Questioning 'Muslim Fictions'

Faisal Nazir[*]

Abstract
This article evaluates the concept of Muslim fictions and Muslim writing that has emerged recently in literary and cultural criticism and is already being widely used to identify and analyze the (mainly literary) texts written by authors from a Muslim/Islamic background. This concept has been developed in response to the need of differentiating authentic, 'insider' representations of Muslim life from the ones produced by 'outsiders'. Though this need had been felt since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1981), works in which Said had identified and criticized the biased nature of western (and, therefore, 'outsider') representations of Islam and the Muslims, scholars in the disciplines of humanities and the social sciences have become more acutely aware of this need since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent 'War on Terror'. In particular, the discipline of postcolonial studies has taken up this task of defining and appreciating representations of Islam and the Muslims produced by writers from an Islamic background, in order to challenge and decentre western representations which have been seen as supportive of the 'clash of civilization' framework deployed in the discourse of the 'War on Terror'. This paper will discuss the post-9/11 context of the emergence of the concept of Muslim fictions/writing, discuss the definitions of the concept as given by Amin Malak (*Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*), Claire Chambers (*British Muslim Fictions*), and collectively by Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in their introduction to *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing*, and, through the case of Pakistani Anglophone writers, will identify some areas in the conceptualization of Muslim fictions/writing which need reconsideration and suggest ways of revising the concept and its applications in order to be a more appropriate reflection of Muslim identity.

The concept of Muslim fictions and Muslim writing has emerged recently in literary and cultural criticism and is already being widely used to identify and analyze the (mainly literary) texts written by authors from a Muslim/Islamic background. This concept has been developed in response to the need of differentiating authentic, 'insider' representations of Muslim life from the ones produced by 'outsiders'. Though this need had been felt since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1981), works in which Said had

---

[*]   Dr Faisal Nazir, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Karachi, Karachi.

identified and criticized the biased nature of western (and, therefore, 'outsider') representations of Islam and the Muslims, scholars in the disciplines of humanities and the social sciences have become more acutely aware of this need since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent 'War on Terror'. In particular, the discipline of postcolonial studies has taken up this task of defining and appreciating representations of Islam and the Muslims produced by writers from an Islamic background, in order to challenge and decentre western representations which have been seen as supportive of the 'clash of civilization' framework deployed in the discourse of the 'War on Terror'. This paper will discuss the post-9/11 context of the emergence of the concept of Muslim fictions/writing, discuss the definitions of the concept as given by Amin Malak (*Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*), Claire Chambers (*British Muslim Fictions*), and collectively by Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in their introduction to *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing*, identify some problems in the theorization of 'Muslim fiction/writing' with reference to the work of Franz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and more recently of Hamid Dabashi, and Lau and Mendez. Finally, through the case of Pakistani Anglophone writers, the paper will identify some areas in the conceptualization of Muslim fictions/writing which need reconsideration and suggest ways of revising the concept and its applications in order to make it a more exact reflection of Muslim identity.

————

The context: 9/11 and after

As stated above, the concept of Muslim fictions/writing has been developed in response to the global political situation since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The terrorist attacks led to the launch of a global 'War on Terror' by the US and its allies, targeting Afghanistan and then Iraq. This 'War on Terror', however, has been characterized not as American retaliation against its supposed enemies but as an attempt to spread 'civilized' values and democracy in the world and to stop the terrorists and their supporting governments from establishing and running violent and despotic regimes. President Bush described the 'War on Terror' as a 'struggle for civilization', a fight to 'maintain the way of life enjoyed by free nations' and Tony Blair, the then British Prime Minister declared that the war was a 'historic struggle', failure in which would mean the loss of 'hope of freedom and religious tolerance in Iraq' and the victory of 'dictators', 'fanatics' and 'terrorists'.[1]

Moreover, for Deepa Kumar and many others, the 9/11 attacks and the 'War on Terror' have brought Orientalist views of Islam into greater circulation and have enhanced their credibility. The views of such writers as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, particularly their

---

[1]   Deepa Kumar, 'Framing Islam: The Resurgence of Orientalism during Bush II Era', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 34:3 (2010), p.260.

'clash of civilizations' thesis, have been used as the conceptual basis of this 'War on Terror'. According to Kumar, 'Since the events of 9/11, the range of debate on issues pertaining to Muslims or Islam has narrowed to a point where Orientalist modes of thought are once again dominant'.[2] In the words of Pal Ahluwalia, 'It is precisely these [Orientalist] forms of representation that have continued to dominate the Western imagination and have became particularly acute following the attacks on the twin towers in New York in 2001. In the immediate aftermath of the events of 9/11, Muslims in the West, but especially in the United States, Britain and Australia, were and are subjected to harassment and extreme violence'.[3] He goes on to assert that 'As part of the logic of the 'clash of civilizations', it has become necessary for the West to recreate the figure of the monster and the beast in an attempt to once again establish its superiority, to claim the mantle of the civilized, to be the very repository of humanity itself'.[4] In commenting on the continued interest and debate about Edward Said's *Orientalism* three decades after its publication, Daniel Varisco states, 'In part this is due to the ethnocentric prejudice and political bias that continue to fuel depictions of the real Orient in the media and popular culture, especially after the 9/11 tragedy and subsequent global War on Terror'.[5] In the same volume, Stuart Schaar writes with reference to Donald Little's *American Orientalism* that 'orientalist images still shape US foreign policy and mass attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims'.[6] 'The octogenarian orientalist Bernard Lewis', he continues, 'still writes best-selling books that foster the ideas of 'Muslim Rage' and 'Clash of Civilizations,' cleverly feeding into the paranoia produced by real terrorist attacks and the 9/11 syndrome'.[7] Schaar further adds:

> Hollywood and the media have joined in intensifying the
> volume of terrorist images all about us. These sell at box
> offices and newspaper kiosks, and produce high ratings for
> TV stations and talk radio. If writers want to get published
> by a reputable press that might help sell their books, it pays
> to put the words jihad, terrorism, Hamas, Hizbullah, etc. in

---

[2] *Ibid*., p.255.
[3] Pal Ahluwalia, 'Afterlives of post-colonialism: reflections on theory post-9/11', *Postcolonial Studies*,10:3 (2007), p.258.
[4] *Ibid*., p.260.
[5] Daniel Martin Varisco, 'Orientalism's Wake: The Ongoing Politics of a Polemic', *Viewpoints*, No.12 (2009), p.2.
[6] Stuart Schaar, 'Orientalism's Persistence in Mass Culture and Foreign Policy', *Viewpoints*, No.12 (2009), p.18.
[7] *Ibid*.

the title, ensuring both publication and sales in a time of economic crisis. Thirty years after the publication of *Orientalism*, the same old stereotypes and clichés about Arabs and Muslims still predominate in mass culture.[8]

