah. Many of those who have

condemned Muslims, too, for accepting Rushdie's help in the past and refusing to allow him his freedom to write now. He said: "If we have accepted Rushdie's help in the past, we should now be ensuring his safety and his right to say what he has to say" (Said, 1990, p. 74).

For Said, many Muslims either practise or support violence. Khomeini's fatwa is not the only Muslim violence that Said condemned as he condemned the Palestinian movements Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as well. Criticising the fatwa, he said: "Islam is reduced to terrorism and fundamentalism and now, alas, is seen to be acting accordingly, in the ghastly violence prescribed by Ayatollah Khomeini" (p. 73). If the fatwa is an act of "terrorism and fundamentalism", Hamas and the Islamic Jihad practise "violence for its own sake". He said: "unfortunately, it is not to my taste, it is not secular resistance. Look at some of the Islamic movements, Hamas on the West Bank, the Islamic Jihad, etc. They are violent and primitive forms of resistance [...] now I am not at all for them, and violence for its own sake is to be condemned absolutely, but they are essentially protest movements" (Said, 2001c, p. 416). Two points could be mentioned here. The first is that Said, by saying "it is not to my taste, it is not secular resistance" seemed to think that while the Islamic movements are not peaceful, the secular movements, supposedly, were peaceful and progressive. In one a way or another, Islam could be seen as under accusation. The second point is that if Said condemned Khomeini (the leader of the Islamic Iranian revolution), Hamas (which is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) and the Islamic Jihad because of their violence practices, he condemned, indirectly, the majority of Muslims

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theories about the Ayatollah Khomeini do not speak a word of Farsi. How many know from direct experience that Khomeini has really passed that death sentence on Rushdie? What about those indignant Muslims who actually have read the book? There is the assumption that all Muslim critics of Rushdie must be ignorant of the English language or incapable of understanding great literature" (Mazrui, 1990, pp. 137-138).

in the world for their support of violence. In his article "Not About Islam? 2002",
Rushdie suggested that Islam's version of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Shia
revolutionaries in Iran, and the Taliban were "presently the fastest-growing version[s]
of Islam" (Rushdie, 2002c, p. 395). Edward Said too appeared to endorse the view
that many Muslims were either practising or supporting violence in the world.

One of the major reasons that led Said to support Rushdie was Said's strong belief in
secularism. As a secular intellectual, he stated: "I am an absolute believer in absolute
freedom of expression" (Said, 2001b, p. 382). Ultimately, this absolute freedom
conflicts with Islam in which respect for the sacred is part of its system of thought.[18]
For Said, the role of an intellectual is to oppose all "totalizing" systems of thought.
"I've always said that the role of the intellectual is to be oppositional [...] to all of
these totalizing political movements and institutions and systems of thought" (Said,
2001d, p. 65). According to Said, a battle is taking place over modernity in the
Islamic world, between the secular and the religious discourses. Rushdie is one of
"the fighters" of this battle and that is why he is attacked in religious discourse.
Supporting Rushdie, for Said, is supporting the modernity that the secular discourse is
calling for:

> We live in an age where the whole question of what the tradition is, and what the
> Prophet said, and the Holy Book said, and what God said, and what Jesus said,
> etc., are issues that people go to war over, as in the case of Salman Rushdie, who
> was condemned to death for what he wrote. That is for us the battle – the battle
> over what the modern is, and what the interpretation of the past is. It is very
> important in the Arab and Islamic worlds. There is a school of writers, poets,
> essayists, and intellectuals, who are fighting a battle for the right to be modern
> (Said, 2001f, p. 259).

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[18] For Sardar and Davies, in addition to Islam, even civilized societies do not accept absolute freedom
without restrictions. They write "in reality, Rushdie's defenders have offered no argument except the
argument of absolute freedom without responsibility, an argument that has no place in a civilized
society" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 6).

The hegemony in the Islamic world of religious discourse at the expense of the secular contributes to the insistence of Said's support for Rushdie. In this context, Said was "vociferous in attacking the banning of the book" as a result of "the absence of any secular theory of any consequence that is capable of mobilizing people" and the lack of "effective secular [political] organization, anywhere, in the fields in which we work, except the state." "That's part of the failure," he concludes, "which I lament so much" (Said, 2001e, p. 221). This "failure" of secularism in the Islamic world needs, for Said, books such as *The Satanic Verses* which can challenge the religious discourse and raise a controversy in which the secular discourse could find a space to articulate itself. For him, it was "an interesting novel [and] in many ways brilliant book" (Said, 2001b, p. 383).

The major factor that united Said and Rushdie was therefore their common opposition to religious discourse. First of all, Said's belief in the freedom of expression led him to defend Rushdie and reject the fatwa. Youssef Yacoubi argued: "defending Rushdie against Khomeini's fatwa of 1989 for his novel *The Satanic Verses*, for Said, was a commitment to the major vocation of a secular intellectual who must defend freedom of expression at all costs" (Yacoubi, 2005, p. 203). In addition, another reason for defending Rushdie's novel was its critique of religious structures. According to Yacoubi, "Said supported Rushdie because he realized that Rushdie's novel was a critique of all structures of oppression, theological and political" (p. 204). In so doing, they opposed the role of Islam in the Muslim world. "Like Rushdie, Said has criticized religious fundamentalism of all forms. It goes without saying that the secular criticism championed by Said and Rushdie remains sensitive to the role and

function of religion" (p. 204). In short, Said supported Rushdie against Muslims' outrage because he essentially "condemns the closure of religious discourse" (p. 204).

In some aspects, Said's famous critique of the representation of Islam in western discourse and Rushdie's famous critique of Islam show them as different. However, in spite of these differences, Said and Rushdie had the same project. Both secular intellectuals, originally from the East, educationally they are of the West. Dealing with the themes of culture, imperialism, postcolonialism, Islam and the West, in general, in writing about such topics in the West they come across as representatives of Islam and Muslims. However, when they write about Islam and Muslims in the Islamic world from their secular perspective, they are looked at as representatives of the West.

In spite of Edward Said's favourable reputation among Muslims arising from his efforts to challenge the negative image of Islam in the West, he was unable to provide a strong and valid argument in defence of *The Satanic Verses* which could change Muslims' ideas about the book.[19] Said seemed unable to give a clear justification for the Orientalist depiction of Islam in the book even though, for many Muslims, it is the main contemporary novel that depicts Islam from an Orientalist point of view. When he tried to address the orientalisim of *The Satanic Verses*, Said came up with this vague response:

> Why, in other words, must a member of our culture join the legions of Orientalists in Orientalizing Islam so radically and unfairly? To try to answer these questions is by no means to deny the anguish and seriousness in the questions. But it is, as a beginning, to say that although it contains many spheres, the contemporary world

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[19] In fact, Said's position towards *The Satanic Verses* supports, in a sense, Dirlik's criticism of postcolonial critics. He points out that "postcolonial critics have engaged in valid criticism of past forms of ideological hegemony but have had little to say about its contemporary figurations" (Dirlik, 1994, p. 356).

of men and women is one world; human history therefore has many divisions, many peculiarities, but it too is one. In this world Salman Rushdie, from the community of Islam, has written for the West about Islam. *The Satanic Verses* thus is a self-representation. But everyone should be able to read the novel, interpret it, understand, accept, or finally reject it. And, more to the point, it should be possible both to accept the brilliance of Rushdie's work and also to note its transgressive apostasy (Said, 1990, pp. 73-74).

It can be argued that Edward Said does not provide an answer here to a very important question about the orientalism of Rushdie's novel. He states that the world is mixed and that Rushdie, coming from the community of Islam, writes for the West; Muslims can accept or reject his writings. However, Achebe, for example, rejects the racism of *Heart of Darkness* regardless of the world it belongs to: the colonial world or the contemporary mixed world. Like racism, anti-Islamic writing is rejected by Muslims regardless of the period in which it was written. Describing Rushdie as belonging to "the community of Islam" but at the same time writing a work of "transgressive apostasy" does not excuse this writing in the eyes of Muslims. V. S. Naipaul is originally from India and he could be described as one of the formerly colonised, but when he wrote in favour of colonialism Said described him as the "demystifier of the West crying over the spilt milk of colonialism" (Said, 2001a, p. 113). Moreover, Said's statement that "everyone should be able to read the novel, interpret it, understand, accept, or finally reject it" does not answer the question mentioned above. The question was not about the right to read the book; it was about exposing its orientalism.

Edward Said's failure to criticise the orientalism of *The Satanic Verses* is an obvious example of the limitations of secular postcolonialism in the reading of contemporary fiction that deals with Islam. In a sense, this failure may lead us to argue that Achebe is more postcolonial than Said himself, who was one of the founders of

postcolonialism. Achebe recognised Conrad's racism after reading *Heart of Darkness* from an African, not a western, perspective. In so doing, Achebe established an African point of view and has become the voice of many Africans. Said, on the other hand, read *The Satanic Verses* as a secular western intellectual, not as one of the million Muslims who refused to accept the depiction of Islam in the novel. Surprisingly, Said was able to endorse Achebe's exposure of the colonial side of Conrad as an application of postcolonial analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, but was unable to see, or ignored, Rushdie's colonial side because he did not apply postcolonial analysis to *The Satanic Verses*. Said, in fact, argued that "[i]t is no paradox, therefore, that Conrad was both anti-imperialist and imperialist" (Said, 1994, p. xx). We might respond to this by saying: it is no paradox that Rushdie is both colonial and postcolonial. For some, prior to *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie was postcolonial, but for many Muslims after *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie is colonial. In short, in Peter Hitchcock's words, "not all of postcolonial is postcolonial" (Hitchcock, 2003, p. 307).

David Thurfjell in his article "Is the Islamist Voice Subaltern?" argues that "the core of postcoloniality is the ambition of decentralising 'the West', or western modernity. Islamism has successfully managed to provide an alternative centre ... among its adherents. This, arguably, makes it one of the most obvious examples of a subaltern postcolonial voice today" (Thurfjell, 2008, p. 160). Islamism, he continues, is "perhaps the strongest [subaltern voice] in the world today" (p. 161). This Islamic postcolonial voice could challenge the western "hegemonic discourse [which] is always colonial in its attitude" (p. 160) and it could, more strikingly, reveal the "hypocrisy in the postcolonial trend because if we really want the subaltern to speak,

it seems inconsistent to say that s/he should do so only when s/he says what we want to hear" (p. 161). If Edward Said could not apply his secular postcolonialism to Rushdie's novel due to his belief in the postmodern paradigm and in humanist discourse, Muslim intellectuals can make Islam an alternative centre and apply postcolonial theory to *The Satanic Verses* and the like.

I would argue that the main concern of a postcolonial reading is how cultural representations are made of postcolonial subjects, and not the literary techniques deployed. In other words, while the text under consideration may be a piece of fiction, the culture behind it is the main target. From a postcolonial perspective, the colonialist novel is not mere fiction. McLeod states: "the teaching of English literature in the colonies must be understood as part of the many ways in which Western colonial powers such as Britain asserted their cultural and moral superiority while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural products" (McLeod, 2000, p. 140). In spite of its utilisation of literary techniques like irony, ambiguity, satire, humour and the like, the colonialist novel is used to serve a 'superior' culture and the postcolonial reading is made in order to resist that culture. Put differently, laying aside literary aspects, "postcolonial literary criticism has affinities with other kinds of study in recent years concerned with reading literary texts in relation to their historical, social and cultural contexts" (p. 144).

Literary techniques are sometimes used by colonial writers to reinforce the cultural misrepresentation of their postcolonial subjects. For Achebe and Malak, for example, the literary techniques used in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Satanic Verses* could not hide the cultural misrepresentation of Africa and Islam. There is a claim that the

attitude to Africa in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's; it is the attitude of Marlow, his fictional narrator, and "Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism" (Achebe, 1997, p. 118). However, for Achebe, this does not justify the colonial representation of Africa in the novel and "if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator his care seems to me totally wasted" (p. 118). As a literary technique, irony provides neither excuse nor justification for the misrepresentation of Africa. This point is also evident in Amin Malak's reading of *The Satanic Verses*. In his article 'Reading the Crisis: The Polemics of Salman's Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses'* Malak critiques Rushdie's misrepresentations of Islam and the Prophet in the novel despite the literary techniques that Rushdie uses in order to deflect criticism. Malak writes:

Rushdie's narrative strategy involves using subterfuge in the guise of fictionality. He cleverly immunizes his texts against external charges by associating the offensive passages with the obsessive imagination of a possessed character. Moreover, he can always deploy the classic claim of authorial distance or demand multiple discourse about an ambivalent text by inviting other hitherto unarticulated layers of meaning. Here then is the sore point for the protesting Muslims: they feel frustrated and furious because the assault on the Prophet can be easily denied as a mere of work of fiction, a mere dream sequence, or a mere statement uttered by a drunken character who does not represent the author's view. They see little room for meaningful, factual, point/counter-point debate. (Malak, 1999, p. 405)

Sometimes "a form of postcolonial resistance" (Ball, 2003, p. 13), satire is deployed by Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* "whose biggest target was not a politician, or even a national political culture, but an international faith" (p. 116). Satire, humour and even jokes are used to target Islam, the faith of many postcolonial subjects. Humour is an important technique in postcolonial writing. It is "a key feature [in] postcolonial cultural practice" (Reichl and Stein, 2005, p. 1). However, the big question is the butt against which cultural humour is used, and what its main purpose is. "In a postcolonial context", Erichsen states, "humour is often used to camouflage rather

than express emotions, for instance to cover up aggression or the pain of being an outsider or of being considered inferior" (Erichsen, 2005, p. 31). It is clear here that humour is a reaction against "aggression, pain, and inferiority"; in other words, humour, in the postcolonial context, serves the postcolonial subjects and is a technique used to challenge colonial discourse. While colonial discourse emphasises the superiority of the colonial perspective, a "great many postcolonial texts employ humour on various levels to emphasise the double perspective inscribed in cultural encounters" (p. 32). Reading *The Satanic Verses* from an Islamic postcolonial perspective, humour comes across as directed against Islam and Muslims instead of being used to challenge the Orientalist claims about them. Humour has a different function here. It is not used as a postcolonial technique to serve postcolonial subjects; it is used to challenge and humiliate postcolonial subjects. Using humour for such a purpose is similar to the role jokes play in the theory of Freud. Richter explains: "Freud makes it abundantly clear that the primary impulse of the joke is not 'funny' but hostile, intended to humiliate and vanquish the 'enemy' (Freud). In this constellation, the role of the third person is quite crucial: the listener is the authority who confirms the defeat of the butt, the triumph of the teller, and, consequently, the establishment of a hierarchal power structure" (Richter, 2005, p. 63).

In the postcolonial context, then, humour can be said to have two functions. It is either used to cover up aggression, pain and the sense of inferiority or to cover up hostile intention. While the first challenges colonial discourse, the second enforces its stereotypes. The context is vital here as it is the identifier of the humour used. The context of *The Satanic Verses* is very clear in its critique of Islam and Muslims which shows that humour is used against postcolonial subjects. In short, using

postcolonialism as a perspective, the main interest in this thesis is to identify the cultural misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims without paying too much attention to the literary techniques employed in the process.

Colonialism and Postcolonialism:

Understanding the terms Colonialism and Postcolonialism and the relationship between them is crucial. In his book, *Beginning Postmodernism*, Tim Woods writes about the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism as follows: "despite the prefix 'post' suggesting that postmodernism emerges after modernism, as a chronologically later period in social and cultural history, there are many theorists who argue that postmodernism is not a chronological period, but more of a way of thinking and doing" (Woods, 1999, p. 8). I think we could say much the same about the difference between colonialism and postcolonialism. By the same token, Aijaz Ahmad, in his article "Postcolonialism: what's in a name?" thinks that "the word 'postcolonial' was to be used increasingly not so much for periodization as for designating some kinds of literary and literary critical writing, and eventually some history writing" (Ahmad, 1995, p. 28). Time, then, is not the main difference between colonialism and postcolonialism. The latter is, in fact, a critique of the former. For some critics, even "*Beowulf* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* could be read as postcolonial texts" as they were written after "the conquering of Britain by imperial Rome" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1). In contrast, some texts that are written today during the so-called postcolonial period might be considered as colonial because "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 17). The main point here is that if Elleke Boehmer could consider *The Canterbury Tales* as

postcolonial and Leela Gandhi could read any novel written today as colonial, then

time is not a necessary difference between colonialism and postcolonialism.[20]

In my view it is very important to consider culture as a field of conflict between

colonialism and postcolonialism. Through colonialism the colonisers try to steal the

land and colonise the mind of the peoples they are colonising; through

postcolonialism, the colonised try to reclaim the land and de-colonise the mind of

their own peoples. "Cultural representations", Boehmer writes, "were central first to

the process of colonizing other lands, and then again to the process of obtaining

independence from the colonizer" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 5). Moreover, for Simon

During, "Cultures are even more worth fighting for than nations" because "hierarchies

of cultures seem to fix identities, whereas hierarchies of nations merely seem to

belong to history and politics. Under this dispensation an imperialist nation,

competing with others, must regard itself as having a world-historical culture"

(During, 1993, p. 139). To put it another way, colonialism should be considered a

cultural threat in addition to a political or economic one. Postcolonial movements

begin culturally and then move on to the other aspects. In *The Empire Writes Back* the

authors are clear in stating this point through using "the term 'post-colonial' … to

cover all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to

the present day" (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p. 2). Here, there are two points: firstly, the

postcolonial process covers pre-eminently the area of culture. The second point is that

the process of postcolonial criticism is still needed in order to demonstrate that the

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[20] Some postcolonial writers like Aijaz Ahmad do not seem happy with broadening the meaning of postcolonialism to embrace *The Canterbury Tales*. He thinks "the fundamental effect of constructing this globalized transhistoricity of colonialism is to evacuate the very meaning of the word and disperse that meaning so widely that we can no longer speak of determinate histories of determinate structures such as that of the postcolonial state" (Ahmad, 1995, p. 31).

influence of the cultural colonialism continues to exist today. In short, "Postcolonial criticism", Homi Bhabha points out, "bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order" (Bhabha, 2006a, p. 245).

It could be considered that there are two types of colonialism: the geographical and the cultural. Although they might have appeared at, or about, the same period, the geographical seems, for some peoples, at least, to have been vanished with independence, while the cultural is still in operation. Some might go so far as to argue that geographical colonialism also still exists today, and all that has happened in recent times is merely a "shift from formal to informal empire". It is obvious that "for the most part, the same (ex-) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies" (Young, 2003, p. 3).

In addition to the colonisers and the colonised, there is always the group of the native informants. Being closer to the colonisers, the native informant, in Said's words, "feel[s] superior to his own people" (Said, 1995, pp. 323-324) and becomes like "the Antilles Negro [who] is more 'civilized' than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man" (Fanon, 1993, p. 26). Those native informants could be the politicians or the intellectuals through whom the colonisers dominate the colonised after independence. Through the politicians, the colonial powers dominate the land and through the intellectuals, they dominate the mind. As a result, the colonial challenge still exists and the postcolonial response is a necessity.

Islam and Colonialism

A significant extract from A.L. Macfie's *Orientalism* clarifies certain aspects of the relationship between Islam and colonialism. He wrote:

> As Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960) and Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962) have shown, by the end of the twelfth century many European scholars had acquired a sufficient knowledge of Islam to understand its principle features. But their understanding was vitiated by a polemical desire to distort the religion, denigrate its followers, and where possible secure their conversion to Christianity, which was seen as the one and only true faith (Macfie, 2002, p. 42).

It is very important to notice that there was "a polemical desire to distort" Islam in the twelfth century, that is, a long time before the beginning of the colonial period. Therefore, Islam was the target of the West before Muslim lands. Put another way, the process of colonising Islam began centuries before the process of colonising Muslim polities. Islam was targeted in the past because it was a "different" religion from Christianity, the religion of the West, which was "the one and only true faith." Yet Islam is targeted today because it adopts a "different" philosophy from the western one. If secularism is claimed to be "the one and only true" philosophy these days, then the main problem of the western colonial "psychology" is this very claim of owning the one and only true faith, philosophy, civilisation, freedom, democracy, human rights, and so on and distorting what the others own and believe in.

In fact, the distortion of the Other is a major difference between Islam and European colonialism. Norman Daniel in his book *Islam, Europe and Empire* touches upon how Muslims, in their powerful ages, treated the Christians who represented the Other at the time. He wrote that the Muslim majority treated Christians "generously" (Daniel, 1966, p. 3) and it was easy for the Christians to feel their differences because of the tolerance of Muslims. "To retain their identities", Daniel noted, Christian

"communities needed a particularly strong sense of difference, and Muslim toleration made this easy" (pp. 3-4). For Daniel, tolerance not only resulted from Islam, but from Arabism as well. He argued that "the Arabs, though proud of race, were not racialists in a modern sense." This tolerance might be one of the reasons that enabled "Islam [to attract] non-Muslims" (p. 3). In addition, it might be a reason for another phenomenon as "it is remarkable how slowly the Christian communities dwindled" in the East (p. 4). Interestingly, the Christians in the Muslim world seem to have preferred to live in the Muslim world than to migrate and live in Europe. Daniel suggested "it might well be easier in fact to rise in the Muslim world than in aristocratic Europe" (p. 16). This Muslim tolerance does not prevent their belief in Islam as "the one and only true faith". Unlike Islam, European colonialism seems to believe in the distorting of the Other. The clash between Islam and the West these days "is more than a clash of cultures, more than a confrontation of races: it is a straight fight between two approaches to the world, two opposed philosophies. … … One is based in secular materialism, the other in faith; one has rejected belief altogether, the other has placed it at the centre of its world-view. It is, therefore, not simply between Islam and the West" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 264).

Although Christianity might not be the main factor within colonialism, the western colonial powers followed the same "one and only truth" way of thinking which contributed to the justification of their colonialism's superiority over the others. It could be argued that every religion in the world believes that it owns the "only truth", and this leads to serious conflicts between peoples all over the world. The question here is how to overcome the conflicts peacefully and with full respect to all the variant religions? Christianity, in general, believes in tolerance as a way of dealing

with the others, but some of its followers continue to uphold it as "the one and only true faith" without accepting its tolerance towards others. They believe in the Self only and therefore become intolerant of everyone else. This is the colonial way of thinking that still exists today as well.

Having said that, the cultural colonialism, for Muslims, commenced before the colonial period, as Macfie noted in the extract above, and it is still in progress even after the end of the colonial period, as Said noted in his *Orientalism*. The colonial powers are still targeting Islam directly and indirectly, either through the media, and some particular western politicians and intellectuals, or by some of the westernised politicians and intellectuals from Islamic countries. As Edward Said noted in *Orientalism*, "books and articles are regularly published on Islam and the Arabs that represent absolutely no change over the virulent anti-Islamic polemics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (Said, 1995, p. 287). Muslims from the twelfth century, if not before, up till now, have been suffering from these colonial attacks which are encouraged by a polemical desire to distort the religion, denigrate its followers, and where possible secure their conversion. In the twelfth century the crusading idea was Christianity, whereas today, it has changed to secularism with all its different manifestations such as democracy, freedom and human rights. It is not, however, a matter of Christianity or of secularism; it is a matter of what the West believes in. The whole world *must* follow the West.

Muslims in the UK

The four novels analysed in this thesis each deal with the crisis and challenges that Muslims face in the West as a result of migration. According to Stephen Castles and Mark Miller's *The Age of Migration*, "migratory movements generally arise from the existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries based on colonialism, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties" (Castles and Miller, 1998, p. 24). It is clear, then, that the West has the primary responsibility in the process of migration as it is the most powerful player in all these fields: "colonialism, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties." For the authors, colonialism is one factor along with others such as "industrialization and integration into the world economy" which have led to the "reshaping of nations and states" (p. 29). The West, then, is the chief contributor to the phenomenon of the existence of the huge numbers of immigrants who live in the West. The colonised people "are brought" to the West either directly as slaves by the colonisers themselves, or as indentured labourers or later as economic migrants; and also indirectly through the black-and-white colonial discourse that creates the image of a superior western civilization and inferior non-western civilizations. As Salman Rushdie wrote:

> One last point about the "immigrants". It's a pretty obvious point, but it keeps getting forgotten. It's this: they came because they were invited. The Macmillan government embarked on a large-scale advertising campaign to attract them. They were extraordinary advertisements, full of hope and optimism, which made Britain out to be a land of plenty, a golden opportunity not to be missed. And they worked. People travelled here in good faith, believing themselves wanted. This is how the new Empire was imported (Rushdie, 1991f, p. 133).

It could be argued that the majority of Muslims in Britain[21] are there because they were encouraged and welcomed to come by the British government – either directly

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[21] Fred Halliday in his book *Britain's First Muslims* thinks that, up to around 1990, "people living in and believing in Islam were not in the main referred to as 'Muslims' but by terms of ethnic

or indirectly. In the 1950s, a lot of Muslims migrated to Britain "seeking to meet the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled industrial workers in the British economy" (Modood, 2006, p. 37). And then "there have also been waves of political refugees from … the Muslim world" (p. 38). Those Muslims who migrated to Britain but are neither workers nor political refugees could be seen as one manifestation of the colonial discourse that imaged the West as superior and the rest as inferior. Castles and Miller state that "the migrations from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to Britain are linked to the British colonial presence on the Indian sub-continent" (Castles and Miller, 1998, p. 24). This does not undermine Muslims' own reasons for migrating to Britain. Rather, it contextualizes the migration and sheds light on the effect of colonialism on immigration. Within this context, Muslim migration to Britain, according to Fred Halliday, was due to two reasons. The first was "the desire to improve income and remit a portion of this income to home" (Halliday, 2010, p. 131), and the second was for political reasons.

Now, Muslims in Britain have British citizenships, but, are they really British?[22] And who should answer this question: the Muslims themselves, the British society, or both of these? Why, anyway, are Muslims asked this question of identity today while Jews, for example, are not? If Muslims, supposedly, are British, which comes first: their Islamic faith or their Britishness? All these questions and others are linked, seemingly, to the western colonial culture that still exists, not to Islam and the

('Pakistani') or geographic ('Asian', 'Middle Eastern') significance. However, from around 1990 it became more common to talk of a 'Muslim community' in Britain" (Halliday, 2010, the preface page, no number).

[22] While asking Muslims these identity questions, it should be kept in mind that "all people, and not least migrants, have multiple identities, born of the combined characteristics of where they come from and where they settle, and of the fact that everyone has multiple determinants – of place, region, gender, race, religion, nationality, political condition, and so forth" (Halliday, 2010, p. 140).

Muslims who live in the West. "No matter what the Muslim identity is or what the Muslims say about it, the fact is that a choice must be made between religion and progress, enslavement and liberation, the old tradition of duties and the modern culture of genuine freedom" (Ramadan, 1999, p.184). This binary, black-and-white discourse is not new: it is the hangover from colonialism in a postcolonial age.

Most Muslims try to accommodate with the western societies by establishing a tolerant discourse, forgetting the past, aiming at creating a harmonious identity that respects both the elements of the Muslim identity and those of the western one. They, for instance, call for multiculturalism as a means of preventing conflict between the different identities that operate within one society.[23] This is why "Muslim politics in Britain clearly includes an advocacy for multiculturalism" (Modood, 2006, p. 52). In addition, Muslims keep stating that "Muslim identity is not closed, confined within rigid and fixed principles. On the contrary, it is based on a permanent dynamic and dialectic movement between the sources and the environment, in order to find a way to live in harmony" (Ramadan, 1999, p. 191). The main aim of calling for multiculturalism and writing about Muslim identity is to assert that "a person can be a devout Muslim and a loyal citizen of Britain" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 263).

However, in spite of the tolerant discourse utilised by those Muslims who want to live peacefully in the West – putting aside the extremists of both sides – western society, in general, is still hesitant about accepting Muslims. This hesitation does not seem to be a result of what Muslims believe in, but rather a result of what western people believe about what Muslims believe in. The problem is not Islam but the negative

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[23] See for example the writings of Tariq Ramadan and Tariq Modood which try to theorise for a harmonious western and Muslim identity in a multicultural society.

image that is portrayed to the British public. This image, for some, is linked with colonialism.[24] Norman Daniel, for example, in his book *Islam, Europe and Empire*, writes: "Islam's image in the mind of Europe was greatly affected by the equation of European with imperialist" (Daniel, 1966, p. 65). Unavoidably, "as the history of the West is a tale of exploitation of other societies, all European cultural practices are touched by imperialism" (During, 1993, p. 138).

In fact, although there are some western writers who try to read Islam impartially, such as Ernest Gellner, in *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Fred Halliday, in *Two Hours that Shook the World*, and Jack Goody, in *Islam in Europe*, there are also western writers who consider Islam and the West as two completely opposed civilisations. According to Samuel Huntington, for example:

> The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West (Huntington, 2002, pp. 217-218).

Such voices might be a trigger to endless clashes between Islam and the West; such conflict maximises the identity questions for Muslims living in the West. Yes, Muslims, like all other cultural or national groups in the world, have the right to believe in the superiority of their culture because "cultures are even more worth fighting for than nations; hierarchies of cultures seeming to fix identities, whereas hierarchies of nations merely seeming to belong to history and politics" (During, 1993, p. 139). However, recognition of this fact should not lead to justification of

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[24] This theme is one of the main themes in Edward Said's *Orientalism* for example.

perpetual clashes, but rather to the opening of doors for dialogue with great respect and tolerance. In the past, as we have seen, when Christians were a minority living amid a Muslim majority in the Muslim world, Daniel Norman noted that the difference between Muslims and Christian was a cause of tolerance rather than a conflict. He said: "to retain their identities, these [Christian] communities needed a particularly strong sense of difference, and Muslim toleration made this easy" (Daniel, 1966, pp. 3-4).

In addition to the fact that there are some westerners and some Muslims who believe in the clash between Islam and the West, the western cultural framework is partially a contributor to this phenomenon. In the West, Edward Said believes that "the academic experts whose specialty is Islam have generally treated the religion and its various cultures within an invented or culturally determined ideological framework filled with passion, defensive prejudice, sometimes even revulsion" (Said, 1981, pp. 6-7). Huntington, it might be maintained, believes in the clash between Islamic civilisation and the West, partially because of the negative image of Islam which was invented by some of the western experts. Muslims, however, cannot play a major role in voicing the other perspective because "whatever Iranians or Muslims say about their sense of justice, their history of oppression, their vision of their own societies, seems irrelevant" (p. 8).

Muslims in the West are sometimes feared for their potential to destroy modernity, "but it could be argued that such fears are based on racist ideologies rather than social realities" (Castles and Miller, 1998, p. 233). Although "you may assimilate white values, you never quite can become white enough" (Young, 2003, p. 23). Muslims in

the West these days face the same challenges, in one way or another, as those Muslims who were colonised by the West in their own territories in the past. In spite of the different times and places, Muslims have been on the receiving end of the same discourse, as for Europe, Islam "is always the same, across vast reaches of time and space" (Robinson, 2007, p. 5). Muslims are always asked to be more western which means, undoubtedly, to be more modern, more civilized and much better human beings. Yet it seems that for some western people it is impossible for Muslims to be accepted as western even if Muslims want to be so. In this perspective, from the colonial period till today, the West has been the centre of the world and all those who are on the periphery should follow its steps in everything. For instance, the goal of inviting others to embrace Christianity in the colonial period and today is, partially, the same: to follow God in a western way. As far as the colonial period is concerned, Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, observed that "the Church in the colonies is a white man's Church, a foreigner's Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor" (Fanon, 2004, p. 7). In spite of the centuries that have passed since western colonialism emerged, this western perspective has remained almost the same, as Said pointed out: "the legendary American missionaries to the Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took their role as set not so much by God as by their God, their culture, and their destiny" (Said, 1995, p. 294).

For us to understand this colonial western perspective would help explain some key identity issues facing Muslims in the West. For example, if Muslims migrating to the West are presumed guilty of not being western enough, and not being fluent enough in their understanding of western ways, it should be remembered that in the colonial

period "the colonized subject [was] always presumed guilty" (Fanon, 2004, p. 16). If Muslims are made to feel inferior today, in the past the colonised were "made to feel inferior, but [were] by no means convinced of [their] inferiority" (p. 16). These days, Muslims in the West, through some well-known Muslim writers like Tariq Ramadan, are calling for multicultural European countries to follow the path of their grandfathers who were calling for a multicultural world even while they were endorsing colonisation. However, multiculturalism, from the colonial western perspective, is a threat, perhaps because it removes the justification for the West's superiority and opens the doors to more than one culture to exist alongside the western. Huntington, for example, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, noted that "multiculturalism at home threatens the United States and the West … [as it denies] the uniqueness of western culture" (Huntington, 2002, p. 318).

The western perspective that cannot accept Muslims can also, in general, be considered racist, as "traditions and cultures of racism are strong in all European countries and former European settler colonies" (Castles and Miller, 1998, p. 233). In the colonial period "white men considered themselves superior to black men" (Fanon, 1993, p. 12) and today some of them continue to think themselves superior to Muslims on grounds of colour and culture. For Taroq Modood, "the discrimination against Muslims is mixed up with forms of colour racism and cultural racism" (Modood, 2006, p. 43). In the past "the Antilles Negro [was] more 'civilized' than the African, that is, he [was] closer to the white man" (Fanon, 1993, p. 26). Today it is the same with Muslims. Racism still exists in the West although "the truth is that there is no pure race and … the noblest countries, England, France, and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed" (Renan, 1993, p. 14). Nonetheless, as a result of the

prevalence of racism, "a lot of people don't like the term 'postcolonial' [because] …
it refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (Young, 2003, p. 7).

One major effect of the colonial western perspective is to deal with Muslims as the
inside's Other, after them having previously been only an outside Other. This forces
Muslims to try to protect themselves by emphasizing their original Muslim identity
rather than their new western one. According to Castles and Miller, "the strengthening
of Muslim affiliations is often a protective reaction of discriminated groups" (Castles
and Miller, 1998, p. 233). It could be argued, then, that the widespread perception of
Islam in the West is informed by the colonial perspective that still exists and which
views Muslims as the inside Others. Muslims, like Jews and Sikhs, can accommodate
themselves to western societies, but Muslims cannot be accommodated to western
racism.

Muslims in the West, according to Tariq Ramadan in his book, *To be a European
Muslim*, constitute discrete groups. Some of them are "Muslims without Islam but still
they are Muslims" (Ramadan, 1999, p. 186). Others consider themselves "in Europe
and out of Europe at the same time" (p. 187). The first group is more western than
Muslim and the second is more Muslim than western, but both of them, for Ramadan,
are extreme. He thinks that "there is a need today to define the Muslim identity in the
West so as to avoid the reacting process. This means considering both the Islamic
teaching and the European environment" (p. 180). However, in spite of Ramadan's
efforts and the efforts of Muslim activists, Muslims will keep facing the same identity
question if the colonial western perspective is still encouraged by racism and
Islamophobia (i.e. the fear of Islam or Muslims). As far as racism is concerned,

Muslims "found it difficult to call themselves 'British' because they felt that the majority of white people did not accept them as British because of their race or cultural background; through hurtful 'jokes', harassment, discrimination, and violence they found their claim to be British was all too often denied" (Modood, 2001, p. 74).

Islamophobia, in addition, plays a negative role by complicating the issue of identity through creating problems, from time to time, aimed at confirming the instant clash between Islam and the West. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a clear example: "most of western Europe's Muslims saw their religion as a private matter. The Rushdie affair made Islamic identity more of a political problem than, say, Catholicism or Protestantism" (Castles and Miller, 1998, p. 262). *The Satanic Verses* may be the first example of a catalyst that led to confrontation between Muslim migrants and indigenous westerners, but it is not the last one. The Danish cartoons against Islam's Prophet and the Swiss ban for building minarets are further examples of provocations that affect the relationship between the West and the whole Muslim world and complicate the meaning of identity for Muslims in the West.

It is therefore crucial to understand that racism and Islamophobia are two major factors behind justification of the process of colonisation in the colonial period, which have continued into the postcolonial period. It could be said that the majority, if not all, of the postcolonial writers and critics believe that colonialism still exists. Although some, like Boehmer and Gandhi, use the word "colonisation", others, like Young, prefer to use different terms such as "domination".[25] In reality, postcolonial

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[25] Elleke Boehmer writes: "colonialism is not a thing of the past" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 10) and Leela Gandhi thinks that "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 17). Robert Young believes, however, that "for the most part, the same (ex-) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies" (Young, 2003, p. 3).

theory might differ with respect to the terms it uses, and its justification and colour, but names are not the main issue when it comes to determining the core meaning of colonialism. For the colonised, what matters is not the name of the process of colonisation, its justification, or the colour of its people; what matters is the feeling of being colonised.

