THE LATEST POST IN THE FIELD: POSTSECULARISM AND SOUTH ASIAN FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Western philosophy became increasingly accepting of the "secularization thesis" – the argument that modernization leads to a decline in religion. Recently emerged theories of postsecularism refute this idea, arguing that the world is experiencing a revival, rather than decline, of religion. This observation has generated renewed interest in and advocacy for the coexistence and interaction of the sacred and the profane along with criticisms of essentialist secular and religious metanarratives. However, most postsecular criticism is Western and Eurocentric in focus, associating present-day "religion" almost entirely with 9/11.

Literary studies of postsecularism are rare, as are works that explore links between postsecularism and postcolonialism – a startling oversight, given the neocolonial connotations present in approaches to religiosity and religious others in the Western world. This dissertation bridges that gap by performing a postsecular analysis of six South Asian postcolonial novels: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* (2007), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009). The analysis of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* explores the complicated distinction between the sacred and the profane through the blurred boundaries between secular and religious imagery in each text. The juxtaposition of Eastern and Western representations of religion, secularism, and postsecularism in *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* interrogates the separation between sacred and profane concepts of national culture and presents a transnational postsecularism that posits a much more inclusive form of postcolonial, anticolonial

nationalism. Finally, the analysis of *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows* juxtaposes the

violence of 9/11 and the American War on Terror with racial discrimination and other

violences perpetuated by the West, challenging Eurocentric approaches to Islam,

religion, and secularism and exhibiting a postsecularism that transcends a literary

fetishization of 9/11. Overall, this dissertation emphasizes the postsecular's capacity to

serve as an organic extension of the postcolonial and challenges the tendencies of

postsecular criticism to adopt, rather than problematize, an inherently Western

imperialist approach to classifications of religiosity, secularism, and postsecularism

itself.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to everybody who takes the time to read it.

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INTRODUCTION

Introducing Postsecularism

Over the years, literature in English has evolved to both reflect and challenge the changing beliefs of the societies in which it was produced. From the religious overtones of Medieval spiritual writings to the rise of realism in the secular novels of the nineteenth century and the modernist works of the twentieth century, it *appears* as though popular literature in general – with exceptions, of course – has followed a gradual trend of secularization. This trend reflects a hypothesis Peter Berger has termed the "secularization theory" (2): the belief that as the world becomes more modern and humanity achieves greater measures of progress, religion will be pushed to the outer margins of society, and secularism will form the cultural centre. However, literary controversies such as those over the contents of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988)1 challenge the core of the secularization theory – alternately known as the secularization thesis – illustrating the coexistence of secular and religious themes, symbols, and concerns in literature and the consequent strain this cohabitation can produce. This coexistence, and the consequent strain, can be understood through the lens of the relatively new concept of postsecularism, which offers a powerful alternative to the secularization theory. As a reflection of the evolving state of societies, literature in particular serves as a poignant vessel through which to analyze the presence of the postsecular and to reconsider the

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1 *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Satanic Verses* are both the subjects of controversial debates about religion, blasphemy, secularism, and censorship laws. Around the world, many Christians took issue with Brown's depictions of Jesus – as married to Mary Magdalene and the father of children. *The Satanic Verses* was likewise condemned by Muslims worldwide for its fictional portrayal of the Prophet Mohammed and his wives, as well as the suggestion that the Qur'an was not the product of divine inspiration. Though both texts were the subjects of protests and demonstrations, the international pushback against *The Satanic Verses* was much more severe, with many countries banning the book and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issuing a *fatwa* – or a religiously decreed death threat – against Rushdie and his publishing team.

way in which the Western world especially continues to perceive and approach secularism and religiosity around the globe.

To describe something as "postsecular" is to suggest that it can accommodate both the religious *and* the secular – the sacred *and* the profane. Postsecularism – which is more thoroughly explained in Chapter One – refers to the "conscious … co-existence of religious and secular worldviews" (Stoeckl), which Kristina Stoeckl describes as a condition of "permanent tension." Further, it represents a desire to resist any master narrative – whether a "supersessionary narrative of secularization, or a triumphal narrative of the return of religion" (Kaufmann 68-69) – by moving beyond models that posit a stark binary opposition between the religious and the secular and complicating our understanding of the two terms ideologically, culturally, and historically.

While the secular and the religious have existed in contemporaneity and in tension throughout human history, the concept of the "postsecular" emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a response to the modernist secularization philosophies of well-known nineteenth-century thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, all of whom believed that human progress was pushing religion to the outer margins of society. The observation that religion has recently undergone a "resurgence" (Beaumont 8) – or, at least, that the public awareness of religion has experienced a resurgence – has brought about a renewed interest in the coexistence and interaction of the sacred and the profane on global, national, and individual scales. As a result, there have been numerous recent publications on postsecularism in relation to politics, international relations, sociology, psychology, and religious studies; yet, literary studies of postsecularism are surprisingly rare. Even scarcer are works that explore the links between postsecularism with postcolonialism, which this dissertation does. Postcolonial

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theory's examination of the social and political hierarchies surrounding the relationship between colonizer and colonized is very similar to the hierarchies addressed by postsecular theory, and the lack of literature on this correlation is surprising, given the neocolonial connotations present in a variety of approaches to religiosity and religious others in the Western world.[2]

This work attempts to bridge this gap by performing a postsecular analysis of South Asian postcolonial literature, emphasizing the capacity for the postsecular to serve as an organic extension of the postcolonial and challenging earlier works of postsecular criticism that adopt, rather than problematize, an inherently Western imperialist approach to classifications of religiosity, secularism, and postsecularism throughout the world. In literature, recent works from the postcolonial world – specifically, works from authors whose nations were once colonies of the British Empire – have targeted oppressive neocolonial perceptions of religion as racialized or visible. There is a shift in postcolonial and global literature, reflecting a similar shift taking place in media outlets – that is, while the same (neo)colonial binaries of Self/Other, West/East, white/black, and so forth continue to propagate, new terminologies and new fears have augmented previous postcolonial vocabularies: terms such as "Islamophobia," "radical," and "fundamentalism," all of which have been stereotypically aligned with the "Eastern" "non-white" "religious" "other." The colonial subject as "heathen" has been replaced by the non-Western other as "religious," thus embedding Western – i.e., white, and therefore invisible – religion within Western state secularism.

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[2] As is further discussed in the Conclusion, one such example of a Western neocolonial attitude toward religion can be found in the current debates surrounding Bill 21 (the "secularism law") in Quebec, which calls for the removal of visibly religious clothing (i.e., turbans, hijabs) from public workplaces but whose proponents support the placement of the crucifix in the provincial legislature due to its importance to the 'national heritage.'

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), for example, exemplifies the organic extension of postcolonial into postsecular themes, as Isma (one of Shamsie's female protagonists) explains:

> If you look at colonial laws you'll see plenty of precedent for depriving people of their rights; the only difference is this time it's applied to British citizens, and even that's not as much of a change as you might think, because they're rhetorically being made un-British.... The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as 'British terrorists.' Even when the word 'British' was used, it was always 'British of Pakistani descent' or 'British Muslim' or, my favourite, 'British passport holders,' always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism. (40)

In spite of her British citizenship, Isma (whose parents are Pakistani) is constantly searched and interrogated at airports, asked to prove her "Britishness" not with her passport but by showing mental assimilation through her opinions on "shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, *The Great British Bake Off*, the invasion of Iraq, suicide bombers, [and] dating websites" (5). Though she is not technically a colonial subject, the hierarchy of Empire still affects her as she is othered for her beliefs, which are subject to Western assumptions of the intersections of nation, race, and faith-based ideology.

As previously mentioned, postsecular concerns have been addressed on a myriad of platforms and may indeed seem best suited to the explorations of political science, international relations, sociology, psychology, and/or religious studies, which would then beg the question, "Why literary analysis?" After all, real-world conflicts between secular and religious individuals, nations, and ideologies fill media outlets every day,

revolving around topics such as border conflicts, immigration, national identity, and citizenship, to name only a few. In a world in which people are killed, governments are overthrown, and migrants are deported and/or rejected over the contentious realities of secular and religious conflicts, why study the postsecular *in literature*?

In *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007), John McClure sets out a prescriptive set of rules for defining a postsecular body of fiction:

> The stories it tells trace the turn of secular-minded characters back toward the religious; … its ontological signature is a religiously inflected disruption of secular constructions of the real; and … its ideological signature is the rearticulation of a dramatically 'weakened' religiosity with secular, progressive values and projects. (3)

Not only are postsecular works, in his understanding, rife with religious ontologies and aesthetic compositions "deeply imbued with the religious" (163), but, he argues, "In the end … postsecular narratives affirm the urgent need for a turn toward the religious even as they reject (in most instances) the familiar dream of full return to an authoritative faith" (6). McClure's work was among the first and most influential publications performing a postsecular analysis of various literary texts. However, while his presentation of the postsecular as rendering secular and religious worldviews simultaneously partial and plural captures the essence of the postsecular challenge to metanarratives, the characteristics he uses to identify postsecular fiction are too narrow.

Conversely, non-literary definitions of postsecularism are quite broad (see Kaufmann 68), and literary criticism should be open to the full scope of the postsecular. For instance, McClure's requirement that postsecular works begin with a secular

character and involve a conversion of sorts places an unnecessary restriction on the classification. As this dissertation demonstrates, postsecularism can be approached as an amalgamation of theoretical traits: the idea that the (Western) world is experiencing a resurgence of religion; the need for religion to receive a public voice within the secular sphere while coexisting with, rather than replacing, secular worldviews; a challenge to the essentialist metanarratives often embraced by religious and secular communities alike; the state of permanent tension between the religious and the secular that may never be resolved; and finally, a fragile yet necessary idealism. Novels that are open to postsecular interpretations should address some sort of discourse, or negotiation, of religiosity and secularism, whether that be within characters themselves, between characters, or in society – and this should not be limited. Religion, after all, may relate to divinity or cosmology, personal experiences with the sacred, and belief in salvation, prayer, meditation, and personal private growth. Or, it may pertain to communal groups providing identity and social structure, as well as morals and methods of resistance against marginalization. The secular, meanwhile, may also pertain to individual beliefs, public legislatures, and/or national self-identifications, to name only a few manifestations.

While understandings of postsecularism and postsecular literature may be broad, and rightly so, a postsecular literary analysis should engage at the very least with the treatment and negotiation of religiosity and secularism in literature – what Christopher J. Tumminello refers to as a "perpetual encounter with difference and an inevitable experience of confrontation" (2). This involves a movement beyond the common belief that there is "something inherently antireligious about the novel as a genre" (Neuman 183). Justin Neuman argues that the novel as a genre closely parallels European

secularism, tells the stories of ordinary individuals and material and social relationships

"repudiating the transcendental frames of reference within which allegories, romances,

and epics forge their meanings," and presents rhizomatic styles at odds with the

"monolingualism of a divinely authored text" (183; cf. Srivastava 21). While these

characteristics contribute to a general belief in the "constitutive secularity" (Neuman

186) of the novel, other novelistic traits enable a postsecular interpretation of literature

in general – even among skeptics. For instance, echoing James A. Beckford's

uncertainty as to whether postsecular literature refers to a concept or a reality (13),

Graham Huggan questions the value of postsecularism as an "indicator of social

realities" (754). Nonetheless, Huggan is still invested in postsecularism as a reading

strategy, or a tool for the rereading of religious narratives and other literary-cultural

narratives (754).

Michael Kaufmann's question, "Is it still the default assumption that academic

discourse in general and literary criticism in particular must be secular, however one

chooses to define the term?" (72), can be answered by the arguments of Arthur Bradley,

Jo Carruthers, and Andrew Tate, who propose that literature constitutes a "*privileged

space*" (3) in which the spiritual can be expressed, in which individuals can "articulate,

imagine, narrate – in short … *write* – th[e] postsecular moment" (1-2). Whereas Neuman

identifies novelistic tendencies to repudiate transcendent frames of reference and

challenge monolingualism as secular, other critics see these characteristics as postsecular

– or, at the very least, as transcending the dichotomy of the religious and the secular.

Bradley, Carruthers, and Tate also identify literature as implying a "challenge to strict

boundaries – between fantasy and fact, transcendence and immanence, the spiritual and

the material" (3), and the descriptions they employ suggest, more specifically, a

challenge to the boundaries separating the sacred from the profane and enchantment

from disenchantment. What they are gesturing toward is, to quote Harold Bloom, the

"stubborn resistance of imaginative literature to the categories of sacred and secular" (4).

Even Salman Rushdie – a renowned secularist himself – says the novel as a

genre has always been

> *about* the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and
>
> about the shifting relations between them, which are relations of power. The
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> novel does not seem to establish a privileged language, but it insists upon the
>
> freedom to portray and analyse the struggle between the different contestants for
>
> such privileges. ("Is Nothing Sacred?" 420)

Importantly, a postsecular interpretation of literature does not rely upon a renunciation

of secular literary criticism, but rather the utilization of the "critical protocols and

insights of secular literary criticism" and the subjection of that criticism to "the pressure

of an opposing perspective that might, for instance, read the same text not only from a

radically different perspective, but also from very different foundational principles"

(Mondal, "Representing" 421).

Manav Ratti argues that within the "creative and flexible space of literature," two

trajectories can coexist within a single representational frame ("Rethinking" 62-63).

Postsecular literary analysis attempts to portray how secular and religious ideologies and

concerns can coexist within a single work of fiction. Not only does postsecular literature

embody both the sacred and the profane but, as Ratti points out in *The Postsecular*

Imagination, "The imagining of the postsecular is a risky journey into the unknown,

where writers challenge received ideologies – of religion, secularism, race,

majoritarianism, minoritarianism, and nation" (17-18). Whereas the avoidance of an

"authoritative centre" differentiates the postsecular from the religious (20), the dimensions of "faith, awe, wonder, and transcendence" in literature can infuse everyday life with "enchantment and re-enchantment" (17, 18), differentiating the postsecular from the secular as well.