Apart from news reports and movies that reinforce Orientalist images of Muslims, works of fiction have also played a role in the resurgence of Orientalism since 9/11. According to Spencer and Valassapoulos, 'Is this not the secret shortcoming of many well-intentioned works of post-"9/11" fiction: the difficulty they find in getting outside official narratives of the "war on terror?"'.[9] They cite John Updike's *The Terrorist*, and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* as examples of post 9/11 fiction that reiterates Orientalist views.[10] According to Margaret Scanlan, 'Since September 11 we have seen how public terror, deliberately created by violent revolutionaries, can also be manipulated and multiplied by politicians, the press, and novelists … Not only do popular films and television programs reinforce this view of Islam as a religion of violent fanatics but so too do post-9/11 novels by distinguished American novelists – Don DeLillo, John Updike, and Sherman Alexie'.[11] Robert Eaglestone has also discussed the response of three 'Anglo-American' writers, namely Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, and Jonathan Safran Foer, to the theme of terrorism in his essay 'The Age of Reason is Over … an Age of Fury was Dawning: Contemporary Anglo-American Fiction and Terror'.[12] He starts this essay by asking how 'contemporary Anglophone writers' have reflected the geopolitical transition from the Cold War to the War on Terror.[13] His answer, given as the concluding suggestion to the essay, is that 'these fictions mark the limits of the current understanding of terror from the western point of view'.[14] 'Not only do the narratives,' writes Eaglestone, 'performatively enact this inability: at the same time, to mask it, they seek to recapture or rephrase terror in distinctly western terms blaming it on evil, illness or on

---

8   *Ibid*.
9   Robert Spencer and Anastasia Valassopoulos, 'Introduction', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46:3 (2010), p.331.
10 *Ibid*.
11 Mangaret Scanlan, 'Migrating from Terror: The Post-colonial Novel after September 11', *Literature, Migration and the 'War on Terror'* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.22.
12 Robert Eaglestone, 'The Age of Reason was Over … An Age of Fury was Dawning', *Wasafiri*, 22:2 (2007), pp.19-22.
13 *Ibid*., p.19.
14 *Ibid*., p.22.

universal desires'.[15] Eaglestone concludes that these texts illustrate the fact that the West has not even begun to understand fully what this crisis is about.[16]

In this context where there is a large scale stereotyping of Muslims and a widespread suspicion of Islam, the role of Muslim writers (writing originally or translated in European languages) has become important. These writers, because of their Muslim identity, are supposed to provide a more authentic and true picture of Islam than is available through the western media. As Muslims, they are considered to be 'insiders' to the world and culture of Islam, and to be its 'true' representatives.

Identity: Not 'who' but 'what'

However, this approach is more biographical than textual as it takes the authors' identity to be the defining aspect of their works, even if the works put that very identity into question. Thus, despite their frequently open and often implicit denial of their Islamic identity, authors with an Islamic background are read as representatives of Islam. A point of concurrence among the writers of and contributors to such books as *The Postcolonial Crescent*, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, and *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative*, is that Muslim writers should not be seen simplistically as representatives of 'Islamic' civilization or culture. As Muhammad Arkoun says about the Maghrebian writers, many of these 'Muslim' writers 'have in fact distanced themselves, as has often been said, from the sensibilities of believers, from the preoccupations and values arising out of Islam …'.[17]

According to Anouar Majid, 'Several Muslim writers have chosen to question Islamic traditions from a Western secular perspective …'.[18] In arguing for his choice of the title *Muslim Narratives* instead of 'Islamic' to designate the works of Anglophone Muslim authors, Amin Malak states:

> This foregrounding of the individuality of representation immunizes against the reductionist equation of the whole culture of Islam with what one author produces in a single work of literature. No author, no matter how talented or

---

[15]   *Ibid*.

[16]   *Ibid*.

[17]   Mohammed Arkoun, 'Religious Feeling in Literature', *The Postcolonial Crescent: Islam's Impact on Contemporary Literature,* ed., John C. Hawley (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.59.

[18]   *Ibid*., p.85.

committed, can ever claim to speak of a culture in its comprehensive entirety. What we see in any work of literature is one individual's view at a specific site and juncture of history.[19]

In the conclusion of his book, Amin Malak has this to say about the Muslim narratives he has studied:

Geographically diverse and with no defining or definitive influences as yet interlinking the majority of them, they thus reflect the specificity of each writer's sociohistorical milieu, intellectual progress, and artistic development. However, from the cumulative concert of these voices, discernible sensibilities, idioms, and motifs emanate pointing unequivocally to an engagement with the world and the values of Islam.[20]

Thus, the relation between the works of Muslim writers and 'the world and values of Islam' can be best characterized as an 'engagement', and not as an attempt to defend Islam against Orientalist criticism. This leads to questions about the nature of this engagement: How do Muslim writers engage with the world and values of Islam in their works? What narrative strategies and voices do they adopt, what images and characters do they create, and what settings and structures do they construct in their works in relation to Islam? And, above all, how do they engage with the Orientalist frames deployed by western media to represent Islam? Do they try to challenge or subvert these frames, substitute them with others, or merely adopt them?

Re-Orientalism: The Orientals as Orientalists
Moreover, this inside/outside debate within postcolonial theory and criticism stands far from resolved. One recent intervention in this debate is by Lisa Lau and Christina Mendez who have come up with the concept of 'Re-Orientalism' to describe 'orientalism perpetrated by orientals' within the context of South Asian identity politics. According to Lau and Mendes, 're-Orientalism is based on how cultural producers with eastern affiliation come to terms with an orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing

---

[19]   Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp.6-7.

[20]   *Ibid*., p.151.

(along) with them or by discarding them altogether'.[21] Re-Orientalism theory, according to Lau and Mendes, is based on three characteristics of Orientalist discourse as identified by Edward Said – the place of the orient and of the Orientalist in Orientalism, the West's self-knowledge developed out of defining the orient, and the internal coherence of Orientalist discourse. These characteristics of Orientalism are reflected in re-Orientalism in the way the 'oriental' writers represent the orient and their own relation to the orient in their works. According to Lau and Mendes, re-Orientalism theory analyses 'the footwork of the re-Orientalists in self-positioning and repositioning' vis-à-vis the binaries of centre and periphery and self and other. Given the elite and powerful position of the oriental writers due to class privilege and warm reception in the West, re-Orientalism theory asks why the oriental writers still prefer to represent themselves as marginal and on the periphery through a process of 'self-Othering' and if these peripheral positions are, in fact, 'covert vantage points' from which these writers are trying to 'concretize their new-found (perhaps incessantly negotiated) positions at the top of the hierarchical order'.[22]

The analysis of re-Orientalism also reveals the consistency and coherence of the representations of the orient in the works of re-Orientalists.[23] Lau and Mendes, however, also identify a key difference between Orientalism and re-Orientalism. Whereas Orientalism was the work of outsiders who infiltrated the orient and therefore required the identity of the orientalist to be forgotten, erased, hidden so as to give the account an objective quality, re-Orientalism relies on the foregrounding of the identity of the writer to validate and authenticate the veracity of the representation. The re-Orientalists, according to Lau and Mendes, claim the status of a 'witness' which requires the prior existence of a body of knowledge produced by the Orientalists which they challenge or confirm. They are thus engaged in a 'quest for authenticity' in order to establish their representations as genuine and true.[24]

The native as intellectual, the intellectual as native
The concept of 're-Orientalism' is related to and is the latest manifestation of what has earlier been theorized as the role of 'native

---

[21]   Lisa Lau and Christina Mendes, *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other within* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p.1.

[22]   *Ibid*., p.4.

[23]   *Ibid*., p.5.