One of the main problems faced by the entire world with respect to the hegemony of western civilisation is the instability of the meanings of its elements. From the point of view of colonialism, the only way to be "civilised" is to be western. But, what is western? It is an unstable meaning. The Africans in the past were slaves because of their race, but today Obama is the president of the most powerful country in the West. The Jews were formerly segregated in Europe because of their race and religion, but today Israel is hugely supported by the western governments. "In the 19th century, the west considered the wearing of clothes as the mark of civilization; it was 'savages' who went naked. In the 20th and 21st centuries, however, semi-nudity became the signifier of western superiority" (Young, 2003, p. 83).

If Muslims are still suffering from the colonial western perspective today, this means they are still, in one way or another, culturally colonised, and in order to gain their full independence they need to challenge this colonial perspective. One means of doing this, I suggest, is through what could be called Islamic Postcolonialism.

Islamic Postcolonialism

In spite of the many writings about postcolonial theory, there are still some writers who think that "there is no single entity called 'postcolonial theory': postcolonialism,

68

as a term, describes practices and ideas as various as those within feminism and socialism" (Young, 2003, p. 7). This being so, the doors are still open to those who were once colonised to discuss and promote their own experiences, feelings and thoughts. One reading of postcolonialism is that it upholds the view that colonialism has divided the world into "the West and the rest." The West is the coloniser and the rest is created to be the colonised. At the time of colonialism, "the rest" always had to keep quiet and let the West speak continually about the meaning of superiority and inferiority. Now, in the postcolonial period, it is time for the colonised people to speak about the meanings of freedom and equality.

The postcolonial countries differ in race, religion, history, traditions and so on. Therefore, their respective colonial experiences will each have a different taste. The Africans, for example, in contrast to other colonised nations, were subjected to slavery in addition to colonialism. The experience of slavery has found its expression and influenced the meaning of colonialism for Africans as well as, in turn, for the meaning of postcolonialism. As Homi Bhabha noted, "in theory courses you can have a range of students, but with postcolonial courses, I have noticed very few African students. [...] This could be because Black Americans see these courses as about another set of problems, maybe to do with minoritisation. And I do think that the experience of colonial racism is different from that experienced by slave societies. Slave societies have such a different history" (Bhabha, 2007, p. 20). The colonised Muslims are another example. The long history of contact between Islam and the West has given the colonial experience of Muslims its own taste. As a result, although the postcolonial discourses of the colonised/formerly colonised peoples may have a quite similar purpose, each postcolonial group has its own experience. The Africans,

then, ought to speak about their own experience and establish their own version of postcolonial discourse; each other postcolonial people should do the same. In their struggle against the western colonialism, the Africans and Muslims may discuss postcolonialism, but the Africans are the best to speak about African postcolonialism and Muslims are the best to articulate Muslim postcolonialism.

Many of the colonised peoples have been Muslims. Here, and before talking about Islamic postcolonialism, two important points should be considered. The first point is that the clash between Islam and the West stretches back centuries before the colonial period.[26] The West, as has been argued above, attempted to "colonise" Islam as a religion before trying to colonise its land; so colonialism for Muslims means to colonise a religion with its land, not to colonise a land with its religion. The second point is that Muslims belong to different races and countries, so they might be Arabs, Indians, Persians, Indonesians, or Africans. As a result, the colonial period for Islam and Muslims could be one of the longest in time and one of the widest and most varied in terms of space.

Islamic Postcolonialism is a combination of the two terms: Islam is the supposed "colonised religion", and postcolonial theory is what is used to identify and challenge colonial discourse. Islam, without postcolonialism, would lack an important cultural theory that was essentially created to help the colonised people to free themselves from the colonial stereotypical images that justify colonialism. On the other hand, postcolonialism, without Islam, will not be able to unmask the contemporary anti-Islamic colonial discourse due to its central belief in secularism. Rushdie's *The*

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[26] The clash between Islam and the West could be read from two different perspectives. Firstly, it is a clash between two civilizations as Huntington believes. Secondly, it is a clash between colonial and postcolonial powers. In this thesis, the main interest is the second perspective.

Satanic Verses is an important example here. Rushdie himself is called a postcolonial writer and critic, but because of his absolute belief in secularism, he could not see the colonial discourse embedded in his novel. Outraged Muslims and postcolonial critics read the novel differently because they read it from different understandings of Islam. Muslims, whether secular or conservative, may have different readings of Islam, but they have almost the same reading of colonial discourse. In *Orientalism*, Said read western literature about Islam from a postcolonial perspective and Muslims, in general, supported his reading and welcomed it. However, as argued above, the secular postcolonial reading of anti-Islamic books has been limited; for example it has not been able to identify the colonial discourse in *The Satanic Verses*.

Islamic Postcolonialism does not have its own special aims and methods although it incorporates new perspectives. It is a postcolonial cultural movement that aims at identifying the colonial discourse embodied in literature about Islam and Muslims and resisting it using postcolonial methods. However, due to the diversity of Muslim backgrounds, experiences, geographies, and histories, Islamic postcolonialism might cover a variety of issues such as slavery, racism and Islamophobia. In addition, the complicated relationship between Islam and the West and the vital role that Islam plays in the lives of many contemporary Muslims contribute to making Islam a field of conflict. Controversial issues like the sacred, the Quran, the veil, and fundamentalism show the need for an Islamic postcolonial discourse to present Muslim perspectives and to resist any colonial stereotype that might appear. In contrast to the general Muslim reading, Islamic postcolonial reading focuses on the colonial stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

To conclude, it is important to emphasise that the deployment of stereotype as a colonial tool is the main concern in this thesis. In spite of the differences between Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, they appear to be well aware of the centrality of the stereotype in colonial discourse. There are different insights in their analyses of colonial discourse, but they both accept the colonial objectives of such discourses. Moore-Gilbert writes that "for Bhabha the relationship between coloniser and colonised is more complex, nuanced and politically ambiguous than early Said and late Fanon suggest" (Moore-Gilbert et al, 1997, p. 33). Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, John McLeod states that "like Said, Bhabha argues that colonialism is informed by a series of assumptions which aim to legitimate its view of other lands and peoples" (McLeod, 2000, p. 52). In his important article, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', Bhabha sheds light on colonial discourse and the importance of the stereotype within it. He states that "an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" and the stereotype "is its major discursive strategy" (Bhabha, 2006b, p. 94). It is obvious for Bhabha that colonial discourse is stereotypical and it is used to justify colonialism. He writes that the colonial discourse "seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (p. 101).

Therefore, despite their differences, Said and Bhabha are well aware of the deployment of the stereotype in colonial discourse and the colonial objective of this use regardless of whether the colonial objective is fully met or not.

I argue that the stereotypes are still used to justify the superiority of western values and cultures. Through his work, Bhabha claims that the aims of colonial discourse have not been fully met because mimicry of the colonised is very much linked to mockery and the ambivalence of the colonised negates and challenges the fixation of the stereotype. However, these outcomes do not mean that colonial discourse does not deploy the stereotype to achieve its goals. In my analysis I do not seek to establish whether or not colonial discourse succeeds; but merely whether or not it uses the stereotype to succeed. Thus, though I acknowledge the importance of Bhabha's *ambivalence* to postcolonial analysis, this thesis will mainly focus on the stereotype in imaging Islam and Muslims. I now intend to stage a reading of four contemporary British novels with Islamic themes from the perspective of Islamic postcolonialism.

Chapter One:

Islam and Muslim Identities in Kureishi's *The Black Album*

Born in 1954 in a suburb of London to an Indo-Pakistani father and an English mother, Kureishi was from the beginning subjected to racism and was considered a Pakistani. London with its different cultures, philosophies, religions and races provides the setting and major themes for almost all his works. It could be argued that, within this hybrid city, Kureishi has attempted to prove his Britishness by writing in favour of white culture until he has become, in Ahmed's words, "more English than the English" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 168). Kureishi himself believes that "some people turn to writing in order to locate an identity" (Kureishi, 2002a, p. 204). I intend to demonstrate how apt this definition is if applied to his own work. Writing is his way of proving his Britishness.

Ruvani Ranasinha notices that though Kureishi was once categorized as Asian, "nowadays the media describe [him] as a British writer" (Ranasinha, 2007a, p. 232). Another critic writes of the "increasingly obvious uniqueness of Kureishi's cultural and political position as fully westernized child of an immigrant father" (Buchanan, 2007, p. 13). Perhaps inevitably, Kureishi's success has come at a price and has cost victims. The price is his rejection of his Pakistani and Muslim identity; the victims are some of those Pakistani (or Asian) Muslims who are imaged stereotypically in his works. To avoid being described as Muslim, he proclaims atheism, and to get rid of his Pakistani side he "exploits and resists his ethnic identity" (Ranasinha, 2007a, p. 222). Through his writing then, Kureishi has succeeded in changing his image and in inventing for himself a British identity in the teeth of racism.

The relationship between Kureishi and the South Asian community in Britain is problematic. Bart Moore-Gilbert believes that "Kureishi, more than any other single artist, has helped to render Asian Britain visible as a subject of cultural representation" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 216). However, Kureishi seems to focus on the visibility of Asian British colour not its culture. For him, Britain should accept the diverse *colours* of its citizens not their diverse *cultures* - that is why he "has a limited interest in 'hybridity'" (p. 200). Ranasinha writes that Kureishi "is influenced by Asian culture" (Ranasinha, 2007a, p. 231) and she describes him as a "cultural translator" (p. 221); but Kureishi himself does not seem satisfied with these connections. He says: "people like Caz and Derek Walcott feel a connection with the Caribbean that I never felt with Pakistan or even India" (Kureishi, 2007, p. 13). It is important to note that Kureishi's treatment of racism is primarily related to colour. As a boy, Kureishi was brought up to be English. However, because of his colour, he was subjected to racism. Therefore, racism is a colour issue only. This limited meaning of racism affects Kureishi's perspective. "Kureishi's vision of Asian Britain is 'assimilated' to the extent that it is indistinguishable from the dominant gaze of the dominant ethnicity" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, pp. 209- 210). Even if he were to be considered a cultural translator, for him the South Asian cultures are not as significant as the British. Esterino Adami points out that although on a visit to Pakistan he "tries to track down the fine culture of the Asian country…little of the Indo-Pakistani heritage emerges from his oeuvre" (Adami, 2006, p. 129).

Nevertheless, Kureishi's writing is important for both the mainstream the British *and* the Asian British community. As a hybrid writer, Kureishi seems in a more appropriate position than white British writers to address his "own people". The colonial experience with all its images and conflicts between Islam and the West, the inferior and the superior, makes the Asian British community a suspicious object for a white British writer to critique. When Kureishi writes, however, racism and Islamophobia are less noticed in comparison to his British white counterpart. He might critique or attack the Asian community or Islam and Muslims in the same way as any white racist, but under the guise of the conversations that should be carried on within that community. On the other hand, the importance Kureishi's writing holds for the Muslim community comes from its ability to raise some of the salient controversial issues in relation to Islam and Muslims.[27] This public dialogue in itself is an important opportunity for Muslims to present their hopes and fears, their ideas and criticism, and to speak out as a united Muslim community. Nonetheless, it remains the case that Kureishi has the licence to write what a white writer hesitates to write, showing Muslims the images others construct of them, and to what extent they are involved in the creation of these images.

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[27] In his book *London Calling*, Sukhdev Sandhu sheds a light on Kureishi's role in presenting Asian lives – and Muslims among them - to mainstream audiences. From the end of the 1970s to the present day, Kureishi, according to Sandhu, is the one "responsible for dragging Asians in England into the spotlight" (Sandhu, 2003, p. 230). In addition, Kureishi "inspired second-generation Asians to look at the world anew" (p. 231). For Sandhu, change is important for Kureishi and he presents his characters and London itself in transformation. Like "most of Kureishi's characters [who] feel the need for change" (p. 248), "London isn't an organic community. On the contrary, it's a restless clamorous agglomeration of exiles, migrants and refugees" (p.259). Kureishi's ideas about transformational London and changing people and characters provide Asians and Muslims with the environment they need to express themselves.

It could be argued that three factors were crucial in the formation of Kureishi the writer: his personal experience of racism; his father's influence;[28] and Salman Rushdie. Writing about his reading when he was young, Kureishi states: "most of the English writers I grew up reading were fascinated by the British Empire and the colonial idea" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 3). But this was not the topic he wanted to write about. "I wanted to read works set in England, works that might help make sense of my own situation. Racism was real to me; the Empire was not" (p. 3). Kureishi's situation is quite similar to the situation of the Arab mentioned by Said in *Orientalism*: "What the Arab cannot achieve himself is to be found in the writing about him" (Said, 1995, p. 311). Racism seems to have harmed Kureishi a lot; the experience was too difficult to hide. He became a writer because he "did want to bring people's attention […] to race and racism" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 50). Thus, he started writing to "make sense" of his own situation and that is probably why, as he mentions, "*The Buddha of Suburbia* was written close to myself" (Kureishi, 2002c, p. 19). Racism, it could be argued, is a spark to Kureishi's creativity, a challenge to compete. Reading Forster and Orwell, for example, he notices that "the 'coloured'

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[28] In England, which Kureishi describes as "racist" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 53), unlike his English mother, his Pakistani father needs clarification. Kureishi's focus on his father serves to purify Kureishi himself from the negative assumptions and stereotypes which usually attach to Pakistani identity. Kureishi intends to present his father as completely different from other Pakistanis. For Kureishi, there are "differences between a 'Paki' and being an Indian. Indian was a rather aristocratic term. […] whereas when you were called 'Paki', you were really scum" (p. 53). For this reason, arguably, Kureishi "uses the two geographical terms confusingly" (Adami, 2006, p. 90) when talking about his roots. In spite of the Pakistani identity of his father, he writes: "my father […] never lived in Pakistan. But, like a lot of middle-class Indians, he was educated by both mullahs and nuns" (Kureishi, 2005f, p. 86). His father is like the "aristocratic" Indians, not the Pakistani "scum". In addition to his similarity to the Indians, Kureishi's father, as depicted by his son, is different from the immigrants in general because of his ambition to be a novelist. "For immigrants and their families, disorder and strangeness is the condition of their existence […] culture and art was for other people, usually wealthy, self-sufficient people who were safe and established" (Kureishi, 2002c, p. 3). This uniqueness of the father is very important because it fed into his willingness and efforts to be considered as English, especially that he "liked England and he wanted to be English and he liked English people" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 55).

77

man is always inferior to the Englishman. He is not worth as much; he never will be"
(Kureishi, 2005a, p. 5). It could be said that his ambition to become a writer was in
part his response to assumed inferiority. Moreover, Kureishi's father plays his own
role as well. "My father came from a literary background and wanted me to be a
writer" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 55). In fact, the father's failure as a writer might have
acted as a further catalyst in determining his son's career: by becoming a successful
writer, he achieves both his own and his father's goals. In addition to his father,
Rushdie valorised his aim of being a writer as well.[29] In his interview with MacCabe,
Kureishi says: "I remember Rushdie saying to me this really cutting thing. 'We take
you seriously as a writer, Hanif,' he said, 'but you only write screen plays.' And I
remember being really hurt by this, and provoked by it. And I thought, well, I'll write
a novel then, and then I'll be a proper writer … that's what being a proper writer was"
(p. 42).

Islam and Muslims in Kureishi's Writing

Islam for Kureishi is a backward religion. It is "a very, very unpleasant religion in all
sorts of ways" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 51), and its ideology "is deeply abhorrent"
(Kureishi, 2006, p. 7). To begin with, "Islam is a pretty old religion [and] one can't

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[29] In spite of differences between Rushdie and Kureishi's works, they have similar views regarding
Islam and Muslims. Bradley Buchanan observes that Kureishi's "work differs substantially from that of
postcolonial authors such as Salman Rushdie." He explains: "Whereas these writers often critique
western culture (implicitly or explicitly) from a non-western perspective, Kureishi has largely accepted
its traditions (though he frequently satirizes the excesses they can lead to)" (Buchanan. 2007, p. 13).
However, there is a remarkable link between Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Kureishi's *The Black
Album* which reveals the similarity of their positions on Islam. In fact, as Kureishi writes, "the idea for
"My Son the Fanatic", as for *The Black Album*, was provided by my thinking about the fatwa against
Salman Rushdie, announced in February 1989" (Kureishi, 2005e, p. 53). Akbar Ahmed argues that
"Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Tariq Ali are examples of the extreme modernist of the late
twentieth century" whose position on Islam is influenced by "the orientalists" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164).

make it compatible with what goes on now" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 51). In addition, it is "clearly not compatible with liberalism" (p. 51) and is a "rejection of the Enlightenment and of modernity" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 8). Also it is "neo-fascist" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 51) and one of the "closed system[s], like […] Nazism [and] versions of Marxism" (Kureishi, 2006, p. 36). Islam is "strict and frequently authoritarian" (Kureishi, 2005e, p. 54) and it is "a particularly firm way of saying 'no' to all sorts of things" (p. 53). Turning to Islam is, for Kureishi, "a future in illusion" (p. 53). Because of Islam, "Pakistan was becoming a theocracy" and "older people [were] wishing that Britain still ruled" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 6). Islam is a threatening religion: "Open the Koran on almost any page and there is a threat" (Kureishi, 2005e, p. 56). Finally, "if Islam is incapable of making any significant contribution to culture and knowledge, it is because extreme Puritanism and censoriousness can only lead to a paranoia which will cause it to become more violent and unable to speak for those it is intended to serve" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 11).

Kureishi argues that there are two types of Muslims. "We need the distinction between being an Islamist and being a Muslim; it's an important distinction" (Kureishi, 2006, p. 14). In Britain, for example, the Islamists – whom he sometimes describes as fundamentalists or religious radicals – are not "representative of anything like the majority of Muslims in Britain" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 8). Generally speaking, then, Kureishi believes that fundamentalists are a minority group among the majority of non-fundamental Muslims in Britain. The question here is who the fundamentalists in Kureishi's view are and what are the main differences between them and other Muslims? In his non-fiction writings, Kureishi writes extensively about the fundamentalists without paying a similar attention to the non-fundamentalist Muslims.

However, he writes about his father who could be seen as the example of the non-fundamentalist Muslim. He writes: "my father was an Indian Muslim who didn't care for Islam ... towards the end of his life he preferred Buddhism to Islam" (Kureishi, 2005b, pp. 97-98). For Kureishi, then, the non-fundamentalist Muslim is the one who "doesn't care for Islam." He portrays the two types and the conflicts between them in more detail in his story "My Son the Fanatic".

The story sheds light on the conflict between a non-fundamentalist Muslim father, Parvez, and his fundamentalist Muslim son, Ali. The conflict is between two generations and the story portrays the opposition between two notions of being Muslim in England. Ali, who has a beard, prays five times a day and does not have a girlfriend; he describes the Jews and the Christians as "infidels" and the West as "a sink of hypocrites" (Kureishi, 2005d, p. 69) and declares his willingness for jihad. Ali deals harshly with his father and challenges him: "you are too implicated in western civilization … the western materialists hate us … papa, how can you love something which hates you?" (p. 69) In contrast to Ali's strict Muslim affiliation, Parvez is quite the opposite. He is not religious having "avoided all religions" since he was a boy (p. 67). He drinks alcohol, eats pork and has a friendship with a prostitute. He does all this because, as he says, "this is England. We have to fit in!" (p. 69) In this story, Kureishi draws the image of the non-fundamentalist Muslim who can accommodate himself to living in England. He is, in other words, a nominal Muslim who is willing to ignore the ordinances of Islam in order to be able to live in harmony with English culture. For Kureishi, this nominal affiliation to Islam seems the only moderate one and all the other types are Islamists, religious radicals or fundamentalists.

80

The ending of "My Son the Fanatic" is quite significant and ambivalent. While Ali is praying Parvez kicks and hits him. Ali remains impassive but at last asks: "So who's the fanatic now?" (p. 74) By dealing harshly with his son, Parvez becomes the second fanatic in the story. So while the story identifies Ali as a clear example of a fundamentalist, his question at the end implies that the meaning of fundamentalism is broader than just his. Ali's question points toward different readings of fundamentalism. Firstly, whether a strict believer or lax, merely nominal one, the Asian Muslim is fundamentalist either way; while the degree is different, fundamentalism is always there. Ali's question turns the tables and seems to imply the instability of fundamentalism: at the end Ali is the peaceful fundamentalist, his father the violent one. This challenges the stability of the stereotypical image of fundamentalists. Thirdly, Ali's question comes at the end of the story and Parvez's answer is not mentioned. The implication is that this question is posed for the readers to answer. Fundamentalism, it suggests, could be read from different perspectives. Nevertheless, despite these different readings Ali is the primary example of a fundamentalist in the story. Parvez's fundamentalism does not negate Ali's; it only broadens the application so forcibly concentrated in the characterization of Ali.

Fundamentalism, according to Kureishi, is "Islam as a political ideology" (Kureishi, 2005f, p. 83); the fundamentalist is "the truly religious [who follows] the logic of submission to political and moral ideals, and to the arbitrary will of God" (Kureishi, 2005c, p. 91). He argues that "fundamentalism is dictatorship of the mind" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 10) and it resembles "the totalitarian systems" (p. 11). It also resembles "neo-fascism or even Nazism" (Kureishi, 2005f, p. 83). Fundamentalism and racism

are in some ways similar: "Like the racist, the fundamentalist works only with fantasy ... The fundamentalist's idea of the West, like the racist's idea of his victim, is immune to argument or contact with reality" (p. 87). In addition, for the fundamentalists and the racists, "mixing [is] terrifying" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 50). Fundamentalism is "an attempt to create a purity" (p. 50) and the fundamentalists despise any "moderation and desire to 'compromise' with Britain. To them this seemed weak" (Kureishi, 2005b, p. 97). For Kureishi there is a difference between the Muslim fundamentalists who bombed London in 7 July and the Irish fundamentalists of the IRA. He explains: "the IRA just wanted independence whereas with Islam there's a whole ideology of truth, and the Quran, and everything that follows from that. It's a completely different form of discourse" (Kureishi, 2007, p. 15).

In his essay "The Road Exactly", Kureishi attempts to understand fundamentalism and the reasons behind its ability to attract young Asian Muslims in Britain. He finds that colonialism in the past and racism now are two influential reasons that lead to a Muslim "being made to feel inferior in your own country" (Kureishi, 2005e, p. 57). Fundamentalism, then, is the refuge by which these young Muslims try to avoid their sense of feeling inferior. In addition, fundamentalism provides the certainty and security that result from gaining the truth. It provides, also, "spiritual comfort or community or solidarity" (p. 58). In spite of his extreme opposition to fundamentalism, which he describes as "profoundly wrong, unnecessarily restrictive and frequently cruel", Kureishi seems well aware that "there are reasons for its revival that are comprehensible" (p. 59). However, in another essay, "The Arduous Conversation Will Continue", Kureishi declares that fundamentalists "are terrifying to us and almost incomprehensible. To us 'belief' is dangerous and we don't like to

think we have much of it" (Kureishi, 2005c, p. 91). It could be argued that Kureishi understands the reasons (colonialism and the experience of racism) but he does not justify the results (fundamentalism).[30]

Despite his efforts to show himself as highly critical of fundamentalists alone, Kureishi occasionally appears to critique all Muslims regardless of their differences. Writing against Muslim faith schools, for example, Kureishi blames Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister at the time, for giving permission for such schools to be set up "as though a 'moderate' closed system is completely different to an 'extreme' one. This might suit Blair and Bush. A benighted, ignorant enemy, riddled with superstition, incapable of independent thought, and terrified of criticism, is easily patronized" (Kureishi, 2005b, p. 99). In this extract, Kureishi does not seem to accept the differences between moderate and extreme Muslims: for him all of them deserve the same negative depiction. In two different instances Kureishi has branded all Muslims, not only fundamentalists, as "horrible". In an interview, he reports: "my little boy said, 'Am I a Muslim?' I said, 'Yeah. You've got a Muslim name anyway; Kureishi is a Muslim name'. And he goes, 'Urgh, but they're horrible'" (Kureishi, 2007, p. 13).[31] In a seminar, he states: "one of my sons, who is blond and has blue eyes, asks me if we are Muslims. Indeed, he's rather afraid of Muslims. If he sees a

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[30] The mere act of returning to Islam is strange for Kureishi. "It perplexed me that young people, brought up in secular Britain, would turn to a form of belief that denied them the pleasures of the society in which they lived. Islam was a particularly firm way of saying 'no' to all sorts of things" (Kureishi, 2005e, p. 53).

[31] Kureishi's position might be read as a way of critiquing Islamophobia by showing how the Muslim image is stereotyped. However, I tend to believe that he is in fact supporting the stereotypes instead of critiquing it and that is due to his belief that Muslims are more dangerous than IRA which he declares in the interview itself. He states that "The IRA just wanted independence whereas with Islam there's a whole ideology of truth, and the Koran, and everything that follows from that" (Kureishi, 2007, p. 15).

man with a beard, he'll say, is that man a Muslim? And he thinks that Muslims are chasing him on the street" (Kureishi, 2006, p. 6).

From this evidence Kureishi's concern about the challenge of Islam and the best way of dealing with it in Britain amounts to an obsession. For him, Muslims are "so different" – too different to be respected. He writes: "how could we begin to deal with it? 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, 2005a, p. 8) Islamic ideology is at the centre of his questionings. He asks: "how can we come to terms with an ideology, as written in the Koran, that is deeply abhorrent to most of us. And how can we make a multicultural society which includes an ideology that we don't like?" (Kureishi, 2006, p. 7) This "anti-liberal", "so different" and "disliked" religion has many followers in Britain and there should be a way of dealing with them, but Islam is incompatible with the belief that "the basis of our living in England together is liberalism and liberalism and certain parts of Islam don't go together at all" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 51). Kureishi insists that Islam, as an old religion, needs to evolve; this could be achieved through Muslims themselves engaging with an active multicultural society. In his interview with MacCabe, Kureishi advises the Muslim community in Britain to carry on a conversation in which they discuss how to strike a compromise between their Islam and British culture. Religion, he thinks, is "a pick and choose thing" and there are parts which are "redundant" and could be rejected because "an old religion in the modern world is a strange thing" (p. 51). In his essay "The Carnival of Culture", Kureishi expresses another idea about how to "modify" Islam. He writes: "you can't ask people to give up their religion; that would be absurd ... but [religions] will modify as they come into contact with other ideas. This is what

an effective multiculturalism is: not a superficial exchange of festivals and food, but a robust and committed exchange of ideas – a conflict which is worth enduring, rather than a war" (Kureishi, 2005b, p. 100). This 'effective multiculturalism' that Kureishi calls for is needed. However, mutual respect and understanding between the different cultures is essential in order to successfully implement this multiculturalism. If, as Kuresishi states above, Muslims are 'so different' that they cannot be respected (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 8) and Islam "is an ideology that we don't like" (Kureishi, 2006, p. 7), multiculturalism will be only the "superficial exchange of festivals and food" which he criticises.

Islam and Muslims in *The Black Album*

The Black Album is a novel concerning a student, Shahid, who was born in England of Pakistani extraction, and who after the death of his father moves to London to study at college and led a new life. There he encounters new people with different identities and opposite interests. His new friends are fellow Muslim students, and an English teacher who becomes his lover. In London, the Pakistani-British student discovers at least two new identities: the Muslim and the English. He finds out, too, how difficult it is to respond to the question of which identity to align oneself with in a multicultural city. Each identity has its attraction to him; he can find justification for aligning himself with either. His Muslim friends remind him of his roots and ethnic history with all their associations of belonging, but his lover represents his personal present. Having established connections to both identities, and having observed their distinct and often opposed alignments within the context of late 1980s racial and religious tension, he leaves his Muslim friends and lives with his English lover. In the

process of embracing London and an English identity, he finally separates himself from the community of his father, his friends, and their Pakistani and Muslim identities.

The novel therefore can be said to focus on the identity crisis that the young Asian British, represented by Shahid, face in Britain. In spite of his recent death, Shahid's father, Hasan, plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of his younger son as "Shahid adored and venerated his father [and] … wanted to be like him" (Kureishi 1995, p. 76). In Shahid's memory he is still alive. Hasan's main personal characteristic could be summarised in a love-hate relationship: the more he hated Pakistan, the more he loved England. When he was in Pakistan "the place enraged him: the religion shoved down everyone's throat … nothing was ever right for Papa there. He liked to say, when he was at his most depressed, that the British shouldn't have left … He'd boast about England so much…" (p. 107).

For Shahid's father, Pakistan and Islam are the opposite of Britain. He hates Pakistan and loves England. It is a clear picture then, but in black and white. Pakistan is black and England is white. In total, Pakistan's politics, economics, and, most strikingly, its religion, are not right. For Hasan, there is no difference between Islam as a religion and the Pakistanis as religious. Their mistakes are those of their religion, and its mistakes are theirs, and that is why he does not seem to believe in Islam or like it. "When asked about his faith, 'Yes, I have a belief. It's called working until my arse aches!'" (p. 92) For Hasan "religion" itself – not just the religious people who "shoved down everyone's throat" – seems the major cause for all Pakistan's

problems. Religion, in contrast to Britain, causes problems, while Britain, in contrast to Islam, appears to be the solution to these problems. Islam and Britain, then, are two opposite systems. The first is completely bad, and the second is perfectly good, and that is why "the British shouldn't have left".

In contrast to his hatred of Pakistan and Islam, Shahid's father loved England so much that his brother asked him once whether he was "'personally related to the royal family'" (ibid: 107). To feel English, he slept with women, ate pork, and drank whisky. He embraced these in order "to tear down the old; he liked 'progress'" (p. 39). His old Pakistani identity along with its religion had to be torn down in order to gain the progressive English identity. It is the black and white picture again, but with different words: old and progressive.

Hasan wanted his sons to be more like the English and less like Muslims. He encouraged them in this day after day. He was happy with Chili's adventures with women: "Chili's relentless passion had always been for clothes, girls, cars, girls and the money that bought them" (p. 41). He "wanted Shahid to emulate Chili. When Shahid was fifteen, Papa persuaded him to take out a local girl" (p. 52). This freedom of sleeping with women, eating pork and drinking alcohol is of course alien to their Pakistani identity which is strongly connected with Islam, the religion that condemns and forbids firmly these actions and considers them as major sins. In addition to this unlimited freedom, Chili and Shahid "had been taught little about religion" (p. 92). Later on when Shahid embraces Muslim ways, Chili argues that their father would

have had a heart attack if he had known that Shahid had taken to praying after his death (p. 164).

Islam, therefore, is imaged as an uncivilised religion and its followers are the same. Zulma, Chili's wife, is also very clear in stating her ideas against religion:

> "…religion is for the benefit of the masses, not for the brain-box types. The peasant and all – they need superstition, otherwise they would be living like animals. You don't understand it, being in a civilized country, but those simpletons require strict rules for living, otherwise they would still think the earth sits on three fishes" (p. 186). "…They will slaughter us soon, for thinking" (p. 189).

Here the Muslims are the masses, simpletons, aggressive, given to superstition, and against thinking. The others – Zulma's class – are civilised brain-box types who believe in thinking. Her portrayal of Muslims led her to berate Shahid for having Muslim friends. "'Oh, Shahid, it's not true you've fallen into a religious framework? … You don't go for prayers, do you? … You had a decent upbringing … I can't tell you the problems Benazir has had with these cunning fools'" (p. 187). From Zulma's point of view, all religious frameworks and all those Muslims who go to prayers are dangerous. If he prays, he will be doing everything that dangerous Muslims do: he will be aggressive, against thinking and commit all the "crimes" which are against his "decent upbringing". It isn't prayer that matters; it is what it connotes, and what will come after. Moreover, by mentioning Benazir and her problems with Muslims in Pakistan, three points could be inferred here. Firstly, Muslims in Pakistan or Britain or in any other country are the same; they are always making problems for their countries. Secondly, the Pakistani identity is a national identity more than a religious

one, therefore, there are some Pakistanis who are as civilised as Benazir and there are others who call themselves Muslims and they are only "cunning fools". Thirdly, the relationship between the civilised Pakistanis and the other Muslims is problematic. These ideas are Zulma's, admittedly, but ultimately they are part of the message endorsed by the novel.

The novel shows that in Pakistan there are two groups of people with two different identities in conflict: the liberal, which is the original, and the Muslim, which is new. The first group consists of those people, like Zulma and some of Shahid's relatives in Karachi, who feel free to drink whisky before going to Friday prayer and for whom English was "in that household, the first and common language" (p. 91). The second group is those who are full of "religious enthusiasm" and "strong political feeling" and they are "from the younger generation" (p. 91). This link between the younger generation and the mixture of religious enthusiasm and strong political feeling seems to prove that the Pakistani "original" identity is much more "liberal" and that this younger generation is trying to create a "new" religious identity. Shahid's family, in addition to their relatives in Pakistan, seems to belong to the first group. His uncle Asif, a journalist in Pakistan, had been "imprisoned once by Zia for writing against his Islamization policies" (p. 6). In Pakistan, then, there is a conflict between "the lunatics [who] are running the asylum" and those who fight for "a free mind" (p. 251). And this extends to the conflict between Muslims who have come to London and the "civilised" Pakistani émigrés who moved there before them.

The Muslims in London in *The Black Album* are not English in spite of having lived there for many years, and they are not Pakistanis although Pakistan is their country of origin. Muslims are represented by a group of college students who seem to be originally from Pakistan, but are trying to live as Muslims in England. The group consists of Riaz, the leader, Chad, Hat, Tahira and others. Chad, for example, refuses to be called by his English name, Trevor, because it is not his "true identity" (p. 266). And when Shahid calls him "Paki", he responds: "No more Paki. Me a Muslim" (p. 128). For this group, Islam is not just their religion, it is their only identity and they have no national identity.

England for Muslims is not home: Riaz says: "this will never be my home" (p. 175). For Muslims, England cannot be home because of racism, immorality and hypocrisy. All the English are racists because "there is a bit of Hitler in all white people" (p. 12). Moreover, they cannot consider a country home while "immorality is rife" (p. 18). In addition, democracy in England is a mere hypocrisy (p. 80). In England, Muslims should keep away from the English so as to protect themselves. Chad declares: "we must not assimilate, that way we lose our souls" (p. 81). Kureishi's depiction of Muslims as mere Muslims without any sense of affiliation to Britain as "home" seems to ignore the hybrid identity of Asian British or Muslim British in the UK. However, this ignorance is likely on purpose. The novel tries to widen and make homogeneous the meaning of Britishness, instead of having a special Britishness for each population group. However, two groups, according to the novel, are against this aim: racists who refuse to accept the non-white citizens in general, and Muslims who refuse to assimilate fully into society. Muslims, then, cannot be British because of their refusal to accept the common values of British society, which amounts to refusal to

assimilate. Muslims in Britain must either be British like Deedee or Muslim like Riaz; there is no identity called Muslim British.

Nevertheless, Muslims are aware of their responsibilities towards their "Muslim brothers" inside and outside England. When they say "our people" they mean all Muslims in England and around the world. When talking about some specific Muslims in London, Raiz states: "our people under attack tonight" (p. 82). He continues: "we will fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir!" (p. 82) It is a global war, then, between Islam and the West in other places around the world as well as in England. "War has been declared against us. But we are armed" (p. 82). Muslims in England not only feel sad because of what is happening to their brothers around the world, but they try to follow the orders that come from those brothers and their action regarding the fatwa against *The Satanic Verses* is an example. Muslim international brotherhood, according to the novel, seems to represent a threat to national societies like the British. One of the main themes of the novel is to image the presence of Muslims in British society and to depict the clash between identities within a hybrid society. In this context, Muslims' strong ties with other Muslims outside Britain seem to complicate the relationship between Muslims and British.

Muslims have no individual life; they have to live together otherwise they would suffer from insecurity. The group divides into leader and followers, and the leader always sends orders and the followers always follow them without real thinking or discussion. Every member must be committed and is the possession of the group.

"Chad assumed that Shahid was their possession; they wanted to own him entirely; not a part of him could elude them" (p. 128). The group demands total loyalty from Shahid, that he be "closer to this gang than he was to his own family" (p. 57). He must also follow the orders of Islam by ignoring anything related to the West; Chad tells Shahid after finding him listening to music and dancing: "I am not sure you're a real brother" (p. 80).

The relationship between the leader and the group members, according to the novel, is very important for both sides. For Riaz, the leader, the group members are his followers through whom he can see the results of his ideas on the ground. He is like the playwright and they are the play actors; without them the play would be just a scenario and nothing would be actualised. "Riaz had little: no wife or children, career, hobby, house or possessions" (p. 173). In this respect he is weak and the strength comes from his followers. Without them he would be alone and he seems to hate being alone: "Shahid realized how rare it was to see Riaz alone; even as he worked at his desk someone was with them" (p. 171). The followers, on the other hand, seem weak without a leader. They cannot think individually, or discuss and share ideas without him; and they cannot take actions without his orders. "Riaz's absence [on one occasion] was annoying. Without their leader the atmosphere was desultory, dispersed; the group could become childish, forgetting the reasons for their actions" (p. 129). For Shahid, any group member without Riaz is "nothing", like "a dog without a master" (p. 218).