The works of Ratti are perhaps the only published texts addressing postsecularism and postcolonialism simultaneously through the lens of literary criticism. Importantly, he argues,

> If postsecularism is one of the destinies of postcolonialism, then literature stands
> as a forum where new conceptions of secularism and religion can emerge,
> gesturing to ethics that grow from individual and cultural memories of a secular,
> religious, and national violence, combined with the hope of a better future for all.
> (*Postsecular* 7)

It is essential that any similarly postsecular approaches to postcolonial theory and literature consider the caveats presented by Ratti, through which he argues that "postsecular" does not refer to the "wholesale abandonment of the hard-won struggles of the secularism that aspires toward democratic and legal recognition of religious difference and, again, minority rights" ("Rethinking" 69) – referring to the integral role of secularism in anti-colonial nationalist struggles. In this way, he points out, the postsecular upholds, rather than dethrones, the postcolonial. Adopting the methods of Ratti produces a vision of the postsecular as a state of being or even a way of reading. Postsecular analysis represents an awareness of and engagement with the relation of the sacred and the profane within literature, as well as an exploration of how literature can be used as a vessel to demonstrate the postsecular, or at least serve as a platform upon which to explore, challenge, or engage with the theory. Further, to quote Ratti once

again, the postsecular literary imagination can be "a forum for imagining, exploring, searching for, and experimenting with – in risky, individualistic, tentative ways – solutions to enduring political, secular, and religious challenges, including those of postcolonialism" ("Rethinking" 69).

Like Ratti's works on postsecular literary theory, this dissertation extends the reach of the postsecular within literary studies by applying it to a postcolonial literary context, focusing in particular on diaspora and migration. This work builds on the foundation of *The Postsecular Imagination*, though it also extends beyond the scope of Ratti's criticism. Ratti approaches the postsecular as an aesthetic phenomenon he locates in depictions of love, friendship, and kindness within communities – often in neomonastic groups composed of people with diverse religious and secular backgrounds. He also frames the postsecular in relation to identity formation in the postcolonial nation, though without positioning this process either within or against pre-existing postsecular criticisms. In contrast, this work engages with earlier works on postsecularism to problematize primarily Western definitions and interpretations of the postsecular, locating the postsecular primarily in the fluidity between secular and religious images and characters. Incorporating a focus on postcolonial works written by diasporic authors of South Asian descent not only allows for an expansion of postsecular criticism into a more global context, but it also presents the transnational application of postsecular literary analysis as a better alternative than current Western manifestations. These arguments are accompanied, and supported, by the postsecular literary analysis of six post-1947 works of South Asian fiction: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* (2007), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

(1980), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009).

In a work maintaining that postsecular literary analyses should adopt a more global context, it perhaps appears counter-intuitive to place such a geographical barrier on the works being analyzed. However, some sort of limitation must be established to help contextualize the work in question, and while South Asia by no means represents the full extent of secular and religious influences around the world, it serves as a good microcosmic example of postsecular concerns in a non-Western setting. Not only does the Indian Subcontinent – and, more narrowly, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh – consist of a unique blend of histories, traditions, cultures, and religious and secular populaces and governments, but the secular and religious political and national upheaval that occurred during and long after the 1947 Partition (and continues to this day) also provides an important platform upon which to examine postsecular concerns outside of more strictly Western contexts. The August 1947 splitting off from British India of Pakistan and East Pakistan (later Pakistan and Bangladesh) accompanied India's independence from the British Empire, representing the beginning of a post-colonial era. Partition brought with it a time of mass secular and religious upheaval on the Subcontinent, with Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs persecuting one another as a vast population shift occurred, with Muslims largely inhabiting Pakistan and Hindus representing the large majority in India.

Accompanying this increased politicization of religion and Jawaharlal Nehru's introduction of a secular Indian government is the growth of a South Asian diaspora and a large increase in migration – both within the Subcontinent and globally. The themes associated with cross-border migration following Partition (i.e., cultural identity,

religious majoritarianism, secular nationalism, and the politicization of religious and/or secular worldviews) continue to manifest in South Asian novels published much more recently. Migration represents a key component to understanding the rise of postsecularism in a modern era of globalization. After all, the tensions between the postsecular and its absence are brought about by coexistence, when the religious and the secular are brought face-to-face. Although it would be erroneous to suggest that secular and religious ideologies were forced to encounter each other only in a post-1947 world, increased global mobility forces the religious and the secular to contend with one another more frequently, and in a more public manner. As is true of the postsecular, however, the global movement of people and ideas spawns not only tension but also – and much more importantly – interaction, which disrupts the binaries traditionally associated with dichotomies of East/West and religious/secular.

Migration is certainly not a new focus for postsecular criticism. Habermas's oft-cited "Notes on a Post-Secular Society" (2008) presents "immigration" as one of the three pillars of postsecularism (20), associating the arrival of "guest-workers" and "refugees" with the rise in postsecularism – a purely Western concept, in his view (17). However, it is imperative to note that Habermas and other like-minded critics focus their writings on "immigration" to the exclusion of migration more generally. In other words, postsecularism is often presented from a Western perspective with a focus on the "stayers'" point of view. By aiming to grasp a non-Western point of reference through applying postsecular analyses to postcolonial literature about religion, secularism, and migration, this work presents a challenge to singular approaches to the postsecular – particularly those that uphold the stereotyped binaries of East/West, Self/Other, dangerous/civilized, and, ultimately, religious/secular.

Chapter One of this dissertation is devoted to an exploration of postsecular theory, delineating the change in public perceptions of religion that began to infiltrate Western consciousnesses in the 1980s and which led – first through the philosophies of Marcel Gauchet, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Phillip Blond, and others – to the spread of postsecularism. While depicting the myriad definitions of postsecularism (many of which oppose one another) and acknowledging that, to date, no consensus on a true definition has been reached, this section explores the many intricacies involved in defining the term and presents a definition that will be used throughout this work. Rather than adopting only one of the many definitions currently in existence, this dissertation approaches postsecularism as an amalgamation of the theoretical traits mentioned above. Accordingly, postsecularism refers throughout to a set of theories predicated upon the idea that the (Western) world is experiencing a resurgence of religion. These theories posit the need for religion to receive a public voice within the secular sphere while coexisting alongside, rather than replacing, secular worldviews. Advocating on behalf of pluralism and challenging the essentialist metanarratives often embraced by religious and secular communities alike, postsecularism embodies a state of permanent tension that may never be resolved. It presents the idealism it espouses as a fragile yet necessary approach to an increasingly diverse world.

Along with establishing a coherent definition of the postsecular, Chapter One further addresses the many criticisms of the theory, including various claims that it is Eurocentric, simplistic, and that it problematically handles postcolonial topics. Finally, while accounting for flaws and discrepancies within the theory, this section advocates for postsecularism as necessary in the current age. Whereas following chapters take a primarily literary approach to postsecular symbols and themes, the theoretical nature of

Chapter One allows for a broader discussion of real-world events representing the existence of, and need for, postsecularism. Addressing current concerns such as Islamophobia, post-9/11 fears over national security, the construction of the religious "folk devil" through the media, and the stereotyping of Eastern nations as religious and Western countries as secular, this initial argument for the real-world relevance of the postsecular sets the stage for further analysis of the same themes in literature.

Chapter Two focuses on themes of migration, return, and narrative deconstruction in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* – both novels that contest the reductive dichotomies of sacred and profane, religious and secular, and Eastern and Western civilization without fully disavowing either sacred or profane worldviews. Rushdie's and Vassanji's works centre around themes of interpenetration across ideological borders and national borders, and analysis of these texts shows that each embraces a postsecular plurality by simultaneously combining, problematizing, and valorizing forms of religiosity and secularism in Western *and* Eastern contexts. Not only do their characters negotiate the secular and religious elements in their lives, but they do so while travelling around the world, with Rushdie's setting spanning from Bombay to London to Nepal and Vassanji's protagonist traveling from Gujarat to the United States to Canada and back. Exemplifying a postsecular desire to resist master narratives and complicate the binary of the religious and the secular (see Kaufmann 68-69), Rushdie and Vassanji both present religious and secular metanarratives, which they subsequently deconstruct. In *The Satanic Verses*, this occurs through the fictionalized retelling of the origin story of Islam and through critiques of racist British nationalism; and in *The Assassin's Song*, it takes place through Vassanji's histories of Pir Bawa and the shrine of Pirbaag and

through the political agendas of Hindu nationalism. Chapter Two presents the argument that while both texts critique religious and secular metanarratives, they ultimately complicate the distinction between the sacred and the profane by blurring the boundaries between the two concepts and combining secular and religious imagery and symbols throughout.

Depicting the importance of history and tradition but also the necessity for autonomy and change, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* challenge the narrative authority of religious origin stories and secularist national metanarratives without fully abandoning the resultant narratives themselves. That is, they never denounce religion or secularism as such. Rushdie and Vassanji embrace the combination of what are typically considered opposites – angel and devil, good and evil, sacred and profane forms of love, and so forth – simultaneously upholding and dismantling the religious and secular metanarratives they target, which tend to support related hierarchies. They complicate nationalist and colonial assumptions by displacing Eurocentric understandings of religion, secularism, and nationalism and approaching these issues with a metropolitanism that is ultimately international in scope. This postsecular interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* emphasizes the correlation between postcolonial and postsecular concerns, dismantling the metanarratives of secular and religious worldviews and disrupting the Western (sometimes postsecular) discourse that upholds the oft-conflated dichotomies of East/West and religious/secular through the crossing and disruption of borders – corporal, national, and ideological.

Chapter Three juxtaposes Eastern and Western (particularly Indian) understandings of religion, secularism, and – by extension – postsecularism through a

literary analysis of Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Further, it addresses topics that are often overlooked by works of postsecular theory, such as communalism on the Subcontinent, Nehruvian secularism, Hindu nationalism, and religious plurality against the backdrop of Partition and the creation of the nation of Bangladesh – all in an attempt to further decentre typically Western approaches to postsecular theory. Importantly, while the characters in Desai's and Ghosh's novels do migrate, their travels across borders – national and otherwise – occur within the Subcontinent as well as outside it, prompting an exploration of postcolonial nationalisms in relation to one another, rather than the relation between East and West that so often becomes the focus of postsecular criticism. *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* challenge the essentialist narratives propagated by both Indian secularism and Hindu religious nationalism, not only introducing a reimagining of India as a more syncretic nation post-Partition, but also embodying a postsecular tradition that looks beyond divisive classes of Eastern and Western religiosity and secularism.

These works are set around violent events associated with Partition and the forming of national consciousness. *Clear Light of Day*, which is partly set before and after the 1947 Partition of India, focuses on the oppressive, restrictive nature of sacred and secular borders. denouncing the fabricated separation between sacred and profane time and between the spiritual and modern (i.e., secular) faces of the nation. *The Shadow Lines*, which occurs before and after the creation of Bangladesh, similarly interrogates borders, presenting postsecular arguments for a sameness and equality that transcends lines of separation – physical, temporal, and ideological. It challenges the concept of authoritative national metanarratives by presenting subjective histories in which postsecular characters and ideologies are portrayed as alternatives to the secular and

religious tensions and conflicts surrounding the East Pakistan/Bangladesh border and accompanying distinctions of "us" versus "them." In short, a postsecular literary analysis of *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates the existence and value of postsecular concerns beyond the Western hemisphere, and the novels' critiques of existing anticolonial nationalisms call for a better method of resistance to imperialism – one that does not subjugate and exclude minorities from a national consciousness. By interrogating the separation between sacred and profane concepts of national culture, *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* embody a transnational postsecularism that posits a much more inclusive form of postcolonial, anticolonial nationalism.[3]

Finally, Chapter Four examines postsecularism in a post-9/11 context in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, both texts that juxtapose the violence inherent in the 9/11 attacks and the American War on Terror with racial discrimination and other forms of violence often perpetuated by the West. Ali and Shamsie decentre the significance of 9/11 as a world event, questioning the myth of 9/11 as the beginning of a new, drastically different era – a myth often perpetuated by the manner in which some Anglo-American novelists organize Western experiences of fear and trauma as pre- and post-9/11. This chapter positions *Brick Lane* as a post-9/11 text that nonetheless presents a postsecular challenge to the conflations of nation, race, and religion that inform the division of communities. *Burnt Shadows* similarly reorients 9/11 by positioning it within a larger timeframe, depicting it as one of many world tragedies, rather than the primary event. Although *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows* both embody alternatives to the centrality of the Western gaze on 9/11 as a cultural and temporal marker of change, each novel's treatment of the aftermath of 9/11 is nonetheless key to a

[3] For a description of the theoretical transnational approach applied by this work, see Chapter One.

postsecular interpretation, as the changing perceptions toward (particularly non-Western) religiosity post-9/11 greatly impact Ali's and Shamsie's characters' experiences of racism and hostile secular nationalism.

This chapter argues that the female protagonists in each novel present postsecular alternatives to other characters more exemplary of essentialist secular and religious worldviews. *Brick Lane's* portrayal of the different worldviews of characters such as Chanu, Karim, and Nazneen demonstrates the complexity of various forms of religious belief. Ali's text thus challenges the idea of religious monoliths – or, the belief that religion is uniform, singular, and exclusive – and presents the fluid, pluralist religiosity of Nazneen (the novel's protagonist and symbol of postsecular sentiment) as preferable to the confining religious sentiments of the male characters in her life. Likewise, by addressing the concept of the "postnation" through the character of Hiroko and her many migrations, *Burnt Shadows* presents a postsecular approach to the globalized world and its problematic conflations of race, nation, and religiosity as an alternative to the nationalist strategies of risk management and moral panic responding to 9/11. When interpreted through a postsecular lens, *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows* exist not only as texts that decentre 9/11 and challenge Eurocentric approaches to Islam, religion, secularism, and violence, but also as works exhibiting a postsecularism that exists apart from a literary fetishization of 9/11. Challenging certain previously localized approaches to postsecular theory and criticism, this reading of Ali's and Shamsie's works offers as an alternative a form of postsecularism that is, again, postcolonial in nature.

Overall, these six selected works of South Asian fiction are ideal subjects for postsecular literary criticism, as each embodies the coexistence of secular and religious terminology and symbols and presents complex critiques of traditional secular and

religious narratives and ideologies without advocating for the abolishment of either. This study not only approaches these works through a postsecular critical lens but also identifies the secular-religious elements within each that render them classifiable as postsecular works of fiction. Most significantly, however, this postsecular analysis of South Asian works extends the current body of postsecular criticism beyond the Western hemisphere, the geographical focus of the majority of postsecular theory. By highlighting the discrepancies present in most Western approaches to postsecular theory – which purport to uphold secular-religious plurality but often neglect to account for the invisibility of 'white' Christianity and the multiple manifestations of other religions, including Islam – this study contends that the most comprehensive understanding of the postsecular is postcolonial in nature, accounting for the evolving yet ongoing divisive relationship between "the West and the Rest" (Huntington 183). Postsecularism is largely about narrative – in particular, the metanarratives upon which religions and secularisms are based – and a literary approach to postsecular theory enables the simultaneous presentation and deconstruction of problematic narratives and the production of better, alternative narratives that are truly postsecular in nature.