[24]   *Ibid*., p.9.

intellectuals' by Frantz Fanon, 'native informants' by Spivak and more recently as 'native informers' by Hamid Dabashi. Fanon was critical of the work of the writers of the 'negritude' movement because he felt that their work would lead only to exoticization and cultural exhibitionism in the name of nativism. For Fanon, in this way the native intellectuals reinforce the binary divisions of white and black instituted by colonial powers instead of challenging them. Spivak's characterization of the native informant takes account of the complexity of the position of the migrant intellectuals while also alerting them to the pitfalls of appropriating a role and occupying a position for which they may not be eligible. Because of their location and association with the hegemonic states and institutions, the migrant intellectuals cannot possess the knowledge which they are asked to provide to the metropolitan audience. According to Spivak, the native informant is a 'certain postcolonial subject' who is engaged in 'recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the Native Informant's position'.[25] According to Mark Sanders, Spivak has those 'deliberately and more or less willingly assimilated "interpreters"' in mind who have become anglicized through the colonial education system devised with the aim of creating a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.[26] As explained by Sanders, 'There is a sense in which this intermediary class cannot quite *inform*; in which it has detached itself from the remainder of the body politic that has not gone through this process of assimilation' (italics original). 'Because of its genealogy,' continues Sanders, 'in colonial subject-making that detached it from unmodified nativity and gave it a stake in colonial language, culture and political economy, the postcolonial subject may find itself appropriating a position to which it is not, strictly speaking, entitled; this may result in various forms of nativism'.[27]

The 'intermediary' role allegedly being played by postcolonial intellectuals has also led some critics to identify them as comprador intelligentsia facilitating trade in cultural goods between the First and the Third World but mainly to serve the First World interests. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the

---

[25]   Mark Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p.9.

[26]   *Ibid.*

[27]   *Ibid.*

periphery'.[28] Arif Dirlik, too, has related the establishment of postcolonial studies as a discipline in the western academy to the arrival and reception of postcolonial intellectuals in the West. However, setting the emergence of postcolonial criticism within the larger processes of globalization and reconfiguration of the capitalist system, Dirlik defines 'postcoloniality' as 'the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism'.[29] Dirlik, however, is not entirely correct in saying that the term 'comprador' is obsolete after the demise of colonialism and the onset of globalization. The word 'comprador' was originally used for merchants who facilitated transactions between colonial powers and local producers. However, in postcolonial theory, the term 'continues to be used to describe a relatively privileged, wealthy and educated élite who maintain a more highly developed capacity to engage in the international communicative practices introduced by colonial domination, and who may therefore be less inclined to struggle for local cultural and political independence'.[30]

However, as Edward Said describes in *Representations of the Intellectual*, the accusations of complicity and conformity with powerful discourses and institutions are not leveled against the postcolonial intellectuals alone. Discussing a number of works ranging from Julian Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* to Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, Said identifies the disappointment many scholars have felt with intellectuals who have sided with power and not with resistance. Though not entirely pessimistic about the role the intellectuals can and do play in the society and the larger world, Said acknowledges that the intellectuals, like everyone else, live within society and are susceptible and vulnerable to the pressures brought upon them by that fact alone. In the present day situation with the increasing professionalism being associated with the intellectual's vocation, Said identifies four specific pressures that bear upon every intellectual in the world but particularly in the American context. The first of these pressures is the need of specialization. The higher the level of education, the more specific and narrow the area of knowledge one is required to address. The second pressure is that of expertise and the need to be recognized as a certified

---

[28]   Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Is the "Post" in Postcolonial the Post in Postmodern?' *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (ed.), Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1997), p.62.

[29]   Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura', *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (ed.), Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1997), p.315.

[30]   Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.47-48.

expert in a particular field in order to command any authority or credibility. In *Orientalism*, Said has specifically criticized the role of the 'area study' or 'regional' experts in the strengthening of Orientalist views regarding the Arabs and the Muslims. The third pressure Said identifies is the pressure to serve the interests of power. National security and economy have long defined the goals of the study of various regions of the world. The knowledge produced in this way is thus far from objective. The fourth pressure Said describes arises out of the university-industry liaison and the funding of research initiatives by powerful state or private entities, often conservative and right wing in the American context. This means that the intellectual is pressed upon to produce knowledge that can be used to further the national or corporate interests. The intellectual's freedom in conducting research is thus compromised by being restricted in this manner.

In this context of highly professional and corporatized world of research and learning, the postcolonial intellectuals have found themselves in high demand and therefore under high pressure in the West. This specific high value that the postcolonial intellectuals possess today in the western world arises out of the need of studying non-western societies and cultures, e.g. the Middle East, for various purposes including economic and national interests. As the supposed possessors of authentic knowledge of these societies and cultures, the postcolonial intellectuals help the western societies understand not only the strange patterns and unfamiliar practices of their societies of origin, but also help them understand the behavior and demands of immigrant communities from those societies. According to Said's view, then, the postcolonial intellectuals have been turned into area experts whose help is called upon whenever a need is felt to understand a specific postcolonial society or culture. From a Marxist perspective, with the rise of globalization with its attendant ideology of multiculturalism, the postcolonial intellectuals have been interpellated into the subject-position of cultural experts and advisors, and thus their ability and claim to resist western hegemony has become questionable.

Dabashi's native informers

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing 'War on Terror', the role of Muslim intellectuals, a sub-group within the larger group of postcolonial intellectuals, has come to the forefront in the discussions of the dissenting and conforming intellectuals. Though the western world has no shortage of experts on Islam and the Middle East in the presence of such figures as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, the cult of authenticity established within the western societies has required the

presence of capable individuals, preferably scholars, with Muslim identities to tell the Muslim story regarding the events of 9/11 and other acts of terror perpetrated in the name of Islam. Their most important task has been to answer the question which, according to President Bush, the Americans were asking after 9/11: 'Why do they hate us?' His own answer – which suggests that the question was a rhetorical one, the answer being already well known by everyone – was that the terrorists hate the freedoms enjoyed by the Americans. The availability of this readymade answer is due to the efforts of a number of Orientalists, Bernard Lewis being chief among them, who have contrasted the despotism in Muslim countries with liberalism in the West. In a number of works such as *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, and *What Went Wrong?*, Bernard Lewis has emphasized this idea that Muslims hate the 'Judeo-Christian' civilization for the freedoms it has granted to its members. Due to the work of these Orientalists, the idea that Muslim societies are oppressive in nature enjoys the status of a universally acknowledged truth in the West. When the Bush administration decided upon war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, there were enough western intellectuals to not only support the decision but even to justify some of the violations of human rights committed in the war in the name of security and justice. Moreover, they helped package this war not as a war of vengeance but as a war for justice and freedom. However, what was needed was the presence of authentic Muslim voices in favour of the war on terror, so that any hesitation and objections the American public may have had regarding the war could be removed by showing that even the people from the attacked countries and cultures wanted the American forces to invade their country to free them from the arms of the oppressors. To fulfill this need, a number of 'Muslim intellectuals' stepped in to support the war on terror as a war for freedom and justice.