Muslims, then, are either dangerous leaders or mere followers. The leaders are dangerous, radical, single-minded, intolerant and unbearable to their parents and societies. The followers are mere followers ready to act, not ready to discuss. And because they follow the orders, they are identical to their leaders in all their negative attitudes. The leaders with their negative thinking and the followers with their negative acts seem to signal the negativity of the religion they belong to.

In fact, there are three Muslim leaders in the novel and all of them are depicted negatively, though in a different way. In addition to Riaz's negativity just mentioned, Khomeini is depicted as having similar attitudes because of his fatwa. He comes across as a dangerous killer who is against literature, creativity and books. The third leader is Moulana Darapuria and his only role in the novel is to confirm how Muslims and their leaders possess the same simple minds. "A devout local couple had cut open an aubergine and discovered that God had inscribed holy words into the mossy flesh. Moulana Darapuria had given his confirmation that the aubergine was a holy symbol" (p. 171).

From this we see that one of the main characteristics of Muslims in the novel is stupidity. They are sometimes "religious lunatics" (p. 251) and sometimes "cunning fools" (p. 187). When they demonstrate against *The Satanic Verses*, "the stupidity of the demonstration appalled him [Shahid]. How narrow they were, how unintelligent" (p. 225). And if they try to follow their religion, they are "simpletons [who] require strict rules for living, otherwise they would still think the earth sits on three fishes" (p. 186).

Another characteristic of Muslims is that they are aggressive. Throughout the novel Muslims attack people, places and ideas, verbally and physically. They deal aggressively with Shahid, the protagonist, more than once. They have the intention of killing Salman Rushdie only because he wrote a book. They fight with a woman and a little child. They attack a bookshop. They attack Deedee's house. Their weapons, in addition to their fists, are "a butcher's knife" (p. 18), "machetes, carving knives, hammers" (p. 239), and "a petrol bomb" (p. 273). They produce fear because they can do anything illegally under the justification of following their religion, Islam. England is not their country and its laws are not theirs. They illegally "use a private house in [a] public way" (p. 177) to display a miraculous aubergine. They demonstrate in the college illegally. They attack people and places illegally. They are "throat-cutters" (p. 244) and that is why "fear was of Chad and the others" (p. 239). An incident between Chad and a child shows clearly the aggressiveness of Muslims: "Chad clenched his weapon over the child's head, and waved it about. He might have wanted restraining. The posse had required a cleansing jihad, but this wasn't at all the sort of thing they'd considered" (pp. 138-139).

Here, Chad seems to represent Islam and the child appears to represent pure humanity. To try to kill a child under the title of jihad shows how the aggression of Islam and Muslims can get out of control.

Muslims do not like to study. Hat, for example, "instead of working at his books […] was spending time with Riaz" (p. 137). Once, when "Riaz had issued instructions to miss college … the brothers and sisters couldn't see the point; they thought everyone had made up their minds" (p. 180). It seems there is a distinction between being a Muslim and acquiring knowledge. They do not go to college or study, because they have an Islamic meeting, an Islamic role that should be played. Being a Muslim, then, would be at the expense of knowledge. To pair Islam and knowledge is like trying to juggle two balls in one hand; one would fall down.

This disjunction spreads to the relationship between Muslims and their fathers. "Riaz was kicked out of his parents' house for denouncing his own father for drinking alcohol. He also reprimanded him for praying in his armchair and not on his knees. He told his friends that if one's parents did wrong they should be thrown into the raging fire of hell" (p. 109). In addition, "Hat had been looking worried lately, as his father was beginning to suspect that instead of working at his books, he was spending time with Riaz" (p. 137). This implies that Muslims do not respect their fathers or their wishes. Muslims do not respect the family "rules" as they refuse to respect the rules of the country. They do not respect rules in general; they seek to follow the laws of their religion only. As a result, Islam and society's codes are in conflict. Moreover, if Muslims are unbearable to their closest family, it is to be expected that to the whole of society they would be the same.

Fundamentalist Islam – for it is clear this is the type of Islam Kureishi intends us to decode in the novel - does not only attract male Muslims; it attracts female Muslims

as well. Tahira, "a young woman wearing the hijab, with skin the colour of melon" (p. 35), also belongs to Riaz's group. Working shoulder to shoulder with male Muslims, she seems to signal to the equality between males and females in Islam. However, this positive is, in fact, negative because it means that all Muslims, males and females, are the same in their fundamentalism. She and Chad, as belonging to the same group, have similar goals and possess the same willingness to attack bookshops, burn books, hate the British and refuse to consider England as home. Among all the group members, Tahira could be seen as the only two-faced Muslim. One day, she followed Shahid to tell him: "from the beginning … I've liked you … … you are broader than the others" (p. 219). But at the end, Hat reveals to Shadid that she has another opinion about him: "Brother Chad and all of us, we trusted you – apart from Tahira, who say from the beginning you an egotist with an evil smile" (p. 235). Trust is very important for women, especially in Islam. But Tahira appears to say one thing while thinking the opposite. She hides her true feeling and so is not to be trusted.

Another characteristic of Tahira's personality is related to all Muslim women who wear the hijab. She told Chad: "I've noticed that you like wearing tight trousers… you brothers urge us to cover ourselves but become strangely evasive when it comes to your own clothes" (p. 105). Her observation hints to some kind of discrimination against women in Islam. Men are always asking them to cover themselves and keep hidden, as the world is only for men to live in freely, or at least to gain more freedom than women. In Islam, then, women are discriminated against by being less free than men. Furthermore, Tahira's depiction in *The Black Album* is a significant example of how Kureishi tries to stereotype the image of Muslims in spite of their real differences. She is similar to all the other Muslims in her fundamentalist goals and

actions. And if she has the "right" to be different, she will be different in order to show some other new negative that cannot be shown without a female Muslim. She wears the hijab and she has two faces. While Chad, for example, wears "tight trousers", she is discriminately asked "to cover" herself. Islam, obviously then, discriminates against women. In addition, she wears the hijab, but she is also hypocritical. In other words, she might wear hijab just in order to hide the opposite of what it should mean. As a result, Tahira's hijab could be seen as a way of showing hypocrisy and discrimination against women in Islam. It could be argued that one of the main reasons behind creating the character of Tahira in the novel is to write about this theme. Tahira, then, as a female, is similar to other male Muslims in some negatives (fundamentalism) and different from them in other negatives (discrimination). All in all, she is depicted negatively in her similarities and in her differences.

In fact, all the Muslim characters in the novel are depicted similarly to Tahira. Although they are all Muslims, they are depicted differently to show the different aspects of negativity in Islam. In spite of their similarities, Riaz is a man of theory and Chad is a man of action. The first is a leader and the second is a group member. These differences are needed to show that Islam is bad in theory and in practice, and its followers are bad whether they are leaders or belong to the masses. Muslims in Iran, Pakistan or England are the same. The fatwa comes from Iran; Muslims in Pakistan destroy their country; Muslims in England try to follow the fatwa and seek to destroy the country they are living in. Khomeini, the supreme leader and scholar in Iran, the government and the masses in Pakistan, and Muslim college students in England, all

therefore are the same. There is no difference in Islam and the result is the same negativity with regard to religious leaders, politicians, students and masses.

The most obvious negative episode that appears in *The Black Album* is the agitation surrounding the Rushdie Affair.[32] The novel depicts Muslim reaction against the publication of *The Satanic Verses* as a turning point because it reveals the hidden and true reality of Muslims in Britain. Muslims' aggressive reaction to Rushdie confirms, according to the novel, their inability to harmonize their religion with British values. However, the publication of the novel provokes an angry reaction from Muslims that manifests itself in different ways. Although the book is "sacrilege and blasphemy" (p. 169) to them, their burning of it shows them as enemies of books and knowledge in general. In addition, their aggressiveness appears undeniable when they declare an intention to kill the author. In trying to execute the Iranian fatwa they appear disloyal to the country they live in and in contempt of its rules. "Riaz had informed Chad they were rejoicing in the Ayatollah's action, and Chad had passed this on to the group" (p. 169). The affair shows once more how the order is produced by only one person, and that the group is then expected to put it into practice without any kind of real discussion. They are always "nodding in agreement" (p. 183). Moreover, merely by their demonstration against the book the group shows "the stupidity" (p. 225) of Muslims. All these negative attitudes are gathered at once to represent the Muslim identity in its most awful manifestation. *The Satanic Verses* affair triggers Muslims into openly and frankly voicing their true ideas hidden for so long.

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[32] *The Satanic Verses* is never named in *The Black Album*. However, it is clearly understood from the context of the novel and Kureishi's statements elsewhere.

It changes Shahid's life too. Before the publication of the novel he was in a dilemma. Sometimes he seemed to favour his English teacher, sometimes his Muslim friends. In the midst of *The Satanic Verses* agitation, he realises to be a Muslim means to be against books and knowledge; to be willing to kill a person because of a book, to implement orders without discussion, to follow an Iranian or Pakistani individual to do something illegal. In short, to be a Muslim means to be a Satanic Person. As a result, Shahid rejects Islam. He has gained from practical experience a true knowledge of the religion and its followers in London. From being inside a Muslim group, he has come to understand that Islam has made Pakistan a troubled country, and is trying to make Britain the same. He concludes: "I'm sick of being bossed around, whether by Riaz or Chad or God himself. I can't be limited when there is everything to learn and read and discover" (p. 272). It is very clear here that Riaz and Chad represent God and Islam for Shahid. Moreover, the Quran is old and "there must be more to living than swallowing one old book? What men and women do, and the things they make, must be more interesting than anything that God is supposed to do?" (p. 272)

Reading the novel from an Islamic Postcolonial Perspective

In an interview with MacCabe, Kureishi states that "colonialism hasn't come to an end … [It] has entered all our heads" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 45). For him, the colonial experience is still being reproduced. "To me, Indian restaurants with their sitar music, flocked wallpaper and pictures of the Taj Mahal on the wall, reproduced the colonial experience in this country for the ordinary person" (Kureishi, 2005a, p. 8). Colonialism, then, is still in process in Britain and if an Indian restaurant can reproduce it for him, a novel like *The Black Album* could reproduce it for Muslims.

Kureishi's Islam in general, and in the novel in particular, does not seem different from the Islam of brown sahibs.[33] After all, it is written to show support for Salman Rushdie.[34] According to Sardar and Davies in their book *Distorted Imagination*, *The Satanic Verses* was written from "an angle of attack formed by the Orientalist view of Islam" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 127). They believe that in spite of the formal end to colonialism, brown sahibs continue to play their customary roles. However, they are now "writers and commentators, novelists and international celebrities" (p. 80). Alongside Rudyard Kipling, Sardar and Davies include the names of V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie in the roll call of brown sahibs. The goal of these writers and novelists is to "grasp European civilization" which means downgrading "local history, literature and culture and identifying strongly with European history and cultural artefacts" (p. 79). As "Europe has always felt disturbed and threatened by Islam" (p. 34), these writers and novelists attempt to produce readings of Islam that are inflected by the type of Orientalism which "sought not to understand Islam but to dominate it, not to seek empathy with it but to ridicule it, abuse it and demonstrate its inferiority" (p. 41).

From an Islamic postcolonial perspective *The Black Album* is not the only work of Kureishi's that might be accused of "reproducing" colonialism. Kureishi's works in

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[33] Sardar and Davies identify the brown sahib as "a descendant of the pre-colonial monarchies and feudal landlords and a product of colonial administrations, which set out to produce a 'go-between' between the rulers and the ruled" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 77). They add "apart from an acute sense of inferiority, vis-a-vis indigenous culture, the groups and individuals selected for brown sahibdom shared three other main features: they had the wealth with which to buy education in the mother country, they possessed skills with which to manipulate the masses, and they had a sense of hereditary right in taking over the colonial administration" (p. 78).

[34] For Moore-Gilbert "Kureishi might be deemed vulnerable to the charge of being a 'coconut' - brown outside, white inside" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 210).

general, and particularly those dealing with issues of identity, Islam, Britishness and multiculturalism, portray Islam and Muslims in a broadly similar way. Arguably, this is caused by Kureishi's personal identity crisis. For him, adopting a critical position toward Islam is not merely a theoretical issue: it is a vital component in the discourse that has led to the construction of his own identity. He seems to think that this position is crucial because it is a measure of the extent to which he may be considered British, and not Pakistani. As Islam is related to Pakistan more than to Britain, the more he critiques Islam the more he can be seen to renounce a Pakistani identity. Kureishi's reading of Islam, then, cannot be read or understood outside of the context of his identity crisis.

Kureishi's stance might become more understandable if it is read in the light of his ideas regarding issues thrown up by identity in his autobiographical essay "The Rainbow Sign". Right from the beginning, as we have seen already, two identities were produced for him: the English and the Pakistani, since he "was born in London of an English mother and Pakistani father" (Kureishi, 2002d, p. 25). He chose the English, but because of racism the society around him chose the Pakistani. "I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else" (pp. 25-26). However, his "brown" Englishness was unacceptable to the English as they considered Pakistanis "dirty, ignorant and less than human – worthy of abuse and violence" (p. 29).

To solve his identity problem, and to find a common ground between himself and English society, Kureishi's strategy was to try to expand the meanings surrounding

Pakistani identity. It could be divided according to ideology and according to class. In Pakistan, there are the rich and the poor, in addition to Muslims and liberals. The English should be made aware of the "real" differences between these groups and avoid generalising their characteristics. There is a perspicuous difference between the rich and the poor; liberals and Muslims; the first is always civilised while the second is not. "The English misunderstood the Pakistanis because they saw only the poor people, those from the villages, the illiterates, the peasants, the Pakistanis who didn't know how to use toilets, how to eat with knives and forks because they were poor. If the British could only see them, the rich, the educated, the sophisticated, they wouldn't be so hostile. They'd know what civilized people the Pakistanis really were. And then they'd like them" (pp. 45-46).

Pakistani liberals are completely different from Muslims. "Shadowing the British, they drank whisky and read the *Times*; they praised others by calling them 'gentlemen'; and their eyes filled with tears at old Vera Lynn records" (p. 41). For them, a colonised liberal Pakistan is much better than an independent Islamised one. They "regretted, under the Islamization, the repudiation of the values which they said were the only positive aspect of Britain's legacy to the sub-continent" (p. 45). While the liberals are "landowners, diplomats, businessmen: powerful people" (p. 32), Muslims could be called as constituting the "masses" (p. 35). And while liberals say "we could be like Japan" (p. 35), "Islamization built no hospitals, no schools, no houses; it cleaned no water and installed no electricity" (pp. 35-36).

Islam is the reason behind all this backwardness in Pakistan because it is "an Islamic country" (p. 32) and because "God was always on the side of the government" (p. 36). Islam is a backward religion and even outside Pakistan exist characters like Elijah Muhammad in the USA, an example of a racist who described whites as "devils" and "preached separatism". He aggressively "ran his organization by charisma and threat" believing in superstitions and thinking himself possessor of the only truth on earth, "claiming that anyone who challenged him would be chastened by Allah" (p. 30). Pakistan represents the Islamic countries, Elijah Muhammad represents the Islamic leaders and the masses of Pakistan represent all Muslims around the world. Islam has no positives at all: this is the ultimate conclusion.

Having established the *real* differences between the rich and the poor; liberals and Muslims, it is time for Kureishi to set out with precision the identity that is his. As a child in England he considered his Pakistani uncles "important, confident people who took me to hotels, restaurants and Test matches, often in Taxis" (p. 25). Later when he went to Pakistan, he was "with landowners, diplomats, businessmen: powerful people" (p. 32). So, he clearly belongs to the rich, liberal Pakistan; not to the poor Muslim masses. He does not deserve to be the object of racism because he is civilised.

We might argue that Muslim identity in "The Rainbow Sign" is used to *magnetise* all the supposed negatives in the Pakistani identity in order that a high, clean, liberal one might be delineated, one that deserves respect, not racism, from the English. The Muslim identity seems to have been made a scapegoat for Kureishi's ambition to be accepted by the English. From a Muslim perspective, however, while some might

understand his position and have sympathy for him being a victim of racism and colonial prejudice, others might focus on the similarities between his discourse and the colonial one behind such articulations of the backwardness and the threat of Islam.

Strikingly, Kureishi's stereotypical portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Pakistan is quite similar to the portrayal of the Asian British Muslims in Britain and in Bradford in particular. In his essay "Bradford", Kureishi portrays Bradford as a stereotypical Pakistani village moved to Britain. "If I ignored the dark Victorian buildings around me, I could imagine that everyone was back in their village in Pakistan" (Kureishi, 2002b, p. 60). In another observation he notices: "I'd never known any other city, except perhaps Karachi, in which politics was such a dominant part of daily life" (p. 63). Like in any Pakistani village, in Bradford "the street was full of kids running in and out [and] the houses were overcrowded. …The clothes people wore were shabby and old; they looked as if they'd been bought in jumble sales or second-hand shops. And their faces had an unhealthy aspect: some were malnourished" (p. 61). Most of the women were "uneducated, illiterate [and] unable to speak English"; "The men had married Pakistani women, often out of family pressure, and frequently the women were from the villages. The Asian women had a terrible time in Bradford" (p. 63). In the ceremony of opening a school, "everything was disorganized" (p. 66). This Islamic-only girls' school is the choice of "a few earnest and repressed believers, all men, frightened of England and their daughters' sexuality?" And "because of the community's religious beliefs, so important to its members, the future prospects for the girls were reduced" (p. 68). After a conversation with the president of the Council of Mosques in Bradford, Kureishi discovers that his views "are extremely conservative and traditional views" (p. 69). When "a young Asian man, an activist

104

and local political star" recognised him as the writer of *My Beautiful Launderette*, "he started to curse me: I was a fascist, a reactionary. He was shouting. Then he seemed to run out of words and pulled back to hit me" (p. 64).

It comes as a surprise to learn that in spite of this stereotypical image, Kureishi reveals that he does not know Bradford well and has just an image of it. "To be honest, I've never been to Bradford really. I've been there for a few weeks and written something about it. But I didn't know it very well. And then I thought, well I don't really care. I mean, it's not really Bradford, it's in my mind" (Kureishi, 1999, p. 44). It could be inferred here that Kureishi "does not care" about the reality of Bradford, Islam and Muslims; he simply focuses on images he entertains of them in his mind. Islam and Muslims in Bradford are *imagined* in Kureishi's *non-fiction* essay "Bradford".[35] If this is the case, what is the difference between Kureishi's fiction and his non-fiction then? As far as the images of Islam and Muslims are concerned, there is arguably no major difference. Islam and Muslims in Kureishi's fiction and non-fiction are quite the same. Thus Kureishi, with all his negative views about Islam and Muslims inscribed in "The Rainbow Sign" and "Bradford", writes *The Black Album* to show why Shahid, or rather Kureishi, refuses to be Muslim and instead insists on being English, but this time as fiction.

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[35] The problem with writing imaginatively particularly in the non-fiction works is that it sometimes comes at the expense of realities. When Kureishi imagines Islam and Muslims in "Bradford", he confuses his imagination with their realities. Kureishi himself in his essay "Something Given: Reflections on Writing" explains how imagination could change realities in arts and which could be applied on the non-fiction writing too. He writes: "In the imaginative world you can keep certain people alive and destroy or reduce others. People can be transformed into tragic, comic, or inconsequential figures. They are at the centre of their own lives, but you can make them extras. You can also make yourself a hero or fool, or both. Art can be revenge as well as reparation" (Kureishi, 2002c, p. 19).

Bart Moore-Gilbert, however, argues that there are some positives in Kureishi's depiction of Muslims in the novel. "*The Black Album* programmatically counters many stereotypes about 'fundamentalism'" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 135). As an example he posits Riaz's group with "its desire for social justice, its hostility to the unrestrained capitalism of the Thatcher era, the second chance in life which it offers characters as diverse as Chad and Strapper, […] all represented positively" (p. 135). Moreover, "the degree of real threat posed by Riaz's group is put into perspective by the novel's references to the violence of the extreme Right" (p. 135). However, these positives are quite marginal in comparison with the centrality of the negative portrayal of Muslims in the novel. In fact, the mere use of the word "fundamentalists" to describe active Muslims in the novel is stereotypical. These positives of the fundamentalists are similar to the positives of the killer who, for example, loves kids or the drug addict who helps the poor. Marginal positives alone cannot balance the negative naming. *The Black Album*, in Kureishi's own words, is a novel about radical Muslims "who burn *The Satanic Verses* and, later, attack a bookshop" (Kureishi, 2005b, p. 97). It is written, mainly, to show Muslims as radicals who "burn" and "attack" and if there are some positives, as Moore-Gilbert notices, they do not prevent Kureishi from saying "'it's fascinating…this clash between a medieval religion and post-capitalism'" (Cavendish, 2004).

Further, as I have suggested above, Kureishi's image of Islam and Muslims in the novel seems to be influenced by Orientalism. Ahmed argues that Kureishi is one of those writers whose "knowledge of Islam is limited and usually derived from a

cursory reading of the orientalists" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164). If Kureishi believes in the backwardness and inferiority of Islam, he does not need to devise a new image: he just has to borrow some of the old colonial images, or the ones recycled by the new colonial writers. To take one example, following the age-old orientalist claim that Islam is a fake religion and God is just a man-made idea, Kureishi writes about Shahid's intellectual journey: "If, along with mythology, religions are among man's most important and finest creations – with God perhaps being his greatest idea of all – Shahid also learns how corrupt and stultifying these concepts can become" (Kureishi, 2009). Moreover, Moore-Gilbert also notices that Kureishi has borrowed "two of the oldest 'Orientalist' stereotypes, 'eastern' despotism and the superstitious nature of Islam, [which] recur in the treatment of Riaz and the unfortunate passages relating to the divinely-inscribed aubergine" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, pp. 147-48).

By presenting fundamentalists as the only Muslims in the novel, Kureishi confirms the stereotypical and orientalist image of Muslims as aggressive and threatening. Ranasinha argues that the novel "crudely and uncritically reflect[s] and embod[ies] rather than question[s] predominant fears, prejudices, and perceptions of practising British Muslims as 'fundamentalists'" (Ranasinha, 2007a, p. 239). The imaging of Islam as a threatening religion and of Muslims as fundamentalists is not new. It is one of the characteristics of much polemical and Orientalist writing against Islam. Said states: "The earliest European scholars of Islam, as numerous historians have shown, were medieval polemicists writing to ward off the threat of Muslim hordes and apostasy. In one way or another that combination of fear and hostility has persisted to the present day" (Said, 1995, p. 344).

According to Sardar and Davies, the portrayal of Islam as anti-modern is a colonial policy: "Colonial policy had confined religious law to the realm of customary personal law: Islam was traditional and therefore anti-modern and anti-progress" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 76). In addition, Kureishi presents Islam as an uncivilised religion that refuses to accept western modernity as well as certain of its manifestations like the arts. To portray Muslims burning *The Satanic Verses* without naming the novel might imply that Muslims are against the arts in general. Moore-Gilbert explains: "*The Satanic Verses* is never named as the text which Riaz's group burns. This has serious implications for the text's representation of Islam. Whereas *The Satanic Verses* affair was a one-off, one might infer from *The Black Album* that Muslims would be likely to react in a similar way to any kind of artistic representation which was felt to be against the spirit of Islam" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 148).

Just as "colonialist literature was informed by theories concerning the superiority of European culture" (Boehmer, 1995, p. 3), *The Black Album* is, arguably, influenced by the same theories. By focusing on the superiority of British values and the inferiority of Islam, the novel follows some of the methodologies of colonial discourse, particularly the construction of an unchanging Muslim identity - "The Oriental is given as fixed [and] stable" (Said, 1995, p. 308) – and the use of binaries. Riaz who represents Islam, and Deedee who represents liberal British culture, are depicted, in general, as opposites. *The Black Album*, in Moore-Gilbert's words, "is structured by the binary opposition, established at the outset, between the values represented by Riaz and Deedee respectively" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 144). Riaz is

fundamentalist, but Deedee is progressive. He is aggressive, but she is tolerant. He burns books and attacks bookshops, but she appreciates books and the freedom of speech. He works within a group and for a community, but she celebrates individualism. In an important sense therefore, the fixed Muslim identity of Muslims in Britain is similar to the fixed Oriental identity in orientalist discourse. This binary opposition inevitably represents the "British Muslim identity [in *The Black Album*] as fixed and not open to renegotiation" (Ranasinha, 2007a, p. 267). In the last analysis, Kureishi's imaging of Muslims and Islam is both derivative and self-serving.

Chapter Two:

Islam and Muslim Identities in Ali's *Brick Lane*

Brick Lane is an important novel about Muslims in Britain. Published in 2003, the novel was welcomed by the British media and readers who found it humorous, cleverly-written, and incorporating large themes like identity and the meaning of Britishness. One of its main successful features is its focusing on Muslims in London at a time when the relationship between Islam and the West had become a hugely debated issue. In addition to the important topic and time, the choice of Brick Lane as a setting for the novel makes such issues more specific.[36] Brick Lane is a street in London full of Bangladeshi Muslim inhabitants. For the Bangladeshis, it is something like an imaginary Bangladesh, or, in Rushdie's words, their "imaginary homeland", but for the British people, it is "a community all but invisible to the rest of London" (Lane, 2003). The novel tries to give a fictional image to life in Brick Lane as the writer observes it. Generally speaking, this fictional image has been welcomed by British people, whilst the Bangladeshi Muslims have not accepted it. Nevertheless, the public controversy aroused by the novel has raised its profile and reminded some of the controversy over *The Satanic Verses*.[37]

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[36] Sinha writes: "a new exciting voice of post-colonial Britain, Ali opens up the experience of minority groups to a much wider readership" (Sinha, 2008, p. 230). This in itself is a success for Ali and the minority she writes about which needs to be voiced and understood. However, if the novel in fact depicts the Bangladeshi Muslims in Brick Lane negatively, then the expected success instead becomes a disappointment.

[37] Matthew Taylor writes: "In the letter [written by some Muslim Bangladeshis] to *The Guardian Brick Lane* is compared to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*: 'what mischievous sarcasm! It painfully reminds us of the insulting name of Prophet Mohammed as 'Mahound' given by Salman Rushdie in his controversial *Satanic Verses*'" (Taylor, 2003).

Brick Lane narrates the story of Nazneen the Bangladeshi girl who comes to London as the new wife of Chanu, a Bangladeshi immigrant. When she is in Bangladesh, she believes strongly in Fate and the inability of human beings to change it. Consequently, she accepts Chanu without even seeing him following her father's suggestion and, of course, her Fate. However, in London, her belief in Fate begins to shake gradually. From being the "unspoilt girl from the village", as Chanu loves to say, she begins to realize that she can make her own decisions about how she would like to live. London offers her quite different challenges in addition to different solutions to those she was used to back home. It is when her personal belief in Fate does not seem appropriate to explain and to justify the new challenges that the foundation of her life becomes a new belief in her own power. Her only sister, Hasina, who lives in Bangladesh and suffers from the difficulties facing women there, keeps sending letters to Nazneen. These letters, in addition to the new challenges and solutions in London, help Nazneen to discover an ability to play a role in shaping her own destiny. *Brick Lane* is therefore a story of a Bangladeshi girl brought to London to live her life as an "unspoilt" woman, but who succeeds in becoming "spoilt" by choosing for herself the type of life she aspires to live.

Brick Lane could be read from a number of different perspectives such as the feminist and the postcolonial. As a first novel written by a young female writer, it is an attractive work because the characters seem real, the story is interesting and the themes discussed are current and important. Ali deserves her reputation as a well-known author and the novel deserves its huge readership. From a feminist perspective, *Brick Lane* presents a successful female transformation from oppression to freedom. Despite all her sufferings and difficulties, Nazneen by the end of the novel is the

opposite of Nazneen in the beginning. In Bangladesh and even in her first years in London, she is quite passive and unwilling to change her life. But this Nazneen gradually changes and becomes different, especially after refusing to go back to Bangladesh with her husband. This is the type of independent behaviour which might be expected to appeal to readers of feminist orientation. Ali has made it possible for the hidden to be revealed and seen to be dealt with. In short, the novel, from feminist and other western perspectives, is important and positive.

However, *Brick Lane*, from British Muslims' perspective, needs to be discussed extensively. Muslims in Britain and in Brick Lane in particular still feel neglected and marginalized. Ajmal Masroor who has "lived and worked in and around Brick Lane for most of [his] life" describes Brick Lane as the "cultural home" for Bangladeshis. He adds: "In spite of the discrimination, disadvantage and social exclusion they have faced, they have worked hard to create a comfortable home for themselves here in Brick Lane" (Masroor, 2006). Although they are British, they are still proud of their origin and religion. Brick Lane, for them, might be in London in reality, but it is something more, too. It is an "imaginary part" of their original home: Bangladesh. They are Bangladeshi and British at the same time, and racism and marginalisation do play a role. Islam complicates the issue more. Especially after 9/11, Muslims are always under scrutiny as representatives of a "threat" which is inside the country.[38] The British government backed the United States in its war against "terrorism" in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. The first two countries (Britain and the United States) seem to represent the West while the second two (Afghanistan and Iraq) represent

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[38] The image of Muslims being a threat to the West is not new. Edward Said notices that: "the earliest European scholars of Islam, as numerous historians have shown, were medieval polemicists writing to ward off the threat of Muslim hordes and apostasy. In one way or another, that combination of fear and hostility has persisted to the present day" (Said, 1995, p. 344).

Islam. Within this context, Muslims in Britain – particularly those who look conservative – have become possible threats. In addition to racism and marginalisation, Islamophobia was born. For Chris Allen, "post-9/11 reificatory processes have therefore both re-established and newly established Muslims as chimerical, monstrous others, drawing upon the legacy of anti-Muslimism endemic to the European mindset" (Allen, 2005, p. 50). Nevertheless, at this critical moment, many Muslims announce that Al-Qaeda fighters represent themselves only and that Muslims are against terrorism.[39] They try to make their voice heard seeking a better and more *real* understanding of their belief. Like all the rest of British people, they are peaceful citizens who are against Al-Qaeda and they do not deserve being accused of "not belonging" all the time.[40] Conducting a research study under the title of *Attitudes to Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism among British Muslims*, Humayan Ansari found that "it was clear that the overwhelming view among [British] Muslims was that the events of September 11 were terrorist acts and wrong" (Ansari, 2005, p. 159).

While many British Muslims were trying to bridge the gap, suddenly, *Brick Lane* was published and received a huge welcome from British readers. Having been written by a writer with a Bangladeshi name, *Brick Lane* appears to show the "reality" that the British reader is hungry for.[41] The negative portrayal of the Bangladeshi Muslims

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[39] Modood argues that Muslims are against terrorism and against, too, the military American attack against Muslim countries. He writes: "the majority of Muslims, whilst condemning the terrorist attacks on the United States, opposed the bombing campaign in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq" (Modood, 2006, p. 47).

[40] Muslims are part of the British nation and the united nations of Europe. Modood writes: "we must rethink 'Europe' and its changing nations so that Muslims are not a 'Them' but part of a plural 'Us', not mere sojourners but part of its future" (Modood, 2006, p. 47).

[41] For many British readers, arguably, Ali reveals Bangladeshis in the same way Kureishi does Pakistanis and Rushdie Indians. Thus in a sense, Ali's representation of the Bangladeshis in Brick Lane

meets the expectations of many of the British readers focusing specifically on the "strangeness" of a given Muslim ethnic community within British society. However, the depiction of the Bangladeshi Muslims as strangers and different does not help Muslims' struggle for equality.[42] For their part, the Bangladeshi Muslims were outraged at their negative depiction in the novel and the huge welcome it has received owing to the Bangladeshi identity of the writer. They had hoped that writers of Bangladeshi-origin might be the bridge by which their voice might be heard properly by British readers. Mahmoud Rauf, chairman of the Brick Lane Business Association stated: "she is definitely a good writer," referring to Ali, "but she didn't use her skill to the benefit of the community" (Lea and Lewis, 2006). Such writers, the Bangladeshi Muslims assume, will carry the burden of their problems and sufferings, their demands and aims for a better life and understanding. Of course, Ali has the right to write whatever she wants, but the community has the right to expect and the right to become disappointed.

Although *Brick Lane* is not the first novel about the Bangladeshis in London, it could be considered as the first one to focus on the experience of Bangladeshi women in London.[43] Putting to one side whether it is a positive representation or not, the mere

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and Bangladesh is similar to Rushdie's. In Harish Trivedi's words: "for many western readers, in fact, Rushdie speaks for India in a way which seems not only representative but authoritative, and his version of India is often taken to be the 'real' India" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 156).

[42] It could be argued that when Muslims are depicted as strangers and totally different from the other British citizens, the process of centralising the superior and marginalising the inferior becomes active. However, the strangeness could transform to an acceptable, if not favourable, difference within multiculturalism. This might explain, partly, why "Muslim politics in Britain clearly includes an advocacy for multiculturalism" (Modood, 2006, p. 52).

[43] Sunita Sinha in her book, *Post-colonial Women Writers*, states that "though Monica Ali is not the first person to write about the Bangladeshi communities who live in Brick Lane, Syed Manzural Islam's *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* (1997) and Faruck Dhondy's *East End at Your Feet* (1976) and *Come to Mecca* (1978) being the previous books dealing with the Bangladeshi communities, Monica

focusing on the Bangladeshi women in particular and the Bangladeshi community in general might in itself have been used to advantage. Such novels shed light on the issues that the minorities face and spark a debate which might lead to better understanding. Although Pakistani British Muslims "are the largest and dominant individual group" (Peach, 2005, p. 20) among Muslims in the UK, "Tower Hamlets in the East End of London [which is the centre of the Bangladeshi population in Britain] has the highest percentage of Muslim population of all the local authorities in the UK" (p. 28). Consequently, Tower Hamlets and its Bangladeshi Muslim inhabitants, in a quite specific way, represent Islam and Muslims in the UK. *Brick Lane* does raise some important issues about Muslims in London, such as: identity, racism, home, terrorism and the position of women in Islam. Raising these issues in a hugely readable novel could open the door to the exchange of different ideas between Muslim and non-Muslim readers. This public discussion could provide an important opportunity for Muslims to try to show their own ideas and beliefs.

Indeed, the depiction of the Bangladeshi women in the novel is not always negative. In spite of the terrible life of Hasina, for example, she seems quite strong when fleeing from home. To flee from home in such a way means rejecting the father's way of controlling the house and being willing to pay the price of freedom. The society forces her to work as a servant or to become a prostitute; in both she is the loser, but the very fact of continuing to fight to change her life provides an inspiration for Nazneen. After the death of her baby son, Nazneen follows a similar path of struggle

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Ali's *Brick Lane* is the first novel to focus almost exclusively on the lives of Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlet" (Sinha, 2008, p. 233).

as her sister but via a different route. While Hasina fights directly and immediately, Nazneen fights indirectly and gradually. Both sisters flee from home; Hasina openly and Nazneen more covertly by marrying Chanu. The father's home does not seem comfortable for the three women – the mother and the two sisters – because the mother kills herself, Hasina flees, and Nazneen chooses escape through marriage to Chanu. Though the two sisters do not accept their condition in their husbands' homes, they respond differently, with different results. Hasina leaves the husband she had loved, but who hits her, only to face greater trials; whereas Nazneen leaves her arranged husband only in the end, and to achieve independence. This might confirm that husbands, whether loved or arranged, are always the same in harming women and, at the same time, women are always the same in fighting back. If Hasina and Nazneen represent Bangladeshi women's conditions at present, Shahana, the rebellious elder daughter of Nazneen, could represent the better future. Supported by her mother, Shahana seems stronger than her mother and aunt and she succeeds in achieving her main goal which is to stay in England and to live free from the control of Bangladeshi society and her father. Hasina, Nazneen and Shahana can therefore be seen as three positive examples of women who contradict the negative images of Muslim women in the West. In this respect, the novel "offers a finely textured corrective to those accounts which portray them [the Bangladeshi women] as elective mutes, unthinking purveyors of Third World Tradition" (Sinha, 2008, p. 233).

Another positive aspect of the novel is Ali's depiction of the meetings of the Bengali Tigers which is supposed to consist of a group of radical Muslims. These meetings are full of different, and sometimes opposite, ideas relating to Muslims' problems in

London or outside. The diverse, often conflicting, ideas mean that Muslims, in spite of having the same religion, are different and free to express their ideas. Islam here does not force its followers to stop thinking individually or to stop expressing their ideas. Therefore, to be Muslim does not mean to be just another copy of another Muslim which led to total ignorance of the sense of individuality.[44] In addition, when Muslims discuss the problems of Muslims in London or abroad and think of the best way to deal with them, they often react to the situations and the problems they face. Muslims here are not against the West, but against the problems that Muslims face in the West. This is something crucial in understanding the mentality of Muslims in the West. For Muslims, and especially those who live in the West, there are some popular images of a fixed set of tenets, promoting oppression and violence, at odds with principles of freedom and equality. Ali confronts these stereotypes, and presents the characters' anger not as a mythical, incomprehensible hatred of the West but as a desperate reaction to their unequal status in that society (Hiddleston, 2005, p.66). [45]

Nonetheless, apart from these few apparently positive points, the novel can be said to provide a stereotypical image of Brick Lane. According to the novel, the reasons behind Nazneen's sufferings are Islam and the Bangladeshi culture which empowers

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[44] Fred Halliday in his book *Britain's First Muslims* writes that there are two beliefs about Muslim identity in Britain. The first is that "Islamic migrants in Britain share a common identity" and the second is that "all Muslims do share certain tenets in common and in this minimal sense there can be said to be a 'Muslim community' in Britain." However, he then concludes: "there are differences between Muslims" (Halliday, 2010, p. 137).