CHAPTER ONE
What is the Postsecular?
The Rise and Westernization of Postsecular Theory

Defining the Postsecular

Postsecularism refers to a fairly new set of theories that began to emerge in the 1980s and is predicated upon the idea that the world is experiencing a resurgence of religion. Whereas religious concerns have existed longer than recorded history itself, this particular theoretical treatment of modern-day religion is surprisingly recent. Justin Beaumont traces a "postsecular turn in continental philosophy" to select arguments and publications that gave birth to the idea of postsecularism: Marcel Gauchet's theory of Christianity as "the religion of the end of religion" in *The Disenchantment of the World* (1985, 1997); Jacques Derrida's "religion without religion" in *Acts of Religion* (2001); Jean-Luc Marion's "religion as a saturated phenomenon" in *God Without Being* (1991) and *Being Given* (2002); and Phillip Blond's "set of alternatives to relativism and nihilism" in *Post-Secular Philosophy* (1998) (4). While the term "postsecular" did not receive much critical attention until the later publication of Jürgen Habermas's "Notes on a Post-Secular Society" (2008), these texts address a renewed interest in the role of religion in society and politics, and they contain some of the earliest theories in the process of critical thought that led to the formation of postsecularism as it is known today.

Each of Beaumont's examples addresses arguments for the persistence and continued influence of religion in the modern world, contradicting the secularization thesis's claim of its demise. Gauchet, for one, argues against "the death of the gods and the disappearance of their devotees" (4). Even though he argues that it is possible to move away from religion (200), he nonetheless believes that religious faith will continue

as a "residue that perhaps will never disappear and is by no means nonsensical" (4).

Derrida recognizes the continued relevance of religion and challenges the assumption

that religion and reason cannot coexist, asking, "*Why is this phenomenon, so hastily*

called the 'return of religions', so difficult to think? Why is it so surprising?" ("Faith"

5). Marion acknowledges that while modernity is "characterized first by the nullification

of God as a question," modernity does not negate God as such (*God* 57); in other words,

while the modern era is typically associated with the phenomenon that Nietzsche

described as the death of God (see Nietzsche 5), Marion believes that modernity does

not necessarily render the concept of God ineffective. Finally, Blond argues that God has

been "erased from human experience" and must be recovered (11), for "reality is indeed

spiritual" and "matter is indeed intertwined with spirit" (28). As forerunners of

developments in postsecular theory, these texts bring to critical attention the concept that

religion has not disappeared, nor is it likely to.

While Beaumont suggests that postsecular concerns were brought to public

attention through the publication (or translation) of these works as early as the 1990s (cf.

Knott 20), other critics, such as José Casanova, date the advent of postsecular theory a

little earlier and attribute it not to theoretical texts but to historical occurrences. In *Public*

Religions in the Modern World (1994), Casanova claims that religion "went public" in

the 1980s (3) – an occurrence he attributes to four main developments: the Islamic

revolution in Iran;[4] the Solidarity movement in Poland;[5] the role of Catholicism in the

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[4] In 1979, the Persian monarchy in Iran was overthrown and replaced with an Islamic Republic.
[5] The Independent Self-governing Trade Union, otherwise known as "Solidarity," was founded in Poland in 1980 and was based on many Roman Catholic social teachings, indicating the persistence of religious vitality within the nation (see Hruby).

Sandinista revolution in Latin America;[6] and the public re-emergence of Protestant fundamentalism in American politics (3).[7] Others have similarly linked religious resurgence to the public emergence of religion as a "social phenomenon" (Reder and Schmidt 1). For some, this was first brought about by the 1989 Rushdie Affair (Nielsen 120),[8] though the majority of postsecular theorists attribute the increased public awareness of religion to the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath (Esmer 36; Gardels 4; Huggan 751; King, *Postsecularism* 9; Mavelli and Petito 934; Norris and Inglehart xiii).

The term "postsecular" itself appeared as early as 1982 in Richard John Neuhaus's article, "Education Diversity in Post-Secular America," which begins, "We are witnessing the collapse of the 200-year hegemony of the secular Enlightenment over public discourse" (309). Since then, the term has been utilized, studied, theorized, and criticized by a myriad of well-known philosophers and critics. Harold Bloom, William Connolly, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Hadot, and Gianni Vattimo comprise only a handful of those who have recently engaged the topic (see McClure ix). However, of the many theorists dealing with postsecularism, Jürgen Habermas is most famously associated with the term (see Leezenberg 91-92; cf. Mavelli and Petito 936), and his "Notes on a Post-Secular Society" has widely been accepted as a definitive blueprint for postsecular theory.

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[6] The Sandinista Revolution, otherwise known as the Nicaraguan Revolution, technically lasted from 1962-1990, but it reached a political apex in 1978-1979 with the overthrow of the Somoza Regime. The political unrest leading to this campaign was largely facilitated by the democratization and revitalization of religious experience in Nicaragua, as the 1968 Conference of Latin Bishops promoted the participation of the poor in revolutionary activities (see Dodson).

[7] Religious fundamentalism reemerged in American politics in 1979 with the formation of the Moral Majority, a fundamentalist Protestant party that proved influential in American politics throughout the 1980s (see Harding).

[8] The publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) was met with great conflict, and the novel was pronounced blasphemous and disrespectful toward Islam. Amid reactionary riots and book burnings, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa*, or death sentence, on Rushdie in 1989, sparking international debates over religious rights and censorship laws (see Pipes).

Building on claims already made by previous critics – that the world is experiencing a resurgence of religion – Habermas's description of modern society as "post-secular" refers primarily to what he sees as "*a change in consciousness*" ("Notes" 20), rather than an actual return of religion. For Habermas, three phenomena in particular led to changing perceptions of religion in the West: 1) The presentation of global conflicts as "hinging on religious strife"; 2) The increasing influence of religion within national public spheres;[9] and 3) The "immigration of 'guest-workers' and refugees, specifically from countries with traditional cultural backgrounds" ("Notes" 20). While not vastly dissimilar from earlier theories, Habermas's presentation of postsecularism as a change of consciousness involves not only the "recognition that religious communities continue to exist" (Leezenberg 94) but also the need to "recognize religion … as an all-embracing source of energy," both for the devout and for society at large (Beaumont 8). This involves, in a nutshell, identifying religiosity as legitimate and deserving of a public, political voice. To accomplish this, Habermas argues, "The liberal state must … expect its secular citizens, in exercising their role as citizens, not to treat religious expressions as simply irrational" ("Awareness" 22). As he states in "An Awareness of What Is Missing," it is necessary, in a postsecular society, for the religious and the secular to maintain equality and mutual respect through communication – "It makes a difference," he argues, "whether we speak with one another or merely about one another" (16).

For most interpreters of Habermas's work, a postsecular change of consciousness is a tool for accommodating religion within the public sphere (Leezenberg 96), and it

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[9] More specifically, Habermas refers to the phenomenon of churches and other religious entities assuming the role of "communities of interpretation" in public areas of secular societies, such as in debates revolving around issues of abortion, euthanasia, and so forth ("Notes" 20).

functions as an "ideal of inclusion" meant to address the "growing pluralism of modern societies" (Mavelli and Petito 936). However, although influential in the theoretical sphere, Habermas is not universally accepted as the authority on postsecular theory. Many take issue with his standpoint as one that – despite its pluralist professions – remains wholly secular. Critics target one passage in particular, in which Habermas writes that although "secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith … in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally accessible, discourses" ("Awareness" 16). In other words, as Josef Schmidt paraphrases, "Reason is the unavoidable norm of genuine communication" (14). Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito interpret Habermas's insistence that religion be translated into a "universal" secular language as overlooking the "secular limits of a tradition of critical thinking" (936, 937). Others, such as Fred Dallmayr, Michiel Leezenberg, and James A. Beckford, similarly see Habermas as privileging the secular over the religious and presenting religious language as "odd, obsolete, and esoteric" (Dallmayr 965; cf. Beckford 10). While Habermas may be attempting to accommodate the public voice of religion, many agree that he nonetheless upholds his own "secularist normative assumptions" through this approach (Leezenberg 96).

Habermas highlights one approach to postsecularism with which even his more ardent critics agree. Despite differing definitions of the postsecular, all acknowledge that postsecularism refutes the *secularization thesis*. Habermas's characterization of the postsecular as involving the "loss of the (hitherto firm) secularist conviction that religion will eventually disappear in the continuing process of modernization" (Leezenberg 94) refers to a phenomenon recognized by scholars such as José Casanova, Joseph A. Camilleri, Justin Beaumont, Peter Berger, Samuel P. Huntington, Giuseppe Giordan,

Enzo Pace, Manav Ratti, Michael Reder, Josef Schmidt, and others. The

"deprivatization" of religion (Casanova 5) is synonymous with "desecularization"

(Berger) and with various definitions of the "postsecular." Beaumont defines

postsecularism as referring to "the limits of the secularization thesis" – also known as

the secularization theory – as well as the "ever-growing realization of radically plural

societies in terms of religion, faith and belief within and between diverse urban

societies" (6). Even Peter Berger himself – previously a proponent of the secularization

thesis – concludes that the "'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken" (2).

The secularization thesis, or theory – which Giordan and Pace describe as the

equivalent of an obituary published prior to death (1) – refers to the assumption formed

in the early twentieth century that "economic and social modernization was leading to

the withering away of religion as a significant element in human existence" (Huntington

95). Simply put, "Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in

society and in the minds of individuals" (Berger 2). Casanova identifies the

secularization theory, or the process of secularization, as "one of the cherished dreams of

the Enlightenment" and frames its "critique of religion" as stemming from what both

Charles Taylor and Marcel Gauchet refer to as the "disenchantment of the world"

(Casanova 30), or humanity's removal from belief in "the world of spirits, demons,

[and] moral forces that our predecessors acknowledged" (Taylor 58).[10] Disenchantment

– or desacralization, to borrow Mircea Eliade's terminology (13) – is deemed crucial to

[10] According to Casanova, "enchantment" refers to the "once upon a time" of medieval Europe in which "this world" was divided into two heterogeneous realms of spheres, "'the religious' and 'the secular'" (13). However, that division has to be distinguished from another division: that between "this world" and "the other world" (14). Disenchantment, or secularization, refers to the breakdown between the dualist system "within this world" and the "sacramental structures of mediation between this world and the other" (15).

secularization and as going "hand-in-hand" with being "modern" (Ratti, *Postsecular* 5). This view suggests that modernity and religious belief are, in fact, incompatible.

The theory of secularization was so widely accepted over the years that Casanova claims it may in fact be "the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences" (17). Yet, while secularization can be traced back beyond the European Enlightenment, the secularization theory officially came into existence only within the last century. Processes of secularization in Western societies grew increasingly evident in the late nineteenth century, evidenced by Nietzsche's famous claim that "*God is dead*" (5) and later through Émile Durkheim's assertion that "the old gods are growing old or already dead" (475) and Gauchet's description of "the current twilight of the gods" (13). Eventually, the secularization thesis emerged in the works of critics like Max Weber, whose claim that science is "apt to make the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe die out at its very roots" (142) embodies the general spirit of the thesis. According to such prominent theorists of the age, time has been progressing linearly toward the end of a religious era, and we are arriving at a new, fully disenchanted era of secularization and modernity.

Yet, despite its historical relevance, the secularization theory has now been challenged even by Berger, who coined the term itself (see Stoeckl). Gauchet, who also wrote of the "end" of religion (4), similarly argues that it would be erroneous to assume that religion will disappear: "Even if we assume that the age of religions has been definitively closed, we should not doubt that, between private religious practices and substitutes for religious experience, we will probably never completely finish with the religious" (200). To put the issue more bluntly, Casanova asks, "Who still believes in the *myth* of secularization?" (11). While membership in religious organizations has

diminished over the years – particularly in the West – (Chirico 332), religion and religious beliefs have not been pushed to the margins of society. Along with the aforementioned philosophies and the growing involvement of religious organizations in public affairs, statistics also present a challenge to the secularization thesis. The 2005-2008 World Values Survey may initially seem to support the secularization theory's predictions, as 79.6% of people surveyed[11] said they did not belong or were not an active member of a religious organization. However, a large percentage (71.5%) nevertheless indicated that religion was still important to them (see Chirico 332).

The apparent importance of religion prompts certain questions: Why was the secularization thesis wrong? If the Western world has indeed progressed from an era of enchantment to a time of Enlightenment and, finally, modernity, how are we now living in a postsecular, rather than secular, age? There are myriad reasons for the failure of these predictions, some of which result from the secularization theory's failure to take into consideration the attractions of religion and the limitations of secularism. However, to suggest that these are the primary reasons for religious resurgences around the world is to imply that people are turning to religion "reactively" (Vattimo, "Trace" 83), in response to external rather than internal factors. Habermas himself acknowledges the shortcomings of this approach, stating that religions offer not only "moral principles" but also "theologically or cosmologically justified paths to salvation. They are *not* reducible to 'ethical' worldviews" ("A Reply" 79). Meanwhile, Derrida asks, "*Can a discourse on religion be dissociated from a discourse on salvation…?*" ("Faith" 2), also emphasizing the need to distinguish between the "religious" and "sworn faith" – or,

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[11] The 2005-2008 World Values Survey asked over 82,000 people in 57 countries questions about the extent of their religiosity or lack thereof (Chirico 332).

between experiences of the divine and experiences of one's own committed, engaged belief – asking if one can experience the sacrosanct without also experiencing belief ("Faith" 33). Both highlight the manifestation of religion as an individual experience, challenging the presumption that religion should be approached primarily from a social, communal point of view.

These points must be taken into consideration in any legitimate discussion of religion. Yet, because of the unique nature of every individual relationship with religious experience and salvation, it is not possible to comprehensively explore the internal factors prompting a visible religious resurgence. There are, however, various external factors that lend themselves to explanations of the failure of the secularization theory. These include the attractions of religious communities and identities; the desire for meaning and morality in a time of absurdity or confusion; the allure of the therapeutic and/or aesthetic qualities of religion; and experiences with prejudicial manifestations of secularism. Though by no means sufficient explanations for religious resurgence, these factors reportedly influence, or augment, individual and communal interactions with religion in an allegedly secular era. The attractions of religion and the limitations of secularism may play an influential role in forming what many recognize as a postsecular state. This resurgence, or awareness, of (often orthodox) religion in an allegedly secular sphere does not, however, mean that secularism itself is becoming irrelevant, nor does postsecular theory suggest that a change of consciousness regarding religious import should eclipse the value of secular institutions.