It is this group of 'Muslim intellectuals' that Hamid Dabashi has severely criticized in his book *Brown Skins, White Masks*. Using Spivak's term 'Native Informant' but changing it to 'native informer' to 'suggest the moral degeneration specific to the act of betrayal',[31] Dabashi accuses these intellectuals of complicity with the imperialist powers and criticizes them for denigrating Islamic religion and culture. While the concept of native informants has been found applicable to anthropologists of Arab or Muslim background who have applied the 'colonial grammar' of their discipline to the study of their own cultures, Dabashi uses the term 'informer' for those writers and intellectuals who

---

[31]   Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skins, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p.12.

have migrated to the West and perform their compradorial services there. He defines the typical native informer in these words:

> The typical native informers, born and raised in places such as Iran, Lebanon, Somalia, and Pakistan, move to Europe and/or the United States for their higher education. They may come from modest or opulent backgrounds; their financial means may be either inherited, the result of advantageous marriage, or payment for services to their American employers. They rarely hold a stable job with professional accountability, remaining rather on the professional margins of the society whose interests they serve. Whether or not they have made a career in their native land, they have always felt alienated from it, but they are no more at home in the country they have adopted just because it is where they can sell their services best.[32]

One important characteristic that the native informers possess is the 'art of simultaneously acknowledging and denying their Muslim origins'.[33] The particular way they speak (with an accent), establishes their authenticity in the eyes of their western audience. (In literary works, the use of local words and expressions also creates the same impact). According to Dabashi, the native informers with such names as Syed Vali Reza Nasr, Azar Nafisi, Fouad Ajami, Ayan Hirsi Ali, Salman Rushdie and Ibn Warraq, have 'provided a cover of legitimacy to American imperial designs on the Islamic world'[34] by raising issues like the lack of human rights and women's status in the Islamic world. However, they have raised these issues inside the safety net provided to them by the western states and have not shown the courage of fighting oppression within their own countries.

As a result of the efforts of these native informers, 'a whole new mode of knowledge production about the Orient' has been created.[35] The difference between this new mechanism of knowledge creation about the Orient and the earlier Orientalist system was that the older knowledge about the Orient was produced by the European officials or scholars themselves while this new knowledge is being produced by 'orientals' about their own cultures. According to Dabashi, 'The native informers have digested and internalized this language and now speak it with the

---

[32]   *Ibid*., p.15.
[33]   *Ibid*., p.16.
[34]   *Ibid*., p.17.
[35]   *Ibid*., p.18.

authority of natives'.[36] This means that the authenticity of this knowledge does not need to be verified and can be taken for granted since it is being produced by the 'insiders'. The function of this knowledge in the West, in Dabashi's view, is the confirmation of the war on terror as humanitarian intervention in the eyes of the American people. While the war against Afghanistan was launched immediately after the 9/11 attacks and the Americans had not had the time to think clearly, the war against Iraq became more challenging to sell to the Americans and many spoke out against this war. It is in shoring up support for this war and the continuing war in Afghanistan that the native informers played their role, providing inside knowledge of the harsh conditions in which the Muslims live, and thus helping the American government convince the American public that these wars were wars for freedom and democracy and not for domination and energy resources as was largely suspected.

Pakistani or 'Paki'?
As the world's attention has turned again towards Afghanistan and Pakistan after Iraq, the American and European media and publishing industry has set itself to work on producing knowledge of what some believe to be the most dangerous region and the hotbed of terrorism in the world today. Since 9/11 and especially over the last few years a number of books have been published regarding the state of Pakistan and Pakistani society focusing exclusively on the themes of terrorism, extremism, women's rights, lack of development, and other traditional Orientalist concerns. Most of these books are from within the disciplines of International Relations, Anthropology, Politics/Political Science, and History. Some collections of journalistic writings have also been published and the genre of literature with a Pakistani setting or origin has also started to thrive. The *Granta* magazine devoted its 112th issue (published in 2010) to writing from Pakistan and aimed at 'bringing to life the landscape and culture of the country in fiction, reportage, memoir, travelogue and poetry'.[37] The *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* also took out a special issue on Pakistan with the title 'Beyond Geography: Literature, Politics and Violence in Pakistan',[38] highlighting the critical response towards English literary writing from Pakistan.

---

[36]   *Ibid*.
[37]   John Freeman (ed.), *Granta 112: Pakistan* (London and New York: Granta Publications, 2010).
[38]   The *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* 47:2 (2011).

Though there are many factors that have played a role in producing a sudden boom in Pakistani English fiction in the 21st century (the relative freedom from government control of the media and journalism in Pakistan, the entry of a number of talented writers from Pakistan into publication, and a general increase in interest in and readership of world literature, for example), one major factor is the increased political significance of Pakistan in world politics which has sent world, particularly western, audiences running towards bookshops to get hold of books about Pakistan. This has made Pakistan a hot topic in the publishing industry, but, unlike India which has enjoyed a long period of interest for Western readers because of its packaging as the mysterious East, the land of exotic customs and cultures,[39] the world interest in Pakistan derives from fear and hostility rather than from desire and curiosity. This specific form of interest which may be described as 'understanding the enemy' has placed the literary writers from Pakistan in a difficult position. As bearers of a Pakistani identity they enjoy a prominence in the world of letters which relies on them for providing much needed cultural knowledge of Pakistan. Yet, they have to maintain a distance from the way Pakistan is perceived in the world, a world in which being a 'Paki' stands for being inhuman, violent, ignorant, uncivilized and barbaric. In order to create and retain a world audience, they have to be recognized as Pakistani and at the same time not to be recognized as a 'Paki'. Thus, they are forced to perform a delicate balancing act in their fictions in which they simultaneously affirm and deny their Pakistani/Paki identity. The affirmation is to be found in the confident way they produce knowledge about Pakistan, its culture, customs, landscape, and languages, and the denial and distancing is to be found in the way these representations are constructed as narratives of alienation, a turning away, a growing up, a moving out, a leaving home that distances the narrator or the main characters from the very cultures and customs that are described so concretely and vividly in the narrative. It may also be added that this distancing is enacted literally and actually in the lives of many of the authors who have chosen to live abroad.

However, there is nothing unique or different about this simultaneous reaching out and distancing toward Pakistan in Pakistani English writing. The writers of other postcolonial regions of the world have also faced this dilemma. The African writers have had to affirm/deny their 'nigger' status; the Indian writers have had to affirm/deny their 'brown' status; the Middle Eastern writers have had to affirm/deny their 'Arab/Muslim' status. All these writers have had to