[45] In spite of this positive view of the Islamic group, Hussain thinks that its depiction has a negative aspect, too. She writes: "Ali ultimately shows the Bangladeshi community at odds with itself. Even the community's attempt to create solidarity through the Islamic group proves unsuccessful, and results in a shambles as the men resort to squabbling between themselves" (Hussain, 2005, p. 103).

males over the females. Because of these reasons, whenever there is a man in control, the woman is oppressed whether she lives in Bangladesh or in London. Therefore, to empower the woman, Islam and Bangladeshi culture should be superseded by western culture. Nazneen lives in London, but her life is as miserable as when she lived in Bangladesh. Changing the places without changing the cultures cannot make a difference. Nazneen's mentality is shaped by the Bangladeshi culture represented by the relationship between her parents, and by Islam which is represented by the Quran. Hamid, Nazneen's father, describes his wife to Nazneen as "naturally a saint. She comes from a family of saints" (Ali, 2004, p. 15). This saying is very significant. As repeated by Nazneen's father, who is a male, describing his wife, who is a female, it could be assumed that this saying represents how males see females in the Bangladeshi society. Repetition of this saying frequently seems, in one way or another, to be used as a justification of all male behaviour, whether good or bad, towards the females. Hamid does not describe himself as a saint and that is why he is free in doing whatever he wants in his dealing with his wife. He is not a saint; so he may perform good or bad deeds. Rupbad, Nazneen's mother, however, is a saint. She should only perform good deeds. Male action can be good or bad, but the female reaction must always be good. Therefore, whatever he does, she must always accept and stay calm because she is a saint. It is essential to notice that she believes that her sufferings and difficulties in life are related to God, not to herself or the people around her, and that is why she must accept everything. She said: "I have been put on this earth to suffer" (p. 398). From this Bangladeshi culture Nazneen has learned to accept sufferings calmly without displaying any intention to change them.

In addition to this culture, Islam, represented by the Quran, also plays a crucial role. Sometimes, when she becomes fed up with her life, Nazneen reads the Quran "seeking refuge from Satan" (p. 19). For her, within the context of her miserable life, to wish to change means to follow Satan whilst the Quran, on the other hand, helps her to ignore the "Satanic wishes" and to suffer calmly without any intention to change. "The words [of the Quran] calmed her stomach and she was pleased" (p. 20). The Quran in this context is depicted as a book that does not seem to be able to stop her sufferings, but it tries, however, to convince her to be as patient as possible. The Quran tries to stop her from thinking of fighting her pain without stopping the pain itself. There is a clash between the holy book and Nazneen's pain. "She recited in her head her favourite sura …… but the pain in her knee and her hands and her ankle destroyed the verses" (p. 57). The pain supersedes the Quran because it is not able, it is assumed, to solve women's problems and to understand their needs and pain.

The depiction of the imam in the novel is also quite significant. Bearing in mind that he is the spiritual leader of the Bengali Tigers which is a group consisting of some young Muslims in London, the imam, an old man wearing women's shoes, "had only recently been imported … he had not the slightest idea what was going on" (p. 242). The imam, through this depiction, does not seem to fit the leadership position of this young group. He is old and they are young; he is "imported" and they live in London; he does not know "what was going on", but they need him to lead and to show them what to do. Moreover, the women's shoes that he wears might signal the real position of women's issues in his belief. Like the women's shoes which are under his feet, the women issues, it might be implied, are the last of his priorities. The imam in the

119

novel, in general, does not seem to concern himself with women's issues in spite of the clear and diverse sufferings of women in the novel. One of the main reasons for the imam's lack of understanding of women's problems, according to the novel, is his masculinity. The man cannot understand fully woman's needs. While she was pregnant and while she was thinking of the difficulty of praying as such, Nazneen thought: "if any imam had ever been pregnant, would they not have made it compulsory to sit?" (p. 69) Like the young Bengali Tigers, the woman in Islam should follow the imam who does not understand her. The imam in the novel is depicted in a way that does not make him worth following. He positively should not be followed because, as Chanu tells Nazneen: "When the imam speaks, it is not the word of God" (p. 422).

The mosque in the novel has negative connotations too. Firstly, mosques can be built by good or bad people. Razia's husband, who began building a mosque, "is not God-conscious" but "mean" (p. 124). The point here is that to build a mosque, in itself, does not mean that the builder is a good Muslim. In fact, building mosques might become negative especially if it comes at the expense of spending money on something more important. He built a mosque but allows his children to go hungry. Razia sarcastically describes her husband, who is "building mosques and killing [his] own children", as a "Holy man" (p. 125). Secondly, mosque schools that teach the Quran are in fact useless, as implied by Chanu's rhetorical question: "Do they call it education? Rocking around like little parrots on a perch, reciting words they do not understand" (p. 197). Thirdly, we are told that the police questioned the imam of the mosque and this might lead us to imagine a relationship between the mosque and law

breaking (p. 206). Overall the depiction of the mosque in the novel suggests it does not seem to play any positive role in society. Building mosques costs a lot and they do not give society anything valuable.

Chanu, Nazneen's husband, represents the male "westernised" Muslim intellectual in London. When he first arrived in London, he was full of dreams and he worked hard to be successful. He reads a lot, has different degrees and certificates, and he seems to be a hard worker. However, in spite of all his efforts, he is unable to achieve his main aim: to be respected. "He worked hard for respect but he could not find it" (p. 203). In order to be respected in London, Chanu's strategy is to be as westernised as possible and this led him to humiliate the Bengali Muslims in Brick Lane to prove his unique willingness to be respected by the English. He describes the Bengali Muslims negatively so as to be seen positively by the English. He is disappointed because "these people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads" (p. 34). Chanu, the Bengali Muslim intellectual, drinks alcohol, does not pray, does not read the Quran or allow his daughter to study it in the mosque school, and does not respect his "brothers", either on account of their shared nationality or their belief in Islam. It seems all this is done to prove that, as he declares, "I am westernized now" (p. 45). Chanu, then, in one of his life stages, represents those Muslim intellectuals who try to be English at the expense of their Muslim "brothers". But the more he humiliates the Bengali Muslims, the more he feels humiliated by the English.

Chanu, especially in his relationship with Nazneen, has two personalities. While the apparent personality is western, the hidden one is Bengali. As a person, he seems western, but as a husband, he seems Bengali. Without Nazneen, the traditional Bengali side of his personality would not appear. From the beginning, he chose Nazneen as a wife because she was "a girl from the village: totally unspoilt" (p. 23). If "western" London is the imaginary country of his first personality, the Bengali "village" is the imaginary country of his second personality. Nazneen, then, could be considered as the mirror by which we see the hidden side of Chanu.

The representative Islamic radical in the novel is Karim. England is his country and he speaks English like a native. However, Islam is his main identity. He is well aware of his Islamic responsibility to help his Muslim brothers all over the world, but he believes in the idea of thinking globally but working locally. For these reasons he establishes the Bengali Tigers and becomes their main active member. Karim has his own reading of Islam and the personality of the Prophet Muhammad. He blames his father because "he never made any trouble for anyone … he thinks he is Mahatma Gandhi. He thinks he is Jesus Christ. Turn the cheek". But "what about Muhammad? Peace be upon him, he was a warrior" (p. 233). He sees the Prophet as a warrior and believes that he should follow him. Here, in imaging the Muslim activists as violent, Ali invokes an old stereotypical image of Muslims.[46] Islam, it could be implied, unlike Christianity (Jesus) and Hinduism (Gandhi), is the main source of violence.

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[46] This image is still vivid as Edward Said notices in *Covering Islam* that "it is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists" (Said, 1981, p. 26).

Despite apparently being the most conservative and active Muslim in the novel, Karim is, in fact, corrupted due to his relationship with Nazneen. (It is striking that Karim's beard becomes bigger after he has slept with Nazneen). The more he gets corrupted, the more he displays his conservatism. He shows that conservative Muslims are corrupted and represent a threat to Muslim and the British societies alike. When Karim left England looking for "a war" to fight in, he followed, again, his Prophet "the warrior". His departure was the beginning of a peaceful life in Brick Lane thus indicating that Islamic conservatism was the reason behind all the violence in the first place.

It is interesting to notice that Karim and Chanu, in spite of their differences, are similar in leaving Britain and in failing to bring happiness to Nazneen. Chanu, the westernised Bengali, and Karim, the conservative Muslim, are from Nazneen's point of view the same. She left them because they represent the two "enemies" of her freedom: Bangladeshi culture and conservative Islam. Nazneen stays in London because she seeks freedom, and they leave London because their ideas do not suit London. Those who live in Brick Lane, then, should leave their Bangladeshi culture and conservative Islam if they want to live peacefully and happily in London, otherwise, their country of origin would be better for them and the British, too. Karim and Chanu's leaving reminds us of the advice that Changez gives to the Pakistanis and the Indians in London in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. He revealed that "to be accepted they must take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 210). Because Karim and

Chanu could not "take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages", they prefer to be "there".

The negative depiction of Muslims in the novel might be understandable if we consider the position of Bangladesh in Ali's life. Born in Bangladesh, she moved to Britain at the age of three. When she was a child, she stopped speaking and understanding Bengali after coming to Britain. She studied at British schools and universities and she is now a well-known British novelist. From her name, Monica Ali (Monica English, Ali Bangladeshi), she seems one of those writers who tries to write their own hybrid identity crisis through fiction. Like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, Ali is Muslim in the eyes of the British people because of her name, and British in the eyes of the Bangladeshi people because of her ideas. Ali's complicated identity is similar to Karim's, the protagonist in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia,* who notices: "to the English we were always … Pakis" (p. 53), but his Indian mother told him once: "you're not an Indian. You've never been to India … you're an Englishman, I'm glad to say" (p. 232). As a result, he describes himself as "an Englishman born and bred, almost" (p. 3). Like Karim, Ali has tried to find her own identity, to create harmony between her inside and her outside which, arguably, are opposites. Fiction for such writers is an "identity card" by which readers may recognise the identity that the writer prefers.

Ali has the right to write about her identity experience, but this might come at the cost of the Bangladeshi identity. Brick Lane inhabitants are well aware of the complicated

relationship between the individual and the community in such matter**s.** For example, one of them accused Ali of wanting "to be famous at the cost of a community" (Lea and Lewis, 2006a). In the novel, there are two countries: Bangladesh and Britain, and two ways of life: the Bangladeshi and the British. Nazneen, the protagonist, is offered these two countries and ways of life. As the first is depicted negatively and the second positively, she chooses to live in Britain and to let her daughters live the British way of life. From the perspective of Brick Lane inhabitants and by generalizing the idea of "at the cost of a community", it could be argued that in order to justify her choice of the British identity, as a reason in addition to others, Ali imaged Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi in *Brick Lane* negatively. The Bangladeshi people, then, are, in a sense, used by Ali to show the uncivilized identity that she abandoned in comparison to the civilized one that she embraced.

Although she does not live in Brick Lane, Ali's childhood seems to participate in creating a special image of this "Bangladeshi" street in London. In fact, Brick Lane, as a street in London, in itself is meaningless unless it is used as a way to reach its inhabitants: the Bangladeshis. For Monica Ali, "*Brick Lane* is in many ways a typical first novel, drawing on concerns and ideas that shaped [her] childhood" (Ali, 2007). Therefore, to understand the novel, it is worthwhile to try to scrutinise these "concerns and ideas" that caused her to image Bangladesh in such a way. Because of the war, Monica's mother with her two children (Monica and her brother) went to Britain and waited for the father to flee. Nobody received the mother and her children in Britain and she decided to go back to Dhaka, but her husband wrote "are you mad? Have you forgotten the small matter of the war?" (Ali, 2003a) Because of the war the

mother would be "mad", according to the father, if she returned to Bangladesh. Later on, as Monica mentioned, "my father escaped from East Pakistan, over the border to India" (Ali, 2003a) then to Britain. For Monica, aged three, Bangladesh was the country of war and fear in comparison to Britain the country of peace. To live peacefully, even after the war, the family decided to stay in Britain forever. For the father, Britain is better, especially since he was about to be killed when he was in Bangladesh. He cancelled all plans to go home, saying "I just got stuck here, that's all" (Ali, 2003a). For the mother, Britain is better because it is her original home and when she was in Bangladesh, she suffered from the "experience of utter social and cultural dislocation" (Ali, 2007). For Monica and her brother, she declared "we stopped speaking to him [her father] in Bengali and then we stopped even understanding" (Ali, 2003a). Like many other migrants, although the family was forced to leave Bangladesh, it has made its own decision to leave Bangladesh forever and to exchange the Bengali language for the English one to be used at home at least.

After leaving Bangladesh and the Bengali language, Ali tried to "rebel" against Bangladeshi culture. She revealed: "when I grew up in an Asian part of Bolton, what we would do when we were out of sight of our parents was to get on the tight jeans or mini-skirts or whatever, and that was our way of rebelling" (Ali, 2006, p. 18). She does not seem to have rebelled against the way of dressing only, but against the Bangladeshi culture which is represented by its rules and norms. It is interesting to notice that Ali, at her different ages, found it necessary to rebel against something related to Bangladesh. When she was a child, she rebelled against the Bengali language. When she was a teenager, she rebelled against the Bangladeshi dress and

126

culture. Writing *Brick Lane,* arguably, is her more recent action of rebellion. This rebellious personality of Ali reminds us of the rebellious Shahana, the first daughter of Nazneen, and her continuous disagreement with her father, Chanu. Shahana wears miniskirts, does not like speaking Bengali at home, and flees from home when she is about to be forced to go to Bangladesh. Ali has said: "there's a lot of me in Shahana, the rebellious teenage daughter, and maybe a bit of her still left in me" (Ali, 2007). In addition to Ali, her English mother can be traced in the life of Nazneen in the novel but in an opposite way. Ali asks:

> Why did I write about Nazneen? I think, but I cannot be sure, that the source was my mother, who is white and grew up in England. She made the opposite journey to Nazneen's, moving to Bangladesh (East Pakistan as it was then) to marry, knowing little of the culture and religion, speaking not a word of the language. When I was a child she often told me about that experience of utter social and cultural dislocation. I thought about it a lot (Ali, 2007).

Moreover, her father plays a role because one of her sources is "the stories that my father used to tell about village life" (Ali, 2003a). Therefore, Ali's imaginary Bangladesh is created by her "rebellious" personality, the "utter social and cultural dislocation" of her mother that Ali "thought about it a lot", and the stories of her father, in addition, of course, to the relationship between Bangladesh and war when she was three.

In spite of her negative point of view towards Bangladeshis, she attempts to present herself as not fully Bangladeshi and not fully English. She writes: "growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider" (Ali, 2003a). She is generally right, but specifically wrong. Generally speaking, the English will consider her Bangladeshi because of her father and the Bangladeshi people will

consider her English because of her mother. However, her point of view is clearly English. Forgetting her surname and the colour of her skin, Monica Ali is an English "insider". Germaine Greer states of Ali: "she writes in English and her point of view is, whether she allows herself to impersonate a village Bangladeshi woman or not, British. She has forgotten her Bengali, which she would not have done if she had wanted to remember it. When it comes to writing a novel, however, she becomes the pledge of our multi-ethnicity" (Greer, 2006). [47]

Striving to be more English and less Bangladeshi, Ali has her own perspective by which she makes observations on and compares Britain and Bangladesh, or the British and the Bangladeshis. This perspective depends apparently upon her personal experience more than the "reality" that she claims to seek for. A striking example of how her personal perspective affects the reality is her reading of Naila Kabeer's book *The Power to Choose*. At the end of *Brick Lane*, Ali writes in her acknowledgements: "I am deeply grateful to Naila Kabeer, from whose study of Bangladeshi women garment workers in London and Dhaka (*The Power to Choose*) I drew inspiration" (Ali, 2004, p. 493). In the preface of this study, Kabeer states a crucial observation which she describes as "puzzling":

> In Bangladesh, a country where strong norms of purdah, or female seclusion, had always confined women to the precincts of the home and where female participation in public forms of employment had historically been low, the apparent ease with which women appeared to have abandoned old norms in response to new opportunities went against the grain of what has been presented in the development literature as one of the least negotiable patriarchies in the world. By contrast, in Britain, a secular country accustomed to the presence of

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[47] In a letter published in *The Guardian*, Rushdie criticized Greer's position towards *Brick Lane* reminding the readers of her critique of him over *the Satanic Verses* and saying "now it's Monica Ali's turn to be deracinated by Germaine" (See Rushdie, *The Guardian*, 29 July 2006).

women in the public arena, and with a tradition of female factory employment going back over a hundred years, particularly in the clothing industry, Bangladeshi women were largely found working from home, in apparent conformity with purdah norms (Kabeer, 2000, p. viii).

Reading this extract neutrally, it could be inferred that the condition of the Bangladeshi women garment workers in Bangladesh is better than in Britain. However, what Ali understands from this book seems completely the opposite. Michael Perfect in his article "The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali's Brick Lane" mentions this point:

> In Kabeer's account, then, it is the women in Dhaka rather than London who are experiencing an increase in personal agency; indeed, in their 'power to choose'. Crucially, Ali's novel seems to invert rather than replicate this finding. During the course of *Brick Lane*, Hasina becomes increasingly powerless and socially excluded, while Nazneen undergoes such a powerful emancipation that she is finally 'startled by her own agency' (p. 10) (Perfect, 2008, p. 118).

Not only does Ali "invert rather than replicate" the finding of the book, according to some Bangladeshi Muslims living in Brick Lane she also does the same with their "reality". Their opposition to *Brick Lane*, the novel and the film, was expressed in different ways. They marched against the film and sent letters to the author and the newspapers when the novel was firstly published in 2003. Through the marches and the letters, they succeeded in making their voice heard. According to different newspapers articles, some of the Bangladeshi Muslims were furious at having been depicted negatively by Monica Ali in *Brick Lane*. The novel, they claimed, is insulting for being named after the street, (Cacciottolo, 2006), full of lies (Lea and Lewis, 2006b) and racist (Lea and Lewis, 2006a). They argued Ali was influenced by her non-Sylheti father (Lewis, 2006); she knew nothing about them, and she wanted to be famous at the cost of the community (Lea and Lewis, 2006b).

In spite of the Bangladeshi Muslims' outrage at their misrepresentation, Monica Ali insists on the "authenticity" of her novel. She states: "a writer from a minority does carry an extra expectation of being a cheerleader for that minority. That's understandable. But I feel my duty is to tell the truth as I see it, not to be a mouthpiece or write a sociological study" (Ali, 2003b). She is telling "the truth" about some people who do not recognize themselves in the novel. Ali's insistence on the authenticity of the novel is due to its importance in making the novel valuable and readable. For many readers, authentic *Brick Lane* explores a community they do not have much knowledge about. One commentator writes: "*Brick Lane* has everything: richly complex characters, a gripping story and an exploration of a community that is so quintessentially British that it has given us our national dish, but of which most of us are entirely ignorant" (Bedell, 2003). Moreover, in 2003 Ali was named by *Granta Magazine* as one of twenty "Best of Young British Novelists" partly, at least, because of her authentic novel. Ian Jack, the editor of the magazine and member of the committee who voted for Ali, wrote: "we liked the book because we (none of us Bengalis from east London) felt that it showed us a glimpse of what life might be like among one of the largest and least described non-white communities in Britain" (Jack, 2003). The claim of authenticity, then, has been very important for the novel in gaining it attention and praise.[48]

However, in addition to Yasmin Hussain who thinks, in her book *Writing Diaspora*, that the novel's authenticity is "a marketing myth" as it "provides an outsider's view of the Bangladeshi community and a rather negative one at that" (Hussain, 2005, p.

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[48] Claiming authenticity is very important for marketing. It provides money and, for some, encourages otherness. Graham Huggan explains: "for every aspiring writer at the 'periphery,' there is a publisher at the 'centre,' eager to seize upon their work as a source of marketable 'otherness'" (Huggan, 1994, p. 29).

92), Germaine Greer strongly criticised the claimed authenticity of *Brick Lane* foregrounding the highly positive reception of the novel: "none of this would have happened if Ali had not created her own version of Bengali-ness. As a British writer, she is very aware of what will appear odd but plausible to a British audience" (Greer, 2006). Greer's criticism is that Ali "creates" an imaginary Brick Lane to meet the expectations of the British who believe that Ali is an authentic Bangladeshi novelist because of her name. Greer explains that "the fact that Ali's father is Bangladeshi was enough to give her authority in the eyes of the non-Asian British, but not in the eyes of British Bangladeshis" (Greer, 2006). I think that Greer's article is very important for two reasons. Firstly, she justifies the Bangladeshi Muslims' declared intention to stop the filming of *Brick Lane* – which in fact strengthened their position toward the novel and its filming. Secondly and more importantly, Greer's position played a crucial role in empowering Muslims' position in their long-term conflict with some literary scholars and novelists. From the controversial debate over Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the conflict has been imaged as being between the "ignorant" Muslims and the "brilliant" artists.[49] Muslims are always *advised* to learn the distinction between fact and fiction and the meaning of freedom of speech. *The Satanic Verses* is only a novel and the Swedish cartoons are only cartoons. In such debates, Muslims are imaged as standing against fiction or the freedom of speech; they are the uncivilised in conflict with the civilised.[50] Within this context, Greer concludes, however, that "the community has the moral right to keep the film-makers

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[49] In order to be allowed to enter modernity, Muslims should accept being imaged as ignorant and inferior. This is modernity's price. Sardar and Davies write: "the Muslim is expected to accept the distorted imagination as self-description. Internalizing the images of ignorance is the price for their entry to modernity" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 4).

[50] In an article published in *The Guardian*, 27 October 2007, Leader writes: "like *The Satanic Verses* book burnings nearly 20 years ago, this appears to be the ignorant getting outraged about the artistic and the acclaimed. As has been suggested in more or less polite terms, they should just butt out."

out" (Greer, 2006) and states clearly that "Bengali Muslims smart under an Islamic prejudice that they are irreligious and disorderly, the impure among the pure, and here was a proto-Bengali writer with a Muslim name, portraying them as all of that and more" (Greer, 2006).

Authenticity is a contested term which is read according to the different contexts and perspectives of those that use it. Ana Maria Sanchez-Arce, for example, individualizes authenticity and limits its representation to the individual. "Being authentic now" she writes "is related to staying true to our inner selves rather than to accepting the social position into which we are born. This is a more individualistic definition of authenticity" (Sánchez-Arce, 2007). In contrast to this individualistic authenticity, Charles Lindholm in his book *Culture and Authenticity* reminds us of the function of authenticity in uniting the people of a society. He states: "authenticity gathers people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity, and a surpassing sense of belonging" (Lindholm, 2008, p.1). Authenticity can therefore represent an individual or a society; the representation is embedded in authenticity itself according to whether it is narrowly or more widely conceived.

The importance of representation in postcolonial discourse is closely connected to the issue of authenticity. Authenticity can be linked with "the demand for a rejection of the influence of the colonial period in programmes of decolonization" (Ashcroft, 1998, p. 21). Authenticity within the postcolonial context is strongly linked with the broader need for postcolonial discourse to represent the values and ways of thinking

of colonised peoples; postcolonial writing achieves its authentic purpose by challenging colonial discourse and encapsulating the voice of the once-colonised. Postcolonial writers may be read as authentic writers either by the people they write about or by the people they write for. While some Muslim readers consider Ali, for example, inauthentic, some British readers consider her authentic.

From the perspective of the formerly colonised, authenticity is a vital issue; in societies targeted by colonial discourse the postcolonial writer restores authentic values and becomes "the voice of the people" (Gordimer, 1973, p.11). Through their "committed literature" (p. 7), the authentic writers participate in creating the cultural authenticity in which societies "set agendas that reflect not the theories of international planning agencies but the cultural heritage of their own peoples" (Lee, 1997, p. 1).

From an Islamic postcolonial perspective, the literature produced by writers of Muslim heritage is not to be automatically classified as authentic writing about Islam and Muslims. This question of authenticity is global and can be related to different groups of people. Nadine Gordimer, for example, in her book *The Black Interpreters*, defines the authentic African literature as the one which is "done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else in the world. One must look at the world from Africa, to be an African writer, not look upon Africa, from the world" (Gordimer, 1973, p. 5). For Gordimer, the important thing is to be "shaped" by Africa and to see the world through African eyes. Names, nationalities, skin colours and languages are marginal here in

comparison to the centrality of Africa in the personality of the writer. By the same token, the name and the nationality of Ali are not as important as the centrality of Islam in her writing.

According to Virginia Richter, readers of *Brick Lane* could be classified into three groups: all the readers that have no connection with the Bangladeshi community in London; middle-class British Bangladeshis who have only a little knowledge about Brick Lane; and the last consisting of those Bangladeshi Muslims who live in Brick Lane and who are mostly lower-class. It seems that "the book was primarily written for the first two groups of readers, for whom it functions as a kind of fictional guidebook. The immediate success of the novel indicates that Ali met the expectations of these readers, whereas the public reactions of parts of the Bangladeshi East Enders are more troubled" (Richter, 2009, p. 70). This classification is important in explaining the different reactions towards the novel. Those who marched and sent letters to the newspapers are those about whom the novel is written or some readers who understand their position. In contrast, those who welcomed the novel are just readers; they are not "inside" the novel so as to feel angry or confused. In fact, the second group could consider the novel as a mirror that reflects their goodness by observing the evil of the inhabitants of Brick Lane. Ali said: "I have, over several years, had an overwhelmingly positive response from people of Bangladeshi descent who have read *Brick Lane*, both in London and around the world" (Ali, 2007). These people could be similar to Ali, that is, Bangladeshi in name only as Greer indicated earlier. Some of the inhabitants of Brick Lane might like the novel too, but this does not mean that the Bangladeshi Muslims' critique is not valid. If Ali has the right to tell "the truth", as she claims, although she lives "outside" Brick Lane, the

134

Bangladeshi Muslims, who live "inside" Brick Lane, have, at least, the same right to say that the novel does not tell the truth.

If this is the case, which group of readers could decide the authenticity of the novel: the readers who have the "expectations" or the readers who live there? This question, I think, is very much related to the position of Muslims in the British society as a whole. Muslims, in general, are subjected to different kinds of images and judgments created and discussed by others or by some Muslims who do not "properly" represent Muslims. There is a kind of "unseen" system which creates Muslims' images and decides on their behalf. If *Brick Lane* is "authentic", this means that Muslims in Brick Lane are backward, uncivilised, against the freedom of women, full of drugs and alcohol and the like. These images of Muslims are created by the same system that believes in the authenticity of *Brick Lane*. The images are already there and Ali just puts them in one basket called *Brick Lane*. It is clear then that the Bangladeshi Muslims' anger is not because of the novel only: their anger is against these images which are reproduced frequently. It could be argued that the Bangladeshi Muslims were filled with an overwhelming sense of outrage because Bangladeshi ethnicity "is largely undescribed except as a problem (poor, uneducated and possibly terrorist)" (Leader, 2007).

Some writers think that Ali's *Brick Lane* is, in one way or another, Dickensian. Harriet Lane in an article in *The Guardian* comments that Ali's characterization "occasionally verges on the Dickensian without ever resorting to caricature" (Lane, 2003). In another article in the same newspaper, Ian Jack believes that *Brick Lane*, by shedding the light on the life of the Bangladeshi Muslims in Brick Lane, is similar to

Dickens' fiction by which the life in early Victorian London is known (Jack, 2003). In addition to these two similarities, *Brick Lane* and Dickens' *Oliver Twist* are alike in writing about two religious minorities in British society – Muslims and the Jews respectively – and in having been accused of their misrepresentation. In *Oliver Twist* Fagin is a Jewish character. Fagin's negative depiction was a good enough reason for some writers, like Norman Lebrecht in his article "How Racist is Oliver Twist?", to describe Dickens as anti-Semitic (Lebrecht, 2005).

However, Dickens and Ali are strikingly different in their reactions towards the criticism from Jews and Muslims. After writing *Oliver Twist*, a Jewish woman sent Dickens a letter criticising his negative depiction of Fagin. Although Dickens was "defensive" at first, he eventually "halted the reprinting of *Oliver Twist* - which was halfway through - and altered the text which had not yet been set … and in his next, and what proved to be his final novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, he includes a major character, Riah (the word means 'friend' in Hebrew) whose goodness is almost as complete as is Fagin's evil." Because of that, the lady "sent Dickens a copy of Benisch's Hebrew and English Bible, in gratitude for his atonement" (Vallely, *2005)*. In contrast, Ali *dismissed* the Bangladeshi Muslims' criticism by saying it was "too silly to comment on" (Ali, 2003b). Then when the issue becomes bigger, she insists on her right to be free in her writing. The crucial difference between Dickens and Ali's reactions is respect. Both are free to write about the minorities, but Dickens seems more committed to showing his respect to the different Other. In addition, the negative image and limited influence of Muslims in the West might play a role.

One of the first British novels that focuses on the identity question for the Asian Muslims in Britain is *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which was written by Hanif Kureishi in 1990. Interestingly, in spite of the thirteen years gap between Kureishi's novel and *Brick Lane*, Ali's novel seems to repeat some of the main themes. Like *Brick Lane*, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is about an Asian family that lives in London and tries to find its answer to the identity question. The mother of the main protagonist, Karim, is quite similar to Nazneen. She is weak and unhappy. Her life is "terrible" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 19) and she accuses her husband and two sons of being "selfish" (p. 20) and all the Asian men of being "torturers" (p. 20). Once again, the implication is that women are oppressed by Asian men – similar to the condition of Nazneen. In addition, Karim's mother, Margaret, seems as passive as Nazneen when saying "no one loves me … no one helps me. No one does anything to help me" (p. 105). While Nazneen waits for God to change her life, Margaret waits for her husband and sons to change her life. Both of them just wait passively, thus intensifying a negative image of women in the Asian families.

Islam and Muslims in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* are, as I argued above, always criticised. Muslims do not appear peaceful in a saying like this: "why go out with these Muslims? … Too many problems" (p. 73). In fact, the novel has a strong view against all the religions including Islam. They are described as "irrelevant" (p. 76), "childish and inexplicable" (p. 212). In addition, the novel is clear in blaming the Prophet Muhammad himself of giving "rise to absolutism" and it claims that one of the Muslim characters is similar to the Prophet because he "thought he was right about everything. No doubt on any subject ever entered his head" (p. 172). This depiction of Islam and Muslims resembles, in certain ways, their depiction in *Brick*

Lane. Muslims are violent, unable to cope with the British values, and refuse to change their minds.

If the depiction of Islam and Muslims is quite the same in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Brick Lane*, why do Muslims react more firmly against the later? It could be said that there are different reasons for this. Firstly, Kureishi's novel criticizes all the "old religions" and not only Islam, while Ali's is about Islam and Muslims only and in some situations it seems to prefer Christianity over Islam. In *Brick Lane*, for example, Karim is different from his father. The father is peaceful like Jesus but Karim is willing to fight because the Prophet was a warrior. Secondly, while Kureishi's novel is about the Pakistanis and the Indians together, Ali's is about the Bangladeshis only. Thirdly and more importantly, Kureishi's is about Asians in London in general, but Ali's is specifically about Brick Lane. While Kureishi criticises all the followers of the old religions (the Jews, the Christians and Muslims) in addition to the Pakistanis and Indians in London, Ali criticises the majority of the inhabitants in Brick Lane who are Bangladeshis and Muslims. Ali, in Greer's words, "creates them" once again and that is the problem: "what hurts is precisely that: she [Ali] has dared to create them" (Greer, 2006).

Significantly, Greer's position against *Brick Lane* caused Salman Rushdie to attack her describing her position as "philistine, sanctimonious, and disgraceful, but it is not unexpected" (Rushdie, 2006) and claiming that Greer supported censorship. In addition, Rushdie writes that Greer did the same with him when *The Satanic Verses* was published by refusing to sign petitions for the novel. It could be argued that this

dispute between Greer and Rushdie represents, in a sense, the ongoing clash between the colonial and the postcolonial discourses, in relation to Islam and Muslims, in the British society.[51] From an Islamic postcolonial perspective, the stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims in contemporary British fiction are clear manifestations of the colonial prejudice that still exists. The racism, marginalisation and exclusion that the British Muslims still face gives evidence to the existence of the colonial perspective which led to their stereotypical and negative portrayal in fiction.

All in all, it could be argued that *Brick Lane* sheds light on female suffering in the Bangladeshi communities and this in itself is necessary and important although Ali's negative imaging of Muslims complicates the issue. As a matter of fact, Muslim women are suffering from some of the aspects of their national and traditional cultures and Islam is against many of such ways of oppression. However, Islam and Muslims are suffering from the stereotypical images in the West in particular. Between the suffering of the women and the suffering of Islam and Muslims, Ali finds herself in a critical and complex position. From one perspective, *Brick Lane* could be read as a feminist voice calling for the freedom of women. From another perspective, however, it is another work that aims at stereotyping the image of Islam and Muslims in the West. The perspective is important here. Muslim readers might feel sympathetic with Nazneen's difficult life, but their attention might move to the negative depiction of Islam and Muslims in the novel if they feel it becomes stereotypical and insulting. In other words, regardless of the main themes of the novel, Muslims are quite sensitive to their image in the West as a result of a long history of

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[51] The relationship between Rushdie and the colonial discourse in relation to Islam and Muslims in Britain is discussed in the Introduction.

misrepresentations. Hasina and Nazneen's struggle for freedom, for example, is positive, but the implication that Islam is an oppressive religion is negative for Muslims. Therefore, in spite of some positive minor themes in the novel, *Brick Lane* in its main themes misrepresents Islam and Muslims in Britain.

From an Islamic postcolonial perspective,[52] the images of Islam and Muslims in Ali's *Brick Lane* are "recycled", stereotypical and hence, colonially-influenced. Muslims are the uncivilised among the civilised, the uneducated among the educated. This depiction, ultimately, provides some authentic justifications for the racism and marginalisation that Muslims face in British society. Such depiction of Muslims justified colonising Muslims' countries in the past and is still used to justify the western intervention in the Muslim world nowadays. Before colonising Afghanistan, for example, the Americans used the conditions of women there as a justification claiming that they would free the oppressed women from the oppressing men.[53] Women everywhere, in one way or another, have fewer opportunities than men and writing about the difficult conditions of women is understandable and needed. However, Muslim men and women alike are subject to huge amounts of prejudice in the West and this should be understandable too. Writing about the "marginalised" woman in the "marginalised" Bangladeshi Muslim community in British society is quite difficult. The solution is, arguably, to write about the freedom of women, but

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[52] See my discussion of Islamic Postcolonialism in the Introduction and below.

[53] Fadia Faqir, in her article "Where is the "W" factor? Women and the war on Afghanistan", comments on that: "only after 11 September did the west 'discover' how Muslim women suffer at the hands of monolithic, monological, monotheistic regimes. 'Liberal' western newspapers began parading Afghani women and their daughters as the 'silent victims', not of America's war on terror, but of their menfolk. Suddenly the newly-discovered oppression of Afghani women became a justification for operation 'Infinite Justice', even by the most chauvinist male journalist" (Faqir, 2002).

within Muslim culture itself. In comparison to the conditions of Muslim women in some very conservative countries like Saudi Arabia, for instance, Iranian and Malaysian women in some aspects provide examples from within particular Muslim cultures of Muslim women living in better circumstances. Such solutions need something more than the freedom of speech; they need to show respect and responsibility which Muslims always ask for. Strikingly, when *The Guardian* published the parallel between *Brick Lane* and *The Satanic Verses* that were made by Muslims in a letter, Ali became angry and blamed the newspaper for being irresponsible.[54] The absolute freedom that Ali uses against Muslims is now used against her.

Monica Ali is British and she seems to encourage the Bangladeshi Muslims in Brick Lane to be more British. This is an understandable point, but there is another one: the stereotypical image of Islam and Muslims in contemporary British fiction. The problem is, arguably, that the more Muslims are imaged stereotypically, the more they feel targeted and become unwilling to be more British. From an Islamic Postcolonial perspective, *Brick Lane* stereotypes Muslims and it angers and reminds them of their discrimination and inferiority in Britain.