Interpreted etymologically, the "post" in "postsecular" seems to denote a time after, or following, secularism, suggesting the devaluation and replacement of secular values with religious ones. However, the prefix functions in a much more complex

manner, similar to that of the "post" in postcolonial and postmodern. Rather than coming after or replacing secularism, postsecularism engages with and challenges secularism – particularly the secularization theory and its values. In "Defining the Postsecular," Kristina Stoeckl compares and contrasts the prefixes "de-" and "post-" in relation to "secularism," explaining that "the first perceives religion and modernity as incompatible, the second as compatible" (Stoeckl). This distinction is important to what Stoeckl refers to as the "modernization narrative," for the compatibility of religion and modernity suggests that secularization is not "breaking away" but is instead "changing form" (Stoeckl). Key to Stoeckl's argument is the spelling of postsecularism, which she – like many others – prefers without a hyphen. Elaborating on the importance of such a small element, Stoeckl points out that the hyphen makes a "semantic difference," and that "post-" really means "after," suggesting that the postsecular era comes "after" a time of secularism: "As if one wanted to say: once society was secular – now it is no longer secular" (Stoeckl). The hyphenation suggests a "timely succession," or a regime change – even a return *back* to religion – which Stoeckl reads as problematic. A postsecular age is not a time after secularism, nor is it a return to a time before. The religious resurgence through which secular theory is contextualized neither replaces secularist ideologies nor portends a return to a previous, enchanted era. Postsecularism is not looking backward but forward to something else: a new way of being in a global, diversified world.

Though Habermas's works are often viewed as the definitive account of postsecular theory, as was previously mentioned, Michael Kaufmann points out that "there is no final consensus on how … studies do ... or should, delimit the term [postsecular]" (68). Some critics are more generous with their application of the term than others, but there are a few points that, when considered together, constitute a fairly

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accurate description of postsecularism as both a theory, a state of being, and a state of awareness. These include an emphasis on both the increase and the importance of religion; the conscious coexistence of religiosity and secularism; the consequent state of tension between the two; the advocacy for religious and secular pluralism, or inclusiveness; and the critique of essentialist ideological narratives.

The perseverance of religion in spite of the predictions of the secularization thesis has become an accepted fact over the last few decades, yet the so-called resurgence of religion merely provides the framework from which postsecularism stems. Postsecular theory also addresses how religious and secular institutions and individuals ought to function within this context. Certain critics see postsecularism as demanding a reassessment of the sacred and the supernatural (Giordan and Pace 1; McClure 17). For others, religion in a postsecular context is "political through and through" (McClure 20), and it demands the inclusion of religious worldviews within secular frameworks and suggests that "values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion, and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework" (Mavelli and Petito 931). Postsecularism therefore refers not only to a growing physical manifestation of religious groups and individuals around the world but also to the radical theory that the resurgence of religion is good: it is socially beneficial, and it is entitled to a public space in which to be heard.

The postsecular may be predicated upon the resurgence and relevance of religion, offering insights into the attractions of religion and the limitations of secularism, but again, the term does not refer to a devaluation or replacement of secularism. Instead, the postsecular can be defined as "a condition of conscious … co-existence [between] religious and secular worldviews" (Stoeckl). Challenging the writings of critics like

Durkheim, who posits that "there is no other example in the history of human thought of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another" (38; cf. Eliade 10), postsecular theory suggests that the coexistence of secularism and religiosity is both present and necessary (see Camilleri 1023; cf. Reder and Schmidt 6; cf. Derrida, "Faith" 5). Casanova argues that the U.S., for one, has already achieved a state of postsecularity: "We may say with some confidence that currently … the majority of Americans tend to be humanists, who are simultaneously religious and secular" (38). While this is certainly up for debate, coexistence – which Tony Blair terms "interdependence" and describes as the "recognized human condition" (30) – demands that "believers of one faith, of a different faith and non-believers must mutually concede to one another the right to those convictions, practices and ways of living that they themselves reject" (Habermas, "Notes" 23). In other words, it is necessary for the religious and the secular to occupy the same spaces but moreover to recognize one another as individuals, communities, or organizations with equal rights and privileges.

Despite postsecular ideals of interdependence and respect espoused by Blair and Habermas, the coexistence of religious and secular worldviews leads to a state of tension. For Stoeckl, this is not only expected but is essential to a proper understanding of the postsecular. Claiming that "postsecularity is a condition of permanent tension," she argues that the very meaning of the postsecular itself lay in its "contestedness" (Stoeckl). Unavoidable tension does not demand isolation or exclusion, despite the "Westphalian presumption" that "cultural and religious pluralism cannot have a public dimension, as this would clash with the very possibility of international order" (Mavelli

and Petito 933).[12] Even though postsecularism's advocacy for the coexistence of two

worldviews previously deemed incompatible seems to constitute a paradox, theories of

postsecularism have been developed not to promote tensions but with the view of

"accommodating the diversity that has become an inescapable feature of most

contemporary societies" (Camilleri 1026). Tensions between religious and secular

worldviews may be inevitable, as both posit different lifestyles and beliefs, but

postsecularism embraces these tensions. Moreover, it responds to them by encouraging

the renunciation of violence between communities with different worldviews (Brieskorn

32) and aiding the development of "strong communicative skills and imaginative,

creative capacities" (Zock 132) – all in an effort to foster healthier methods of dealing

with diversity.

Postsecularism's insistence on the coexistence of religious and secular

worldviews and its acceptance of the consequent tensions are intrinsically related to its

support for religious and secular pluralism. By advocating for religious pluralism

(Morozov 39) and identifying the porous nature of the boundaries separating the

religious and the secular (Kaufmann 71), postsecularism produces "new, complexly

hybridized forms of thought and life" (McClure 10). Its insistence on the

accommodation of secular and religious beliefs depicts a pluralism of values that leads

to what Giordan and Pace term a "culture of pluralism" (3), which is essential to the

legitimization of diversity in an increasingly multicultural, globalized world. As such, its

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[12] The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia stripped empires and churches of their public authority, initiating a legal distinction between the public affairs of the state and the private affairs of religion. This separation of spheres is now often viewed as a cornerstone of Western secularism. The resultant "Westphalian presumption" is perhaps best embodied by Émile Durkheim's argument in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that "religious life and profane life cannot coexist in the same space," and in his consequent claim that "for religious life to flourish, a special place must be arranged from which profane life is excluded. Hence the institution of temples and sanctuaries" (228-29).

negotiation of multiplicity and hybridization posits theories of duality, rather than oppositions. This is apparent in Ratti's description of the postsecular as "[unable to be] captured through dichotomies like 'neither religion nor secularism' or 'either religion or secularism'" (*Postsecular* xxii). Postsecular societies are indeed hybrid spaces, and the postsecular refutation of dichotomy offers a positive alternative of "both/and" to the sometimes exclusionary "neither/nor" classification of people and ideas that identify as multiple rather than singular.

Supporting a dualistic approach to secular and religious worldviews, postsecularism challenges the essentialism inherent in most (secular *and* religious) ideological metanarratives. Postsecularism's anti-essentialist critique of authoritative structures is perhaps best explained by Kaufmann, who writes that

> there seems to be broad general agreement that postsecular thought stems from a desire to resist any master narrative, whether it be a supersessionary narrative of secularization, or a triumphal narrative of the return of religion. Postsecularism attempts to qualify these master narratives in several ways: (a) complicating our understanding of the terms "religious" and "secular" by deepening our awareness of the ideological, cultural, and historical valences of those terms; and (b) complicating our understanding of the relationships between the religious and the secular by moving beyond any model that posits too stark a binary opposition and towards models based on co-existence and co-creation. (68-69)

In short, while postsecularism advocates on behalf of both religiosity and secularism, it simultaneously challenges both, refusing either a monopoly. This idea is expanded by Habermas, who writes that "all subcultures, whether religious or not, are expected to free their individual members from their embrace so that these citizens can *mutually*

recognize one another in civil society as members of *one and the same* political community" ("Notes" 23). Meanwhile, McClure argues that postsecular thinking ensures that religious alternatives to secularism and secular alternatives to religion "leave room for reflection, disagreement, difference, and innovation" (12).

Finally, in its capacity for coexistence, pluralism, tension, and ideological critique, postsecularity is also recognized as a state of being that is never fully resolved. Instead, it often appears as a frail idealism in the face of stark oppositions. McClure's use of words such as "partial," "provisional," and "piecemeal" to describe postsecular modernity (18) articulates the fragility of a postsecular society. However, many postsecularists nonetheless remain positive in their expectations of postsecular theory. Aleksandr Morozov is hopeful in his remark that "the secular and religious will continue to coexist until the end of history, sometimes in conflict, sometimes existing in parallel, and sometimes in fruitful collaboration" (44). Similarly, Ratti approaches the ethics of humanism – which he identifies as "a commitment to genuine openness of acceptance of 'other' worldviews" – as in need of affirmation by postsecularism, despite the fragility of the latter (*Postsecular* 208). He writes,

> It is the notion of "working through" which constitutes the "humanism" of the postsecularism of fiction: working *through* secularism, nation, and religion, working *through* moments of crisis, working *through* the search for some affirmative values, working *through* the literary challenge of representing that which remains resistant to representation. (*Postsecular* 209)

This concept of "working through" is of primary importance to a thorough evaluation of postsecularism. Though idealistic, full of tensions, and never fully resolved, postsecularism posits the need to work through the problems inherent in a pluralistic

world, even though there may never be a peaceful resolution to the tense relations between two very different worldviews.

Rather than adopting only one of the many definitions of postsecularism currently in existence, this work approaches postsecularism as an amalgamation of the theoretical traits mentioned above. Accordingly, postsecularism refers throughout to a set of theories predicated upon the idea that the (Western) world is experiencing a resurgence of religion. These theories posit the need for religion to receive a public voice within the secular sphere while coexisting alongside, rather than replacing, secular worldviews. Advocating on behalf of pluralism and challenging the essentialist metanarratives often embraced by religious and secular communities alike, postsecularism embodies a state of permanent tension that may never be resolved – it presents the idealism it espouses as a fragile yet necessary approach to an increasingly diverse world.

Postsecular Criticism vs. Criticism of the Postsecular

Postsecularism has become a topic of interest since the term first made its way into academic discourse in the late twentieth century. However, its growing popularity among various disciplines does not signal uncontested acceptance. Many critics have advocated on behalf of theories of postsecularism, yet others contest the concept whole-heartedly – and with good reason. Many early writings and applications of postsecular theory are riddled with problems, and critiques of postsecularism span multiple aspects of the theory, addressing the term itself, its Western/Eurocentric centre, and its simplistic approach to terminology. Yet, as controversial as postsecularism is within the academic realm, it should not automatically be dismissed. Rather, engagement with these

criticisms is beneficial and necessary for a comprehensive understanding of what the postsecular *is*, how it has been implemented, and how it can, and should, be "fixed."

For some critics of postsecularism, the term itself is a source of contention. For instance, the designation *post*secularism suggests a new, unprecedented response to secularism, when in reality religiosity has been an integral aspect of society and academia through the centuries. In contrast to those who believe the postsecular has been present since at least the Romantic era (McClure 3), there are others who argue what is effectively the opposite – that it does not exist. Steve Bruce sees the existence of religious revival as "unlikely" (236), and Beckford would agree: "Talk about postsecularity has certainly swelled, but it would be wrong to infer that a phenomenon of postsecularity must therefore exist" (13). Many others agree that "postsecular" is not an accurate description of our times, though for different reasons. Graham Huggan, for one, argues against the existence of a postsecular age (752-54), claiming that the concept contains "watered-down" views (754), and therefore it is easier to define what postsecularism "isn't" than what it is (753). This comment on the vagueness of the term itself, which Beckford similarly describes as various, incoherent, and inconsistent (see 13, 2), reflects a dissatisfaction shared by Gourgouris and Mufti. For the former, "The name 'post-secularism' exhibits the worst of all 'post' designations: generally, a lazy way of codifying emergent historical terrains"; it therefore "testifies to the impoverishment of the terms of discussion of contemporary problems" (*Lessons* 66). Likewise, accusing postsecularism of being a "straw man" theory ("Why" 7), Mufti declares,

> I am not a postsecularist because the concept is an internally incoherent one, evasive about the transition it supposedly marks and confusing different levels of

analysis. Does the *post* in *postsecular* mark a transition in the world at large, in

intellectual practices concerned with understanding the world, or some

combination of both? None of this terrain seems very clear from the ways in

which the term is commonly deployed and appears sometimes to be purposely

obfuscated. ("Why" 9)

The obfuscation of definitions of postsecularism signals only one aspect of the confusion

many critics identify in those using the term. Whereas Mufti questions what

postsecularism actually entails, others go beyond this to ask whether the basic premises

– or, what they *see* as the basic premises – of the theory are correct.

Vattimo, one of the earlier critics of postsecular theory, questions whether or not

the "religious revival" being perceived by parliaments and the media is really anything

other than a form of secularism paradoxically enacting religiosity ("Circumstances" ix).

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd likewise wonders if secularism might be an appropriation of

religion, rather than its absence (955). Both approaches suggest an inaccurate

understanding of the concepts of religiosity and secularism upon which postsecularism is

founded. This argument is taken up by Gourgouris, who believes that "to call our present

historical moment *postsecular* is testimony to our incapacity to deconstruct the secular"

("Why" 42). These critics approach postsecular theory as an outgrowth of uneducated

and simplistic insights into the nature of secularism and religiosity. Finally, of the many

who take issue with the term itself, there are those who conclude that there can be no

postsecularism because, quite frankly, there has been no secularism.

Approaching the prefix "post" as an indicator of "coming after," Gourgouris

argues,

In order to have any rigor at all, *postsecular* would have to mean that either some sort of pure secularity has been achieved – that the so-called process of secularization has been completed – or that the secular has been left behind, outmaneuvered, or indeed abolished by another social-imaginary horizon. ("Why" 42)

Unlike Norris and Inglehart, who believe postsecularism is nonexistent because secularity is still increasing in the Western world, Gourgouris argues that postsecularism cannot exist for the opposite reason: Secularism is not being, and has never been, achieved. This same form of reasoning is apparent in the writing of Kwame Anthony Appiah, who suggests that the Weberian triumph of "instrumental reason" has only occurred in the "tiny … world of the higher academy," and thus we are not seeing "the end of religions – but their commodification" (344). Even critics who do not entirely refute the process of secularization challenge postsecularism based on the absence of secularism elsewhere (see Robbins, "Why" 56). "As an American, I do not live in a society that is or has ever been secular" ("Why" 56), Robbins declares, and argues that the validity of postsecularism depends on proof that secularism has been embraced by Americans *and* that its presence has been "a bad thing" ("Why" 59). Whereas many argue that secularism has never been attained, Robbins points out that even *if* secularization has occurred in areas of the world, it is unlikely that secularization has been so terrible as to warrant a religious revival. Either way, critics who target the term appear to agree that the very tenets upon which postsecularism is founded are vague and/or nonexistent, rendering the theory obsolete.