---

[39]   See Lisa Lau and Christina Mendes, *op.cit.*

struggle against an Orientalist construction of the world in which white/European enjoys a superiority over every other race/region. The significant thing to note is that both affirmations and denials have strengthened the white/European self-created position of superiority, as affirmations confirm the otherness of the writers to the white/European and denials express similarity and solidarity with the white/European. This is the result of the either/or structuring of the world created by the Orientalists and enforced by European colonialism through both repressive and ideological apparatuses. Interestingly, while the repressive apparatus was as forceful in South Asia as anywhere else in the world (as evident in the way the Indian uprisings were dealt with by the British forces), the ideological apparatus was applied more strongly in India than at any other place in the world. The aim of the British education policy in India as stated by Lord Babington Macaulay (quoted above) was to create this group of individuals identified as the 'brown sahibs' by Ziauddin Sardar, and have been recast as the native intellectuals/informants/informers in postcolonial criticism as identified by Hamid Dabashi. A number of critics have also identified the rise of postcolonial theory in the American academy as due to the efforts of critics of mainly Indian origin (Spivak, Bhabha, Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash, etc). (For a detailed discussion of the influence of Indian writers and critics on the development of the discipline of Postcolonial Studies, see *Between The Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*, edited by Deepika Bahiri and Mary Vasudeva). Not only postcolonial theory but also postcolonial literature is dominated by writers of Indian origin or association – the works of Salman Rushdie and VS Naipaul have been very influential in defining the characteristic features of postcolonial literature, so much so that Elleke Boehmer has termed the valorization of Rushdie style fiction in postcolonial theory as a kind of 'neo-Orientalism'.[40] Under the influence of these literary critics and authors, hybridity and migrancy have come to be recognized as the definitive qualities of 'postcolonial condition'. While this approach to identity has been derived from poststructuralist critical theory, its reinscription in postcolonial theory has associated hybridity with migrancy, so that the local manifestations of hybridity as in the mixed up nature of ethnicities and local cultures are not given enough attention. Moreover, the typical postcolonial individual is theorized not only as migrant and hybrid but also as intellectual – educated, enlightened, and civilized, one who has given up a narrow minded nationalism for a broad

---

[40]   Elleke Boehmer, 'Questions of Neo-Orientalism', *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1:1 (1998), pp.18-21.

minded cosmopolitanism. Thus, in postcolonial theory, the diasporic intellectual has been idealized as the exemplary embodiment of the true postcolonial condition.

This valorization of a specific kind of hybridity in postcolonial theory, one obtaining through and associated with migrancy, has meant that the postcolonial writers have found their identity split between not only their home and adopted countries or locations, but also between their identity as a native, and that as an intellectual. Though 'nativism' has been thoroughly discarded in postcolonial theory as parochial and essentialist, the authenticity of the 'native' intellectual derives from being a 'native' of a postcolonial state, though not necessarily a native *in* a postcolonial state. The second half of the term, 'intellectual' indicates this condition of having moved out of, of having risen above, one's inherited traditions and of having adopted a cosmopolitan outlook. Edward Said's characterization of intellectuals as 'exilic' individuals, in exile both metaphorically and/or actually, also implies a sense of alienation from their own society and culture. And, thus, where it implies a sense of gain, a broadening of vision, it also implies a sense of loss, a loss of specificity and closeness of touch with the actual living experience of the 'natives'. And this disconnect between the natives and native intellectuals is not only an effect of the actual moving out, of leaving home, of the intellectual but is also an effect of the intellectual conditioning through education within the postcolonial state whereby a group of individuals learns to look down upon their own history and culture in favour of the enlightened and civilized cultures of the West. Class differences play a further role in exacerbating this distance between the native and the native intellectual. The natives and their representatives, the native intellectuals, live a carefully secluded lives. The localities they inhabit, the food they eat, the schools they attend (the natives, if at all), the careers and professions they pursue – are completely and utterly different from each other. They do not even speak the same languages – the natives speak the various local languages of Pakistan, while the native intellectuals, having been educated in English medium schools, having done their 'O' and 'A' levels, are fluent in English. (In some Pakistani schools, speaking any language except English is a punishable offence). With the dismal literacy rate in Pakistan, where even the local languages in written form are inaccessible to a large number of the natives, English is simply an alien language – that is, in a literal sense, a language spoken by inhabitants of some other planet. Even in diasporic communities, the difference between an educated elite, the native intellectual class, and the poor immigrants remains. While the intellectuals, the educated elite, find a relatively less

racist and discriminatory atmosphere in their circles, the poor immigrants have to face a more hostile environment. Thus, the intellectuals find it easy to adopt a cosmopolitan attitude towards questions of culture and identity, while poor immigrants are constantly reminded of their otherness, foreignness, and alienness.

With such vast differences and distances in learning and experience, the claim of one to be a representative of the other, to have the ability to represent the other, is very questionable. This claim, as has been mentioned earlier, is based on the 'insider' status of the literary author to a specific culture and tradition. While the above discussion has shown that the writers under discussion, the postcolonial/Third World/Pakistani writers, maintain a more ambivalent 'insider-outsider' status instead of 'going native' (which has its own problems) in their works, the existence of homogenous indigenous cultures and traditions, national, ethnic, and/or religious, seems to have been taken for granted. This position has also been questioned in various schools of theory. The Marxist scholars, Eric Hobsbawm for example, have identified the inventedness of all traditions, and the power games involved in conservative attitudes towards the questions of tradition and culture.[41] The postcolonial critics have identified the 'pitfalls of national consciousness'[42] – the dangers inherent in inventing and enforcing an idea of a unified and coherent national culture. There seems to be a consensus among theorists of various schools that cultures are diverse and various and attempts to enforce cultural unity can only be hegemonic and repressive. Especially, questionable has become the idea of a national culture and national identity. Although no system of political identification alternative to national identity (passports, ID cards, birth certificates, e.g.) has been developed so far, globalization and the enhancements in communication technology have made such identities almost meaningless today. Thus, the notion of cultural identity in regional (e.g. African, South Asian, western) or national (e.g. Indian, Pakistani, British, e.g.) context is maintained in the discourse of globalization. Not only is it maintained, but is also put to great service by the culture industry as there exists a large market of exotic goods almost everywhere in the world comprising such attractions as 'African art', 'Indian cuisine', 'Chinese food', 'Arab poetry/music', 'Persian carpets' etc. It is inevitable, then, that literary works, too, have been added to the

---

[41] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[42] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans., Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

list of exotic goods, and thus, South Asian literature, Indian writing in English, Pakistani English fiction, have also become highly marketable products. Other more academic and scholarly sources of knowledge also exist about such exotic places in the world as India and China, but they lack the charm of the narrative, the plot and the characterization. They also lack the pleasure of stories, the fairy tales, the romances, and the travelogues. Thus, people who may have had no idea of where Afghanistan was on the map of the world, admire the Afghanistan story in the writings of Khaled Hosseini and learn about Afghan traditions, culture, and history from his novels. The same job is performed by the Pakistani writers for the audience interested in Pakistani culture and traditions and the role these have played in producing the violent and oppressive social and political structure supposed to exist in Pakistan.

In this context in which literary writers have been co-opted by the publishing arm of the culture industry, the one quality, for some the raison d'etre of postcolonial literature, that has been the defining quality of postcolonial literature since its inception – resistance to all forms of hegemony and control but specifically the colonial and neo-colonial hegemonic formations – has been compromised and in some instances has even been said to have been replaced with complicity with hegemonic forces (e.g., Hamid Dabashi's comments on Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* in *Brown Skins, White Masks*).[43] Resistance has been theorized in various ways in postcolonial theory. In the period of anti-colonial struggle for national freedom and decolonization, resistance meant opposing the colonial forces in the name of national identity constructed on the basis of a national culture. However, in most cases the bitter experience of decolonization and independence brought to light a number of contradictions and gaps in the nationalist ideologies. It was realized that the bourgeois took over the reins of control in the postcolonial states and not only utilized the state machinery for their own benefit but also kept the free nations in subservience – both materially and ideologically – to the former colonial powers. Nationalism itself became a coercive ideology, and anyone who questioned the policies and actions of a government was declared a traitor to the nationalist cause and made to suffer various degrees of oppression – from imprisonment and torture to exile and banishment. Many literary writers were among the people who had to suffer at the hands of the government on charges of spreading obscenity, inciting rebellion, denigrating national figures,

---

[43]   Also see Saba Mahmood, 'Freedom, Democracy and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror', *Women's Studies on the Edge,* ed., Joan Wallach Scott (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

disfiguring national history and many similar charges. Resistance, in this context meant not only resistance to neocolonialism, but also to various forms of oppression exercised by the forces of power (often military dictatorships) in postcolonial states. With the advent of globalization, resistance is often theorized in Marxist terms as a critique of global capitalism and the dehumanization and denaturing of the world that it is accused of having caused. Movements like the World Social Forum (WSF) and theories like Hardt and Negri's *Empire* emphasize the need of resisting the capitalist economy through democratic means.

As Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* show, the Pakistani writers hold Islamic fundamentalism responsible for the persecution of artists in Pakistan. Moreover, this state aggression against, and restrictions on, writers and artists is not unique to Pakistan. Writers in various Muslim states, from the Middle East to South Asia have faced hostile governments and/or political organisations and Islamism as a fundamentalist political ideology is generally regarded as inimical to the interest of the artists. The attempted murder of Naguib Mahfooz, the Egyptian Nobel laureate for literature, and the imprisonment and exile of of Faiz Ahmed Faiz have become well known examples of the 'fundamentalists'' hostile relations with literary writers. The persecution of writers and artists by military and Islamist regimes in most Muslim countries have seared the imagination of Muslim writers from around the world. Their first acts of resistance have been, thus, directed not against a foreign enemy or hegemonic force but a local threat to their life and work. The almost universal portrayal of fundamentalists as bigoted, aggressive, cruel, and violent in Pakistani English writing is thus a reflection of their experience of Islamic fundamentalism at home.

Muslim writing/fiction

It is to highlight the diversity of approaches to Islam and to accommodate this uneasy relationship writers from Islamic backgrounds have had with the political and social conditions in their home countries dominated by aggressive and militant Islamism that 'Muslim writing' has been developed as a conceptual category in postcolonial literature. Amin Malak has developed a definition of 'Muslim narrative', which, according to him, 'suggests the works produced by the person who believes firmly in the faith of Islam; and/or, via an inclusivist extension, by the person who voluntarily and knowingly refers to herself, for whatever motives, as a 'Muslim' when given a selection of identitarian choices; and/or, by yet another generous extension, by the person who is rooted formatively and emotionally in the culture and civilization of

Islam'.[44] This last 'inclusivist extension' is further elaborated by Claire Chambers by pointing out that '[m]any significant Pakistani and Arab writers are secular, agnostic, atheists, or (like Pakistani American novelist Bapsi Sidhwa; Pakistani British poets Moniza Alvi and John Siddique; Lebanese artist, writer and publisher Mai Ghoussoub; and the late Palestinian-American theorist Edward W. Said) were not brought up as Muslims or come from other religious communities'.[45] The Muslim element in their writing thus comes not from 'religiosity or piety' but from their having an access to a common 'Muslim civilizational heritage'.[46] In their discussion of the concept of 'Muslim writing', Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin have also pointed out a 'semantic ambiguity' in the term. This ambiguity is evident in the identification of 'Muslim' writers who may range from 'authors self-identifying as Muslims, or those for whom the rituals and inner promptings of faith are at the heart of their sense of identity' and 'authors hailing from a Muslim cultural background, for whom God and faith may have receded entirely from their sense of themselves and their affiliations in the world'.[47] However, Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin also point out that between these two extremes there are a 'range of positions combining faith and doubt, materialism and spirituality, individualism and community, in ways that undermine the distinct binaries into which those terms usually resolve themselves'.[48]

The combined effect of the above descriptions of 'Muslim writing' is the foregrounding of the authors' identity as a Muslim, and the discussion of their work in the light of their identity. As self-declared Muslims and/or as bearers of 'Muslim civilizational heritage', these authors have been deemed supremely capable of 'project[ing] the culture and civilization of Islam from *within*'[49] (italics added), i.e. of providing its authentic representation. Yet the above discussion has pointed out the very diverse and often antagonistic relations the 'Muslim' writers have had with Islam. This problematizes the derivation of authenticity of representation from the identity of the author. It also points out the

---

[44] Amin Malak, *op.cit.,* p.7.
[45] Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.10.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing,* ed., Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.3-4.
[48] *Ibid*., p.4.
[49] Amin Malak, *op.cit.,* p.2.

conflict between individual and cultural authenticity as described by Robert D. Lee in *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity*. According to Lee, individual authenticity derives from the unique experience of individuals and does not admit of any external influence, while cultural authenticity derives from the acceptance and practice of certain customs and traditions by a group of people. Thus, 'Individual authenticity requires radical rejection of external standards, whether these be the product of cultural tradition or modernity, the logic of Aristotle or the rationality of Islamic establishment, the dictates of parental guidance or the conventions of high society'.[50] In Lee's view, the excessive emphasis on cultural authenticity in the Islamic world, mainly due to the influence of the Islamist groups, has tended to alienate the 'more secularized, development-oriented' individuals in these societies. The unfortunate result of this overemphasis on cultural authenticity, Lee points out, is that it 'has become synonymous with reaction and fanaticism'.[51]

This problematic approach towards cultural authenticity is further compounded by the fact that in current cultural theory the 'religious imaginary is dismissed ahead of time as either conservative or unredeemable'.[52] The religious experience can be easily seen as inauthentic in the individual sense since it requires an individual to submit to norms and traditions imposed by the society and/or the state. The key concept here is that of 'agency' which identifies the ability a subject has to act on his or her own will, and thus makes the experience authentic. The characterization of the religious experience as that of submission to norms leads to the characterization of religious subjectivity as devoid of agency. Conversely, as Saba Mahmood describes, agency is seen only to operate in terms of resistance to norms. It is this coupling of the concepts of agency and resistance that Saba Mahmood has questioned in her book *Politics of Piety*. Expressing the need to decouple agency from resistance, Mahmood turns to Foucault's theory of subject formation to make her point. According to Mahmood, 'Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency as: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historically and

---

[50]   Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), pp.2-3.

[51]   *Ibid*., p.2.

[52]   Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p.vii.

culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed'.[53]
Describing it as a paradox of subjectivation, Mahmood identifies that in
'Foucault's formulation … the capacity for action is enabled and created
by specific relations of subordination'.[54] This complex reading of the
paradoxical experience of religion enables the reader (and the writer) to
approach religious experience not as a blind and mechanical following of
traditions but as a self-conscious participation in religious rituals and
practices that enables the participants to exercise their agency in self-
fulfillment.