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[54] She said: "it's irresponsible on so many levels. They have used the comparison with *The Satanic Verses* in that casual and utterly baseless manner. I have two small children. Don't they realize it's people's lives they are playing with?" (Ali, 2003b)

Chapter Three:

Islam and Muslim Identities in Faqir's *My Name is Salma*

In an interview at the University of Sunderland's 2010 conference "Postcolonialism and Islam,"[55] Fadia Faqir was clear in stating her relationship with Islam. She acknowledged that Islam was "nothing" for her before September 11, but when people in Britain kept calling her and dealing with her as a Muslim she said "yes, I'm Muslim". Faqir was born and brought up in Amman, Jordan, in a Muslim house and within a Muslim society. She was born Muslim and this identity of birth cannot be changed. In Britain she is Muslim because of her skin colour and her name and as long as she cannot change them, she will always be considered as a Muslim. Faqir's given identity is confirmed by the outside; not from her inside. The "outside" British society judges her "outside" skin colour and name and calls her Muslim; this confirms her Muslim identity and returns her to her origin. However, when Faqir says that Islam is "nothing" for her, she talks about her "inside" and "real" identity.[56]

Faqir's mixed identity is linked, in a way or another, with the country she lives in. Because she lives now in Britain, her Muslim identity will always be noticed. Similarly, if she lives in Amman, her British identity will be noticed.[57] In addition,

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[55]The conference was held by the Northern Association for Postcolonial Studies (NAPS) at the University of Sunderland, UK, 16-17 April 2010.

[56] As a compromise, Faqir, apparently, establishes this new writing identity: "I am a cross-cultural, transnational writer par excellence; I cross borders, languages, cultures and literary traditions in a blink. I belong to a rootless multicultural community" (Faqir, 2011, p. 7). However, Islam, again, does not seem important in this new writing identity.

[57] In Jordan, when her father saw her for the first time without a veil after her return from England, he said: "she looks like a western model!" (Faqir, 2007a) However, in spite of her many years living in England, she is still considered as, in her own words: "being a foreigner and being on the margins" (Faqir, 2007b).

Faqir's writings about the people of the Muslim or the western countries identify herself. Writing about Islam and Muslims is, in a sense, a way of choosing an identity for writers such as Faqir. Though nominally Christian, Edward Said, for example, confirms his "outside" Muslim identity by writing about the stereotypical imaging of Islam in many of his books. Salman Rushdie, on the other hand, confirms his "inside" western identity by, according to many Muslims, attacking Islam in *The Satanic Verses*, although he was Muslim by birth. Islam, for such writers who belong to both Islam and the West in one way or another, is a mirror to their "real" identity. By writing about Islam and Muslims in *My Name is Salma,* Faqir seems to identify with her deeper identity.

Fadia Faqir is one of the Arab novelists who write in English and live in the West without forgetting the issues of the Arab and the Muslim world. The Anglo-Arab writers, in Geoffrey Nash words, "present insiders' narratives apparently starting out from Arab and Islamic source cultures" (Nash, 2007, p. 16). Being exposed to both the western and the Arab and Islamic cultures, the Anglo-Arab writers could play a crucial role in "fostering acceptance through understanding" (Al Maleh, 2009a, p. x). However, their views about Arab and Islamic culture, which this "understanding" is based on, need to be considered. The big question is: to what extent do these writers represent Arabs and Muslims? Layla Al Maleh acknowledges that "Anglophone Arab writers are perhaps the furthest away from paradigmatic Arabs, themselves being the progeny of cultural espousal, hybridity, and diasporic experience" (Al Maleh, 2009b, p. 1). In addition, there is another factor which might affect the representation of the Arab and Muslim culture by these writers. As they write about Arab and Muslim issues in the West, Nash noted that "a literature taken as too tied to the unfamiliar

codes and preoccupations of Arabic literary culture would be unsuccessful unless it were domesticated to meet the expectations of a western readership" (Nash, 2007, p. 15). These two factors, the hybrid identity of the writer and the need of meeting western expectations, might cause Arab and Muslim writers to obfuscate their representation of their native culture according to what Sardar and Davies term a "distorted imagination" (Sardar and Davies, 1990).

In fact, some of the Anglo-Arab writers are influenced deeply by the West and as a result entertain their critical views about their Arab and Muslim culture. Layla Al Maleh in her survey article "Anglophone Arab Literature: an Overview" thinks that "many were the subjects of cultural colonialism [... and] they yearned to express themselves creatively in the language of the 'superior' Other and to internalize the 'Other' in every possible way" (Al Maleh, 2009b, p. 6). They see "themselves and their people through the eyes of Europeans, […] presenting mostly a folkloric picture of life in the Arab world" (pp. 7-8). Such writers represent the western imagined Arab and Muslim culture rather than the culture itself. Contrary to their supposed contribution in bridging the divide and fostering understanding, some of the Anglo-Arab writers seem to endorse the western prejudicial stereotypes at the same time claiming authenticity for their own work. Although they "are perhaps the furthest away from paradigmatic Arabs" (p. 1), they claim to represent Arabs and Muslims in western eyes.

Being an active feminist writer, Faqir confronts the patriarchal social systems that undermine the woman in the Arab and Muslim world and this stand complicates her position as a writer of fiction. As a woman writer from the Arab and Muslim world,

writing in English "is itself an act of rebellion against and resistance to the burden of national, cultural, and religious 'authenticity' and loyalty expected of her by her own culture" (Abdo, 2009, p. 240). Moreover, since her writing touches the big and controversial topics in the Arab and Muslim world in general and the woman issue in particular, she receives a great deal of criticism and accusations. She is one of those writers whose "distance does not always rescue them from their critics 'back home', who take them to task in unsparingly vociferous attacks, relentlessly construing both their choice of foreign tongue and their subject-matter as a reflection of disaffection or lack of national feeling" (Al Maleh, 2009b, p. 14).

My name is Salma is a novel that narrates the story of Salma; she is a shepherdess living in a small and rural village in the Arab world called Hima. She loves the farms and her goats and that is what makes her life simple and happy. However, a love that makes her life happy might in time lead to a miserable life. She loves a young man from her village called Hamdan and through him soon becomes pregnant out of wedlock. This is the turning point in her life because honour killing is widespread in Hima. So as not to be killed by her father or brother, she is taken into police custody for some years. In prison she gives birth to a baby girl, Layla, who is taken from her mother directly. After about six years in prison she flees to Lebanon then to England with the help of two Christian women: Khairiyya and Miss Asher respectively. She tries to begin a new life in England, but Layla, her daughter who is still in Hima, always reminds her of her sin with Hamdan. She still remembers Layla and thinks of her but, fearing death, is unable to return to Hima. In England, she gets married to an Englishman as a way of accommodating herself to the new country. However, after giving birth to her baby boy, she begins dreaming and imagining Layla calling her for

145

help. After hesitation and in spite of the objections of her husband, she goes back to Hima to find that her daughter has been recently killed by her brother. While crying for her daughter, she is shot by her brother, too.

Focussing on honour killing, the novel tries to shed light on the controversial position of the woman in Muslim societies. Although Islam does not permit honour killing, Islam is depicted in the novel as a potential cause of this kind of crime. Those who chased Salma and threatened her are at the end all Muslims. Hima is a Muslim village. There is a mosque, an imam, and Muslims there pray and read the Quran. In England, too, there are some Muslims. How Islam and Muslims are depicted in the novel is the focus of the reading that follows.

Islam and Feminism in Faqir's Writings

In order to understand the characterisation of Islam and Muslims in the novel, it is quite crucial to explore Islam in Faqir's viewpoint as seen in her non-fiction writings. As an Arab feminist activist, she aims at achieving full emancipation for women and opposes any system which might oppress them. Faqir's position towards Islam depends, then, on woman's position in Islam. She does not seem to show equal interest in Islam as a whole; prayers and fasting, for example, are less focused on than woman's affairs. However, Islam, as a whole, will be judged according to the position of the woman. If the woman is respected in Islam, it will become a respected religion. If the woman is oppressed, Islam will deserve to be oppressed. Here, the rights of the woman are the most important. Allah, the Prophet and the Quran are respected, but if the woman is oppressed, Islam will be considered as an oppressive religion with full respect to Allah, the Prophet and the Quran.

It could be argued that Faqir's Islam is influenced by Faqir's own experience and the position of woman in Muslim societies. Two articles, which are written by Faqir herself, are very important here. The first one is her article in *The Guardian* about the story of her conflict with her father regarding the veil. The importance of this article comes from its symbolism and representation of the relationship between the veil, representing Islam or its conservative reading, and Faqir, representing the woman in a Muslim society. This article, in a sense, summarises how Faqir experiences Islam in her own life and how this experience affects her viewpoint about Islam. Another important article appears in her edited book *In the House of Silence*. These together could be seen as a summary of her viewpoint on the position of woman in Muslim societies.

At the beginning of her first article Faqir states: "my father [58] imposed the veil on me three times and I took it off three times" (Faqir, 2007a).[59] This shows a clear conflict between the father, who represents the social and traditional values and norms, and

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[58] Similar to Hanif Kureishi's technique of writing about family members in fiction, Faqir writes this article about her conflict with her father over the headscarf. In addition to this non-fiction article, Faqir is going to write about her father in her fictional memoir. The title is *My Father the Fundamentalist*. She comments: "I will write this novel as an attempt to understand and perhaps forgive my father, who is a reluctant tyrant. He was a leading member of the outlawed Hizbul Tahrir, something I never understood. My father, who was busy fighting for his cause and was absent most of my childhood and adulthood, controlled our lives and was the reason behind the breakdown of most of my eight brothers and sisters" (Faqir, 2011, p. 10). The negative depiction of her conservative Muslim father in the article and, apparently, the coming memoir is, in a sense, evidence of Faqir's stereotypical perspective by which she observes conservative Muslims in the Arab and Muslim world. Such depiction meets the western expectations of tyrant fathers in Muslim societies.

[59] In writing about the veil in such a way and using the verb "impose", Faqir seems to be trying to meet the expectation of the western reader and to show how Muslim women are forced to wear the veil as a form of oppression. Leila Ahmed writes about the symbolism of the veil: "veiling – to western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies" (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 151-152).

the daughter, who represents all the women in the Muslim society, over the veil**,** which represents Islam. The father "imposed" the veil and she "took it off"; the question is: did she take the veil off because it was imposed on her or because she was against the veil itself? She might refuse the veil because of the two together: the veil and its imposition upon her. The number of orders and the refusals, three times each, emphasises the insistence of the two parties. Although the father seems stronger than her as he is the one who orders, she seems strong enough to say no.

Strikingly enough, the veil here is depicted "neutrally" with total silence with regard to its belonging to Islam. The conflict over the veil appears similar to any conflict that might occur between a daughter and her father such as if she wants to study mathematics and he prefers engineering. The veil, though Islamic, must be debated like any other issue in life and once imposed will be refused; in other words, the veil here is not an Islamic order to be followed like fasting and praying, it is an issue for discussion. Accordingly, Faqir seems to give her own freedom of thought priority over the religion into which she was born. She must be convinced of the need to wear the veil in order to wear it. Otherwise, she will not do so. The Islamic rule, then, is something to think about, not to be taken for granted. All in all, Islam does not seem so significant within this conflict. It appears weak as it needs the father to impose it; at least it appears too weak to convince the daughter to wear the veil on its own account.

In addition to her father,[60] Faqir's "unveiled, secular aunt" seems to play a crucial role in her veil story. "She had always encouraged me to resist and taught me how to negotiate a way out" (Faqir, 2007a). This secular aunt gives a new dimension to the conflict. Fadia Faqir, the Muslim daughter, who lives in Amman, within a Muslim society, has a "conservative" father who "imposed" the veil and a "secular" aunt who "helped" her to "resist" and "negotiate". Contrary to her secular aunt who believes in resistance and negotiation, her conservative father does not seem to believe in negotiation as she described him: "my father was a reluctant tyrant". The qualifier "reluctant" could well be an indicator of his temperament, and imply a wish not to be dictatorial; nevertheless, whether they are tyrants or reluctant tyrants, conservative Muslims, as represented by her father in the article, embody an intolerant attitude.

Faqir seems well aware that wearing the veil is an Islamic injunction. While talking with her father about the veil she asked "am I less important to you than religion?" (Faqir, 2007a) This demonstrates that Faqir believes that the veil is a religious ordinance; it is not one of the many traditions or customs of Jordanian society. However, she still does not believe in wearing it. For her "the veil had caused me so much suffering" and she has to take it off to "keep a shred of self-respect" (Faqir, 2007a).

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[60] Faqir's father, it could be argued, represents all those conservative peoples (like brothers and imams) or organisations (like mosques or governments) that impose the veil or the Islamic orders in Muslim societies. Her refusal to wear the veil could be seen as a refusal of this whole system. For Faqir, her father, as representative of this patriarchal system, was the reason behind changing her culture. She described herself as: "a writer who has crossed from one culture into another because of her father" (Faqir, 2010c).

To sum up, this article shows that Faqir's viewpoint regarding Islam and those Muslims who want to practise it is negative. Islam is imposed by male conservative Muslims on female Muslims. Islam, in the case of the veil at least, causes suffering and does not lead to self-respect. Conservative Muslims are tyrants willing to impose, not to negotiate. The Muslim woman who is suffering under the role of those tyrants should resist and continue resisting till the end. The secular people in the Muslim society can play a significant role by helping the Muslim woman to resist and teaching her how to refuse to follow fathers and Islam and instead to obtain her wishes through negotiating.[61]

In her edited book *In the House of Silence*, Faqir describes the situation of the woman in Muslim countries. In the introduction, she indirectly but clearly states that Islam is the reason behind the position of the "hidden and silent" women in Muslim societies. She writes: "a good Muslim woman must be […] hidden and silent. Breaking the silence and speaking out has a heavy price" (Faqir, 1998a, p. 12). The "good Muslim woman" who follows Islam fully becomes, automatically, "hidden and silent" and any woman [who] wants to "speak out" will not be a good Muslim. In the same book, she confirms the discriminatory cultural practices of women in Islam by saying:

> Islam, or that particular interpretation of the hadith and Qur'an, perceives a specific role for women which in practice places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy – "men are superior to them by a degree." Islam identified women with chaos, anti-divine and anti-social forces. … the unchecked rights of men, polygamy and divorce, were all strategies to subjugate women. A true Islamic Baghdadi house was a house where men provided for women, protected women and policed them (Faqir, 1998b, p. 51).

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[61] Faqir's real veil story is quite symbolic. The conflicts between the father and the aunt over her veil sheds light on the conflict between conservative Muslims and secular ones over the position of women in the Arab and Muslim world. Contrary to the harsh tyrant father, the secular aunt is shown as very positive and supportive. The story provides a stereotypical image of conservative Muslims and seems to welcome and gives credit to the secular discourse in the Muslim world. Arguably, Faqir writes *My Name is Salma* from this perspective.

Islam here is obviously criticised. Faqir appears strong enough to name Islam openly as the main source of women's sufferings in Muslim societies. However, in her article in *The Guardian* she is quite hesitant about mentioning Islam by name. Her conflict is depicted as a conflict with her father, but in "Stories from the House of Songs", she identifies the cause and tries to challenge it as "she entered into a conflict with the religious and political orders" (p. 52). She is against the "religious order"; which is the Islamic order, because it is the cause of the suffering of the Muslim woman.

Faqir does not seem willing to differentiate between "faith" and "the men of religion" because she thinks that Islam itself oppresses the woman. After saying that Islam places women "at the bottom of the social hierarchy", she directly confirms with a verse from the Quran that "men are superior to them by a degree" (p. 51). What the Quran states here oppresses the woman and the conservative Muslims are just following it. By the same token, in her novel, *Pillars of Salt*, Faqir links women's suffering with Islam itself. The lives of both Maha and Um Saad, the main characters of the novel, are affected negatively by Islam. When Daffash slapped Maha one day, her mother told her: "'What do you expect? He is a boy. Allah placed him a step higher. We must accept Allah's verdict'" (Faqir, 1996, p. 37). And while telling Maha her story, Um Saad states: "Allah and His creatures are against us. Since I opened my eyes, I have not seen anything except misery and pain" (p. 40). Faqir implicitly suggests that Islam is the cause of all the "misery and pain" for Muslim women. Islam is "against" women because "Allah placed" the men "a step higher". This patriarchal "Islamic" position of men and women in Islam led the men to oppress the women who "must accept Allah's verdict". Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad in their study

of Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* assert that although "Faqir's discourse is not militant or directly confrontational…there is no sentimental affiliation with religion or native culture, but rather a self-investigating critique of this culture" (Suyoufie and Hammad, 2009, p. 282). By criticising her native religion and culture in this way, Faqir appears to align herself with western secular feminism. Suyoufie and Hammad point out:

> In the case of Faqir, the appropriation of western feminist poetics in foregrounding the grievances of her female characters marks a position akin to that of western feminism in its early stages, when women demanded such basic rights as full suffrage and social participation (p. 282).

Faqir's reaction towards wearing the veil is conditioned by her orientation as an Arab feminist. Obviously, there are a number of diverse readings of the veil, two recent ones being Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution* (2011) and Emma Tarlo's *Visibly Muslim* (2010). Ahmed provides a cogent explanation of the veil's resurgence in the Arab world and America by suggesting that hijab is an emblem of Islamism more than of piety and devoutness. She argues that the re-emergence of hijab, after its near disappearance in the 1950s and 60s, was very much influenced by the campaign of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928. Ahmed associates the hijab with the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamism and all its threatening and negative memories and associations. Perceiving women in hijab as female Islamists influenced by a threatening group and not as devout Muslims, the sight of Muslim women in hijab in America is described by Ahmed as "a disturbing sight" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 3).

In fact, Ahmed reads the veil from two different perspectives in her two books *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) and *A Quiet Revolution* (2011). While she reads the veil as a postcolonial writer in the first book, criticizing the colonial attempt to make inferior the veil and Islam, she reads the veil as a secular writer in the later book. Eventually, and particularly from the perspective of those Muslims who believe in the veil as part of Islam, Ahmed's secular reading of the veil in *A Quiet Revolution* might be said to enforce some of the outcomes of the colonial reading which she criticizes in *Women and Gender in Islam*. Hijab in Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution* is stereotypically presented and there are many binaries between the veiled and the unveiled women. While the unveiled are "progressive" (p. 1), the veiled women are the opposite. Moreover, Ahmed remembers that the idea that veiling is backward and unveiling is a sign of advancement "was by the time of my childhood, the 1940s, simply part of the normal assumptions and self –evident 'truths' of the day" (p. 43). Hijab is a symbol of threat and intolerance, reminiscent of the Muslim Brotherhood who "bombed places" (p. 3), and a reminder of the sufferings of Farah Foda, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Naguib Mahfouz and Nawal El Saadawi, at the hands of the Islamists. In contrast to these negative associations of the veil, unveiling was, in Ahmed's words "the emblem of an era of new hopes and desires, and of aspirations for modernity" (p. 39).

We might observe that Ahmed's image of the veil has apparently not developed as far as the western one has. Her reading of the veil is influenced by her childhood assumptions and memories and she remains faithful to these old, personal ideas despite the length of time. "The Brotherhood women's style of veil", Ahmed states, "remained for me forever charged with these negative associations and memories" (p.

4). Contrary to this persistent reading of the veil, the western reading has appeared to develop and this could be traced from different locations in Ahmed's book itself. In the beginning, the West considers the veil as "a sign of the inferiority of Islam as religion, culture and civilization" (p. 45). However, from the 1990s this western understanding and language began to change. Ahmed writes: "many Americans and Europeans, in the 1990s and today, assume that some Muslims women wear hijab simply because they are observant Muslims. Wearing hijab, they assume, is just what devout, observant Muslims do" (p. 3). As a result of this understanding, some in the West have begun to defend the veil, to "defend minorities, [and] defend people's right to be different" (p. 2). While Ahmed associates the veil with the threatening Muslim Brotherhood, the West, according to her book, associates it with Islam's piety and devoutness. While Ahmed stereotypes the veil, the West seems to better understand and accept it.

This contradiction between changing western readings of the veil and Ahmed's reading as representative of feminists from Muslim background sheds a light on the role of the feminists in complicating the meaning of the veil in the West. The well-known Arab feminist that Ahmed refers to in the beginning of her book talked about the enmity between the veiled and the unveiled women and said that "our own friends [in the West] defend them" (p. 2). The West defends the veiled women and this feminist declares the enmity. In addition, Ahmed does not appear to understand the reasons behind wearing the veil because she does not attempt to read the veil from the perspective of the veiled women themselves. She exclaims: "since they [women in hijab] lived in a free country [America] where it was quite ordinary for women to

challenge patriarchal ideas, why on earth did they feel bound to accept whatever it was that they were being told?" (p. 5)

In contrast to Ahmed's stand on hijab, Emma Tarlo in her book *Visibly Muslim* attempts to show the complexity of the meaning of the veil. Speaking generally, she suggests that "visibly Muslim dress practices cannot be reduced simply to ideas of religious community, politics or ethnic group but involve complex aesthetic, ethical, social and political choices made in the context of cosmopolitan milieux which offer a variety of possibilities" (Tarlo, 2010, p. 13). Tarlo's complex reading of the veil negates Ahmed's threatening one. In fact, Tarlo appears to believe that the threatening reading of the veil is "informed by a long legacy of Orientalist images and texts" (p. 3). From Tarlo's perspective, the veil's resurgence is not a result of, as Ahmed claims, the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamism. Rather, it is a reaction to the attempts to suppress the veil. She writes: "one consequence of early-twentieth-century attempts to suppress 'the veil' was its later emergence as a powerful symbol of authenticity and resistance in many parts of the world" (p. 4). Tarlo's positive reading of the veil leads her to accept and understand the veil as it appears in the West; for her the sight of veiled women is not "disturbing" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 3) as Ahmed describes, it in fact adds something new. She writes: "far from signalling a challenge or threat to western values, British Islamic fashions are evidence of the emergence of new cosmopolitan material forms born out of the British Muslim cultural experience" (Tarlo, 2010, p. 15).

Nevertheless, it could be argued that while reading the veil differently, both Ahmed and Tarlo underestimate the Islamic influence behind Muslim women wearing the veil. While Ahmed emphasises the hijab's Islamism, Tarlo focuses on its complexity and the diverse factors behind veiling for many Muslims. Despite their differences on some issues, the widely influential and respected Islamic centres represented by Saudi Arabia, Egypt (Al-Azhar), Iran (Qum) and Iraq (Najaf) all agree on the necessity of veiling in Islam and that wearing hijab for women is part of being Muslim. The majority of Muslims all over the world respect one or other of these four centres and consider their readings as the closest to the reality of Islam. It is true that Islamism and many other political, economic and social factors have played their part in identifying the limitations or the manifestations of veiling in some societies, but Islam, for many Muslims, is the primary reason behind their belief in veiling. In a sense, veiling could be seen as part of the identity which many Muslims choose as their first, primary identity. In spite of the complex national and cultural identities of Muslims, many of them prefer to be seen as Muslims rather than, say, Pakistanis, Indonesians, or Arabs. Similarly, in spite of the various complex reasons for veiling, many Muslims consider it as part of their religion. From this perspective, Ahmed's focus on Islamism, and Tarlo's on the complexity of the veil, are marginal issues in comparison to the centrality of following Islamic practice. If veiling is a result of Islamism or other complex reasons, it can be discussed like any other ideas. However, if veiling is a part of Islam, it is not an idea to be accepted or refused; it is an order to be followed like fasting and praying. Granted this is the case, we need to recognise the importance of reading the veil from the perspective of the Muslim veiled women themselves who consider veiling as part of their religion. Otherwise, as Daphne Grace

writes, "the figure of the veiled woman is in danger of becoming a palimpsest written over with the desires and meanings of others" (Grace, 2004, p. 23).

Faqir's feminism in the Islamic context is clearly evident when it is compared to other feminist theories in the Arab and Muslim world. Feminism and its relationship with Islam has become a controversial and much debated issue. While agreed on the necessity of improving woman's conditions, writers and intellectuals differ in identifying the path that women should take to improve their lot. Broadly speaking, three theories might be observed: Islamism, feminism and Islamic feminism. Islamists, in general, insist on Islam as the only means through which women might improve their conditions. Feminists, on the other hand, like Fatima Mernissi[62] and Haideh Moghissi,[63] endorse western secular feminism and accuse Islam or its extreme conservative interpretation or the traditional systems accompanied with it of causing the subordination of women. For their part, Islamic feminists[64] like Miriam Cooke,

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[62] Anouar Majid argues that in Fatima Mernissi's writings "Islam is depicted as fundamentally antihistorical and antifeminist" (Majid, 2002, p. 61). As a result, she is highly critical of the veil. She believes that the return to the veil is an invitation to women "to be marginal, and above all subordinate" (Mernissi, 2004, p. 24) because "the enigma of the *hijab* ... hides the feminine and crushes its will at the risk of denying its existence" (Mernissi, 1992, p. 119).

[63] Haideh Moghissi's *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (1999) is a very important book because it thoroughly explores the relationship between Islam and feminism from a secular feminist perspective. Her main theme is that Islam and feminism have completely opposite theoretical grounds and, consequently, cannot be reconciled. "Feminism's core idea" she writes "is diametrically opposed to the basic principles of Islam" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 140). She is against Islamism because "the Shari'a unapologetically discriminates against women" (p. 141) and against Islamic feminism because "how could a religion which is based on gender hierarchy be adopted as the framework for struggle for gender democracy and women's equality with men?" (p. 126) She seems to support secular western feminism as "Islamic feminism as an alternative to Europe-based feminism will not take us on the road to transform all relations and structures of subordination" (p. 142).

[64] Compared to Islamism and Feminism, Islamic feminism could be seen as the new third way which tries to improve females' conditions in the Muslim and Arab world by combining feminism with Islam. Majid thinks that "the failure of both modernist ideologies and clerical Islam indicates the need for a third way that is both indigenous and progressive" (Majid, 2002, p. 83). Islamic feminism seems to attract many intellectuals and writers from diverse backgrounds. For Margot Badran, it even includes those who "may not accept the Islamic feminist label or identity" in addition to "secular Muslims ... and non- Muslims" (Badran, 2002). Tariq Ramadan is one of the Islamists who call for Islamic

157

Margot Badran, and Tariq Ramadan, in spite of their differences, attempt to combine Islam with feminism. By clearly stating that "Islam identified women with chaos" (Faqir, 1998b, p. 51), Faqir seems to identify herself with those feminists who consider Islam to blame for women's subordination in the Arab and Muslim world. Faqir's western feminism complicates her position particularly when it is read within the framework of the complexity of the emergence of the feminist movement in the Arab and Muslim world. The complicated relationship between Islam and the West, particularly after the colonial experience, contributes to identifying the reception of feminism. Qasim Amin's book *The Liberation of Women*, which was published in 1899, is considered as the beginning of the feminist movement in the Arab world. Significantly, Leila Ahmed in her book *Women and Gender in Islam* argues that:

> The rationale in which Amin, a French-educated upper middle-class lawyer, grounded his call for changing the position of women and for abolishing the veil was essentially the same as theirs [the missionaries]. Amin's text also assumed and declared the inherent superiority of western civilization and the inherent backwardness of Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992, p. 155).

Feminism, then, entered the Arab world through the colonial door. And, in Ahmed's words, it "served as a handmaid to colonialism" (p. 155). Within this context, Islam was linked with oppressive tradition and feminism is to be linked with colonialism. Faqir's feminist position, then, which looks at Islam as oppressive, might have been inflected by the colonial perspective.

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feminism. In his book *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (2004) he says*:* "we must speak of and promote **'**Islamic femininity**'** and encompass all aspects of the matter: the dignity and autonomy of the feminine being, equality before the law, and natural complementarity" (Ramdan, 2004, p. 143). However, in spite of their support for Islamic feminism, Margot Badran and Tariq Ramadan seem to have different ideas regarding one of the most important issues in relation to Muslim women, the veil. While Ramadan thinks that wearing the veil "is an Islamic duty" (Ramadan, 2006), Badran thinks that veiling is one of the "so-called Islamic practices ... imposed upon urban women [and which they discovered] were not ordained by Islam as they had been led to believe" (Badran and Cook, 1990, p. xxvii).

158

Islam and Muslims in *My Name is Salma*

Before the novel is analysed, it is important to mention that the ideas of Faqir and Salma, the author and the narrator, are, arguably, quite similar particularly where Islam is concerned. To begin with, Faqir acknowledges that "she [Salma] is part of me, yet not me" (Faqir, 2010d). They share ideas and what they think about Islam is one of these shared ideas. The perspective that Faqir uses in writing *My Name is Salma* seems to be the same as the one she uses in her non-fiction writings, especially her article about the veil, mentioned earlier. As a way of empowering themselves, both Faqir and Salma refuse to wear the veil. As a symbol of Islam, the veil is imposed on them both and both live more happily after leaving their traditional and Muslim societies. Honour killing, which is the main theme in the novel and the main problem of Salma in Hima, is one of the chief problems that women face in Jordan, Faqir's country of origin.[65] Both left their countries to leave the religious and traditional ordinances that cause their suffering. Like Salma, Faqir leaves Jordan for freedom because, as she said, "for much of my childhood, I felt that I was living in a prison, and likewise when I got married" (Faqir, 2011, p. 9). In short, in spite of a few differences between Faqir and Salma, their viewpoints on Islam seem almost the same and it is difficult to divorce Salma in the text from Faqir in the context.[66]

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[65] In spite of her living for more than 20 years in Britain, Jordan is still vivid in Faqir's life. She acknowledges: "although I don't physically live there, Jordan is part of my mental landscape" (Faqir, 2011, p. 5). In this, again, she is similar to Salma who despite her many years in Exeter is still linked with Hima.

[66] Amin Malak writes about the relationship between text and context while commenting on the Rushdie Affair. He states: "if the 'Rushdie Affair' proves anything, it affirms the inseparability of text and context. Any previous notions we might have had about the insularity of literature have been proven false… We … cannot divorce text from context. Put differently, the production of any literary work is culturally conditioned; subsequently, the responses to the literary work are likewise culturally conditioned" (Malak, 2005, pp. 108-109). Salma is a product of Faqir's culture observed from Faqir's own perspective and as such seems to be her voice in the novel.

Although there are many Muslim characters in the novel, because of Islam none of them seems to be successful and happy. I intend to argue that there are three Muslim identities depicted in the novel: the nominal, the conservative and the semi-practising. The nominal Muslims are represented by two English white men, Dr John Robson and Mark, who convert to Islam in order to marry two Muslim women, Salma, the protagonist of the novel, and her friend Parvin, respectively. John becomes Muslim although he does not "believe in God"; he is Muslim "in name only" (Faqir, 2008, p. 290), while Mark, in his wife's words, "agreed to convert to Islam to put my mind at rest" (p. 255). This shows, interestingly, that some Muslims can be atheists and the only reason behind their conversion to Islam is to satisfy others or to achieve a goal.

The second Muslim identity is the conservative one. In spite of the fact that there is no single conservative character in the whole novel, conservatism is identified by Noura, the best friend of Salma in Hima prison, while telling the story of her sick child. She acknowledges: "I never prayed, but that night I prayed for the first time … 'Please, God, if you cure him I will wear the veil, pray five times a day, fast, give the zakat to the poor and go to Mecca to do the pilgrimage'"(p. 198). These things are what conservative Muslims should do, according to the novel, to be closer to God. However, because becoming a conservative Muslim "is difficult … [and] complicated" (p. 290), Noura breaks her vow at the end. It could be argued that the message that Faqir would like to send here is that it is unrealistic to expect Muslims to be conservative in this "difficult" and "complicated" life.

The third Muslim identity is the semi-practising. Most of the Muslim characters in the novel, whether in Hima or in England, whether in the East or the West, believe in God but without practising their religion fully. In Hima, Haj Ibrahim, Salma's father, insists on "getting a fatwa from the imam" (p. 45) to sell his olives although he "did not pray regularly" (p. 19). Similarly, the Muslim friend of Salma in England "Sadiq, the owner of Omar Khayyam off-license", sells alcohol, but "prayed five times a day" (pp. 18, 19). Both of them believe in God; both of them pray, but each has his own way of respecting his religion. While Haj Ibrahim focuses on earning money in the right Islamic way, Sadiq is willing to sell the forbidden drink for a living. However, praying seems more important to Sadiq than to Haj Ibrahim. Once again, this type of Muslim identity might confirm the difficulty of practising Islam regardless of the place. Sadiq, who lives in developed England in the Christian West and Haj Ibrahim, who lives in the rural village of Hima in the Muslim East, are two different examples of how Islam all over the world seems hard to obey fully. By not providing a single positive conservative Muslim character, Faqir suggests that Islam is difficult in practice. This position, needless to say, is secular and contradicts what many Muslims believe Islam to be about.

Salma has experienced the three types of Muslim identities during her life. With the exception of her relationship with Hamdan, she appears to be a conservative Muslim when she is in Hima. She wears a scarf, a shawl, a black *madraqa*, a wide dress and loose pantaloons. Before reaching England and when she is on the ship with Miss Asher, Salma refuses to drink wine, eat pork and insists on eating "halal meat only" (p. 188). However, one day, after spending some years in England, she undergoes a

complete transformation. She seems to have turned into a nominal Muslim when she declares: "[I] was really an infidel, who would never be allowed to enter the mosque" (p. 46). Despite her seeming conservatism in Hima and her sudden adoption of a nominal identity one day in England, Salma appears to be a semi-practising Muslim, who for the rest of her life insists on being Muslim despite committing certain sins. Thus though having committed the sin of *zina* (sexual relations out of wedlock) twice, one with Hamdan in Hima and the other with Jim in England, she tells Sadiq, her Muslim friend in England, "I don't have an English boyfriend. I am a Muslim" (p. 261).

Salma's identity, "swaying" from a Muslim identity to another, is bound up with the place that she lives in. This, in fact, proves that Muslims, in Faqir's viewpoint, are influenced by the social environment more than their religion. Salma's veil is a striking example here. Because it is unacceptable to take off the veil in Hima, she says, "my hair is aura. I must hide it. Just like my private parts … I cannot take off veil, Sister. My country, my language, my daughter. No piece of cloth. Feel naked, me" (p. 189). When mentioning the causes that prevent her from taking off the veil, she does not indicate God, Allah or Islam, but rather she mentions "the country". What makes her "feel naked" without a veil is her country, not her religion, and when changing the country, the veil begins its process of change. Lebanon, the second country she lives in, witnesses the second stage of her relationship with the veil. In Hima, in addition to the veil, she wears traditional and conservative dresses but in Lebanon, in addition to the veil, she wears jeans and a T-shirt "conscious of the tight elastic around her hips and breasts" (p. 87). In Lebanon, the veil is still there covering

her hair, but with "tight", not "loose", clothes. Her "tight" clothes in Lebanon show that the influence of Hima over her has waned and she begins to free herself from its system. In England, after taking off the veil, she once wears "the tightest and shortest skirt in the wardrobe" to live "the few precious moments of the evening when I forgot my past. Those moments when I looked at my reflection as if looking at a stranger were the best" (p. 58). The veil and the loose clothes become something from the past that she wants to forget. In addition, the impracticality of the veil in England, as it is assumed from the novel, is another factor behind Salma's unveiling. Parvin, while talking to Salma about the veil, acknowledges "it will be much harder to get a job while you insist on wearing it" (p. 123). This image of the veil suggests that it belongs to the social traditions, not Islam. Being traditional, the veil is easily taken off, particularly in the West where modernity supersedes traditions.

Muslims in the novel deal with the Islamic injunctions selectively. They do not follow Islam because it deserves following. Rather, they follow it for their own personal purposes. The level of their belonging practically to Islam depends on the advantages or disadvantages they might receive from Islam. If Islam "brings" some benefits, they follow it. If it "takes" benefits away, they leave it. Haj Ibrahim, for example, prays only "whenever a goat was stolen or we were having a long spell of drought" (p. 19). Similarly, when Noura's child was sick she said, "I never prayed, but that night I prayed for the first time" (p. 198). Practising Islam here is not a want in itself. Haj Ibrahim and Noura do not pray regularly; they cannot see any point in praying or being close to God if their life is stable and without any problems. Islam, for them, is only needed whenever there is a need. On the other hand, Islamic ordinances

163

sometimes prevent Muslims from obtaining some reachable benefits and this led some of them to ignore Islam in order to get the benefits. When Salma asks Sadiq: "what about you? Praying all the time and selling alcohol to infidels!" he replies: "Business is business also" (p. 125). Sadiq is willing to pray five times a day to satisfy his "Muslimness", but he is not willing to lose his work because of that. Sadiq's situation is similar to Salma's when she takes off her veil to get a job.

This weak relationship between Islam and Muslims shows that Islam is impractical and Muslims are not truly faithful to their religion. Islam, as it is shown in the novel, cannot add any value to its followers' lives. Haj Ibrahim tells his daughter, Salma, "you are lucky to be born Muslim … because your final abode is paradise" (p. 19). She is lucky not because her life would be happier and more fruitful with Islam, but because of paradise in the hereafter. In fact, Salma's great suffering is strongly linked with Islam through its followers in Hima. Hamdan, her lover who leaves her after pregnancy, is presented as a Muslim with a "praying expression on his face" (p. 25). Mahmoud, her only brother who promises to kill her, is Muslim. All young men in her tribe, who chase her and are about to reach Lebanon following her, are Muslims. All Hima people, who cannot help her or stop her brother from killing her, are Muslims. Islam cannot come to her aid, cannot save her daughter, and cannot save her life. This weak Islam does not deserve following. If she follows it, she follows the religion which causes all her suffering at the hands of its followers.