Postsecularism is also problematic because it is primarily Eurocentric in focus and employs terminology that is often perceived as exclusionary. To date, postsecular

theory has largely come across as applicable only to the West. This understanding of

secularism is shared by Gauchet (3) and by Norris and Inglehart, who argue that "*rich*

societies are becoming more secular but the world as a whole is becoming more

religious" (217) – their understanding of rich societies comprising "the West" as it has

come to be known. This critique illuminates the extent to which postsecularism not only

focuses on Western societies to the exclusion of others but also approaches

Westernization and modernity in generalized, overarching terms, further emphasizing

the narrowness of the theory's focus. Postsecularism has been criticized for the same

thing Samuel Huntington was chastised for. Huntington's claim that "the world, in short,

is divided between a Western one and a non-Western many" (36) participates in a

generalist, primarily geographical, approach to culture in a multifaceted, globalized

world. In the same way, postsecularism has been identified as a theory that not only

excludes non-Western nations in its analyses but also approaches "the West" as an

overarching, hegemonic concept. While proponents of postsecularism might counter

with the argument that the secularization theory and therefore postsecular theory refer

only to the modern, Western, secular world, the terminology used often overlooks both

Western and non-Western complexities, such as the variety of religions and secularisms

coexisting in each hemisphere.

     Postsecularism employs generalist terminology in its depiction of secularism as

an ideology synonymous with modernity, and specifically Western modernity.

Habermas's philosophy of "reason [a]s the unavoidable norm of genuine

communication" (Schmidt 14) presupposes what Pabst refers to as "the hegemony of

secular reason" (996). In essence, this presupposition suggests that "the West" – a

similarly homogenizing term – is ultimately secular at its core, and it should make room

for religiosity without displacing its essential secularity. Many postsecularists have conflated secularism with the West and religiosity with the East, and Habermas does this in his discussion of secular reason at the core of Western society *and* his perception that religion is being brought into the West by immigrants from "traditional" (i.e., Eastern) nations ("Notes" 29, 20).

Yet, even when postsecularism looks beyond the West, it still upholds geographical-ideological binaries. Robbins castigates this tendency, explaining, "If the secular/religious binary doesn't work as a practical account of West/non-West relations, it's because the West has never been constitutively secular and the non-West has never been constitutively religious" ("Is" 259). This skewed approach upholds the secular/religious binary while inaccurately approaching secularism and religiosity as geographically distinguished phenomena. Problematically, secularism is often associated with the West *and* is approached as the opposite of religion, which is consequently seen to typify the East. Thus, postsecularism is often judged as classifying the world geographically as "the West and the rest" (183), as Huntington predicted. Despite the argument that "modernization is distinct from Westernization" (Huntington 20), conflations of secularism with modernization and with Westernization associate modernity with the West.

In "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," Habermas writes that the weakness of the secularization thesis is due to "rash inferences that betray an imprecise use of the concepts of 'secularization' and 'modernization'" (19). However, the imprecise use of these concepts plagues more than the theory of secularization. Beckford points out that, in postsecular theory, "curiosity about the processes whereby the basic terms of 'religion,' 'secular,' and 'postsecular' are negotiated … tends to be low" (13), Not all

postsecular advocates have such a singular approach to secularization and modernization, however. For example, Rosati and Stoeckl point out in their introduction to *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*,

> Whereas the Western program of modernity includes at least ideologically, as
> one of its principal components, secularization – with its functional
> differentiation, privatization of religion and decline of religious beliefs
> (Casanova 2001) – modernization in non-Western settings often incorporates or
> even thrives on religion rather than excluding or diminishing it. (2)

Yet, this one acknowledgement does not offset the myriad other approaches that inaccurately view secularism through a single lens – a Western lens – as a result of the previously addressed conflation. This approach results in an inaccurate understanding of secularism in all its complexities and in its different contexts, including the different forms of secularism employed by India and by the West (see Huggan 752; cf. Chambers and Herbert 7; cf. Chatterjee).[13]

Along with the oversimplification and Westernization of the concept of secularism, postsecularism also often fails to differentiate between religions. Beckford sardonically touches on this when he claims that "there is … a danger that talking about the postsecular will be like waving a magic wand over all the intricacies, contradictions, and problems of what counts as religion to reduce them to a single, bland category" (17). This compression of terms finds a critique in Derrida as well, when he questions the terminology, "**Religion?** *In the singular?*" ("Faith" 25; bold in original). And yet, the term continues to be used throughout postsecular and related theories as a singular, all-embracing entity. In gathering all religious groups under the term "religion," postsecular

[13] A fuller discussion of secularism in India can be found in Chapter Three.

theories oversimplify, and thus do a disservice to, diverse religious groups around the world.

Postsecularism not only fails to differentiate between various religions but also often fails to address "private" aspects of religion, privileging its "public" facets and/or social significance. Paul Elie comments that "in America today Christianity is highly visible in public life but marginal or of no consequence in a great many individual lives" (Elie), and though Elie is addressing a different issue here, he nonetheless draws attention to the fact that postsecularity usually excludes considerations of metaphysics and transcendence, not to mention salvation (cf. Pabst 996-97; cf. Habermas, "A Reply" 79; cf. Derrida, "Faith" 2, 33). Abdullahi A. An-Na'im predicts the outcome of this approach to religion as a social phenomenon in his argument that

> To unite faith (which pertains to the individual consciousness) and matters of politics, economy, and social life (which operate in the public domain of rights and obligations through legislation and executive action) will necessarily lead to trivializing and undermining the authenticity of belief and worship in the lives of believers. (116)

Despite postsecularism's professed interest in secular and religious equality and respect, the separation of public and private aspects of religiosity into a dichotomy of "religion or belief" (Beckford 16) suggests the two terms are no longer synonymous; and according to the terminology postsecularism employs, it is a resurgence of public religion, rather than individual belief, that is of interest.

While often conflating multiple religions as one, postsecularism sometimes uses the term "religion" to refer to a specific, though unnamed, religion, thereby suggesting that one is more prominent than others. This occurs most frequently in regard to

Christianity and Islam. However, when this does occur, the former is simply construed as the dominant Western religion, whereas the latter is deemed representative of religion as the foreign, dangerous, "other" to the secular – which in turn is associated not only with Westernization and modernity but also with the public institutions of Western Christianity. What is now known as "the West" has been called "Western Christendom" (see Huntington 46-47), and just as postsecularism adopts the West as its centre of focus, so too does the theory look to the history of Western religion as its foundation. Certain postsecularists, such as Blond, Gauchet (3-4), Habermas ("Notes" 18), and Hadden (601-02), further this problematic assumption by implicitly addressing only Christianity when they use the term "religion." Their approaches are met by accusations from other critics who emphasize the need to globalize this focus. For instance, John R. Hinnells argues that "if a person studies only one religion, say Christianity, then he or she cannot be said to be studying religion, only Christianity" (4). Further, Norris and Inglehart emphasize the need for a wider focus if one is to accurately understand "broader trends in religious vitality in churches, mosques, shrines, synagogues, and temples around the globe" (4). In short, there is a consensus that postsecularism lacks a comprehensive approach to world religions and (mis)uses the term "religion" in a limited way.

However, complicating this issue, postsecularism not only discusses Christianity and the Western world but also implements the word "religion" to target a discussion of Islam, or, as Mufti states, "something that all sides refer to as 'Islam'" ("Why" 10; cf. Cooper 25). In response to what he identifies as postsecular essentializing tendencies, Mufti claims, "I am not a postsecularist because the view of contemporary Islam evinced here is highly misleading and functions as an attempt to close off prematurely the possibility of a materialist and historical understanding of the present in the Islamic

world and a critical engagement with it" ("Why" 11). In "Why I Am Not a Postsecularist," Mufti problematizes postsecular assumptions, including the simplistic "jargon of authenticity" (10-11) that overlooks the fact that in Muslim societies both "the 'secular' nationalist and the Islamist positions share [a] ground of authenticity" (17). The previously discussed dichotomies in postsecular theory tend to overlook these complexities inherent in religious and secular realities around the globe, instead assigning shallow classifications of "religious" and "secular" to the "East" and the "West," designating Islam as an Eastern "religion" that is "other" to the secular, liberal Christianity of the West. In many postsecular discussions of religious resurgence or changing perceptions of religion, authors cite examples of Islamic violence or unrest, not only suggesting that "religion" is a term used to cushion a critical focus on Islam, but also casting religion/Islam as "other" to the "Western" secular structures of tolerance, peace, and democracy.

Postsecularism often looks at the world through a Western lens, resulting in a problematic Westernization of postsecular theory and subsequent focus on Western issues to the exclusion of the rest of the world. Postsecularism does at times attempt to overcome this insularity and tackles postcolonial issues; yet, it typically does so without fully escaping from its Western biases, fostering a discussion of postcolonial topics that reflects a background of colonialist ideology. In a nutshell, postsecularism often others the subjects it discusses – a fact taken up by multiple critics of the theory. Postsecularism is accused of furthering separatism and upholding white, Western privilege (Morey 137). Slavoj Žižek touches on this in "Human Rights and Its Discontents," in which he discusses the "extremely violent gesture of reducing the other to the helpless victim" (Žižek). This theme is picked up by Mufti, who explains,

I am not a postsecularist because postsecularism envisions a *philanthropic*

orientation of the postcolonial liberal Western subject toward its others, which

closes off in advance any possibility of engagement and *critical involvement* in

the postcolonial societies and communities in question, with only the Western

subject being understood as self-critical. ("Why" 16)

Mufti sees postsecularism as "inherently *majoritarian* in nature" and attempting to

normalize "*certain* religious and social practices and forms of authority and social

imagination as representative of 'the people'" ("Why" 18). The exact manner in which

postsecularism accomplishes this can be traced in Georgie Wemyss's pivotal study, *The*

Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging (2009).

Wemyss engages the idea of "tolerance," itself a key concept in definitions of

postsecularism such as those in which critics such as Habermas encourage the secular to

tolerate the religious ("Notes" 23), or the West to tolerate the East. Wemyss describes

"tolerance" as "a keyword … central to white liberal discourse and the maintenance of

cultural hegemony" (20), and therefore inherently hierarchical. After all, "Those high up

that 'hierarchy of belonging' have the power to grant or withhold tolerance from those at

the bottom" (Wemyss 123). Calling on secular institutions to tolerate the religious

frames the religious as other and functions as "a strategy of domination presented as a

form of egalitarianism in the dominant liberal discourse" (Wemyss 132). Moreover,

because Western Christianity is often associated with the secular nationalist structures of

the West, it is non-Western, non-Christian religion that is usually targeted as the other in

need of tolerance. Neelam Srivastava explains, "The notion of tolerance is at the basis of

any formulation of a majoritarian secularism, but in the very notion of tolerance there is

something intolerable. It implies a liberty to not tolerate, and the implication of an

inherent inequality in a society where tolerance is exercised" (39). Calling on one group

to tolerate another essentially suggests that the former has the power and the status not

to. After all, tolerance is seen as a "*liberty* and not a *right*" (Srivastava 40), ultimately

debunking the associated assumptions of equality.

In Defense of the Postsecular

These myriad criticisms might suggest that postsecular theories should simply be

ignored. Yet, though riddled with problems, postsecularism does have value. At its very

core, the premise that secular and religious worldviews, individuals, and institutions *do*

and *must* coexist – and in a respectful manner, recognizing the legal and human rights of

each – is essential to life in our globalized world. The suggestion that religion is

suddenly important *again* may be misleading, as religion has retained its importance in

various places over various times; yet, the postsecular does offer something "new": an

"opening for some kind of mutually advantageous accommodation" (Camilleri 1023)

structured on the fact that we now live in a truly global age.

Despite the many benefits emanating from the cultural sharing of worldviews

and ideas, globalization often results in a "collision" of cultures, ranging from cultural

misunderstandings to more deep-rooted ideological differences, including religious and

secular worldviews. Postsecularism has been criticized as vague and unrealistic in its

treatment of such issues, but it nonetheless espouses an idealism that should be

considered. In fact, given the current global climate, there are few, if any, fair

alternatives. Religions exist and will continue to exist, and they must engage secularisms

in "constructive dialogue" (Reder and Schmidt 7), and vice versa. This is perhaps the

only logical answer to Srivastava's question, "How can one allow for the validity of

religious belief in the modern age without either reducing it to sentiment and affect or accepting it simply by virtue of its cultural difference, thus implicitly not engaging with it?" (41). Though it may seem idealistic to expect religious and secular worldviews to engage one another and strive for inclusion, it is important to work toward this ideal of pluralization and openness. As Zock argues, "Individuals are required to develop strong communicative skills and imaginative, creative capacities in order to be able to deal with diversity" (132). In other words, contact and communication between those with different backgrounds, opinions, and/or beliefs are key components in an increasingly globalized world.

Of course, requirements may be resisted, and this is no exception. Yet, what happens if we resist the cultural heterogeneity resulting from globalization's meeting of cultures and beliefs and instead turn toward essentialist, separatist systems of belief? As Rushdie asks, "Doesn't the idea of pure cultures, in urgent need of being kept free from alien contamination, lead us inexorably towards apartheid, towards ethnic cleansing, towards the gas chamber?" ("March 1999," 21). Postsecularism aims to "rearticulate the idea of global community" (Martin 9). There is a need for a shift in global identity and belonging, and although religion and secularism are at the core of postsecular theory, postsecularism – and the "renewed resurgence" of religiosity in the West – stems more broadly from globalization and the mixing of peoples and ideas this phenomenon, or process, entails. Postsecularism's discussion of secularism and religiosity is inseparable from this context, and though critics have accused postsecular theory of being overly idealistic and too general, postsecular concerns are not so very different from other concerns being discussed in more public forums and by more widely known individuals. For example, Tony Blair espouses an argument similar to that of postsecularism:

A sentiment that we are members of a global community as well as individual

nations means we must be global citizens as well as citizens of our own country.