　　　　However, the Islamist groups' insistence on the observance of
rituals as evidence of cultural authenticity has forced many Muslim
writers to approach the formal performance of religious rituals as devoid
of individual authenticity. In Pakistani English fiction, for example, the
religious characters like Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, and the
members of the *Jamaat e Paidaish* in *The Geometry of God* seem to be
so caught up in the ritual performance of religion that they are blind to
their own ignorance and the harmful impact of their actions upon others.
This reading and rendering of the formal aspects of religion has led many
Muslim writers towards a valorization of Sufi experience of religion
which is rendered as more personal, compassionate, and authentic. It is
also described as a more tolerant form of Islam, which, because it
downplays appearances and rituals, can accommodate an inner
orientation towards spirituality from anyone around the world no matter
belonging to which region or religion. While most scholars of Sufism
agree that Sufism is concerned with spiritual purification, to describe
Sufism as a purely spiritual orientation and experience goes against the
way Sufism has been established in the world as a set of very elaborate
practices and rituals, with various Sufi orders having their own specific
rules and regulations regarding the Sufi path. With its strong emphasis
on inner growth and spirituality, Sufism has also been represented in
some Muslim writing (e.g. by Nadeem Aslam, Uzma Aslam Khan)[55] as
an internal critique of the Islamist movements with their almost
exclusive focus on rituals and outward conformity. This has led to a
situation in which piety and abstinence that are an integral part of the
Sufi practices and sources of spiritual strength have little appeal in the
novels – in fact, piety and abstinence are either deceptive or forced,

[53]　Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist
　　　Subject* (Princeton NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.29.
[54]　*Ibid*.
[55]　Nadeem Aslam, *Maps for Lost Lovers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004);
　　　Uzma Aslam Khan, *The Geometry of God* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008).

never genuine – while the more outward signs of a supposedly Sufi orientation such as love of divine beauty as seen in nature and the arts, tolerance towards outsiders, and a lax attitude towards ritual performance are given more importance. This is a very literal reading, a reading which in most matters of religion is ascribed exclusively to the Islamists, of Sufism which is otherwise a mystical and esoteric discipline that relies heavily on symbols and metaphors for conveying the Sufi experience. Thus, for example, the state of intoxication that Sufis often describe in recounting their experience is taken literally to mean drinking alcohol (as in *The Geometry of God*) and the use of a feminine voice and persona in writing about the Sufi longing for the beloved is taken literally to imply a feminist politics at work in the Sufi poetry (as in *Maps for Lost Lovers*). To represent the Sufi as a rebel against the juridical Shari'a oriented approach to religion espoused by the Ulama is an Orientalist approach chiefly associated with the writings of Louis Massignon.[56]

The representation of both inward and outward religious experience, therefore, remains problematic for most writers, probably because the two dimensions are often seen in oppositional rather than in complementary terms. In the post 9/11 novels included in this study, there are no characters who combine the inward and the outward religious dimensions, whose spirituality is not opposed to their rituality. Though most novelists try to maintain a distinction between Islam the religion and Islamism a political ideology, and, therefore, between a Muslim and an Islamist, religion is represented almost entirely by the Islamist characters in the novels. The non-Islamist Muslims are characterized as liberal and secular, with an indifference towards religion in both inward and outward dimensions. Religion is solely the domain of the Islamists, and there are no practicing Muslims who are not Islamists just as there are no non-practicing Muslims who are not secularists or indifferent towards religion. Except for Dunya in *The Wasted Vigil*, and Neelam in *Night of the Golden Butterfly*, the practicing Muslims are characterized as ignorant, conservative, and violent. Apart from these characters, the gap between the indifferent, secular minded Muslims, usually from an upper-class background, and the emotional, religious minded characters, usually from lower classes remains unabridged in these novels.

Some Muslim writers have demonstrated how this gap can be bridged with the creation of characters who combine the inward and the outward dimensions of Islam in their behavior and thought. Foremost among these characters is the Egyptian character Ustaz Badri in Leila

---

[56]   Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

Aboulela's novel, *Lyrics Alley*. A teacher of Arabic and a Hafiz-e-Quran, Ustaz Badri, shows a consciousness which is deeply religious yet not fanatical. He is deeply attached to his family particularly to his wife towards whom he is sexually attracted. Overall, he comes out as a balanced personality, one who has both worldly ambitions and spiritual aspirations. Another such character who achieves a balance in his personality through his experience is Sami in Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel, *The Road from Damascus*. Starting off as a non-believer in religion but deeply attached to the art and culture of his country, Syria, Sami goes through a series of failures which make him realize the weaknesses in his personality and he turns towards religion to remake himself. Instead of becoming a fanatic or an Islamist like his brother-in-law, he follows the example of his wife in becoming a moderate but practicing Muslim. Even in the well known story by Hanif Kureishi, an author who is known to have a secular stance towards matters of belief, *My Son the Fanatic*, the young boy's inclination towards Islam is described in a highly ambivalent way through the eyes of his father, whose own life is no good example for a young boy to follow. While the father is disturbed at his son's increasing reclusiveness and piety, he also sees him growing more organized and clean than he was before discovering interest in his Islamic identity. Of particular interest and relevance is the ending of the story. Parvez, the father enters his son Ali's room and finds him praying, and this is what happens:

> Parvez kicked him over. Then he dragged the boy up by his shirt and hit him. The boy fell back. Parvez hit him again. The boy's face was bloody. Parvez was panting. He knew that the boy was unreachable, but he struck him nonetheless. The boy neither covered himself nor retaliated; there was no fear in his eyes. He only said, through his split lip: 'So who's the fanatic now?'[57]

It is these ambivalences, these contradictions and paradoxes that characterize the human situation in regard to religion that are under-represented in post 9/11 Pakistani English fiction. Characters are either religious or secular with the in-between positions identified by Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin above left relatively unexplored in the fiction.

Muslim writing and Orientalism
This paper has identified persistence of the Orientalist framework in the representation of Islam in the post 9/11 novels analyzed in this study,

---

[57]   Hanif Kureishi, 'My Son the Fanatic', *Collected Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p.127.

while also pointing out how some writers have consciously tried to avoid using this framework in representing Islam. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said had defined Orientalism as a 'system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire'.[58] Said had also differentiated between what he called 'latent' and 'manifest' Orientalism, describing the former as a 'distillation of essential ideas about the Orient – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its backwardness – into a separate and unchallenged coherence' and the latter as 'differences in form and personal style' among the writers dealing with the Orient.[59] In the post-9/11 geopolitical context, it is in a situation of military conflict that Orientalism has been redeployed as a framework for representing Islam. This is very much a neo/re-Orientalism, and not what Ian Almond has defined as the 'new Orientalism'. In Almond's view, the new Orientalism 'is the employment of the Islamic Orient – its motifs and symbols, its alterity and anachronisms, its colour but also its threat – in order to sustain an attempted critique and re-location of Western modernity'.[60] Though the latent Orientalism remains intact in the new Orientalism, its aim is to 're-evaluate many of modernity's central tenets' by invoking an 'Islamic/Arab other'.[61] The Neo-Orientalism does not involve a critique of modernity but rather a defense of such 'central tenets' of modernity as 'enlightenment', 'rationality', 'progress', and 'development'. These principles of modernity can only be upheld today, after poststructuralism and postmodernism, only in opposition to the 'Islamic/Arab other'. It is significant to note that this colonial binary opposition between the forces of enlightenment and the forces of darkness has been recommissioned in the context of the 'War on Terror' which many writers, including David Harvey have defined as a 'new imperialism'. Neo-Orientalism, thus, serves the interests of new imperialism.