Islam seems to be the victim of the extreme tribal traditions which means that Islam not only cannot protect women, it cannot protect itself either. There are two extremes in Hima. The first extreme is represented by Mahmoud and led eventually to the second opposite extreme which is represented by Salma's grandmother, Shahla. Neither extreme relates to Islam although they are each adopted by Muslims. Mahmoud kills his sister and her daughter without any permission from Islam because of his belief in honour killing. Moreover, women, in Mahmoud's viewpoint, must not talk to strangers and they deserve punishment if they do so as Salma thinks: "if my brother Mahmoud sees me talking to strange men he will tie each leg to a different horse and then get them to run in different directions" (p. 29). On the other hand, Shahla believes in love in spite of everything. She tells Salma, "follow your heart always, daughter of mine." In Shahla's case "her marriage was a love match" (p. 31). Her tribe and the tribe of her lover were at war, but when he told her "tonight I will come to kidnap you, prepare yourself … she sat fully dressed waiting for him" (p. 32). Mahmoud and Shahla are Muslims, but Islam is so weak in Hima as to be unable to correct their ideas and behaviour. Here, Faqir attempts to image Islam as an unprotected religion. In other words, the tribal traditions could mix up with Islamic ordinances which might worsen the situation of women. In addition, when Islam is influenced by tribal traditions, this could justify the refusal of some Islamic rules under the guise of the refusal of the tribal traditions that enter Islam. The veil, for example, could be seen as traditional. Faqir here seems to try to complicate the meaning of Islam in relation to tribal traditions as a way of providing secularism as the best option.

The influence of Islam over the tribal traditions has waned in Hima. Throughout the novel, the role of Islamic symbols such as the Quran, the mosque and the imam is not significant. Salma keeps a Quran along with her valuable things (p. 306) and her mother "murmured verses of the Quran" (p. 91) before leaving her. These are the only instances of the Quran playing a role in the novel: it is only to be kept and to be murmured, not to be followed and not to be considered as a guide. It seems that, in Salma's view, the Quran should be kept to remind her of her mother and not because it is the holy book of Islam. The link between the Quran and her mother is based on three things. Firstly, her mother is the one who "murmured" the Quran. Secondly, it is kept with her mother's shawl. Thirdly, in the whole novel there is not a single day on which she spends time reading a verse. The Quran thus does not symbolize religion; it is just a "book" from which her mother used to murmur certain "sentences" in Hima. This image of the Quran is quite negative because it undermines its assumed influence over Hima's Muslim society. By imaging the Quran in such a way, Faqir seems to deal with it from a secular perspective which tries to undermine the role of religion in society in order to empower women. In reality, there are some Muslims who deal with the Quran like Salma, but there are others who try to follow the Quran and respect it religiously as a guide. Focusing on Salma's "traditional" way of dealing with the Quran could be seen, from a conservative Muslim perspective, as a secular attempt to present the inability of the Quran, or Islam, to lead Salma to her freedom and empowerment.

The mosque image is not positive either. The mosque is mentioned when Salma returns to Hima to save her daughter from being killed. She states she "was about to

ask the driver to turn round and drive me back to the airport. Then I saw a group of young men walking up to the mosque … twisting their moustaches, and suddenly changed my mind. Layla was out here somewhere and I must find her" (p. 317). For Salma, Layla seems in danger of being killed by those young men, or others like them, who are going to the mosque. "Twisting their moustaches" might signal their masculinity and their "walking up to the mosque" hints that they are conservative Muslims. It could be inferred that the more masculine and religious they seem, the more dangerous they could be. The mosque here appears to symbolise the danger and the threat that Salma comes to save her daughter from.

The imam is the third Islamic symbol mentioned in the novel. Salma refers to the imam while talking about her father. "'**We cannot sell our olives before getting a fatwa from the imam**' my father used to say. I looked at my father with my ten-year-old eyes and realized that he was weaker than the imam … Why was that tall strong man weaker than the imam? Why should he consult him before selling the boxes of olives rotting in the storeroom?" (p. 45) This shows that in Hima there are two resources of strength. Although her father is tall and strong, the imam is stronger. The imam, who represents Islam, seems an influential figure in society and people are willing to follow his fatwa. The big question here is: if the imam is the strongest person in society and all men follow his fatwa, why does he appear not to issue a fatwa against the wide-spread honour killing in Hima? Depicting the imam as a silent observer of the killing and the great suffering of Hima's women might imply his approval of these thus affecting, eventually, the image of Islam.

Contrary to the depiction of the weak Islam that cannot protect women and in contrast to the silence of the Muslim imam over the issue of honour killing in Hima, Faqir depicts the Christian characters as those who make clear their opposition to honour killing and show their full support for Salma. After spending six years in Hima's prison, "my first visitor ever" (p. 62) was Khairiyya, the Lebanese civil nun. All the Muslims of Hima forget Salma and ignore her case, but the Christian civil nun comes from Lebanon only to help her. Khairiyya says: "I am a civil nun from Lebanon. I have saved many young women like you. I prayed for all of you for years, but now I only travel between prisons and smuggle out women. I cannot bear the thought of an innocent soul getting killed." (p. 64). In full contrast with the silent Muslim imam, she "prays", "travels" and "saves" the "innocent soul" from being killed. Khairiyya accompanies Salma to Lebanon where she spends some months living with kind hospitality from the Christian religious women there. Then she leaves to England with the English Little Sister, Miss Asher, "a woman who had saved my life" (p. 120). Miss Asher adopts Salma, teaches her and helps her to reach England and find safety. The Christian woman, represented by Kairiyya and Miss Asher, is extremely active in helping suffering women regardless of their religion. The Muslim woman, on the other hand, is either a victim like Salma or helpless like her mother. In addition, having two Christian women activists one from Lebanon, the East, and the second from England, the West, might be taken as a sign of the Christian global interest in women's affairs. Khairiyya, in particular, represents the active woman who, despite belonging to the East, appears to avoid suffering because she is a Christian by faith. The difference between Khairiyya and Salma, or any other woman from Hima, is that the first is Christian and lives in a Christian society, while Muslim is the identity of Salma and her society. According to the novel, Christianity is more committed to

participating in helping women than Islam. In other words, the rights of women in Islam are less protected than in Christianity.

Because some might think of Khairiyya and Miss Asher as feminists more than Christian, the priest Minister Mahoney appears to show that the male and female Christians are the same in practising their helping and tolerant religion. Like Khairiyya, "he spent his time visiting immigrants in prisons" (p. 143). But unlike her, he seems to visit immigrants in general not women in specific. He helps promote Salma's case and argues that she should be given asylum as "thousands of women are killed every year" (p. 162). She "was happy" in Lebanon (p. 95) with the Christian women and she seems to be happy with the kind Mahoney who reminds her of her father. "You are so kind. Like … [a] father to me" (p. 209). He tries to calm Salma down. When she tells him "I did shameful things", he tries to calm her: "We have all done things we regret … it's part of being human" (p. 39). Mahoney, in Salma's eyes, is a unique holy man because "although he was a man of religion he was so kind and understanding" (p. 161). It could be inferred here that the men of religion she knows are not so kind and understanding. Accordingly, the religious Christian is kind and understanding while the religious Muslim is not. Muslims, in comparison to Christians, are silent, helpless, and without kindness and understanding where the issue of honour killing is concerned.

If Mahmoud, who "thinks he is the sheikh of the tribe" (p. 241), represents eastern Muslim men, Minister Mahoney seems to represent the western Christian ones. For Salma, in spite of some differences between her father, Mahmoud and Hamdan, they are all represented by Mahmoud, who is intent on killing her in the name of the tribe's

males and in order to keep their heads high. The Muslim man in Hima, for Salma, is intolerant and very aggressive. Minister Mahoney, on the other hand, represents the tolerant and kind Christian man in the West, as he is the first western man encountered by Salma. Salma, who flees from Hima because of its aggressive men, describes Mahoney as "this honey man" (p. 209) and "my saviour" (p. 38). She seems to love him as a father because he has saved her from the dangerous men in Hima. If Mahoney becomes like her father, Allan becomes like her brother. She tells him, "you're like a brother to me" (p. 240) because "he was honest, discreet and protective" (p. 240). Her real Muslim brother wants to kill her, but Allan is "protective". Her real father could not save her, but Mahoney is a "saviour". The meanings of fatherhood and brotherhood are in question here. In fact, this opposition seems to prove, in Faqir's perspective, the superiority of modern western civilization over the Muslim traditional one. Allen and Mahoney are two products of the kindness of the West and Salma's father and brother are products of the aggressive Muslim society. The idea is: people are different because their cultures are different. The western secular culture appears to be best in the novel. The Muslim and traditional culture of Hima is stereotyped and presented as backward.

Muslim women seem to live in misery in Muslim societies. Although Salma is the clear example of that, there is a history of suffering there. "My mother had nothing of her own, her brother took her share of the farm; when her husband died Shahla was thrown out of her house so she came to live with us; and all I had was a daughter of my own, who cried and cried for me" (p. 210). Salma, her mother and her grandmother are all victims of the greedy and aggressive men. A "house" is taken from her grandmother, a "share of the farm" from her mother, and Salma is forced to

170

leave all the farms and the houses of Hima in addition to her little daughter and her life. Honour killing appears to be happening in Hima quite frequently. Because of a rumour, Sabha's "brother shot her during the wedding" and "it did not take long for her mother to follow her" (p. 115). The death of Sabha's mother and the killing of Salma's daughter at the end of the novel show that honour killing causes other indirect killings of other women. If the women of Hima deserve killing because of a rumour, they are voiceless and without protection.

To prove that Muslim women in all Muslim societies, and not in Arab societies only, are subordinated, Faqir provides Parvin, the British Pakistani friend of Salma in England, as an another example of a Muslim woman who is a victim of male superiority. She suffers in Pakistan as her father intends to force her to marry a man she does not like. Parvin and Salma, the Pakistani and the Arab, are both Muslim women suffering from the patriarchal systems in their societies. Parvin and Khairiyya, the Lebanese civil nun, add new dimensions to the Muslim identity of Salma in the novel. Each of these three women has two identities: national and religious. Salma is a Muslim Arab, Parvin is a Muslim Pakistani, and Khairiyya is a Christian Arab. The question is: which identity is it that causes the suffering of Salma, the Arab or the Muslim? Although she is an Arab, Khairiyya does not suffer, because she is Christian. Although she is Pakistani, Parvin suffers because she is a Muslim. So the Arab identity of Salma in itself does not relate to suffering; Islam is, seemingly, the main cause.

According to the novel, love affairs in Hima are of three types. All of them present women as victims to the discriminatory cultural systems of Muslim societies. The first type depends largely on rumours without any real incidents. They are "some whispers in the dark turned into a rumour and then turned into a bullet in the head" (p. 106). The second type consists of those cases in which women are led indirectly by men to lose their virginity or to be considered as prostitutes. Salma, as it seems, thinks that Hamdan is going to marry her, but after her pregnancy he "refused to marry me and disappeared. He said that I was a slut, cheap … and a liar" (p. 289). Madam Lamma, Salma's friend in the prison of Hima, is another example of this type. After learning that her husband is going to take a second wife, she stood "naked under the lamppost in the main street. They thought I was a prostitute. I am not a prostitute" (p. 180). The third type consists of those women who become prostitutes for economic reasons. Noura, Salma's best friend in prison, is a good example here. Noura's husband takes a second wife and leaves her with her children. When one of her children becomes sick, she needs money for treatment. She "used to go to the kebab shop to wash dishes at night and then rush to the hospital in the morning" (p. 197). But after losing her job and to have some money for her son's treatment, as she confesses, "I began taking off my clothes" (p. 198). Faqir depicts *all* women in Muslim, traditional societies as victims of patriarchy.

As a result of the widespread inequality in Muslim societies, Islam itself is targeted by the subordinated women like Salma. For her, Islam is not a "neutral" religion; it is rather the religion which is used by men to oppress women. Women in Hima are always forced by men to follow the tribal orders whether they are religious or not. To

be forced, not convinced, to do something by somebody else, it is natural to hate them both: the something and the somebody. The Islamic ordinances, mixing up with the tribal Arabic customary laws, were forced upon women by men in Hima - to refuse the patriarchal system in society, Islam should be refused too. Salma asks: "If you didn't force people to go to church [or mosque] why would they? There had to be a strong imam or priest shaking his stick, invoking God and promising sorrow" (p. 44). For Salma, there is no point in religion and people only practise it when forced. Salma repeats the same formula about religion when she is in England and after her great suffering from the Muslim men in Hima.

Not being able to protect Salma, Islam does not seem important in her life. It is notable in Salma's life that she is always regretting her sins, but without trying to stop committing them. She is always remembering her "dark deeds" and "shameful past" (p. 8) depending on what she does with Hamdan, but she does the same with Jim in England. After taking off her veil, she regrets it: "I felt as dirty as a whore … a sinner who would never see paradise and drink from its rivers of milk and honey" and then she "cried and cried for hours" (p. 129). This situation in Salma's life could be explained by her ideas about religion. She seems to believe that all these religious rules belong to the system which causes all her suffering in life. Therefore, to have a new life and to live without suffering, all these should be ignored. In spite of all her regret and tears, she cannot follow this "oppressive" system. When she is "completely mute and on hunger strike" in Hima's prison, she thinks: "they put us in prison, took away our children, killed us and we were supposed to say God was only testing his true believers" (p. 136). It is clear here that women are always asked to accept their suffering as something from God.

173

As a result of the false use of Islam by men over women in Hima, Salma does not just refuse to follow Islamic prescription in the things relating to women's issues only, but she begins to refuse to practise those rules that she has already practised. From the beginning, Salma does not appear to pray, for example. When Sadiq asks her "Do you want me to teach you how to pray to Allah also? I waved a hello and crossed the street quickly" (p. 205). However, she wears hijab and does not drink alcohol. After a while, as a way of refusing the oppressing system, she takes off the hijab. Alcohol does not relate to gender issues and she says once that "alcohol had never passed my lips ever. I was a goddamn Muslim" (p. 258). Sometime later, she says, "I drank my first glass of champagne ever … 'Damned is the carrier, buyer and drinker of alcohol' I heard my father's voice. My hand trembled carrying the forbidden drink to my lips. It had been almost sixteen years since I last saw them" (p. 265). Although she has mentioned a tradition, this does not remind her of the Prophet or God; it reminds her of her father. By drinking alcohol she seems to refuse her father's order, not the Islamic one. Similarly, she takes off the veil "which my father had asked me to wear" (p. 129). The influence of her father over her, which represents Hima's patriarchal system, has waned. When Salma is asked by her father to wear the veil, she seems to refuse to follow him, not her religion, when taking off the veil. The veil is traditional here and to be modern in England she should take it off. Faqir always depicts the veil as traditional to justify its removal following the western feminism that she seems to believe in.

Although Salma appears to be a conservative Muslim in Hima, her clothes show that her conservatism is forced on her by society. From the beginning, her clothes signal the conflict between her and her society. To satisfy her society she wears "wide pantaloons and loose flowery dresses", but some of the colours of her dress imply her resistance: "red to be noticed, black for anger". She wants to be noticed by men and she seems angry for not having the freedom to wear whatever she wants. In addition, Salma seems to have the courage to be free in performing some actions publicly which might anger men. In spite of her knowing that, in her conservative society, "only a loose woman takes off her clothes and swims in public. Men might see you" (p. 287), she dares to do it, ignoring men and what people might say about her. In spite of her "wide" and "loose" conservative clothes, her father has to warn her about her breasts: "cover them up" (p. 13). However, she does not follow her father's advice and her breasts "were the first thing Hamdan had noticed" (p. 13). In spite of her seemingly conservative clothes in Hima, Salma is not conservative in reality. By wearing such clothes, she tries to follow her social traditions not her religion. Social traditions seem more important to her than religion. Islam is not strong enough in her life to guide her. Muslim women who wear conservative clothes in Muslims societies are depicted as forced here. It is a polemical and stereotypical image of many Muslim women who choose to wear their own clothes following their own religion.

In spite of her conservative clothes in Hima, Salma appears happy to make love with Hamdan. If Salma, when she was in Hima, is taken as representative of conservative Muslim women in Muslim societies, this action will distort the image of Muslim women. The whole love story between Salma and Hamdan shows Salma's opposition

to the system of her tribe. It is striking to notice that she does not seem to regret her love making with Hamdan after the incident. The society forces her, directly or indirectly, to regret it. After sleeping with him, for the first time, "I wrapped my mother's shawl around me and walked back home" (p. 29). She returned home without regretting, without crying, and without feeling guilty about having sex out of wedlock. She seems happy as she says, "From then on I lay under the fig tree waiting for him most nights" (p. 36). Salma's reaction after her love making with Hamdan is similar to her reaction after sleeping with Jim in England. Of sleeping with a man at night and his leaving in the morning, she acknowledges, "I continued eating my breakfast. No yanking of hair, crying or rending of garments … do your ablutions then pray for forgiveness" (p. 80). Salma, in Hima and England, seems the same in her reaction after committing one of the major sins in Islam. However, the conservatism of Hima's society and what happened later to her and her daughter shows her the seriousness of her deed.

Like Hima's, it could be said that English society changes Salma. When she is wearing hijab, "people look at me all time as if disease" (p. 123). Society here, in a sense, plays the role of Salma's father in Hima who asks her to wear the headscarf. Indirectly, Salma is forced to take off the veil because of this "look" from English society and because "it will be much harder to get a job while you insist on wearing it" (p. 123). In addition to the veil, she is forced, indirectly of course, to work in a bar and to wear even more revealing clothes than the English themselves: "there were very few women customers, and they were all better covered than me" (p. 182). However, the difference between direct force in Hima and indirect force in England is

crucial. Although England has forced Salma indirectly to take off the veil, this has happened as a consequence of the direct force of wearing the veil in Hima. As England has given Salma a new life, she seems willing to accommodate herself in the new country. While ignoring the Islamic prayers, for example, she does not mind praying in a cathedral (p. 177). In a sense, this depiction of Salma seems to prove that freedom and feminism come before culture and religion. Salma's willingness to absorb British culture is, arguably, a reaction to the freedom and feminism she receives from it. It could be inferred here that the Muslim culture cannot meet women's expectations and needs and, thus, they look for their freedom and feminism in other cultures despite the challenges they might face in the new cultures like racism in the West, for example.

In spite of the apparently negative depiction of Islam and Muslims in the novel and in Hima in particular, the personality of Salma, as a female Muslim, in England seems quite positive. Generally speaking, when Islam is central in Hima, it is depicted negatively. However, when it becomes marginal in England it is depicted positively. Salma, who suffers in Hima because of the traditional and the Muslim society, seems quite happy to be Muslim in England. The positive depiction of Islam in England is a celebration of Islam's marginality. In England, Salma tries to be a good Muslim, but in her own way. She tries to be a free female first then to be a Muslim. While in Hima her freedom is marginal, and traditions and Islam are central, in England it is the opposite. As a result, the positive depiction of Salma's Muslim identity in England could be seen as a positive point of secularism which respects Islam when it is marginal and critiques it when it becomes central in Muslim societies. Salma's Islam in England is interesting. As long as her freedom and her feminism are secured, she is

willing to practise Islam like any moderate or even conservative Muslim. It is a practice that is not demanded. She chooses when and what she practises in order to feel Muslim.

Salma practises Islam in different ways in England. She cleans the "dirty house" of Liz cleaning "every glass, every piece of china, every utensil" and washing "the floor, the walls, the ceiling and above all the toilet seat", justifying doing all that by saying: "I was a goddamn Muslim and had to be pure and clean" (p. 18). She follows the Islamic rule when she becomes clean and she follows it, too, when she refuses to drink alcohol – as she says: "alcohol had never passed my lips ever. I was a goddamn Muslim" (p. 258). Islamic prescriptions for Salma, in these two cases, must be followed and she proves her affiliation to Islam by following them. These two Islamic orders, being clean and not drinking alcohol, do not affect negatively the reception of Salma's personality in English society. In some situations, however, Salma tries to balance Islam and the society she lives in. When asked one day in a bar "you don't drink?" she replied, "I'm tired, that's all" (p. 169). Given the way the question was asked, she would appear strange if she confessed that she did not drink. To avoid a clash between her religion and society, she is clever in not drinking and hiding the Islamic reason. By doing so, she follows her religion without losing her position in English society.

Salma has another interesting way of balancing Islam and English society. One day, in a bar, she ordered an apple juice because "the colour of apple juice looked like beer so whoever approached me would think that I was open-minded, not an inflexible Muslim immigrant" (p. 66). From this situation, two important points about Salma's

personality could be inferred. Firstly, she wants to seem English, but not at the expense of her religion. After gaining her freedom as a woman, Islam appears important even if she is willing to go to bars and to drink something similar to beer. Here again, she knows how to balance her religion and society. Secondly, there are two groups of Muslims in England: open-minded and inflexible. The open-minded drink alcohol while the inflexible do not. The apple juice which is similar to beer puts Salma in an interesting position. According to her classification, she seems inflexible in reality because she does not drink alcohol; however, she wants to be seen as open-minded because people would think that the apple juice is beer. In other words, she is an inflexible Muslim inside, but open-minded outside. However, in both cases, her Islam is marginal in comparison to her feminism and freedom.

This conversation between Salma and Sadiq, her Muslim friend in England who sells alcohol, explores further Salma's understanding of what it means to be a Muslim:

> "I don't have an English boyfriend. I am a Muslim," I said and smiled.
> "All coconuts have English boyfriends. Muslims by name only", he said.
> "There are Muslims and Muslims", I said.
> "There are one Islamic", he said.
> I crossed the street and stood by him on the pavement in front of his shop. "What do you want me to do to prove to you that I am a Muslim? Pray five times on your doorstep?" I said" (p. 261).

For Salma, "there are Muslims and Muslims". While some of them are "Muslims by name only", others are practising Islam. And because she says "I don't have an English boyfriend. I am a Muslim", she puts herself in the practising group. She is Muslim, but she does not have "to prove" it to anybody and praying is not the only proof of being Muslim. This conversation indicates some significant points concerning the meaning of being Muslim in the novel. First, 'Muslim' as identity has a diverse and broad meaning; there are always, as Salma said, "Muslims and

179

Muslims". A Muslim could be nominal or practising and the practising Muslim could follow Islamic teaching in one aspect but ignore it in another. Second, Islam is in certain respects a personal issue. Salma has her own way of practising Islam and she does not have to prove her affiliation to another person. As a result, Islam could be read differently according to different individual perspectives.

Salma's Muslim identity in England appears much stronger than her Muslim identity in Hima. The main difference between the two Muslim identities of Salma is that her first identity from Hima is imposed from society while the second is "chosen" freely by Salma herself. Paradoxically, although Hima is a Muslim society and Exeter is not, Salma seems keener on practising Islam in Exeter than in Hima. In her appearance, and because of society, she seems conservative in Hima by wearing the veil and the shawl. But in reality, she does not seem to be convinced of the need to do this. Hamdan is her "boyfriend" there and she sleeps with him many times, but in England she says she cannot have a boyfriend because she is Muslim. In Hima and in England she is Muslim and she commits some sins. However, her real affiliation to Islam, not the affiliation that comes from society, is more obvious in England. Arguably this shows that even for practising Islam the secular environment is better than the Muslim and traditional one. Here, as a secularised writer, Faqir presents one of the differences between secular Exeter and Muslim Hima. According to her viewpoint, Islam can be better followed in secular societies where everything is chosen by the individual, than in Muslim societies where everything is imposed. Again the emphasis is that Islam is unable to enfranchise people in Muslim societies.

A comparison between the beginning and the end of Salma's life in England shows the success of Salma in facing the problems of her new life. The first few months in England are quite difficult. She spends two months in the port prison and then she and her new friend Parvin "were scavengers looking for leftovers in garbage bins" (p. 239). What makes things worse is that she, the Bedouin Arab woman, is without a man to help and protect her as was the case in Hima. Nonetheless, she fights for a better life and succeeds in changing her situation within a few years. In spite of her difficult beginning, towards the end of her time in England she seems to have become a successful person. Starting from her job as an assistant tailor, she has a part-time job in a bar, does a part-time degree in English Literature, and ends up being married to an English university tutor and has a son from him. This ending proves that Salma, the female Muslim, is strong, hard-working and ambitious. Salma's success in England seems to prove the appropriateness of the marginal position of Islam in society. When Islam was central in Hima, Salma's life was under threat, but when it becomes marginal she becomes successful. Islam is depicted here as a religion which stands against the success of women.

Another element of Salma's success in England is her ability to build good relationships with English white people in spite of the seemingly widespread racism. Liz, her landlady, represents the awful racism in England. She seems to hate Salma and considers her as one of the "foreigners", "aliens" and "illegal immigrants" (p. 26). In addition, she deals with her as "her servant in India" (p. 48) and does not hesitate to tell Salma that "slaves must never breathe English air" (p. 211). Salma, on the other hand, does not react similarly. On the contrary, Salma seems to respect Liz without forgetting that Liz has allowed her to rent a room in her house. Because Liz is

alcoholic, Salma could just ignore her, but Salma does not do that. She helps her, serves her and feeds her when she becomes seriously sick. When one day Liz cuts deeply Salma's hand while drunken, Salma does not tell the truth to the doctor in order to keep Liz away from any police questioning. After the death of Liz, Natasha tells Salma that "My aunt [Liz] was fond of you, Sally" (p. 294). Salma is successful in building a positive image for herself and in defeating racism by her kindness. As a Muslim living in England, this successful and positive personality of Salma's provides an image which contradicts the stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims in the West.

Her relationship with Max, her boss in the tailoring shop, is another example of her way of defeating racism. There is a rumour that "Max was a supporter of the British National Party, which wanted to kill Jews, Arabs and Muslims" (pp. 40-41). Although this rumour frightens Salma for a while, she does not think of changing her job and tries, instead, to deal with Max in the way she deals with Liz. With Liz, she does not focus on her racism, but her permission to rent her a room. With Max, she does the same. She thinks: "although Parvin had called him a racist, sexist pig Max gave me a job when no one would" (p. 280). It is interesting to notice the difference between Parvin and Salma here. While Parvin focuses on Max's negatives, Salma focuses on his positives. This kind way of "imaging" Max proves to be fruitful. Max seems to have an inside-versus-outside personality and Salma appears to understand that. She notices that "he kept me in the background and never called me to the front of the shop while he had customers around" (p. 277). This is his outside personality. He thinks that if the customers see Salma, his business might be affected. However, he seems to enjoy having conversations with her from time to time and he is kind enough

to raise Salma's wage and she is clear in saying "Max had always been kind to me" (p. 138). This kindness towards Salma explains Max's inside personality, which is in fact a reaction to her kindness. Max's way of dealing with Salma is similar, in one way or another, to Salma's apple juice which has the colour of beer. He tries to balance his society and his belief. He is kind to Salma and this means he is not racist, but he does not seem to like to show that to the public, fearing the loss of some of his customers. Once again, Salma's kindness seems to defeat Max's racism, from inside at least.

Salma, in comparison to Liz, seems to confirm another meaning of being British. Stereotypically, the British, or the western in general, is always associated with positive characteristics such as being civilised, active, hard-working, and ambitious and the like. The Muslim Arab, or the Eastern in general, is expected to be the opposite. This "imaginary" difference, though colonial, is still widely believed in. Therefore, the depiction of Liz and Salma without following the stereotypical images of the western and the eastern is postcolonial. The question here is: who is the "real" British now, Liz or Salma? Liz is white and English, but her life is miserable. She either drinks or sleeps without having a job or study. She does not seem to have friends and does not have a family. In addition to her whiteness and name, her history in India is the main source of her Englishness. This, seemingly, justifies her racism towards Salma who represents, in Liz's mind, her Indian servants, her eastern inferior, who has become better than her now in England. England has changed, but "Liz expected this country not to change" (p. 172). Salma, on the other hand, seems to know that the world has changed. In fact, she comes to England to change her life as she states: "I wanted to mend my life" (p. 61). Liz and Salma have different attitudes

towards the past. While Liz would prefer to bring it back, Salma tries to forget it. Britishness, for Liz, is something "historical" and strongly linked with colonialism. For Salma, it is to feel free in building your new life. Dealing with Salma colonially, Liz always corrects Salma's English accent and keeps "waiting for [her] to come home to give [her] advice on something or other" (p. 46).

Reading the novel from an Islamic Postcolonial Perspective

To read the novel from an Islamic Postcolonial perspective, it is quite crucial to understand Faqir's feminism – her theoretical ground in writing the novel –[67] in the light of the position of Muslim women in colonial discourse.[68] From a colonial perspective, "Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, … the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and **…** these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies. Only if these practices 'intrinsic' to Islam (and therefore Islam itself) were cast off could Muslim societies begin to move forward on the path of civilization" (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 151-152). According to colonial discourse, the cause of women's suffering in Muslim societies is Islam, and the solution is therefore to remove Islam. In fact, Leila Ahmed seems to think that western feminism, in general, is influenced by colonialism. She writes: "the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the

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[67] A major reason why she wrote the novel was to shed light on honour killing in some of the Arab and Muslim societies: "this novel celebrates the life of one of the faceless victims of honour crimes and is a humble attempt to give her a name, a voice and a life" (Faqir, 2010a). However, Faqir thinks that the novel is only partly about honour crimes. She says: "it is also important to note that *My Name is Salma* is partly about honour crimes but mainly about the immigrant experience in Britain today" (Faqir, 2011: 8).

[68] For more details on colonial discourse and Muslim women, see Ahmed's book *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992

comprehensive superiority of Europe" (p. 154). Within this context, Faqir's negative depiction of Muslim women in Hima and the inactive role of Islam in helping the oppressed women, in addition to the symbolic moment when Salma takes off her veil in England to start a new and successful life, all this, can lead u**s** to the conclusion that Faqir's feminism, and her novel too, have been influenced by colonial discourse. However, this does not mean the novel is unconnected to postcolonial discourse. I would argue that *My Name is Salma* incorporates both colonial and postcolonial discourses, though at different levels.

Being one of the Anglo-Arab writers in the West, Faqir shares common themes with postcolonialism, as Al Maleh suggests. "Anglo-Arab literature is haunted by the same 'hybrid', 'exilic', and 'diasporic' questions that have dogged fellow postcolonialists" (Al Maleh, 2009a, p. x). In her article "Lost in Translation", Faqir posits herself as a postcolonial writer. She argues that her writing experience, and what she calls "Arabs writing in English", comes "under the broader realm of postcolonial literature" (Faqir, 2010c). Her themes are indeed similar to postcolonial ones. As she states: "as an Arab writer, writing about the Arab culture in English, I find myself preoccupied with themes of exile and representation" (Faqir, 2010c). In short, she acknowledges that she emerges as a writer "from a post-colonial position." (Faqir, 2010c). Nevertheless, I am arguing that Faqir's attempt to propose her writing as postcolonial is obfuscated by her western feminism. Known as a "Middle Eastern feminist" (Nash, 2007, p. 35), she critiques Middle Eastern culture and the religious and social system accompanied with it, which, she believes, oppress women.[69] From this feminist perspective, the

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[69] Faqir critiques Islam directly sometimes and indirectly at other times. An example of her direct critique is her statement that "Islam identified women with chaos, anti-divine and anti-social forces" (Faqir, 1998b, p. 51). In her indirect critique, she proposes a particular interpretation of a patriarchal system accompanying Islam but she seems to emphasise that it is difficult to penetrate into Islam

native culture becomes an object to criticise rather than a source of pride. Contrary to the postcolonial writer who tries to read his or her native culture with great sympathy in order to challenge the stereotypical colonial image, Faqir's main focus is on the issue of women and the ways of freeing them from their oppressive native cultures.[70] In spite of her "bicultural identity" (Faqir, 2010c), Faqir demonstrates her western[71] side once the issues of women are under discussion and she leaves behind her postcolonial position when the veil, for example, is concerned. In fact, the veil is quite significant in identifying her perspective. The veil seems to be a central theme in some of Faqir's fiction and non-fiction writings. In her *Guardian* article of October 2007, Faqir presents her struggle for her right to take off the veil depicting it as an imposed and backward item of cloth (Faqir, 2007a). In *My Name is Salma*, she depicts the veil in a similar way to its depiction in the article. Her tyrant father in the article becomes the tyrant culture of Hima in the novel and the veil she refuses to wear in the article is taken off by Salma in the novel. When Salma takes off her veil in London, it becomes a transformational moment leading to a new successful life. The veil in the novel, arguably, symbolizes Salma's oppression in the Arab and Muslim world and to free her from that difficult situation, the veil should be removed.[72] On the issue of the

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without these interpretations or systems and, therefore, Islam is difficult to restore. Practically, Islam, whether directly or indirectly, is imaged as unable to help women. An example of the particular interpretation is when she writes that "Islam, or that particular interpretation of the hadith and Qur'an, perceives a specific role for women which in practice places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (p. 51). Regarding the patriarchal system, she asks "If Islam has functioned for centuries under patriarchy how can we restore its ethical and egalitarian thrust? (Faqir, 2010b) In these two examples, it appears quite difficult to "restore" Islam.

[70] While postcolonialism "refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (Young, 2003, p. 7), Faqir seems to acknowledge the superiority of western culture over the Muslim one when she accuses Islam, or the system accompanying it, of oppression and that is why she "has crossed from one culture into another because of her father" (Faqir, 2010c).

[71]She declares clearly that "my mind speaks English but my heart speaks Arabic" (Faqir, 2011, p. 7). Between the English mind and the Arabic heart, Islam's position does not seem important.

[72] By presenting the veil as an oppressive symbol, the male Muslim as an oppressor, and the female Muslim as oppressed, Faqir provides a fixed meaning to the veil and depicts Muslims using "fixity".

veil, Faqir seems more ideological than any other Anglo-Arab novelists, even Ahdaf Soueif, for example. "While Soueif [in her novel *Map of Love*] romanticize**s** the veil, which she views through an orientalist lens, Faqir [in *Pillars of Salt*] speaks of its oppressive effect" (Suyoufie and Hammad, 2009, p. 307). By linking the veil with female inequality in the Arab and Muslim world, Faqir seems to look at the veil from a western perspective. Robert Young thinks that "nothing symbolizes the differences between the western and the Muslim worlds [more] than the veil" (Young, 2003, p. 80). The position of the veil, then, is very important in identifying the identity or the perspective of the writer. "For many westerners", Young continues, "the veil is a symbol of patriarchal Islamic societies in which women are assumed to be oppressed, subordinated, and made invisible. On the other hand, in Islamic societies, and among many Muslim women in non-Islamic societies, the veil (hijab) has come to symbolize a cultural and religious identity, and women have increasingly chosen to cover themselves as a matter of choice" (p. 80). From this perspective, Faqir appears to be more western than Muslim on the issue of the veil. Moreover, Leila Ahmed could see in the issue of the veil a colonial dimension. "It would be unreasonable to fault the young women of today for adopting Islamic dress, as if the dress were intrinsically oppressive – which is how the veil, at least, was viewed by the former colonial powers and by members of the indigenous upper and middle classes who assimilated colonial views" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 230). Accordingly, Faqir could be seen as similar to those "who assimilated colonial views" and her novel *My Name is Salma* could be

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This recalls the old polemical western images of Islam in general and the veil in particular. Further, it does not respond to the development of Muslim societies which has undoubtedly had an effect on the condition of the veiled Muslim women. Edward Said thinks that these fixed meanings are orientalist as the "the Oriental is given as fixed [and] stable" (Said, 1995, p. 308), and Homi Bhabha links these fixed judgments with colonial discourse. He writes: "an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (Bhabha, 2006, p. 94).

considered, from an Islamic postcolonial perspective, a colonially-influenced one because it celebrates Salma's refusal to the veil as a way of freeing herself.

Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* is an interesting example of a novel that mixes both colonial and postcolonial discourses. Suyoufie and Hammad suggest that "unlike postcolonial women writers [...] Faqir perpetuates the image of native women as oppressed". For them, the novel is not postcolonial. They continue: "at the same time, Faqir's novel [*Pillars of Salt*] might be seen as an exemplar of the 'empire writing back', yet we have no practical alternative project to that of the colonizer" (Suyoufie and Hammad, 2009, p. 306). Writing back is undoubtedly one of the postcolonial characteristics. In addition, while the novel appears postcolonial in describing the native landscape, it appears colonial in depicting the native people. In an interview, Faqir described the landscape as "magical" and that "*Pillars of Salt*, was written to document that magical landscape and to preserve the Bedouins' noble way of life, which is fast disappearing" (Faqir, 2010d).[73] However, the people who live in this magical landscape are depicted as completely the opposite. Suyoufie and Hammad write:

> The novel is hardly complimentary to the autochthonous Arab culture. Arab men crowd like 'cockroaches' (216); they have 'no dignity.' The Arab male is ruthless when it comes to women, but sheepishly obsequious before the colonizers [...] the Arabs are also motivated by 'vanity' in their military encounter with the British. Moreover, Arabs lack loyalty and solidarity among themselves, as when an Arab informer betrays the small band of Arab freedom fighters to the British. The presentation of Hamia as a 'dull' village, with houses made of mud and straw, and naked children playing in its 'stable-like lanes' (4), is hardly 'nostalgic', and it stresses the 'unhomeliness' of the native country (Suyoufie and Hammad, 2009, p. 307).