All this sounds impossibly idealistic. But if the analysis of the nature of the

world is as I set out, then it is in fact the only practical way to organize our

affairs. Idealism becomes the new realism. (30)

For Blair, the ideal of "peaceful coexistence" trumps the alternative of "catastrophe"

(30), which makes coexistence – however tense – an ideal worth striving for.

Many public spokespersons, including Blair, do not use the term "postsecular" or

even consider themselves postsecularists, though their conversations touch on the

postsecular. This begs the question why postsecularism, in particular, is of interest; after

all, many more established theories address these same issues, and postmodernism

especially has been heralded for its deconstruction of monolithic structures, just as

postsecularism has. As King asks, "Why advocate the relatively unheard of coinage

'postsecularism' when 'postmodernism' might capture a similar set of stances?"

(*Postsecularism* 22). After all, the similarities between postsecularism and

postmodernism have not been overlooked, and many critics view the two as nearly

synonymous (Morozov 39, Morrissey 100, Ratti, *Postsecular* 20). Further, the

"permanent and irreducible *pluralism* of cultures, communal traditions, ideologies,

'forms of life' or 'language games'… or the awareness and recognition of such

pluralism" which postmodernism features (Bauman 102) is not dissimilar to the

postsecular focus on religious and secular pluralism.

One fundamental difference between the two theories, however, is that

postmodernism "contains within it a pessimism largely incongruent with faith" (King,

Postsecularism 22), which King contrasts with religion's "stance of trust and

thankfulness towards existence" (*Postsecularism* 24). While some of King's terms such as "pessimism" and "thankfulness" may not be the most precise depictions of postmodernism and religion as such, they do suggest the deconstructive and constructive tendencies of the two theories. Whereas postmodernism posits deconstruction, movement, and "play" in all spheres, including those of religiosity and secularism, postsecularism challenges the essentialism of these ideologies without entirely discrediting either. While arguably deconstructive, postsecularism is simultaneously constructive, acknowledging rather than trivializing or dismantling the beliefs and institutions from which adherents to various worldviews derive identity and meaning. Finally, secularity and religion – but particularly religion – have become loaded terms over the last few decades, and postsecularism addresses their interaction more specifically than other theories whose scopes are much broader. While other theories also address similar topics of discussion, postsecularism is more localized in its approach.

Definitions of the postsecular posit the coexistence and inclusion of religiosity and secularism within the public sphere, but for many the renewed awareness of the presence and power of religion was accompanied by fear, othering, hatred, and violence. The postsecular context included not only a renewed awareness of the continuing importance of religion but also changing perceptions of religion as fundamentalist, threatening, and violent. Habermas recognizes that religious resurgence goes "hand-in-hand with an increase in the frequency of conflicts between different religious groups and denominations," even though many have different (i.e., non-religious) origins and have since been "codified in religious terms" ("Awareness" 19). Cavanaugh identifies this presumption as the "myth of religious violence" (4). This view of religion as

inherently problematic is instrumental in constructing a dichotomy that requires "rational, secular forms of power" to rule the public sphere, while religion, which is "irrational and dangerous," is kept away from public issues (Mavelli and Petito 934).

When present-day Western societies use the media and other forms of communication to present secularism and religiosity as at odds with one another, they typically refer to a very specific form of secularity and an even more specific form of religiosity. Presenting Western secularity and Islam as all-encompassing oppositions, these outlets portray Western religion as secular and rational while denying secularity, cultural variation, and complexity to Islam and other less-discussed "Eastern" religions. In her discussion of white liberal discourse, Wemyss points out how power hierarchies are maintained discursively, such as "through the construction of essentialised and exclusive categories such as 'Muslims' and 'middle class'" (5), and keywords such as "outsiders," "extremists," and "violence" "work to construct and consolidate racial categories ... central to the dominant discourse" (73). In short, the vilification and attachment of overarching religious labels to those deemed other enables a concentrated proliferation of power and the creation of a national Self.

In his much-contested *Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington claims, "It is human to hate. For self-definition and motivation people need enemies" (130). It has been common knowledge for years that the construction of an "Other" enables the proliferation of the idea of the Self, which is deemed essential to the construction of imagined communities or nations (see Anderson). While there has historically been a pronounced disparity between Islam and the West, this has been exacerbated in recent decades by anti-Muslim sentiment *and* the growing classification of individuals by religious affiliation, such as the increased categorization of Bangladeshis as "Muslims"

in racialized discourse (Wemyss 169). According to Leezenberg, the generic category "Muslim" has become associated with "backward, unenlightened and premodern modes of thought and forms of life, and with violence, intolerance and sexual repression" and thus becomes a stigmatizing label (109-10). However, it is particularly the construction of "the Muslim as a problematic, violent 'body'" (Khair 25), especially in the form of a terrorist, that has become most familiar, as media depictions of Muslims focus on "their acts of physical protest, legitimate or not, while the 'other side' comes across as using non-physical means, whether fluent words or bad cinema" (Khair 25). Generally speaking, Western individuals are often shown the image of the religious other – often Muslim – as a threat. In an attempt to discern why this is, Thomas A. Pyszcynski, Jeff Greenberg, and Sheldon Solomon tie the recent accelerated fear of terrorism and hatred for Muslims to 9/11.[14] Pointing out what perhaps *should* be obvious, they write,

> If we step back for a moment and think about how we would be feeling so much
> more secure if there were no such thing as terrorism and terrorists, the question
> of why arises. Without terrorists, all we would have to worry about killing us is
> cancer, heart disease, diabetes, car accidents, Lou Gehrig's disease, AIDS,
> muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, homicide, or if we are very lucky, a death
> in several decades due to the inevitable exhaustion of our bodies. (Pyszcynski et
> al. 8)

Given the reality that "we are all far more likely to injure ourselves by climbing a stepladder in our own house or to get hit by a car than to be a victim of a terrorist attack"

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[14] The significance and problems associated with literary and theoretical approaches to this event will be discussed later in this chapter.

(Pyszcynski et al. 8-9), why did 9/11 result in such heightened insecurities and anti-Muslim sentiments?

"Terrorism," "The War on Terror," "radical," "fundamentalist," "national security threat": these terms have become synonymous with religion, but particularly with Islam. In the racialized, religiously codified hierarchy upheld by media presentations and moral panic,[15] the subtleties of religion are often ignored, and the religious themselves are denied a voice. Of course, postsecularism is not a perfect theory. As has been mentioned, the majority of postsecular criticism is West-centric in its focus and therefore generalizing in its approaches to "other" kinds of religion and secularism. This does not mean, however, that postsecularism itself is inherently this way; rather, the recognition of the problematic tendencies apparent in many works produced by postsecularists allows for change and improvement in later applications of the theory. Postsecularism's advocacy for pluralism among religious and secular worldviews and its critique of essentialist narratives are beneficial, espousing open-mindedness. However, what critics do with this theory varies widely. For example, in *Partial Faiths*, McClure approaches postsecular fiction as depicting only "partial conversions" (4) and situating religious belief as "fragmentary" and "only partially illuminating" (9), favouring compromise between worldviews rather than attempts at coexistence. However, as Danielle Haque points out, McClure advocates only for a privatized form of religion: he has "a modicum of respect for faith, so long as it does not represent institutionalized belief systems" (Haque 803-04). Her subsequent accusation

[15] "Moral panic" refers to "a condition or situation in which public fears and state interventions greatly exceed the objective threat posed to society by a particular group who are claimed to be responsible for the condition" (Bonn 84). Within the "West," local moral panics are often facilitated by the media's racialization of violence, resulting in Islamophobia (Bonn 85; Morgan and Poynting 13).

that "postsecular methodologies fail to take into account those works that do not take religion's great signifiers and ethics and 'translate' or 'secularize' them" (804) coincides with Paul Elie's question, "Where has the novel of belief gone?" (Elie). Both target the West-oriented presumptions that underlie the majority of existing postsecular criticism, including McClure's analyses; however, the problem appears to be with postsecular *texts* and *criticism*, rather than with postsecular theory as a whole.

Criticisms of postsecularism are valuable, as they provide a foundation from which to improve postsecular theory. Just as Srivastava calls for "a form of secularism which is not merely a rehearsal of rationalist arguments about the subordination of all other worldviews to reason" (37), there can also be a form of postsecularism which is not merely a secularization of religion, a conversion of secularism, or an inward-looking naturalization of Western religiosity and secularism. While options for improvement are vast, one way in which postsecularists can combat these problematic tendencies is by adopting a more postcolonial approach to postsecularism – in short, by theorizing in such a way that challenges the centre from which postsecular criticism has primarily emerged.

The Need for Postcolonial Postsecularism

A few theorists have noticed the organic intersections between postcolonial theory and current secular and religious concerns. MacLennan, for one, sees postcolonialism as becoming "more frankly postsecularist in direction and content" (13). Srivastava similarly finds a "tendency to recuperate religion, or religiosity, in theorizations of postcolonial identity" and argues that "what is needed is a different engagement with the hybrid postcolonial subject that does not close off a dialogue with

religion, but allows an opening up, to the spiritual and the metaphysical" (21, 37).

Adopting a postcolonial approach to postsecular theory emphasizes the problematic

stance currently taken by multiple postsecularists and allows for a more comprehensive

understanding of the coexistence of secular and religious worldviews in a globalized era.

Much current postsecular criticism does not take colonial and postcolonial contexts and

histories into consideration, resulting in work that overlooks marginalized voices,

experiences, and concerns of individuals from "other" countries with "other"

worldviews. It glosses over the complexity and diversity of "other" – i.e., non-Western

and non-white – manifestations of religion and secularism around the world. The centre

from which the majority of postsecular criticism stems does not merely uphold a binary

of secularism and religiosity in which secularism is central and religion is that of the

marginalized other that must be tolerated; rather, secularism and religiosity are also used

to uphold a colonial paradigm in which binaries of Self/Other, civilized/barbaric,

West/East, white/black, and secular/religious are implemented. By denying diversity to

both Western and Eastern sides of these constructed dichotomies, many postsecular

theorists who approach the intermingling and coexistence of secularity and religiosity as

a result of globalization ignore the unmitigated cultural flow on which postsecularism is,

and should, be founded.

The marriage of postcolonial and postsecular theories allows for a more accurate

and nuanced depiction of both secularism and religiosity, challenging the binaries that

uphold a hierarchy between them and their alleged adherents. On the one hand, Western

orientalists have "created a distorted image" of Eastern countries by "attributing to them

religious phenomena which are not really in their nature" (Cipriani 278) and by adopting

Huntington's theory of a clash of geographically separate civilizations rather than

recognizing the competition between "carriers of tradition within the same nations and civilizations" (Hefner 92). On the other hand, as Robbins points out, postcolonial studies have not paid much attention to the concept of secularism ("Is" 245), which for years was not assaulted the way other "watchwords of 'the West'" were ("Is" 246). Postcolonial postsecularism allows for a focus on how colonization and neocolonialism have impacted the formation of various nationalisms and religions – for example, by popularizing the concept of a Hindu majority and Muslim minority in India (Hefner 94) – and also the manner in which secularism and modernity in Eastern countries such as India do exist and differ from the various forms of secularism and modernity in the West (see Srivastava 18-47).

Some contest the combination of postsecular and postcolonial theories, arguing that the latter is in fact outdated in an era of multiculturalism and globalization. Robbins, for example, sees the continuation of the binaries of Self and Other being upheld through the recent "war on terror" and the related "war on immigrants," both of which are fuelled by secular and religious antagonisms. Yet, he argues that "the ethics of immigration are not the ethics of colonialism" ("Is" 261) and that "immigration … is too multifaceted an issue in its own right to give postcolonial studies a new disciplinary foundation, let alone a foundation centered on the defense of religion" ("Is" 261). Rather than seeing postsecularism as a logical extension of postcolonial theory, he comments,

> It is possible that the divide between secularism and religion has come to the fore
> as a replacement for colonialism's genuine, historically restricted binary –
> between those who conquer and rule and those who are conquered and ruled – at
> a moment when the field of postcolonial studies had reason to worry that its
> founding opposition might be losing some of its force. By choosing secularism as

their antagonist, in other words, postcolonial critics might have felt that they were retrieving both the moral high ground and a certain topicality that was slipping away from them. If so, this has led to both an unnecessary hostility toward, and a necessary qualification and enrichment of, the concept of secularism. Still, moral complexities and doubt are better for scholarship than simplicity and certitude. The field would perhaps be better served either by shunning the secular/religious binary altogether or by returning to its initial ambivalence. ("Is" 262)

This is a valid point and must be taken into consideration. However, the approach that Robbins problematizes is not an approach that should be taken by postsecularists performing postcolonial analyses. To present secularism as the antagonist of postcolonial subjects is to uphold the same binary imposed by the colonial paradigm: that of religion as Eastern and secularism as Western.

Combining postsecularism and postcolonialism instead enables exploration of the manner in which traditional colonial binaries are still being used to uphold fear, hatred, and prejudice toward the "religious other." In response to Robbins's treatment of colonization and the war on immigration as separate historical experiences, one ought to consider Ashcroft's claim that "crucially, words such as 'post-colonial' do not describe essential forms of experience but forms of talk *about* experience" (12), allowing for the diversity and variety of experiences of oppression (12-13). While migrants from decolonized nations living in Western countries might not share the same experiences of colonization as their ancestors, they can still undergo similar experiences of oppression. Colonial histories differ from later generations of immigrant encounters with the West, but the discourses regarding both situations share similarities. For instance, the reference

to young "British/Canadian/American Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and so on who were born in the West" as "migrant groups" is an offensive method of othering (Hinnells 3) – of excluding these individuals from the classification of the Western Self and representing the "postcolonial experience of fragmentation and marginalization" that, though seemingly "unleashed by colonization" (Camilleri 1035), is still maintained through imperialism and social separatism.

The majority of non-Christian religions in postcolonial countries have been othered and Orientalized by the West alongside the countries themselves and their inhabitants. A postcolonial approach to postsecularism combats this in particular, challenging how normalized Western religion – i.e., Christianity – is generally accepted by secular institutions and attains many of the ideals proposed by postsecularism, such as inclusion within the public sphere; yet, discourses that see Christianity as normative and integrated with the secular often align it against other religions. The association of secularism with the framework of the modern state has led Western secularism in particular to be associated with the colonial, or imperial, enterprise (see Robbins, "Is" 260). Rather than supporting the binaries of West/East and secular/religious, however, a postcolonial approach to postsecularism breaks them down. It is not secularism *per se* that postcolonial postsecularism challenges, but rather the centralization of Western secularism and religiosity and the consequent Orientalizing and/or outright ignorance of non-Western forms of secularism and religiosity within and across various countries and communities.