Postcolonial theory and Muslim writing

What role can postcolonial theory play in making sense of the present cultural and political landscape of the world? As discussed by Sangeeta Ray, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, many writers

---

[58]   Edward Said, *op.cit.,* pp.202-3.
[59]   *Ibid*., p.205.
[60]   Ian Almond, *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p.2.
[61]   *Ibid.*

criticized postcolonial theory for its inability, even unwillingness, to study the resurgence of fundamentalism in the world and for its uninhibited celebration of globalization through the themes of migrancy and hybridity.[62] More than 10 years after 9/11, questions about the relevance of postcolonial theory in making sense of the present day geo-political context are still being asked. With reference to the 'Arab Spring' – the recent political uprisings in the Arab world – Hamid Dabashi has declared that 'postcolonial ideological formations have reached the point of epistemic exhaustion', and that the Arab spring has ushered in a post-ideological moment in the Muslim world.[63] According to Dabashi, 'We are, in my view, finally overcoming the condition we have termed 'coloniality' and, *a fortiori*, 'postcoloniality.' Coloniality is finally overcome [in the Arab Spring], not prolonged in the protracted ideological procrastination called 'postcolonial''.[64] Including Islamism in his 'postcolonial ideological formations' Dabashi is of the view that Islamism as a political ideology premised upon an opposition to the West has exhausted itself and no longer answers to the needs and desires of the people which are more accurately reflected in a 'cosmopolitan worldliness' which he defines as 'a new worldliness, the restoration of a confidence in being-in-the-world'.[65]

Interestingly, when scholars like Dabashi and other scholars have been speaking about post-Islamism in the Muslim world, Robert Young wants postcolonial theory to engage with Islamism in order to be relevant today. Describing the absence of a vigorous engagement with Islamism in postcolonial theory as part of the 'politics of invisibility and unreadability' in postcolonial theory, Young advocates a (re)reading of Islamism as an 'oppositional discourse and practice' to western imperialism. Before Young, Susan Buck-Morss had also made the same point in *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*. According to Buck-Morss, 'Islamism is not terrorism. It is the politicization of Islam in a postcolonial context, a contemporary discourse of opposition and debate, dealing with issues of social justice, legitimate power, and ethical life in a way that challenges the hegemony

---

[62]   Sangeeta Ray, 'Postscript: Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11', *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed., Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp.574-83.

[63]   Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012), p.156.

[64]   *Ibid*., pp.9-10.

[65]   *Ibid*., p.10.

of Western political and cultural norms'.[66] Acknowledging the violent nature of Islamist extremists, she insists that 'Islamism in its origins is first and foremost a critical discourse articulated by intellectuals and educators, often at great personal risk, and their analytical insights merit discussion and debate within a global public sphere by non-Muslims and Muslims alike'.[67] It is this approach toward Islamism as a postcolonial oppositional discourse that has been missing in postcolonial theory. Though Dabashi and Roy may speak of a post-Islamist politics in the Muslim world, in Young's view Islamism 'remains' in the Muslim world but due to the politics of invisibility and unreadability, it 'remains' unnoticed and untouched in postcolonial theory mainly because of the theory's origins in the 'secular tradition of Marxism' in which 'religion … merit[s] little serious attention…'.[68]

As the recent victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the victory of the Islamic party in Turkey in the last two elections show, Islamism has not lost its political clout in the Muslim world. Yet, the Arab Spring in particular has also shown that all Muslims are not Islamists and, therefore, emphasized the need to see Islam outside Islamism. While there is a need to study Islamism as a postcolonial political ideology, there is also a need to see the world of Islam, the Islamic nature and content of the everyday life and culture of the Muslims, beyond Islamism. Crucial here is to avoid the adoption of a binary framework of Islamism/Secularism to describe the life of the Muslims, and thus to reduce the number of choices available to Muslims in the practice of their religion to an either/or binary. Just as every Muslim is not an Islamist, every non-Islamist Muslim is not a secularist either. And not being an Islamist and a secularist also doesn't mean that a Muslim is thus on the spiritual path of Sufism. It is important to recognize that like Islamism and secularism, Sufism has also become a political position which signifies tolerance and flexibility towards others, and not the spiritual discipline known by that name in religious discourse. Thus, for postcolonial theory it is important to shun its own Eurocentric biases (Marxism, secularism) and to acknowledge the invisibility and unreadability of Islam except in the Islamism/secularism binary frame in order to engage with manifestations of religion in everyday life in their full spiritual, psychological, and political dimensions. In this regard, it is important to redefine such key terms in

---

[66]   *Ibid.*, p.2.

[67]   *Ibid.*

[68]   Robert Young, 'Postcolonial Remains', *New Literary History*, 43:1 (2012), p.30.

postcolonial studies as agency, hybridity, migrancy, resistance, and subjectivity so as to explore the Muslim experience of Islam without the inbuilt, inherent biases in the discipline due to its roots in such European/western discourses as Marxism and postmodernism.

In their response to Young and Chakrabarty's articles, Robert Stam and Ella Shohat suggest 'Postcolonial Indigeneity' as their answer to the second part of their question 'Whence and Whither Postcolonial theory'. Though they hardly mention an engagement with Islam(ism) as a future task for postcolonial theory, their description of 'indigenous critique' suggests a way of approaching Islam in postcolonial theory. 'Indigenous critique,' they write, 'incarnates a temporal paradox: it is very traditional and ancient and, at the same time, very radical and new. Not only does it challenge the logics of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and the nation-state; it also questions the productivism of Marxism, the nomadism of postmodernism, and the constructivism of poststructuralism'.[69] The character of Ustaz Badri in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* is a good example of this approach. A traditional, practicing Muslim, he is completely unconcerned about the big political questions about the postcolonial future of Sudan and Egypt and totally aloof from Islamism/secularism debate in the postcolonial Muslim states. All he is concerned about is making a decent living and his family's welfare and in that struggle he finds guidance and support in Islam. His character is a living embodiment of the spiritual and ethical aspects of Islam. The absence of politics in his character does not make him irrelevant to postcolonial theory. As Saba Mahmood states in *The Politics of Piety*, the division of a religious/ethical private and a political public sphere is a part of old liberal political theory which, as she shows through a reading of Foucault's work on subject formation, has become questionable in the light of recent poststructuralist theory. According to her, there is a consensus among critics today that 'all forms of politics require and assume a particular kind of subject that is produced through a range of disciplinary practices that are at the core of regulatory apparatus of any modern political arrangement'.[70] The question, then, to ask about any political discourse, Mahmood states, is: 'How does a particular concept of the self require and presuppose different kinds of political commitments? Or to put it another way, what sort of subject is assumed

---

[69]   Robert Stam and Ellah Shohat, 'Whence and Whither Postcolonial Theory?' *New Literary History*, 43:2 (2012), p.385.

[70]   Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject, op.cit.,* p.33.

to be normative within a particular political imaginary?'[71] In the postcolonial political imaginary, it is the hybrid, diasporic subject that has been normative for a long time, requiring the articulation of multiculturalist, cosmopolitan politics. This study has shown that to engage with the Muslim subject rooted in the Islamic religion, a different sort of politics needs to be articulated, one that incorporates religious identity and experience as authentic modes of existence and alternative ways of being human in the global world.

---

[71]   *Ibid*.