Comparing Fadia Faqir's novel and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad point out the difference between the two from a

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[73] While Faqir thinks that she presents the Bedouin landscape as "magical", Suyoufie and Hammad think that she "does not romanticize the landscape" (Suyoufie and Hammad, 2009, p. 307).

postcolonial perspective. They suggest: "unlike Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, where both positive and negative aspects of the native culture are displayed, Faqir does not depart for a moment from her intention to indict the native culture of the Arab setting and to present the experience of women there as 'unhomely'" (p. 307). This difference between the two novels reveals that although Faqir is haunted by the themes of exile and diaspora, which are major postcolonial themes, her writing is not always postcolonial. The key difference between Faqir's writings and the postcolonial ones is the perspective from which she sometimes writes. While the postcolonial writers write against the idea of the superiority of the western culture over their native cultures, "Faqir's stand is based on 'assuming' a foreign culture that – it is assumed – is superior to her native one" (p. 309).

It is clear that *My Name is Salma* is a feminist work that attempts to shed light on the issue of women in general and of honour killing in particular in the Arab and Muslim world. From this specific perspective, the woman is the centre. Islam and Muslims are judged according to the positions they take on the issues related to women. Faqir acknowledges that "throughout the novel she [Salma] observes Islam being practised from the outside, but she never practises herself because after the loss of her daughter she comes to the conclusion that religion does not offer any consolation" (Faqir, 2010a). This "conclusion", it could be argued, is the main factor that forms the image of Islam and Muslims in the novel. To demonstrate that Islam "does not offer any consolation", Faqir images Islam as the religion that cannot provide Salma with the protection and the freedom she struggles for. Islam, for Salma, is something which belongs to Hima the village she leaves.

Nevertheless, the successful life of Salma in England needs to be carefully considered. Although Salma refuses to follow Islam by not wearing the headscarf and not praying in England, she, simultaneously, does follow Islam by not drinking alcohol and not having a boyfriend. Further, the mere constant affiliation to Islam in England, though not fully practised, is significant. Salma does not leave Islam, but she leaves Hima's version of Islam which is central and conservative. It could be argued that the headscarf and praying symbolize the subordination of women and conservative Islam, respectively. For Salma, she is oppressed in Hima by the conservative Muslims. In short, there are central conservative and moderate marginal versions of Islam in the novel. The central conservative Islam in Hima oppresses women while the marginal moderate one in England does not prevent her from being successful. The novel stereotypes the first and seems to accept the second.[74]

Broadly speaking, the novel, where the setting is England and Islam is marginal, could be called postcolonial. However, where the setting is Hima and Islam is central, it is stereotypical and colonial. In England, there are no black-and-white characterizations or categories. Both Muslim characters and British characters have their own negatives and positives. They are all human beings without stereotypical images as Faqir says: "this novel is an attempt to humanize both the Arabs and the British" (Faqir, 2010d). Liz [75] the English woman is hopeless, but Salma the Muslim

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[74] Salma's moderate Islam in England is quite strange. Because she is Muslim, as she said, she never drinks alcohol, but she does not pray although she is Muslim. If praying is a conservative ordinance which might remind her of Hima's conservative culture, not drinking alcohol could be seen as the same. As a result, it could be assumed that Salma's moderate Islam is a way of allying her to a privately chosen sense of Islam. In other words, Islam is a personal issue and every Muslim could practise it in his own way. This personal Islam does not have to be logical; its main role is to let the person feels that he is Muslim. This is a postmodern view.

[75] The depiction of Elizabeth and her relationship with Salma in Exeter is, indeed, postcolonial. In Faqir's words: "in *My Name is Salma* I have no 'goodies' or 'baddies'". In fact, all of the characters are

is ambitious. Parvin and Max are both racists in their own ways. In addition, they can live in harmony despite their differences. Ideas are always in transformation. Some English people convert to Islam and some Muslims change some of their ideas like Salma when removing the veil. Although she is able to become Christian or even atheist, Salma's insistence on remaining Muslim is quite significant in suggesting that moderate Muslims, who practise Islam marginally, could live actively in British society. Salma's kindness is her "postcolonial" response to the hateful "colonial" discourse of Liz and her like in British society as a whole.

Muslims in Hima are imaged completely differently. As far as Islam and Muslims are concerned, my argument is that the novel should be judged on its depiction of Islam and Muslims, not on the identity or the religion of its writer, as "Muslims might be secular [and] might be even atheists" (Cooke, 2001, p. 61). In spite of her Muslim identity, Faqir seems to depict all the Muslim characters in Hima, whether male or female, negatively. Muslim society oppresses the woman. Almost all the Muslim female characters are oppressed by male Muslim oppressors. Salma and her daughter, mother, grandmother, friends in prison and even Parvin her Pakistani friend in England, all suffer at the hands of a father, a brother, a son or even a silent imam. The mosque is the place where the seemingly aggressive and dangerous young men go to and the Quran is just a reminder of Salma's mother. Muslims pray only when they need something like rain or the recovery of a sick child and they are willing to be prostitutes to gain some money.

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tragic figures, even the English landlady Elizabeth, who mistreats Salma. When we discover what Elizabeth has lived through and survived we forgive her excesses" (Faqir, 2011, pp. 5-6).

In addition to Hima, Lebanon (which might be considered as representative of the Arab world) and Pakistan (the Muslim world) are mentioned, probably, to widen the space in which Muslim women are subordinated to cover the entire Arab and Muslim world. Although Lebanon is one of the most democratic Arab countries and many of its population are Christian, it is similar to Hima in its inability to protect Salma's life and stop her Muslim brother, oppressor and killer from killing her. Geoffrey Nash suggests that "the physical space in which Salma is in danger for her life extends beyond Bedouin tribal territory to incorporate much of the Middle East. There is, in other words, also a wider connection with the Arab world as a whole" (Nash, 2007, p. 129). In Pakistan, Parvin, Salma's Pakistani friend in England, is oppressed by her father. This incident indicates that Pakistan and Hima are the same in their oppressing systems towards women.

The portrayal of the Muslim woman as oppressed throughout the whole Muslim world does not seem postcolonial. Perhaps some writers, like Faqir, could have more than one "writing identity" because "different narratives by the selfsame author may be characterized as postcolonial … and orientalist or non-postcolonial, that is strongly submissive to the literary norms of western culture" (Erickson, 1998, p. 5). More strikingly, the same narrative, I might argue, could have different characterizations when read from different perspectives. From a general perspective, Faqir's writings "rarely descend to the level of stereotype" (Nash, 2007, p. 37), but from a Muslim perspective, *My Name is Salma* is stereotypical and non-postcolonial in depiction of Muslims in Muslim societies. In other words, apart from Islam and the condition of

Muslim women in the Muslim world, Faqir's writing is postcolonial. She says: "if the discourse in the metropolis aims to de-humanize Arabs and make them disappear in order to justify 'collateral damage', my fiction and writing aims to humanize not only the Arabs but the English, the Americans, the Indians, etc. It is harder, perhaps, to shoot someone you know very well" (Faqir, 2011, pp. 5-6). However, it does not seem one of her writing aims to humanise Muslims who centralise Islam in their lives in the Muslim world.

Inferiority of Muslim women in the Muslim world takes different forms and the main one, according to the novel, is honour killing. The negative depiction of Islam and Muslims seems to be used as a way of showing the awfulness of this kind of killing. The idea here is that Islam and Muslims deserve being badly imaged because they accept or stay silent towards honour killing.[76] Islam and Muslims, then, are accused of either direct involvement or complicity in this killing and all women's discriminatory cultural practices in the Muslim world. However, Faqir undoubtedly knows that Islam does not permit honour killing. In her article about honour killing in Jordan she writes:

> A parallel value system seems to exist which is in action not Islamic. Islam abolished the femicide or the burying of young girls in the jahiliyya (pre-Islamic) period. However, the protection of honour now takes priority over Islamic teachings. Societal and political structures conspire to form a parallel value system, which is stronger than the Islamic religion (Faqir, 2001, p. 74).

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[76] Faqir seems one of those feminist novelists to whom Anouar Majid addresses these two important questions: "are women to be given their rightful place in the canon only if Islam is depicted in the broadest orientalist strokes? Is it possible to champion women's rights while simultaneously extricating progressive Islam from the deadwood of orthodoxy and the biased interpretations of much of western scholarship?" (Majid, 2002, pp. 58-59).

It is clear, then, that this "parallel value system", not the Islamic one, is the cause of honour killing and if this system is "stronger than the Islamic religion", Islam cannot be blamed. Further, honour killing has been practised in non-Muslim societies such as the Christian Mediterranean and Hindu/Sikh India.[77]

The novel is full of stereotypical images about Islam and Muslims in the Arab and Muslim world.[78] Applying Edward Said's ideas regarding the representations of the civilised West and the uncivilized East,[79] it could be argued that the novel is following the same way of depicting Islam and Muslims in Hima which represents the Arab and Muslim world. Whenever opposition occurs between Islam and the West, whether the Christian or the liberal, the West is always the superior. In contrast to the Muslim rural village, Hima, the western Exeter is a modern town. The woman in Hima is always oppressed, but in England she is not. The man in the Muslim country is an oppressor, but he is not in England. Unlike the nameless, silent and inactive Muslim imam in Hima, the Christian people, Kairiyya, Miss Asher and Minister Mahoney, are very active and are willing to travel from one country to another and from one prison to another to help all the suffering people regardless of their religion.

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[77] Faqir herself acknowledges that "honour crimes happen in many countries and to associate them with the Arab world is unfair" (Faqir, 2011, p. 8).

[78] It is striking to notice that while Faqir critiques western Orientalism, she is critiqued for following it in her fiction. *The Cry of the Dove,* the edition of *My Name is Salma* in the United States, "has a totally covered woman on the cover in the courtyard of a mosque" which Faqir describes as "totally Orientalist" (Faqir, 2011, p. 6). In addition, she thinks that "most of [Arabic books translated into English] confirm stereotypes about the Arabs" (p. 7). Paradoxically, while she critiques these Orientalist stereotypes, she is faced with the criticism of perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes about the Arab oppression of women, particularly in relation to *My Name is Salma*'s plot of the honour killing (which often holds an exoticized place in the Orientalist imagination) (p. 8).

[79] See: Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 1995

The Quran is always kept as a memory while the Bible is opened, read and taught by Miss Asher. Islam is depicted as a harsh religion which punishes those who have sins, but Christianity believes in forgiveness. Islam is "difficult" and "complicated" because of its many restrictions while Christianity is not. For Salma, even making a cup of tea and removing the hair from her legs raises differences between Hima and England. In England these things are much easier.

While fighting for Arab women's rights in Arab societies, Faqir should always remember that in these societies "religion [is] a source of identity" (Badran and Cooke, 1990, p. xxxvi). The promotion of secular feminism in the Arab world might lead to the complicated issue of "tilting towards the West's image of the Orient" (Nash, 2007, p. 32). Muslim women are still suffering in Arab societies, but Islam is not the cause and attacking it, following the practice of western feminism, will create further problems because "the feminist agenda for Muslim women as set by Europeans ... was incorrect and irrelevant" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 166).

Chapter Four:

Islam and Muslim Identities in Aboulela's *Minaret*

With the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in the late eighties, the images of Islam and Muslims began to take a shape that has lasted up to the present. Inspired by Rushdie, a hero after Khomeini's fatwa, fiction, arguably, was used to assimilate British Muslims.[80] Under its guise, writers have seemed free enough to image British Muslims as victims to a religion which cannot match with western values. Together with Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Monica Ali, in their novels *The Black Album* and *Brick Lane* respectively, offer a similar portrayal of Islam and Muslims enhancing in the process their reputations for being brave enough to tackle this controversial topic. In the world of fiction Islam becomes their expertise.[81] They voice the message that Muslims should be more westernized, that Islam without essential renovation and Muslims without serious assimilation will remain uncivilised. On the other hand, the emergence of Leila Aboulela's fiction might be said to represent a turning point in relation to the depiction of Islam and Muslims in contemporary British fiction. Aboulela's writing challenges the stereotypical images made by Rushdie, Kureishi and Ali.[82] In a sense, she is "writing back" in order to give voice to those Muslims who for some time were depicted negatively in British fiction. Strikingly, Aboulela herself, as an educated female writer who wears the hijab, is a

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[80] This role of fiction is similar to its role in the colonial period when "literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation" (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p. 3).

[81] Akbar Ahmed believes that "the West, accepting them as authentic spokesmen, was generous and welcomed them [although] most in this category are nominal Muslims only" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164). It is essential to notice here that these writers gain their authenticity from the West and not from Muslims themselves. They appear to represent western assumptions about Islam and Muslims more than their realities.

[82] The British writers who write extensively and stereotypically about Islam and Muslims in the contemporary period have Muslim backgrounds. Rushdie, Kureishi and Ali bear Muslim names and they are originally from South Asian Muslim families.

practical riposte to the image of the oppressed woman in Islam. Unlike those previous writers who attempt "to 'explain' or satirise Islam from a western perspective", she tries to "write from inside the experience of growing up and living with a network of customs and beliefs" (Philips, 2005). Writing from the inside, Aboulela has created a new image of Islam and Muslims; once the perspective is changed, the positions of the Self and Other do the same. In the first phase, Islam was the Other, but now, in the new phase, it is the Self. Writing about Islam and Muslims, for Aboulela, is writing about herself. The image of Islam is hers and in defending Islam she is defending her own beliefs. That is why, for of all she has written about Islam and Muslims, she can report: "I have so far written close to my autobiographical situation" (Aboulela, 2007b).

Aboulela's portrayal of Islam and its relationship with the West does not challenge the western image only. Rather, it challenges some eastern ones too. Since Islam and western secularism are widespread all over the world, Aboulela's fiction has emerged as a different voice in terms of much eastern as well as western fiction. British writer Monica Ali and Sudanese Tayeb Salih might be different in many aspects, but they both belong to the same extreme that Aboulela writes against. Ali's Islam is different from Aboulela's, and the West of Saleh is, again, different from Aboulela's. As compared to Monica Ali, Anita Sethi observes in *The Observer*: "Aboulela offers a very different portrayal of Muslim women in London from that in … *Brick Lane*. Rather than yearning to embrace western culture, Aboulela's women seek solace in their growing religious identity" (Sethi, 2005). On the other hand, "Jamal Mohamed Ibrahim, Sudan's ambassador in London, saw in [*The Translator*] 'a dialogue of

civilizations' in contrast to Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North*, which depicts 'the clash of civilizations'" (Ghazoul, 2001).

Aboulela's personality appears to have been influenced by her Egyptian mother and her western education: "My mother is a wonderful person, very open-minded and progressive, and she taught me a lot of things that I still use, even though literature is not her field at all ... She was one of the few women in Khartoum who worked, one of the few women who could drive" (Aboulela, 2000). Aboulela's mother does not therefore seem an oppressed woman and this has inevitably affected her daughter who takes for granted her freedom to work and drive. In addition to her mother's influence, Aboulela's personality is built upon her western education. Apart from her years in Khartoum University, she was exposed to the western educational system from the age of seven through her study in the American school and then a Catholic girls' school; ending her study at the London School of Economics. Putting her daughter in American and Catholic schools, the mother does not conform to a stereotypical conservative Muslim outlook which normally prefers the local and Muslim schools in order to protect daughters from western culture. It could be argued that Aboulela's family and education are in harmony and both help shape the western side of her personality.

Significantly, through Aboulela's western education and progressive mother she discovered a moderate form of Islam. She explains how at the age of seven she borrowed her first English novels from the school library: "I read them again and again, and even though I knew that the characters were not Muslim, I found Muslim values in those novels" (Aboulela, 2007a). Thus from her early years Aboulela

learned that Islam and the West are not inimical, they hold some values in common. In addition to this very important piece of knowledge, her mother, practically, taught her that the woman in Islam has her own rights such as working and driving a car. It could be construed that this, in a sense, was against the Sudanese traditions of the time. Indeed, Sudanese traditions might, in some situations, differ from modern interpretations of Islam. Whereas Islam and the West could have some things in common, such as the values Aboulela discerned in the novels she read, Islam and traditional societies like Sudan might have different points of view, such as over the issues of females working and driving a car. If Islam is seen in this way, without the traditional influences, it can be said to share some of its values with western ones, and thus could be seen as a global religion.

Together her mother and her eastern education provided Aboulela with her first cultural impressions concerning Islam; however, her deeper, spiritual understanding of Islam came after arriving in London. As when she saw Islamic values in western novels, now she discovers Islam in London. The turning point was wearing the hijab. "'I didn't know anybody. It was 1989 and the word 'Muslim' wasn't even really used in Britain at the time; you were either black or Asian. So then I felt very free to wear the hijab'" (Sethi, 2005). Aboulela "felt very free" in London. It provided her the freedom and the opportunity to decide for herself without outside influences. Strikingly, under the pressure of her progressive friends, she could not wear the hijab when she was in Sudan. "I held back out of fear that I would look ugly in a head scarf and that my progressive friends would make fun of me" (Aboulela, 2007a). In London, though she might still fear looking ugly, this was not, apparently, her main consideration.

While wearing the hijab is the act of a conservative Muslim, Aboulela does not reject western culture for the sake of Islam. Rather, she tries to bridge the gap between the two. Unlike some of the western writers who look at Islam from outside, and unlike, too, those Muslim writers who look at the West from the outside, Aboulela appears, at one and the same time, to be inside both of them. She states: "I am considerably westernized [but] I am in this religion. It is in me" (Aboulela, 2007a). As a result, one of the main themes of her fiction is the removal of misunderstanding. "Like *Minaret* and *The Translator*, *Coloured Lights* deals with questions of cultural misunderstanding and mistranslation" (Procter, 2009). In addressing the relationship between Islam and the West, Aboulela argues: "this clash between Islam and the West actually first happened in Muslim countries, when the coloniser came, not when Muslims started coming to Britain'" (Allfree, 2010). If western colonialism produced the first spark for this clash, the West, for Aboulela, is not alone to blame for the misunderstandings. Out of the many controversial issues arising between Muslims and westerners, the hijab is one of the most striking examples. According to Aboulela: "The problem with hostility to the hijab is that Muslims can't help but feel attacked. But I also think European Muslims don't understand why there is criticism of the hijab – they haven't listened or read enough. They just think: 'Oh these people don't like us.' But that's not dialogue. It's about people taking sides. And when it comes to getting to know each other better, taking sides holds us back" (Allfree, 2010). Regardless of the cause of this misunderstanding, then, Muslims "haven't listened or read enough" to understand why they are criticised. For Aboulela, both sides must take part in dialogue.

Although she is proud of being from Sudan, Aboulela's national identity is not purely Sudanese. "I am Sudanese, but my mother is Egyptian, I was born in Cairo but that was only because my mother was visiting her parents. I lived in Khartoum, but every year we spent the summer months in Cairo" (Aboulela, 2002a, p. 198). With a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, brought up in Sudan, but born in Egypt, national identity, for a person like Aboulela, does not satisfy her full sense of belonging. Citizens who feel themselves purely Sudanese might see differences between her and themselves; Egyptians, on the other hand, might see similarities. In addition to her strong sense of belonging to Islam, the instability of her national identity causes Aboulela to prefer her religious identity to her nationality one. Sethi notes: "for Aboulela, a personal, religious identity provides more stability than national identity. 'I can carry [religion] with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can easily be taken away from me'" (Sethi, 2005).

Islam and Muslims in Aboulela's Writing

Aboulela has written three novels and the collection of short stories, *Coloured Lights*. Her three novels, *The Translator*, *Minaret* and *Lyrics Alley*, attempt to negotiate the controversial issues between Islam and the West in the present world. Occasionally, when she has preferred to write about the past, as in her last novel *Lyrics Alley*, she does that, arguably, to shed light on some of the roots of the contemporary misunderstanding between Islam and the West. The topic of Islam is therefore present in whatever she writes; we can say that in general she is "motivated by putting Islam into fiction". More specifically, she has "always wanted to write about what it feels like to have faith in the modern secular world." The modern world is secular and Islam is a global religion so writing about such a topic in effect means writing about

Islam both in the West and in the East. Unlike many other western and eastern writers, especially those who write in English, Aboulela is one of the few who write "sympathetically about people who have faith" (Aboulela, 2007b).

In discussing the perspective from which Aboulela writes her fiction I propose to argue and demonstrate that she is successful in two things. In her representation of issues concerning Islam and Muslims in the West, she sets out to identify and challenge the images projected in colonial discourse. This she does in postcolonial terms, but she also builds into her writing a constructive spirit which attempts to facilitate better understanding of each other's cultures by those in the East and in the West. Aboulela's preferred approach to the continuous conflict between Islam and the West globally is to replace negative misunderstanding by positive appreciation. Her discourse sets itself against the extreme western discourses that attack Islam in the West and also against the eastern discourses antagonistic to the West in the Muslim countries. For this reason, some critics see Aboulela as one of the founders of a new kind of literature in representing Islam and Muslims in the West: "This new kind of literature explains to non-Muslims aspects of Muslim lives, especially those of minorities in Europe and North America, while at the same time exposing prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia" (Hassan, 2008, p. 317). In her fiction, Aboulela tries to bridge the gap between Islam and the West by explaining the role of Islam in Muslims' lives and voicing the fears of its followers.

To exemplify this I, shall refer to two short stories from *Coloured Lights* (2005). The coloured lights in 'Coloured Lights' and the museum in 'The Museum' provide two examples of misunderstanding. The coloured lights which were hung up for Christmas

reminded the protagonist of her brother, Taha, who died on his wedding day because of the electrical shock he received from them. These lights therefore have different connotations. Here in London they connote happiness and celebration; but for the narrator they are a memory of death and mourning. London is beautiful with the lights, but this same London invites a negative response from her: "I was alienated from this place" (Aboulela, 2005b, p. 1). In 'The Museum', the main protagonist Shadia, accompanying her friend Bryan to the museum, experiences an unpleasant shock. "She had come to this museum expecting sunlight and photographs of the Nile, something to appease her homesickness, a comfort, a message. But the messages were not for her, not for anyone like her" (Aboulela, 2005c, pp. 102-103). As a Sudanese, she does not see her country or her Africa, only the western image of it. The coloured lights and the museum symbolise, in a sense, the different images, ideas or connotations separating the East and the West. In the two short stories, Aboulela purposely raises issues of a controversial, postcolonial nature with a view to opening them up for discussion and probing the reasons behind the misunderstanding.

We might argue that Aboulela's project depends on understanding the other more than rejecting or changing it. Muslim women will not be asked to remove the hijab once the philosophy behind it is understood. As a result, we meet certain characters in Aboulela's fiction, conservative Muslim women who pray and wear the hijab, but who do not feel neglected by the West. The relationship between Sammar and Rae in *The Translator* is a good example. Sammar does not stop practising her religion to satisfy Rae. Rather, he himself is the one who changes his beliefs in order to marry her. Being an expert on Islam, Rae's professional empathy towards Sammar's religion prevents him from asking her to change some of its practices, such as wearing the

hijab. Even before getting married, Sammar and Rae are close enough to understand each other. This closeness and understanding, for Aboulela, represents the possibility of harmonising the relationship between Islam and the West without any need to change practices that might be described as controversial. Changing such practices, in a sense, would constitute a form of misunderstanding. However, replacing the misunderstanding by understanding will go a long way towards solving the problem.

But how are we to situate Leila Aboulela with respect both to modern trends in Islam and to postcolonial thinking? Contrasting Tayeb Salih and Aboulela, Waïl Hassan argued:

> Whereas his are narratives of failure (of the national project, of the colonial bourgeoisie, of postcolonial intellectuals, of secular Arab ideologies of modernity), hers are narratives of redemption and fulfillment through Islam. While Salih's work reflects the disappointments of the 1960s and 70s, Aboulela's materializes the slogan of the Islamist movement that emerged in the mid-1970s: "Islam is the solution" (Hassan, 2008, p. 300).

Hassan believes that Aboulela's fiction emerged at the same time as "the Islamic resurgence that has attempted to fill the void left by the failure of Arab secular ideologies of modernity" (p. 298). It is certainly true that she gives voice to Muslim sensibilities both in the East and in the West. In the East, her writing questions the suitability of secular discourse representing Muslims, especially as secular discourse takes a negative position on Muslim issues like the hijab. In the West, Aboulela's fiction succeeds in creating a new image of Islam and Muslims by looking at them from a new perspective. At base, her work represents a criticism of the secular discourse that undermines Islam in the East and the West, while, on the other hand, endeavouring to place Islam in a stronger position in its dialogue with the West. Aboulela represents a new page, then, in literature written by writers of Arab

ethnicity. In fact, her work is a challenge to the secular point of view about Islam in the West, too:

> In a secular climate (such as British/European society and I can even include the intellectual and literary Arab circles where religion is almost a taboo subject), faith is seen as either part of tradition/culture or it is seen as political … But this language to me has been and is very limited and I do not feel that it could show readers, the kind of faith I knew and grew up in. I wanted to write about this space ... that is beyond the political because I feel that this space is important and it is neglected … I have to make up this language or chart this new space. This is the biggest motivation I have to write (Aboulela, 2007b).

Furthermore, Aboulela's new portrayal of Islam has attracted readers, as Nash writes: "it is this positive image of Islam and Muslim identity which has attracted readers, and not only female Muslim ones, but others who recognize the conditions of possibility within which Aboulela writes, and out of which she translates her otherwise unfamiliar message to a wider readership" (Nash, 2012, p. 49). While her Muslim characters have flaws, this is because they are human beings and not simply because they are Muslims. As human beings, Muslims might be influenced by their own cultures and traditions; they might fail to follow Islamic ordinances in their entirety. However, Islam is not to blame. Unlike a writer like Monica Ali, who thinks that Islam is one of the reasons behind women's oppression in the Muslim world, Aboulela believes that Islam has its own way of liberating women through spirituality. Tina Steiner suggests: "she portrays her characters' spirituality as a liberating force, which affords them the room to construct transnational identities as Muslim women" (Steiner, 2008).

Putting Islam to one side, we see that Aboulela portrays her Muslim characters like any others, with positives and negatives. As she has said: "my characters do not necessarily behave as 'good' Muslims; they are not ideals or role models. They are

205

flawed and complex" (Aboulela website). What makes these Muslims different from Muslims in other writing is: firstly, although they are not good, they aim to be good by "trying to practise their faith or make sense of Allah's will, in difficult circumstances" (Aboulela website). Second, an Islamic logic moves their modes of living. Ferial Ghazoul points this out as the reason for describing Aboulela's writing as Islamic. "What makes her writing 'Islamic' is not religious correctness or didacticism. Rather, it is a certain narrative logic where faith and rituals become moving modes of living" (Ghazoul, 2001). I now intend to test these axioms in my discussion of Aboulela's second novel, *Minaret* (2005).

Islam and Muslims in Aboulela's *Minaret*

Minaret is the story of a Sudanese girl living a happy and comfortable life in Sudan. Her family is rich and aristocratic. Her father is a close friend of the president and her mother is from an important family. Brought up and educated as western, Najwa enjoys travelling to Europe, attending parties in the American Club in Khartoum, and having fun generally. Then a coup in Sudan suddenly changes her life. She becomes a refugee in London, her father is executed, her mother dies, and her twin brother is put behind bars for drug dealing and fighting with a policeman. In London she is free enough to have an affair with Anwar who was her friend in Khartoum University and who fled to London after another coup. After leaving Anwar and to assuage feelings of guilt and find relief, Najwa turns to Islam; she wears the hijab and becomes religious. In London, without a family to help her, she works as a maid in a Muslim house where she falls in love once again, with Tamer, the younger brother of her employer. In spite of their different ages and positions, Najwa and Tamer's similar religiousness led Tamer to insist on marrying her, but his family refuses and Najwa

leaves the house. As a compromise, she ends her relationship with Tamer, and the family does not stop Tamer from studying his favourite major at university. She leaves Tamer, but has before her the fulfilling prospect of going on hajj.

Referring to what has already been written above, the novel shows Muslims, and conservative ones in particular, as like everyone else in having their own positives and negatives. They are neither completely good nor completely bad. Tamer, for example, in Najwa's words, "is so devout and good" (Aboulela, 2005a, p. 93), but in another situation, she says "[i]t disturbs me when he is harsh about his parents. It is the only fault I find in him" (p. 210). Shahinaz, Najwa's close friend in London, is another example of a Muslim with mixed characteristics. In spite of her goodness, Najwa notices that "Shahinaz envies me sometimes" (p. 210). Tamer and Shahinaz are very normal and have their own faults even though they try to be good Muslims. In fact, this issue is very much related to how a person judges other people in general. Najwa and Lamya are both Muslims, but they see each other differently. Najwa notices:

> She will always see my *hijab*, my dependence on the salary she gives me, my skin colour, which is a shade darker than hers. She will see these things and these things only; she will not look beyond them. It disappoints me because, in spite of what Tamer's said, I admire her for the PhD she is doing, her dedication to her studies, her grooming and taste in clothes (p. 116).

Both Najwa and Lamya therefore have mixed characteristics, some positive, others negative and limiting. But while Najwa focuses on Lamya's positives along with her negatives, Lamya focuses only on Najwa's negatives. Doctora Zeinab describes her daughter, Lamya, as a person who "sees things in black and white" (p. 261). The same contrast exists in respect of Tamer and Omar. In spite America's bad reputation in the eyes of many Muslims, Tamer has his own image. He says: "here [in London] there're all these anti-American feelings. It bugs me. My American teachers were really nice"

(p. 117). America is not a bad country; it has its own positives. Omar, on the other hand, seems to follow Lamya in her "black and white" perspective. Najwa says: "for my brother, anything western was unmistakably and unquestionably better than anything Sudanese" (pp. 131-132). Lamya and Najwa's different outlooks might be read in the context of colonial and postcolonial representations. Lamya creates a representation of Najwa that reflects Lamya's superiority in socio-cultural terms. Najwa is stereotyped and fixed by her veil, career and skin colour and Lamya cannot see her without these frames. For Lamya, Najwa is characterised by negatives, and the positives, if there are any, are ignored. Najwa, however, seems more realistic in her assessment of Lamya. For her, Lamya has her own positives. She provides a representation of Lamya without stereotypes or fixations. Though they are two Muslims who live in Britain, their view of one another is determined, on Lamya's part, by a colonial perspective. Lamya shows it is not only western people who can be accused of looking at things with a colonial eye: Muslims, too, do the same. The conflict between the colonial and the postcolonial perspectives, then, is not restricted automatically to the conflict between the colonisers and the once-colonised; it can be extended to conflict between those within the same culture, where one adopts a colonial perspective toward those who challenge them.

Further, the novel portrays Islam as a global religion which attracts people from different nationalities and classes.[83] It diversifies Muslims. Najwa is from Sudan,

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[83] By depicting Islam as a global religion, Aboulela presents Islam as an active participant in cultural globalization. Like western culture, Islam has the potential to cover the globe. In addition, this depiction challenges, in a sense, the core idea of stereotyping which depends largely on nationalism and the cultural differences between nations. On the issue of Islam and nationalism, Ziauddin Sardar writes: "Islam and nationalism are contradictory terms. While Islam is intrinsically a universal creed and worldview, which recognizes no geographical boundaries, nationalism is based on territory and is parochial in its outlook. While Islam insists on the total equality of humanity, recognizes no linguistic, cultural or racial barriers, nationalism glorifies assumed cultural, linguistic and racial superiority. Nationalism demands the total loyalty of a people to the nation ('my country, right or wrong'), Islam

Shahinaz, her close friend in London, is from Pakistan. Um Waleed the Quran teacher in the mosque is from Syria, Wafa who washed Najwa's mother's corpse, is from Egypt. Wafa's convert husband is a blond Englishman. In the mosque some look Malaysian and others Indian and there she meets the wife of the Senegalese Ambassador in addition to some British Muslim girls, while in a magazine she sees some Iranian girls in black chadors. All these are Muslims in spite of their different nationalities. In addition, Muslims belong to different classes. The same Islam that attracts Najwa the servant attracts some of the Sudanese lecturers in Khartoum and the wife of the Senegalese Ambassador. Islam in *Minaret* is a source of inspiration for the poor and the rich, the simple and the important people. Moreover, the novel mentions some important and famous Muslim personalities, Islamic movements and countries without highlighting the differences between them; this is arguably done to focus on their belonging to one religion rather than differences between them. The personalities are Khomeini and Amr Khalid, the Islamic movements are the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbullah, and the countries are Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Britain and Palestine. It is noticeable that some of these are Sunni while others are Shia; but they are mentioned as Muslims only. The idea is that in spite of differences, Muslims are Muslims at the end of the day. The ability of Islam, according to the novel, to absorb or accept all these differences under its umbrella presents Islam as a global religion willing to unite people in spite of their national, class or sectarian differences.

Regarding Aboulela's giving a new direction to the portrayal of Muslims, Tamer, as a young conservative Muslim living in London, challenges the image of the

demands loyalty and submission only to God. …… However, while Islam rejects the ideology of nationalism, it accepts both the existence of nations and the practice of nationhood" (Sardar, 2003, p. 81).

fundamentalist. In contrast to the assumption that conservative Muslims appear unable to compromise their Islam with British culture, Tamer, in general, succeeds in harmonising the relationship between Islam and the West: his appreciation of them both helps in shaping his identity. Although he is still immature in years, and displays the enthusiasms of youth, in comparison with the extreme, impressionable young Muslims we meet in Kureishi and Ali, such as Shahid and Karim, he is more balanced in the way he views his background, and more realistic in his aims. However, this does not mean Aboulela turns him into an idealised character. Tamer was born in Oman of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother. In Oman, he studied in an American private school then he moved to London to study Business. In spite of his young age – he is only nineteen years old – he has exposure to the cultures of five countries (three Muslim and two western) though in different degrees: Oman, Sudan, Egypt, America and London, UK. Expressing the influence of both Islam and the West, when asked by Najwa about his identity, he states: "my education is western and that makes me feel that I am western. My English is stronger than my Arabic … I guess being a Muslim is my identity" (p. 110). It could be inferred here that being Muslim does not lead ultimately to the rejection of the West, that Muslims can live appropriately in Britain. In spite of Tamer's arguments with his mother and sister on religious issues, he does not become involved in any activities against the British culture or society. London is not an enemy. It is a place where he can pray and fast and even spend some days in a mosque for *Itiqaf*. The character of Tamer therefore clearly contradicts the stereotypes of young conservative Muslims. Through Tamer, in fact, Aboulela provides the young conservative Muslim with a new, more rounded image.

Tamer's relationship with Najwa also subverts the image of the male conservative Muslim who oppresses women. Aboulela presents the relationship between Tamer and Najwa with full sympathy. It is striking to notice that Islam's centrality in their lives marginalises all their differences. The gap between Najwa and Tamer is twenty years; while she is a poor servant, he is a rich university student. However, they are both conservative Muslims. Najwa finds in Tamer the sobriety, the respect and the understanding that she is looking for. One of Najwa's wishes, especially after being left alone in London, is to live within a family after losing her own. Najwa's life in London is miserable. Her parents are dead, her brother, Omar, in prison and she is no longer in touch with her previous lover, Anwar. In such a difficult life, she needs someone who can feel sympathy for her, calm her down, and encourage her to overcome her problems; these are some of the reasons behind her love for Tamer: "There are nights when I want nothing else but someone to stroke my hair and feel sorry for me" (p. 117). She has been looking for someone like Tamer for years. Unlike his mother and sister, he talks to her about his personal life and thoughts and asks her about hers. He appreciates her religiousness and trusts her. Whenever she gets humiliated or blamed by Lamya, Tamer tries to calm her down. He accompanies her while going out with the little baby. In general, he always tries to take care of her and that is what she is mostly in need of. He is a positive, flesh and blood character: not a type.

In opposition to the negative image of the hijab in the West, in *Minaret* it is represented positively. Not merely a traditional headscarf, it is as Islamic as praying and fasting. Throughout the novel, there is a link between wearing the hijab and being religious, but on the other hand, there is no relationship between the hijab and being

Sudanese. At Khartoum University, for example, when Najwa was not wearing the hijab, she remarked "many girls dressed like me, so I was not unusual" (p. 14). Najwa and those who do not wear it are as Sudanese as those who do. Khartoum University represents a cross-section of Sudanese society: it consists of Muslims, the westernised, and the communists, even though Islam is the religion of the country. However, Najwa notices that "not everyone prayed. Girls like me who didn't wear tobes or hijab weren't praying" (p. 43). This link, then, between wearing hijab and praying gives hijab its religious significance.