Despite similarities between discussions of the postcolonial experience and the othering of non-Western religions by a self-identified secular West, few postsecularists have focused on this topic, and this is likely why postsecularism has so far been

packaged as a Eurocentric theory. Whereas multiple critics have pointed out the majoritarian, Eurocentric nature of current postsecular criticism, only a few critics to date have engaged this criticism to produce works of postsecular critique that embrace postcoloniality. Ratti's *The Postsecular Imagination*, for one, analyzes postsecular, postcolonial works of fiction. Meanwhile, Rosati and Stoeckl's "Introduction" to *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies* takes a "mostly non-Western" perspective that deconstructs the "long-held assumptions about the connection between modernity and secularism" (1). Describing the goal of their work, Rosati and Stoeckl explain,

> By examining non-Western experiences of modernization, secularization and religious revival, we hope to shed light on some fundamental questions that shape the current academic debate on multiple modernities and postsecularity: is the idea of multiple modernities able to grasp differences as well as similarities between different kinds of modernities and democracies? Are modernity, democracy and secularism universalistic concepts or are they, on the contrary, peculiar to Western civilization? (1)

Their work differentiates between Western modernities, which largely include secularization, and non-Western modernities, which "often incorporate … or even thrive … on religion rather than excluding or diminishing it" (2). Though their focus employs a postcolonial challenge to the centralization of Western concepts of secularism, religiosity, and modernity, Rosati and Stoeckl do not identify their work as postcolonial, but rather only as postsecular.

Following in the footsteps of critics such as Ratti, Rosati, and Stoeckl, this dissertation examines "non-Western experiences of modernization, secularization and

religious revival" (Rosati and Stoeckl 1) by performing postsecular readings of postcolonial novels – more specifically, novels of migration written by authors of South Asian origin who migrated after the 1947 Partition of India and now live elsewhere. For this dissertation, a work of literature is considered postsecular if it embodies, contains, or presents a dialogue between religiosity and secularism by addressing either the renewed awareness of religion as significant on a public or private level, the coexistence of religious and secular worldviews, and/or the criticism (but not abolition) of religious and secular metanarratives.

Postsecularism in a Postcolonial Literary Context

Six novels by South Asian diasporic authors are analyzed in this work: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows.* As might be expected, these novels address themes that are fairly typical of postsecular literature: religion, secularism, the coexistence of worldviews within and between characters, resultant tensions, partial conversions, and so forth. However, these works also incorporate something that is integral to a comprehensive understanding of postsecular theory, but which is not often included. Each chosen novel places secular and religious concerns within tales of migration, incorporating both the physical and ideological crossing of borders. Borders and migration are key facets of postcolonial theory and postsecular theory; yet they also shape the prejudicial responses that largely resist globalization and postsecularism. Because of the centrality of cross-border migration in each of these discourses, the contents and themes of the chosen novels enable postsecular interpretations that

positively augment the extant body of postsecular literary criticism and challenge the previous centralization of the postsecular gaze on Western concerns.

It is perhaps needless to point out that the colonial enterprise remains, in many ways, dependent upon borders. As Ashcroft points out in *Post-Colonial Transformations*, "The physical occupation and control of space have been crucial to British imperialism" (124), and boundaries enabled this control. Throughout history, colonizers have controlled space by defining it, which was accomplished by forming territories contained by boundaries. While the "creation of the map of the world" (Ashcroft 128) is a tangible symbol of the European colonial domination of space, borders are also integral to Western thinking, as ideological boundaries separating race, ethnicity, nation, gender, and class continue to constitute "social regulation[s]" for "how things are" (Ashcroft 164, 183). Colonization depends on the drawing, shifting, and sometimes erasing of borders, which have become the easiest way of differentiating "us" from "them" and making visible the spaces one controls.

Borders are also important components of postsecular theories. On the one hand, the intermingling of different religions and secularisms often results from the crossing of physical borders, which on the other hand exemplifies the dissolution of non-literal borders, such as those between East and West and religiosity and secularism, and between various kinds of religions and secularisms. Multiple postsecularists have emphasized the role of cross-border migration in the formation of postsecular communities. Habermas, as was mentioned, attributes a postsecular "change in consciousness" to three phenomena, one of which is "the immigration of 'guest-workers' and refugees, specifically from countries with traditional cultural backgrounds" ("Notes" 20). Rosati and Stoeckl, who argue that "interpenetration … between once

rigidly separated borders is essential to the making (and understanding) of a postsecular society" (4), similarly see religious pluralism – which is crucial to challenging "religious monopoly" – as fostered by "globalization and immigration" (5). Michael Hout, Andrew M. Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde also argue that migrants drawn to the U.S. bring relatively strong religiosity with them.[16] However, as Knott points out in "Cutting Through the Postsecular City," postsecularism engages borders in yet another way. Acknowledging the "language of opposition and warfare" often used to describe the relationship between religiosity and secularism, the postsecular "highlights the boundaries between them which are discursively constructed, negotiated and policed by those on opposing sides. It highlights their territories and boundaries as spaces open to investigation" (12). In this manner, postsecularism challenges the boundaries assigning religiosity to the East and secularism to the West while fostering a space in which ideological pluralism can exist.

In instances of migration, individuals may struggle to develop an identity in a new homeland while retaining ties to a culturally diverse motherland. When migrants move between nations with different national belief systems, the challenge to accommodate both cultural identities can evolve into an internal struggle between various competing religious and secular identifications. After all, as Norris and Inglehart argue, the prominent practices in any society, even a secular one, "are rooted in long-standing cultural traditions and histories" (218). Thus, they continue, "The religious

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[16] While it is of course inaccurate to assume that all migrants entering Western countries identify as religious, migration as a tool for spreading religious pluralism should not be overlooked. As Harold Coward points out in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States* (2000), "Of the 420,000 South Asians in Canada, 135,000 are Sikhs, 120,000 are Hindus, 90,000 are Muslims, 55,000 are Christians, 3,000 are Buddhists, 70 are Jews, and the remaining 4,000 number among them the Jains and Parsis" (148), suggesting that of the 420,000 South Asian immigrants in Canada in the year 2000, almost all of them (approximately 407,000) identified as religious.

traditions of Protestants and Catholics, Hindu[s] and Muslim[s], shape the values, practices, and beliefs of people living in these societies, even if they never set foot in a church, temple, or mosque, or if they personally adhere to a minority faith" (218). To a certain extent, then, the practices of migrants' homelands and traditions of new places of habitation may differ greatly depending on the religious and/or secular traditions of each nation, despite characters' own personal beliefs. Within this context, postsecularism addresses characters' struggles to re-articulate their identities as plural instead of partial within multicultural metropolises that house many seemingly incompatible diversities.

Postsecularism is usually framed as a theory for sociological or international-relations discussions and is typically applied on a public, or communal, level. The personal struggles of individuals are sometimes overlooked. Within global cities, for instance, Beaumont describes how these "hubs for globalization" often help produce "multiple, split and sometimes conflicting identities based on class, ethnicity and others," which include both religious and secular dimensions (9). In such global settings, Ashcroft argues, diasporic peoples' links between identity and physical location may have been "irredeemably severed" (125) and yet, he argues,

> It is, ultimately, in the capacity to transcend the trope of the boundary, to live 'horizontally', that post-colonial habitation offers the most radical principle of transformative resistance. It is in horizonality that the true force of transformation becomes realized, for whereas the boundary is about cultural regulation, the horizon is about cultural possibility. (15-16)

In other words, it is by transcending not only physical borders but also the nonliteral boundaries meant to uphold social regulations and structures that one resists and transforms the current order. On the individual level, this means embracing a postsecular

plurality rather than dichotomies regarding one's identity, culture, and beliefs, as well as overcoming the binary between the secular and the spiritual that Chatterjee delineates as separating the inner and outer domains of cultural identity when it is threatened by globalization and neo-imperialism (6).17

Just as postsecularism attempts to understand individuals' (or characters') internal struggles between adherence to either sacred or profane identities, ideologies, and lifestyles, so too do postsecular theories apply to public spaces *within* national borders. After all, borders are meant to both contain and exclude, but above all to provide a clear means of classification, whether national, religious, or otherwise. National borders contain people, objects, spaces, and places, and yet the spaces within these borders can differentiate themselves as sacred or profane locations that in turn contain and define what (and who) comes inside their borders. National borders regulate a "recognizable or representable identity" (Ashcroft 175), and yet, people also constitute their identity "in terms of the congregations of organizations they inhabit: scholarly, ethnic, sporting, commercial, religious" (174-75). The lines that separate nations are historically touted as the primary method of differentiating between Us and Them, but within these borders the boundaries of buildings and spaces provide various forms of identity to and differentiation between the people that coexist within nations. Among the most easily identified of these are sacred spaces and profane spaces (or religious and secular spaces).

17 In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee claims that "anticolonial nationalism" creates a "domain of sovereignty" by "dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual" (6). The material is the outer domain, which includes secular, public institutions such as the economy, state-craft, science, and technology, while the spiritual, or inner, domain houses the "essential marks of cultural identity," including religious beliefs and cultural tradition (6). As in a Western secular society, the inner and outer domains of anticolonial nationalism are separated from one another – however, this is done to preserve the inner domain, and by implication non-Western culture, from the infiltrations of Western imperialism.

Multiple theorists have argued that it is in urban spaces, such as large multicultural cities, that postsecularism is growing through a resurgence of religion and consequent coexistence with secularism (Leezenberg 107; Beaumont 3-4; Knott 27-28). Moreover, as is the focus of Beaumont's article, postsecularism is intensely observed in terms of public space, including building use (Beaumont 3). The religious buildings and architecture within secular cities (in the forms of churches, mosques, temples, etc.) functionally provide borders that contain the religious and separate them from the secularity of the public streets outside its door. As has been seen through history, space is indeed important to classification and to both religious and secular practices – places of worship are an integral aspect of many religious beliefs, just as courthouses are part of a secular understanding of justice. In these instances, the walls, fences, and borders setting apart buildings or even rooms as secular or religious spaces may perform important functions of communal inclusion, upholding tradition or symbolizing cultural identity. Yet, they are often designed to *be* set apart, to separate themselves from the spaces outside their walls – a separation, rather than coexistence, that postsecular theory attempts to challenge.

While postsecularism challenges the essentialism to which many ideological groups adhere, it does not completely deconstruct systems of belief, as postmodernism does, but upholds the importance of both religious and secular worldviews, calling for a coexistence and conversation between the two without trivializing the elements of meaning-making and identity associated with each. Raymond Brady Williams explains this when he writes that the challenge facing religious groups is

> to create and maintain boundaries within which individuals can fabricate their
> identities and preserve continuities with the past. These can become either

workshops or prisons. Can religion provide materials, perhaps newly conceived

and worked, with which groups can build porous boundaries, ones strong enough

to sustain personal and group identity but sufficiently permeable to allow easy,

natural, nonthreatening movement among groups that will cause cooperation and

goodwill to abound? (32)

Though Williams words this as a question, the concept he presents of "porous

boundaries" that contain identity but allow cooperative movements among groups is a

good description of the postsecular ideal. Postsecularism advocates not for the abolition

of borders between the religious and the secular, but instead for the opening of these

borders, allowing the secular and the religious to coexist and converse.

Of course, the issue of borders separating religious and secular ideologies and

spaces within cities can be expanded to incorporate a discussion of geographical borders

separating religious and secular nation-states, such as Pakistan and India, or to border

security policies by which nations refuse entry to individuals based on the affiliations of

their homelands. While these issues are indeed salient to the postsecular focus of this

dissertation, including the classification of geographies and individuals as "secular"

and/or "religious," questions of national borders and migration from a political, policy-

based point of view involve much more than questions of the secular and the religious,

and therefore an exploration of the laws surrounding border-crossings is beyond the

scope of this dissertation.

The global era that has given rise to the boundary-breaking discourses of

postsecularism and the decentring voices of postcolonialism has in some ways resulted

in confusion and instability as the growing infiltration of cultures into one another

threatens uniform national identities. For many, this results in a sense of loss that can be

regained through adherence to ideologies and communities not dependent upon borders. In a global culture that "makes itself 'at home' in motion rather than in place" (Ashcroft 207), individuals experience a "deterritorialization" of identity (Camilleri 1033) and are often left looking for other (i.e., non-national) forms of identity and individual or collective meaning. For many, this desire is satisfied by religion, which, as Zock points out, can "bind people with various cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds together" (141). Because beliefs and ideologies transcend borders, they are often embraced as a means of forming a sense of community, belonging, and sameness for those surrounded by difference.

Yet, the very feeling of instability that can foster religious adherence or affiliation can simultaneously lead some to perceive adherents to "other" belief systems as a threat, and the trope of the border plays a key role in this response. The moral panic that ensues when the public is presented with portrayals of others, particularly Muslims, as "folk devils" is fueled by media representations of other religions and religious migrants crossing Western borders. The national border, which was used by colonial systems to enable geographical control while separating Self from other, never actually went away and is often implemented as an instrument of fear and aggression toward the idea of a postsecular state of coexistence. While there are many who celebrate the cultural heterogeneity and pluralism of beliefs that accompany international migration, this very movement of peoples is often demonized by media outlets such as Fox News and politicians like Donald Trump.

Current security concerns worldwide revolve around borders and who, or what, is not allowed to cross which borders. Borders, border-crossing, and migration fuel present-day political debate, figuring prominently in platforms in the 2016 U.S.

presidential election, the 2015 Canadian federal election, and the Brexit vote, to name only a few. Instances of migration and border-crossing are integral to the various concerns postsecularism encompasses, and yet, they are often considered in postsecular theory from a Western, Eurocentric, neocolonial point of view. At the moment, most postsecular theory that considers migration positions itself within Western borders and views migration passively, as a receptor, without considering how the West also transgresses other borders or paying significant attention to the views, experiences, and voices of those who actively cross national borders and take up residence within Western countries.

This dissertation analyzes South Asian novels about borders and migration with a postsecular lens to approach the very issues of secular-religious interactions so salient in Western postsecular literature while contesting the centre from which these works and corresponding criticism are overwhelmingly written. By using both postsecular and postcolonial theories in its analysis of novels about migration, borders, and the coexistence of religious and secular worldviews, this dissertation looks at works by authors whose voices are generally excluded from postsecular discourse. These novels depict secular-religious conflicts – whether public or private, personal or political, or even intrapersonal – that result from the crossing of borders both near and far. Moreover, situating this analysis away from works of Western non-migrant writers promotes a postsecular reading of multiple forms of religiosity (rather than presenting Western Christianity as normative and thus invisible), and of other, non-Western, forms of secularism.