However, it might be argued that Aboulela's point of view regarding the hijab is incomplete if read from the point of view of *Minaret* only. A more complete image is divided between her two novels *Minaret* and the *Translator*. The reasoning behind this statement is that Najwa in *Minaret* is in a better position socially before wearing the hijab. This might indicate that wearing the hijab and being religious could prevent women from holding a comfortable position in society. When she was in Khartoum, before wearing the hijab, Najwa was young, rich and a university student. In London, after wearing the hijab, she is older and poorer and works as a maid. This contrast in social positions could be misunderstood and the hijab might be held as the cause. Here it is important to compare *Minaret* with *The Translator*. Sammar in *The Translator* is an example of a successful woman. In spite of her religiousness and wearing of the hijab, and in spite of living alone in Aberdeen for four years, Sammar's professional position is good in comparison to her friend, Yasmin, who does not wear hijab. Sammar is a translator in a university and Yasmin works as a secretary. In addition, Sammar seems more attractive than her married friend. "She thought of herself as more educated, better dressed. She covered her hair with Italian

212

silk, her arms with tropical colours. She wanted to be as elegant as Benazir Bhutto" (Aboulela, 2002b, p. 8). The mere mention of Bhutto, Pakistan's prime minister of the day, is significant here as she too adopted the hijab. Like Bhutto, Sammar's elegance and successful social position do not conflict with her hijab. Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret* can be seen to provide a rounded image of the hijab in Aboulela's fiction.

Muslims are usually depicted as members of a group, a community or a society. This membership comes at the expense of their individuality. Najwa challenges this assumption about the relationship between Islam and individualism. The decision that she has taken to be religious is hers alone and was made without any kind of pressure from family or society. She accepts Islam as a way of life and a form of identity. Religiosity, she thinks, will benefit her. When she went to the mosque for the first time she reviewed her feelings: "I wanted to be good" (Aboulela, 2005a, p. 237). Before she had thought of others: the Sudanese who lived in Khartoum; the university students; and herself as one of a group of friends gathering in the American Club, as one of her own family in Sudan and then in London, as the sister of Omar, and finally the lover of Anwar. Now she thinks for herself for the first time in her life. In this intensified state of individuality she chooses to be religious.[84]

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[84] Her individualism does not mean not thinking of others. In spite of leaving Tamer, she is happy in the end because she is going on *hajj* and becoming "innocent again" (Aboulela, 2007b). The hajj, in Aboulela's words, is "the final stage in her process of completely getting over the past and becoming a new person" (Aboulela, 2007b).

In *Minaret* therefore we see an attempt to represent the hidden side of the picture of Islam by its focus on Islam's capacity to effect self-realisation and spiritual consciousness in an individual. Najwa's loneliness in London symbolises, arguably, her loneliness in the materialistic world. She "yearned to go back to being safe with God" (p. 242). God is her source of safety. Her sense of being close to God helps enhances her spiritual nature with its different shapes. "I felt a kind of peace" (p. 237) and "now I wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence" (p. 242). She seeks for "exfoliation, clarifying, deep-pore cleanse" (p. 247). The demands she places upon her spiritual life are the consequence of growing weary of her previous spiritually empty existence. "I'm tired of having a troubled conscious. I'm bored with feeling guilty" (p. 244). At this stage, she has discovered a new kind of pleasure. "I reached out for spiritual pleasure and realized that this was what I had envied in the students who lined up to pray on the grass of Khartoum University" (p. 243). The discovery of spiritual fulfillment is very striking here as it led to the discovery of the self. Many times before, Najwa envied those students who prayed and wore hijab at university. She even envied her servants who woke up early in the morning just to pray the dawn prayer. Her materialistic life did not provide an answer to her questioning self. She awakens to the realization that materialistic side of human life is limited and spirituality is not just a mere pleasure but a means of knowledge, too. In short, Najwa's religious spirituality is her source of safety, peace, purging and soul knowledge.

Reading the novel from an Islamic Postcolonial Perspective

In order to make an informed reading of Islam and Muslim identities in Aboulela's *Minaret* it is crucial to read Aboulela's writing as a reaction to the depiction of Islam and Muslim women in colonial discourse. In her book *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), Leila Ahmed remarks that colonial discourse criticises veiling, accuses Islam of the oppression of women, and believes in the inferiority of Islamic societies and the backwardness of Islam. In this discourse, according to Ahmed, the oppression of Muslim women is a result of the backwardness of Islam itself. Islam then is the main target in order to *free* Muslim women.[85] Amal Amireh in her article, "Arab Women Writers' Problems and Prospects" (1997), probes the reasoning behind the western welcome afforded to the writings of Arab women writers. While writing about Nawal El Saadawi, for example, she observes that for some critics "the West welcomes her feminist critique of Arab culture because it confirms the existing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as backward, misogynist and violently oppressive" (Amireh, 1997). She adds: "Historically, the West's interest in Arab women is part of its interest in and hostility to Islam. This hostility was central to the colonialist project, which cast women as victims to be rescued from Muslim male violence. The fixation on the veil, the harem, excision, and polygamy made Arab women symbols of a region and a religion that were at once exotic, violent, and inferior" (Amireh, 1997). This indicates that the colonial and stereotypical images of Islam and Muslim women are still vivid in the West and some Arab women writers re-enforce these images.

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[85] For more details, see Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*, 1992.

215

The importance of Aboulela's writing in this context is that it challenges the western image in general and these colonial images in particular. I would also argue that in itself the strong affiliation to Islam demonstrated by Aboulela is a postcolonial act. She "writes back" to the western centre making visible those marginalised Muslims who are frequently subjected to polemical prejudice. In addition to challenging the colonial image and giving voice to marginalised Muslims, she is an Islamic postcolonial writer because she "posit[s] complex personal relationships experienced by women whose identities are co-defined by Islam and the post-colonial condition" (Stotesbury, 2004, p. 69). Aboulela, in a sense, "shifts" the centre[86] without undermining the margin. In fact, in spite of her belief in the centrality of Islam, she does not seem to believe in the marginality of the West. She writes against stereotyping Islam as well as performing a similar function with the West.[87]

In order to challenge the stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims, Aboulela depicts the modern world as full of instability, transformation and confusion in which it becomes difficult to hold on to stable images and concepts. In *Minaret*,[88] people are

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[86] Islam is Aboulela's centre and the perspective by which she writes. In order to understand her novels, Aboulela asks the western reader to respect her centre and perspective as she respects the centrality of the West while reading western novels. Speaking about Rae's conversion to Islam in *The Translator,* she explains: "I was often asked 'Why should Rae convert, why should religion be an obstacle etc., etc?' In my answer I would then fall back on *Jane Eyre* and say 'From an Islamic point of view, why can't Mr. Rochester be married to both Bertha and Jane?' In the same way that I, as a Muslim reader, respect and empathise with Jane's very Christian dilemma, I want western/Christian readers to respect and empathise with Sammar's very Muslim dilemma" (Stotesbury, 2004, p. 81). This centralization of Islam in Aboulela's fiction is postcolonial as it led to a world with different "centres" which contradicts the centrality of the West in colonial discourse.

[87] She clarifies the positions of Islam and the West for her in this important paragraph: "I appreciate the West. I love its literature, its transparency and its energy. I admire its work ethic and its fairness. I need its technology and its medicine, and I want my children to have a western education. At the same time, I am fulfilled in my religion. Nothing can compete with the elegance, authority and details of the Koran" (Aboulela, 2007a).

[88] Before *Minaret*, Aboulela's postcoloniality appears in her debut novel, *The Translator*, in which Sabine Berking observes that its "happy ending represents a 'postcolonial reply to the colonial narratives'" (Guth, 2006, p. 80).

unrooted. Because of a coup, Najwa, the aristocrat in Sudan, becomes a maid in London. Sudan, then, is not for poor people only and London is not for the rich alone. In Sudan, the Muslim country, Najwa is western while in London, the secular western city, she is a conservative Muslim. Sudan and London, the Muslim and western worlds, are globally connected. Anwar, the Sudanese, is a leftist and atheist while Ali, the white English, is a Muslim convert. Najwa and Tamer fall in love although they are conservative Muslims. The mosque in London is similar to the American Club in Khartoum; each one answers to a civilisation outside its normal territory. It could be argued that this depiction of the instability of the modern world is essential to understanding the transformational concepts and identities of postcolonial fiction. Like the world, the stable, fixed, stereotypical concepts and images of Islam and Muslims should be challenged. This transforming world needs transformational concepts and images.

By writing sympathetically about conservative Muslims in the West, Aboulela resists the colonial perspective at its centre. The West, historically, is the geographical and cultural centre of the polemical discourse directed against Islam and Muslims through Orientalism and colonialism. If the colonial discourse of the West is replete with Islamophobia and racism against Muslims, Aboulela's fiction resists that through focusing on humanity equality and the right for Muslims to narrate their own values and experiences. This narration is of course in itself a function of postcolonial writing. In Aboulela's fiction, Islam is not a backward religion, Muslims are not all fundamentalists, Muslim women are not uniformly oppressed, though there are *some* fundamentalists and *some* oppressed women. From this positioning Aboulela

humanises Muslims, abrogates colonial perspectives, and actualises the postcolonial bases of her fiction. In Hassan's words, Aboulela's "fiction adds nuance and complexity to the representation of Islam and Muslims" (Hassan, 2008, p. 317). It is postcolonial because it is "writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 3).

I intend now to further scrutinise the positioning of Aboulela's writing within Muslim and postcolonial writing frames. In *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Malak points out that nearly "all the early Muslim writers in English and most of the current ones are either from there [the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh subcontinent] or have their roots there" (Malak, 2005, p. 2). As a Sudanese writer, however, Aboulela brings further diversification to the national cultures of Muslims writing in English. The different national cultures from which they come have ensured that such writers will view Islam from a variety of angles. Under the wide umbrella of Islam this diversity has the potential to obfuscate the fixed stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims found in Orientalist and colonial discourse, providing Islam with its global dimension.

Malak finds that "the first narrative ever published by a Muslim in English is a short story entitled 'Sultana's Dream' written by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and published in 1905 in India" (p. 2). It is significant that a Muslim woman, Rokeya Hossain, wrote the first Muslim narrative in English. By publishing *Minaret* in 2005, Aboulela completes a century of female writing about Islam. If Aboulela's Sudanese culture challenges the fixity of Muslim identities, her feminism as a fiction writer challenges the stereotypical assumptions of women's oppression in Islam. Malak writes: "the

maturity and sophistication of Muslim women's writing are a definitive answer to the biased stereotypical images that we continually come across about the backwardness and enslavement of Muslim women" (p. 13). Perhaps more significantly, Malak argues that the first Muslim novel written in English is anti-colonial: Ahmed Ali's novel, *Twilight in Delhi*, was published in 1940. Malak believes that Ali's novel projects "the perspective of a colonized culture and civilization that had hitherto been denied the opportunity to speak for itself" (p. 19). From the beginning, then, the Muslim novel plays its postcolonial role and represents its "colonized culture and civilization". Malak, moreover, observes some similarities between Ali and Chinua Achebe. "Like Achebe's attachment to the Igbo culture of Nigeria, Ali's allegiance to the Muslim civilization of India is committed but never uncritical" (p. 27). It could be argued, building on Malak's observations, that the Muslim novel is, historically, postcolonial due to its representation of a "colonized culture and civilization", namely, Islam. Further, the Muslim novel's postcoloniality is similar to Achebe's in being "at once self-representative and self-critical" (p.27). Within this context, Aboulela's fiction could be read as a continuation of Ahmed Ali's project of voicing the "colonized culture and civilization" of Islam.

Through *Minaret* and the characters of Najwa and Tamer in particular, Aboulela not only gives a voice to Muslims, she writes against the colonial portrayal of Islam and Muslims as well. She believes that colonialism is the reason behind the current clash between Islam and the West. "'People were suspicious of the British wanting to change their culture. So this clash between Islam and the West actually first happened in Muslim countries, when the coloniser came, not when Muslims started coming to Britain'" (Allfree, 2010). In addition, she thinks that the media coverage of Islam is

still influenced by these stereotypes. "The coverage of Islam in the media is becoming more sophisticated and there is more access to knowledge. [...] Still, though, there is a stereotype of Islam as a religion of violence and oppression of women" (Aboulela, 2011). *Minaret* is written with the aim of refuting this "stereotype of Islam as a religion of violence and oppression of women". She tackles the issue of violence through the personality of Tamer and the issue of women oppression through Najwa.

Like any other piece of postcolonial literature, Aboulela's *Minaret* insists on the differences between the reality of Islam and Muslims on one hand, and the assumptions made about them in colonial discourse on the other. In colonial discourse, according to Leela Gandhi, "the 'West' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West'" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 16). As a result, postcolonial writers resist this colonial attempt by "emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p. 2). Aboulela's depiction of Tamer and Najwa as different from western culture and different from colonial assumptions is postcolonial. In contrast to the colonial assumptions about fundamentalism, although Tamer is a conservative Muslim, he is not violent or anti-western. In fact, his western education and his appreciation of his American teachers led him to critique the anti-American feeling among Muslims. Najwa's personality and freely willed decision to wear the hijab in particular, on the other hand, confronts colonial assumptions regarding female oppression in Islam. In *Minaret*, Najwa appears freer and more independent after becoming religious in a portrayal that clearly resists the colonial one. Islam provides Najwa with peace, spiritual fulfillment, social life, a new identity, and dreams. To reiterate: this Islam is

different from Islam's habitual representation in colonial discourse. *Minaret*, in short, presents Islam and Muslims differently, and – it must eventually be concluded – postcolonially.

The portrayal of the hijab in *Minaret* is a clear example of Aboulela's method of challenging colonial assumptions regarding the position of women in Islam. A signally important subject in colonial discourse, the hijab, as I have suggested, has succeeded in convincing many people in the West of the inferiority of Islam. "For many westerners, the veil is a symbol of patriarchal Islamic societies in which women are assumed to be oppressed, subordinated, and made invisible" (Young, 2003, p. 80). In dealing with these assumptions, Aboulela – by according the hijab its religious significance and context – appears to differentiate herself from those Muslim female voices that tend to think of the hijab traditionally, and as a sign of patriarchy. Miriam Cooke, for example, in her book *Women Claim Islam* writes: "the veil symbolizes belonging to a religious community that is both patriarchal and powerful, but beyond it has many meanings. While some of these meanings are negatives, others are empowering" (Cooke, 2001, p. 132). The first implication here is that the woman in Muslim communities is forced to wear the hijab by "patriarchal and powerful" currents. The second is that the hijab, especially because some of its "meanings are negatives", does not seem to belong to Islam. In short, Cooke believes that the symbolism of the hijab "is so saturated with patriarchal meaning that it is difficult to appropriate for feminist purposes" (p. 136). *Minaret* challenges this point of view. Najwa's freely arrived at adoption of the hijab in London directly after leaving Anwar contradicts the influence of the patriarchal and powerful community, reverses Cooke's view, and is thus an implicit criticism of it. In other words, where Cooke

upholds freedom of choice and argues that powerful communities should not put pressure on women to wear hijab, Aboulela asserts that freedom of choice is precisely what Najwa needs in order to do so. In complete contrast to colonial assumptions, the hijab in Aboulela's fiction "is an outer cover that far from hiding oppressed women is merely the public uniform of a variety of types: feminine looking, attractive, glamorous, motherly, Somali, Indian – all united by the occasion and a further implied emphasis: living in Britain" (Nash, 2012, p. 48).

Another postcolonial characteristic of *Minaret* is its rejection of the superiority of western culture. Robert Young argues that postcolonialism "disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (Young, 2003, p. 7). *Minaret* adopts all these perspectives. "The order of the world" demands that people should leave their inferior cultures to join the supposedly superior western one. *Minaret* "disturbs" this order when Najwa refuses to accept the assumed "privilege and power" of western culture and embraces Islam. In point of fact, Islam in *Minaret* is the superior culture. However, western culture is not represented as entirely inferior. Tamer demonstrates an important positioning here. His respect for his American teachers is an endorsement of the progressive values of western education. In addition, the stable life in London in comparison to the political chaos in Sudan (two coups within a few years) signals the progressive model of western politics. *Minaret*, then, both refuses the superiority of western culture but without ignoring its progressive aspects. It is clear that postcolonialism "seek[s] to change the terms and values under which we all live" (p. 20). And that, as Edward Said argues, "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism" (Said, 1995, p. 328). Nevertheless, while challenging colonialism, its images and stereotypes become

Aboulela's primary concern, from this base she can strive to erect a harmonization of the issues that set Islam and the West against one another. This balance is also posited within the notion of the postcolonial.

The portrayal of Islam as a global religion in *Minaret* is, arguably, postcolonial due to its implication of the capacity of Islam to compete with western culture and limit its global domination. Implicit in the advocacy of the globalisation of western culture is its superiority. *Minaret* challenges the uniqueness of globalised western culture by presenting Islam as a globalised religion. Muslim characters in the novel are from different countries. Moreover, the stable life pursued by Muslims in London portrays Islam as a religion which could be followed in the heart of the western culture. Aboulela, according to Ghazoul, "makes it possible to join South to North under the emblem of a universal quest, that of Islamic humanism" (Ghazoul, 2001). Muslims who live in the West are usually imaged either as culturally defeated or as strangers. They are either westernised or branded as fundamentalists. These two categorizations of Muslims are a result of the perceived inferiority of Islam and Muslims in the West. Aboulela's portrayal of Muslim characters, however, is different. Najwa, Tamer and all the Muslims who they meet in the mosque appear as conservative Muslims who function without feeling seriously affronted by western culture. Attending the mosque, praying, fasting and the like, are the tools they utilise to strengthen their affiliation to Islam and to inoculate themselves against the culture of the host country. This Islam and these Muslims are strong. They are not westernised but neither are they strangers to the West. Islam here cannot be defeated. Said writes: "the main difficulty with Islam, however, was that unlike India and China, it had never really been pacified or defeated" (Said, 1981, pp. 28-29). Islam in *Minaret* resists the

domination of the western globalized culture. According to Ahmed, "the West, through the dominant global civilization, will continue to expand its boundaries to encompass the world; traditional civilizations will resist in some areas, accommodate to change in others. In the main, only one, Islam, will stand firm in its path" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 264).

Postcolonial approaches also operate in *Minaret* in the manner in which the novel provides the voice of a Muslim self to challenge the voice of the Muslim other which is created from non-Muslim perspectives. The Muslims in *Minaret* are imaged by a Muslim. Aboulela articulates her own Muslim identity and experience through her characters. By doing so, she is one of those writers who, in Mike Philips' words, "write from inside the experience" (Philips, 2005). This "from inside" writing resists the writing from outside. Said notices that "since an Arab poet or novelist – and there are many – writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity (however strange that may be), he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient is represented" (Said, 1995, p. 291). Writing about the self "disrupts" the colonial image of the other, and because of that, writing about the self becomes postcolonial. Aboulela clearly states her positioning of self in her writing about Islam. "I can never truly see [Islam] through western eyes. I am in this religion. It is in me" (Aboulela, 2007a). The positive portrayal of Najwa's strong religiousness and affiliation to Islam could be linked with Aboulela's discovery of the importance of religiousness in her real life. Whenever Najwa justifies wearing the hijab or her spiritual fulfillment, Aboulela herself could be imagined justifying her own decisions. Aboulela can be seen in Najwa particularly in her experience with

Islam. This depiction of Muslims as the self is rare but celebrated by a writer like Malak who writes: "gone are the days when the representation in English of Muslims and their cultures was dominated by others" (Malak, 2005, p. 7). We might argue that Aboulela's writing about the Muslim self appears closer to the reality than western assumptions. As Young puts it: "when western people look at the non-western world what they see is often more a mirror image of themselves and their own assumptions than the reality of what is really there, or of how people outside the west actually feel and perceive themselves" (Young, 2003, p. 2).

It is, however, noticeable that in spite of the postcolonial characteristics of *Minaret*, colonialism and resistance to it are not directly addressed in the novel. "The Islamic identity Aboulela articulates may be […] empty of the 'resistance' element espoused by postcolonial theorists" (Nash 2012, p. 48). Nevertheless, my argument is that the novel "resists" colonialism indirectly. The colonial discourse is marketed today within a western global culture. Colonialism and its adjectives like 'colonial' and 'colonialist' are old-fashioned terms. However, the domination that they originally once described is still alive. By the same token, resistance has developed new techniques of its own. Since culture is the field of the battle, *Minaret* resists the assumed inferiority of Islam and the assumed superiority of the West. *Minaret*, arguably, is an indirect critique of the indirect colonial discourse embodied in current western culture.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that postcolonial theory, while it is a vital and necessary tool in the defence of formerly colonised peoples, has demonstrated limitations when applied to religiously Oriental culture(s) such as we find in Islamic nations and diasporic Muslim communities in the West. These limitations are bound up with the secular assumptions embedded in much postcolonial writing. In order to counter the colonial discourse levelled against Islam and Muslims, a different form of postcolonial practice is required, what I have termed Islamic postcolonialism. Authors from formerly colonised peoples will write with the aim of exposing and critiquing colonial discourse, and Muslims are no exception. Postcolonial theory is predicated upon the existence of colonialism, but while postcolonial writers insist on the continuation of colonial discourse, some have appeared unable to resist it, and may actively engage with it, once Islam and Muslims are the targets. The secular background of key postcolonial writers and critics has caused them to favour freedom of speech above the sensitivities of religious culture. As a postcolonial writer, particularly in the 1980s, Salman Rushdie consistently wrote and spoke against the colonial discourse embedded in British culture; however, for many Muslims, as the author of *The Satanic Verses* he targeted the history and tenets of Islam and in so doing employed colonial and Orientalist ideas and images. Even Edward Said, whose critique of colonial discourse in many of his writings has caused him to be considered one of the founders of postcolonial theory, failed to criticise the images of Islam and Muslims in Rushdie's novel, prioritising instead Rushdie's freedom of expression as a writer. This lack in the practice of postcolonialism, predicated as I have said on the secular outlook of its key practitioners, demonstrates the need for an alternative

226

practice, Islamic postcolonialism. The task of Islamic postcolonialism therefore is to target the colonial and Orientalist discourse in the literature that focuses on and claims to represent Islam and Muslims.

From an Islamic postcolonial perspective, the depiction of Islam and Muslims in the four main novels discussed in this study can be categorised into three groups. In the first I place Kureishi's *The Black Album* and Ali's *Brick Lane*. They are both novels that present Islam and Muslims in stereotypical ways. Neither of them seriously differentiates between Muslims as human beings and Islam as a religion: Islam and Muslims are the same in their inferiority. While both novels encode a range of negative images of Islam and Muslims, Kureishi's foregrounds the political and religious dimensions of 'Islamic fundamentalism'; and Ali focuses on Muslims' effectual oppression of women. These two stereotypes – fundamentalism and oppression of women – may be considered to be among the most repeated in colonial discourse imaging of Islam and Muslims. Faqir's *My Name is Salma*, on the other hand, can be said to belong to a second category. Like the first group, the novel portrays Muslims in a Muslim society, the village of Hima, as conservative and female oppressors. However, it also represents nominal or moderate Muslims in Britain differently.

That is to say, the novel provides two images of Islamic practice: conservative and central in the Muslim society of Hima, and moderate and marginal in Britain. In the first instance Islam is stereotypically represented, while in the second more positively. Arguably, this implies a constitutive difference between Islam and Muslims which depends on where and how Islam is practised. In Britain Salma is a successful Muslim

227

woman. By considering herself Muslim in Britain, she appears to reject the conservative practice of Islam in Hima, but not Islam itself. Faqir's differentiation between Islam and Muslims privileges a harmonising relationship between moderate Islam and western culture. Writing the novel from her feminist perspective, Faqir ensures that moderate Islam provides the female protagonist with all her rights within and according to the norms of western culture. At heart, therefore, the novel celebrates the centrality of women's rights and the marginality of Islam. From an Islamic postcolonial perspective, the novel's stereotypical representation of Islam and Muslims in a Muslim society accommodates to colonial discourse. However, in its positive depiction of a moderate and marginal Islam in Britain, the novel gestures toward a postcolonial representation, but one in which Islam is subordinate to feminism.

Aboulela's *Minaret* is representative of a third group. This novel resists stereotyping Islam and Muslims either in a Muslim country such as Sudan, or in a western one like Britain. In addition, it portrays conservative Islam and Muslims sympathetically. Furthermore, Aboulela goes so far as to challenge stereotypes of the kind found in Kureishi and Ali's writing. In contrast to Riaz and his group of fundamentalists in Kureishi's novel, Aboulela creates Tamer; and in opposition to the oppressed Nazneen in Ali's novel, she creates Najwa. Through Tamer and Najwa, Aboulela abrogates pervasive colonialist representations of fundamentalism and female oppression in Islam. Tamer is conservative, but he is not fundamentalist; Najwa wears the hijab, but she is not oppressed. Moreover, *Minaret* provides an alternative image of a traditional Muslim society, Sudan, which abrogates the stereotypical images of Bangladesh in *Brick Lane* and of Hima in *My Name is Salma*. The Sudanese society

in *Minaret* is actually diverse, and the Muslim women there are not oppressed. In addition, unlike Faqir's Salma who finds her happiness after marginalising Islam, Najwa's happiness comes after making Islam central in her life. Tamer and Najwa are two conservative Muslims who succeed in harmonising the relationship between Islam and British society. The Islam we encounter in the novel could be followed in the West as well as in the East. Tamer and Najwa appear satisfied living in London in spite of their conservatism. Indeed, Najwa benefits from the freedom and the individuality British culture facilitates to discover her religiousness. I shall summarise below how this non-stereotypical portrayal of Islam and Muslims might be considered as postcolonial.

Central to Aboulela's postcolonial positioning is her challenge to the assumed authenticity of colonial discourse. The writers of the three novels in categories one and two might be said to claim authenticity for their work either through their intimate connection to or knowledge of Islam and the communities they are representing. Their fictional portrayals may be said to derive from realities of lived experience in which Islam and Muslims have for them constituted life difficulties or identity crisis. Islam appears to affect and complicate their personal lives. For Kureishi and Ali, Islam once operated at the centre of their identity crisis; for Faqir, the conservative religion of her home society prevented her from gaining her full feminist rights. Within these contexts, Islam is an obstacle they were forced to deal with. In order to prove their Britishness, Kureishi and Ali marginalise Islam in their lives and criticise it in their work; to embrace her version of feminism Faqir does the same. Islam is the religion they write against, not for. They write about it as the other, not the self. Their authenticity is taken for granted as a result of their Muslim background although

Islam is either marginal in or excised from their identities. Aboulela's Islam, however, is completely the opposite. Islam is her first identity and when writing about it she writes about her personal beliefs. Aboulela's authenticity does not come from outside only; it derives from the reality of living inside this religion. In writing about female oppression in Islam, Faqir and Aboulela represent different authenticities. Aboulela's is the more positive due to her strong affiliation to Islam. By writing about Muslim women, she indeed writes from the interior, not the exterior, of Islam. Unlike the colonial discourse which stereotypes the position of women in Islam as a way of stereotyping Islam itself, Aboulela's positive writing about Muslim women could be seen as writing about Islam itself. *Minaret* challenges the authenticity of the other three novels not only from the point of view of women's position in Islam, but in imaging Islam itself.

Minaret not only resists the positions of Islam and Muslims in the colonial discourse as portrayed in the three novels, it also resists the criteria used in positioning them. Western cultural norms are the criteria and the perspective used in *The Black Album, Brick Lane* and *My Name is Salma*. Western freedom, the pleasure principle, education and arts are some of the values against which Islam and Muslims are weighed. Shahid in *The Black Album*, Nazneen in *Brick Lane* and Salma in *My Name is Salma* are superior to other Muslims because they assimilate more closely to these values. In other words, the more westernised they become, the better they appear. In *Minaret* these criteria are challenged. The centrality of the West is superseded by the centrality of Islam. The more Muslim Najwa becomes the happier she is. However, the novel does not reject western criteria in their entirety; it limits them and gives the priority to Islam. Najwa practises the western freedom to choose when she decides to

be a conservative Muslim; she experiences pleasure and joy in the celebration of Eid in the mosque; Tamer appreciates the stimulation and fulfilment of western education. Though these experiences are to some extent enabled by western criteria, these criteria are marginal in relation to the spiritual life and the sense of closeness to God in Islam. The contrast between Najwa and Lamya is instructive here. Lamya is a rich postgraduate student while Najwa is her maid. The former is more western while the latter is more religious. Contrary to the western criteria of the three novels in categories one and two (for example, Nazneen's freedom, independence and business success at the close of *Brick Lane*), *Minaret* appears to welcome and celebrate Najwa's religiousness in spite of all her difficulties.

The significance of spirituality and closeness to God in Aboulela's novels not only proffers a fresh image of Islam, it also resists the materialistic criteria used in the three other novels. One of the implications of Aboulela's diverse portrayal of Muslims is that Islam provides its followers with something more important. Muslims, whether poor or rich, high or low in society, embrace Islam to find in it something they cannot find in national or class identities. Islam is the most important part of their nationalities and lives. It makes the poor Najwa happier than the rich Nazwa; Najwa the maid is more fulfilled as a person than Najwa the aristocrat. Islam provides her with the peace and the spiritual fulfillment she cannot find elsewhere. The significance of the spirituality portrayed in *Minaret* makes it difficult to categorise Islam using materialistic criteria. Tamer's education is important and ultimately requires Najwa to sacrifice so that he may study his favourite major at university. However, the ultimate and most important goal is to be close to God. In spite of losing her aristocrat family and prestige, her university study, her homeland and her friend

and lover Tamer, Najwa appears content at the end of the novel because she is going to hajj which means being closer to God. This implies that Islam and closeness to God are the most important factors in her life. This Islamic criterion resists the western criteria in the three other novels.

Another key difference between *Minaret* and the other three novels is the manner in which it diversifies the presentation of Muslims both in terms of their nationality and social level of life. Islam in *Minaret* is able to attract people from a variety of nationalities and classes. It comprehends the maid and the ambassador, the Sudanese and the white British. This depiction stands in stark contrast with the Islam portrayal in *The Black Album*, *Brick Lane* and *My Name is Salma*. In these, Muslims are restricted to being South Asians or Arabs. Islam here is embedded in these nations only. Moreover, Muslims here are, in general, from the lower classes in society. While they are traditional villagers in *My Name is Salma*, they are illiterate and poor in *Brick Lane*. And although some Muslims are college students in *The Black Album*, education is not a priority for them. They use the college as a pretext while they practise their activism.

Tamer, as a young conservative Muslim living in London, challenges the image of the fundamentalists in Kureishi's and Ali's novels. In contrast to Kureishi's Shahid and Ali's Karim, both of whom appear unable to establish a compromise between Islam and British culture, Tamer succeeds in harmonising the relationship between Islam and the West through his appreciation of them both as factors shaping his identity. Tamer's image clearly contrasts with the images of young Islamist activists in *The Black Album* and *Brick Lane*. Riaz and his group are always in conflict with British

culture; Karim leaves Britain at the end of the novel after his role in the disturbances in Brick Lane have signalled his inability to live in peace in London. Through Tamer, Aboulela provides the young conservative Muslim with a new image.

In addition, by depicting Tamer as peaceful, Aboulela does not follow the colonial discourse which insists on the aggressive and threatening character of the young fundamentalist Muslims. In *The Black Album*, Riaz's group burns books and attacks bookshops and people. In *Brick Lane*, Karim figures the Prophet Muhammad as a warrior and blames his father for being tolerant and peaceful. In *My Name is Salma*, Salma leaves her village in fear of being killed by her brother. Muslims in these novels are aggressive and violent. They are always willing to fight, whether against an idea, a book, a woman or a whole culture. Fighting for these young people becomes a way of living. They form a group, attend meetings, write leaflets, prepare for demonstrations, attack bookshops, or racists or the police; some of them, like Salma's brother, might spend years waiting for his sister's return in order to kill her. Tamer displays contrasting behaviours. If fighting is the main challenge for Riaz, Karim and Mahmoud, Salma's brother, love is the main challenge for Tamer. And if some of them leave their families and ignore their studies to practise their activism, Tamer does not do the same because of his love for Najwa. Aboulela here presents a *peaceful* conservative Muslim character that loves and does not fight.

Tamer's American education and his admiration for his American teachers further confront the image of conservative Muslims as anti-western. Riaz and Karim's groups are imaged as such either directly by clearly reacting against the western way of life, or indirectly by insisting on their affiliation to Islam in the West. Tamer, however, is

not anti-western in spite of his conservative affiliation to Islam. Aboulela here stereotypes neither America nor conservative Muslims. Kureishi, on the other hand, asserts the diversity of the West without doing the same for Muslims. *The Black Album* admits racism as a western negative, but no positive is to be found in its portrayal of Islam. Like Kureishi, Faqir in *My Name is Salma* focuses on racism in England, but without providing a positive to Hima inhabitants.

Minaret also attempts to highlight controversial issues like the symbolism of the hijab and the meaning of individuality in Islam, this in order to present Islam differently from the way it is in colonial discourse. In opposition to the negative depiction of the hijab in *My Name is Salma*, the hijab in *Minaret* conveys positive meanings. In both novels the hijab functions as a turning point. While Salma becomes happier after removing it, Najwa becomes happier after wearing it. Faqir presents the hijab as traditional and a sign of female oppression. Salma is forced by her traditional society to wear it and her removal of it is her way of rebelling against that society's strictures. Aboulela's image is contrastive. Najwa's hijab symbolises her new identity and religiosity. In addition to the hijab, we have the issue of individuality. Young conservatively-oriented Muslims belong to groups in *The Black Album* and *Brick Lane*; conservative Muslims in *My Name is Salma* belong to a society. As an individual Chad is bound to follow Riaz, while if Salma deserves killing, nobody in the collective can stop it. The group and the society are more powerful than the individual. Within this frame, those who wish to practise their full individuality must depart from the Muslim group as Shahid does, or flee the Muslim society like Salma. However, Aboulela through Najwa challenges the imbalance of the relationship between Islam and individualism represented in the other three novels. Najwa decides

as an individual on her own religiosity. In *Minaret*, Muslims are not forced by a society or a group leader to embrace Islam. Tamer does not belong to a group and he is the only conservative Muslim in his family. Najwa decides to be religious without any kind of pressure.

<center>*</center>

All in all, Aboulela's postcolonial image of Islam is significant because it resists the distorted image of Islam that has prevented the West from searching out a common ground upon which to address the diverse cultural issues over which it and the Islamic world diverge. Islam in colonial discourse is presented as inferior both as a religion and in the cultures it has produced. The opposition between Islam and the West inscribed in this discourse cannot lead to a dialogue; it led, instead, to a clash of two cultures in which the West attempts to impose its values on Islam. The distorted view of Islam found in colonial discourse is thus an obstacle on the way to fruitful cross-cultural interchange. Today's widely appreciated slogan across the world is the need for dialogue between civilisations and cultures; such dialogue requires clear imaginations and authentic postcolonial voices. Aboulela's representation of Islam is neither inferior nor a threat, although for the West it stands in a position of difference and otherness. However, while the distorted image of Islam in colonial discourse complicates the differences between Islam and the West and creates misunderstanding, Aboulela provides Islam with an image that has the potential to contribute to harmonisation of this relationship and to opening the door to greater understanding. If Islam is the Other of colonial discourse and the West is the Other of Aboulela's postcolonial discourse, where the former stereotypes its Other, Aboulela's postcolonial discourse affords the West appropriate respect. Indeed, Islamic postcolonialism arguably has the potential to play a part in establishing a foundation

for successful dialogue between civilisations and cultures owing to the respect it entertains towards otherness and difference. It aims to marginalise the stereotypes of the self and the other as well as to centralise and give respect to the positives of both sides. It also has the potential to transform the analysis of fiction about Islam and Muslims for Muslims and for postcolonial writers alike. While it demonstrates the limitations of postcolonialism, as practised by secular writers, in defending Islam, it confirms the flexibility of postcolonialism in its capacity to raise the status of Islam and enable Muslim voices. Islamic postcolonialism encourages Muslims to read and analyse the fiction written about them and their religion through adopting postcolonial theories as their perspective. Such involvement of Muslims in postcolonial analysis should lead to more realistic and authentic readings and analysis of the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in fiction. Islamic postcolonialism, in short, provides Muslims with the space they need to speak out. By resisting colonial discourse, critics and writers who adopt the perspectives of Islamic postcolonialism will be able to extend the spaces to which postcolonialism can reach and shed light on a neglected area. Orientalism and colonialism are the roots of the distorted image of Islam and once-colonised countries in general. Within this context, Islamic postcolonialism might be considered a bridge that connects the Islamic world, as a formerly colonised space, and postcolonialism, a theory aimed at defending all colonised countries and cultures.

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