Analyzing novels by authors of South Asian origin not only involves a postsecular reading of novels informed by non-Eurocentric agendas, but also prompts an

exploration of the history of borders and migration within the Indian subcontinent, particularly during the 1947 Partition of India and the resultant secular politics and religiously motivated conflicts that accompanied this division. This context decentralizes Western secularism and Western concerns over borders and security, allowing even further challenges to the secularization theory through discussions of how the history and functions of religiosity and secularism within South Asia differ from those in the West. Primarily, however, the context of South Asia, with its myriad cultures and religious beliefs, challenges the anti-historicist conflation of all religions as the same that often occurs in less comprehensive works of postsecular criticism, as well as the oppositional terminology often used to position religiosity and secularism on separate sides of an East/West dichotomy. The writings and political movements of Gandhi and Nehru in particular indicate the existence of postsecular concerns beyond the Western hemisphere, including the same fears and tensions that accompany pluralistic coexistence around the world.[18]

This dissertation also lends its attention to South Asian novels that are classified as post-9/11 novels – or, novels that focus on 9/11 and its aftermath. While post-9/11 novels[19] generally emphasize the increase in moral panic in Western countries and the racialized constructs of religious identity that resulted from 9/11, the South Asian post-9/11 novels analyzed by this dissertation[20] portray these conflicts while simultaneously problematizing the Western framing of 9/11 as the singular great tragedy of the 21st-century world. 9/11 is often credited as the defining moment in the postsecular change in

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[18] The context of Hindu secularism and the South Asian Partition is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

[19] Peter Morey divides post-9/11 novels into the categories of "trauma narratives" and semi-fictionalized "Muslim misery memoirs" (136).

[20] Namely, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

consciousness described by Habermas as a renewed awareness of religious importance. Indeed, multiple authors pinpoint 9/11 as a watershed moment in history that, to quote Mike King, broke down the "mutual ignorance pact" between secular culture and faith traditions (*Postsecularism* 5). Although some warn against the equation of present-day social religion with the events of 9/11 (Reder and Schmidt 1; Beaumont 5), the majority of postsecular critics (and even critics unconcerned with postsecularism) are quick to point to 9/11 as the critical moment in which religiosity suddenly re-entered the secular sphere and revealed its relevance once more (cf. King 9; Gardels 4; Mavelli and Petito 934; Huggan 751; Norris and Inglehart xiii; Esmer 36).

While the importance and devastating impact of 9/11 should not be underestimated, the association of 9/11 with religious resurgence targeted specifically against Western secular institutions foregrounds (Eastern) religious violence while overshadowing instances of Western religious violence, secular nationalist violence, and peaceful religion. Brieskorn, for instance, calls on religious communities alone to renounce violence (32), and Mike King claims that "it is not right … to suggest a moral symmetry between religious extremism and extreme atheism, as the latter has in itself no history of violence" (*Postsecularism* 6). Such interpretations that pinpoint 9/11 as exemplary of postsecular tensions and of the state of religion in the public sphere overlook the history of Western violence toward both Western and other, previously colonized, nations – not to mention recent anti-Islamic shootings in the United States and elsewhere. To equate the severity of violence with ideological motivation allows for a demonization of others from Elsewhere – a tactic employed by George W. Bush in his approach to the War on Terror (Cilano 157) and in Donald Trump's discourses of

"Homeland Security" that make borders increasingly more difficult to cross (Morey 137).

The post-9/11 novels considered here illustrate current problems and difficulties facing religious migrants in the West, rather than positioning the migrants themselves as the "problem," as discourses surrounding border control and Homeland Security often do. Meanwhile, the post-9/11, religiously racialized atmosphere in the West emphasizes the need for a postsecular state of plurality, rather than the opposite. Approaching this topic from non-Western perspectives not only decentralizes 9/11, as Pei-Chen Liao proposes one should, but also heightens awareness of how Western media and even the Western academy have influenced the perceptions and terminology used by postsecularism in a prejudicial manner. These novels, which deal with multiple global acts of violence, show that 9/11 was not the beginning of a religious resurgence or a global watershed moment in changing perceptions of religions; moreover, they challenge perceptions that only Eastern nations and religions are violent by focusing on Western military actions and targets abroad – things often overlooked by the Eurocentric lens through which postsecular thinking has so commonly viewed the world.

Borders and migration, religious and secular conflict, and related tensions and fears surrounding issues of national security around the globe are all important subjects at present, and a postsecular exploration of postcolonial novels of migration promises to address such salient issues while expanding the current focus of postsecular theory to a more transnational orientation. This work employs a form of transnationalism that Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt refer to as "Philosophical Transnationalism," which "*starts from the metaphysical assumption that social worlds and lives are inherently transnational.* In other words, transnational phenomena and dynamics are the rule rather

than the exception, the underlying reality rather than a derivative by-product" (2).[21]

Based on the overarching belief that social life "crosses, transcends and sometimes transforms borders and boundaries in many different ways" (Khagram and Levitt 1), transnationalism itself has been manifested in many different ways, causing some critical contestation of the term. For instance, "theoretical transnationalism"[22] may be combined with "conventional explanations" to produce "more compelling theoretical accounts," but it may also compete with phenomena previously theorized in "local, national, international, or global terms" (Khagram and Levitt 2). Theoretical transnationalisms could benefit postsecular theory by emphasizing a cross-border analysis of religious and secular co-existence, but they also pose the threat of deemphasizing the role of nationalism, local politics, and cultural influences in the formation of different religious and secular worldviews. It is particularly important to avoid replacing (or even overshadowing) postcolonial theories with transnational ones. Therefore, this work employs a definitively philosophical transnationalism, recognizing that religions, secularisms, and human interactions more generally transcend and transform boundaries – but without positing a theoretical analysis that competes with the postcolonial focus of this study.

Postsecularism and postsecular states reveal the fluidity and constructed nature of boundaries between concepts such as the secular and the religious, or the sacred and the profane, and it is in this context that the transnational experiences of migrants who

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[21] Khagram and Levitt go on to argue that philosophical transnationalism "is purposely framed to encourage encounters and exchanges with other perspectives from the positivist to the interpretivist to the constructivist. Its goal is to bring into sharp focus the interaction between different levels and sites of social experience" (2).

[22] According to Khagram and Levitt, "Theoretical Transnationalism *formulates explanations and crafts interpretations that either parallel, complement, supplement, or are integrated into existing theoretical frameworks and accounts*" and includes "identifying and explaining previously obscured kinds of phenomena and dynamics" (2).

cross these borders – which are often overlooked – are given voice. By analyzing works whose characters migrate across borders and develop a sense of belonging in more than one place and within more than one community, this dissertation explores lived and fictional experiences of cultural pluralism and the difficulties this experience can pose to traditional classifications according to nationality, ethnicity, or religious and secular beliefs.

CHAPTER TWO
Should I Stay or Should I Go?
Migration, Return, and Narrative Deconstruction in
Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*

It is difficult to talk about *The Satanic Verses* without first discussing the Rushdie Affair (see Ball, *Satire* 116). All existing criticism on the text at least gestures toward the controversy, and even a quick Google search of "the Satanic Verses" leads to more accounts of the Affair than descriptions of the novel as a work of literature. Though it is tempting to diverge from this status quo, to exclude any mention of the Rushdie Affair would be to do a disservice, for before 9/11, the Rushdie Affair was viewed as a primary example of the twentieth century "resurgence of religion" deemed postsecular. On February 14, 1989, shortly after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced a *fatwa*, or religious decree, against Rushdie and anyone involved in the publication of the infamous novel who was aware of its contents, sentencing them to death. This *fatwa* became emblematic of the international debate surrounding the contents and reception of *The Satanic Verses*, primarily focusing on the novel's fictional depictions of the Prophet Mohammad, his wives, and the writing of the Qur'an. As a result, Rushdie went into hiding from 1989 to 1998. To this day, the Rushdie Affair remains one of the most prominent examples of a public clash of secular and religious values in the West, and it is still referenced in debates about freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

On one hand, the Rushdie Affair exemplifies the postsecular tension that ensues when secular and religious concerns are brought into coexistence. On a much deeper level, however, the Rushdie Affair exposes the essentialist, Eurocentric approach to secularism and religion that has permeated much postsecular criticism. One of the

failures of most postsecular criticism is its tendency to group Western Christianity under the category of the secular, or else approach it as the only religion indicated by the broad term "religious" – both tactics of framing "Other" (i.e., non-Western) religions and/or secularisms as outside Western narratives of modernity. The controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* emphasizes the extent to which this form of exclusionary nationalism (which is criticized in the novel) was rampant in society as well. As Srivastava explains,

> The Rushdie affair exemplified a deeper schism between the public spheres of countries where Islam was considered a fundamental component of its national culture, and countries where it wasn't considered as such. In Britain, famously, the book couldn't be banned under the blasphemy law because this law only covered acts or texts considered offensive to the Christian faith. (22)

In other words, the reason *The Satanic Verses* was not banned in Britain was not because Britain upheld free speech, but because Islam and Muslim sentiments were not deemed part of the national culture. The Rushdie Affair revealed, as Srivastava points out, not the "supposed 'intolerance'" of Muslims, but "the concealed Judaeo-Christian origins of contemporary European secularisms" (22-23). Yet, although the impact of the Rushdie Affair on international politics and the development of postsecular theory reveals the Eurocentric tendencies of many postsecular understandings of religious resurgence, the controversy has far too often overshadowed the contents of *The Satanic Verses*, which further combat the binaries that ironically still permeate postsecular criticism and which prompt a recognition of the intersections of postsecular and postcolonial theory.

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* both contest the binaries of sacred and profane, or religious and secular, embodied by

the discourse surrounding the Rushdie Affair, as well as the reductive dichotomies of Eastern and Western civilization. However, they do so without disavowing either sacred or profane worldviews. Rather, their works uphold the ethos of "interpenetration … between once rigidly separated borders" that Rosati and Stoeckl see as essential to a postsecular society (4). The interpenetration of borders in these works extends not only to sacred and profane worldviews and symbols, but also to the literal crossing of national borders that occurs throughout both. Rushdie and Vassanji embrace a postsecular plurality by simultaneously combining, problematizing, and valorizing forms of religiosity and secularism in Western *and* Eastern contexts.

Exemplifying what Kaufmann defines as a postsecular desire to resist master narratives and complicate the binary opposition in our understanding of the religious and the secular (68-69), Rushdie and Vassanji present essentialist metanarratives, both religious and secular, that they subsequently deconstruct. Rushdie's fictionalized retelling of the origin story of Islam and Vassanji's histories of Pir Bawa and of the shrine of Pirbaag challenge historical narratives, from which many religious worldviews derive singular authority, by including episodes of misinformation. Likewise, Rushdie and Vassanji also critique secular nationalist metanarratives – English and Indian – and their exclusionary attitudes. Importantly, however, neither Rushdie nor Vassanji upholds the secular/religious binary, for while contesting both religious and secular ideologies, they complicate this distinction by blurring the boundaries between the two concepts and combining secular and religious images and symbols throughout their works. In *The Satanic Verses*, the protagonists Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha embody sacred and profane qualities, but their characters change, convert, and merge at various points, challenging essentialist distinctions between the two characters and their sacred and

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profane qualities. Meanwhile, at the end of *The Assassin's Song*, the protagonist Karsan Dargawalla combines religious tradition and secular learning as the first secular Saheb of Pirbaag. In both novels, the characters and worldviews that posit exclusivism, or solely religiosity or secularity, are problematized, whereas Saladin and Karsan – the most postsecular characters – are distinguished from others for overcoming singularity and embracing a postsecular ethos of secular-religious coexistence.

Depicting the importance of history and tradition but also the necessity for autonomy and change, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* challenge narrative authority without abandoning the narratives themselves. Rushdie and Vassanji embrace the combination of what are typically considered opposites, simultaneously upholding and dismantling the religious and secular metanarratives they target. They also complicate nationalist and colonial assumptions by displacing Eurocentric understandings of religion, secularism, and nationalism, approaching these issues with a cosmopolitanism that is ultimately transnational in scope. A postsecular interpretation of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* emphasizes the correlation between postcolonial and postsecular concerns, dismantling the metanarratives of secular and religious worldviews and disrupting Western discourses that uphold the oft-conflated dichotomies of East/West and religious/secular through the crossing of borders – corporal, national, and ideological.

Satanic, Angelic, and Postsecular Verses

The Satanic Verses tells the story of Gibreel Faristha and Saladin Chamcha – film star and radio star, respectively – who miraculously survive a fall of nearly 30,000 feet into the English Channel when their airplane is hijacked and explodes in the air.

Rushdie follows the intersecting lives of Gibreel and Saladin who, post-fall, undergo extreme transformations. Gibreel takes upon himself the identity of archangel and experiences schizophrenic dream-visions in which he witnesses and partakes of fictionalized episodes of religious history. Meanwhile, Saladin physically metamorphoses into a goat-like, devil-like figure and is forced by experiences of English racism to retreat from his previous, Anglophilic attitudes to the safety of a multicultural migrant community. The text explores the ensuing relationship between the two adversaries, ultimately culminating in the suicide of Gibreel and the final reconciliation of Saladin with his father and his homeland.

Although a small number of critics have approached *The Satanic Verses* as a postsecular text (Ratti, Tumminello), the novel is typically viewed as secular, likely influenced by the fact that the author himself identifies as secular (Rushdie, "Imaginary" 16; cf. Rushdie, "In Good Faith" 404-05) and has argued that secularism is "the only way of safeguarding the constitutional, civil, human and … religious rights of minority groups ("Introduction" 2-3). The Rushdie Affair has also ironically served to frame *The Satanic Verses* as secular, given the condemnation of the text as blasphemous by many individuals and religious communities. Christopher Warnes, for one, claims that "there is no novel more irreverent" (97), and others would seem to concur. Rushdie has been charged with practicing "black magic" (Ashraf 20) and exercising "satanic forethought" when writing *The Satanic Verses* (Shahabuddin 37), and his novel has been denounced as an attack on religion and specifically on Islam. Shabbir Akhtar describes the character of Salman the Persian as a "mouthpiece" Rushdie invented to "launch a bitter diatribe against Islam and all things Islamic" (10), and he further declares that "any Muslim who fails to be offended by Rushdie's book ceases, on account of that fact, to be a Muslim"

(22). In addition to offending religious sensibilities, the novel is seen by critics as conforming to "the conventions of the European novel as a secular cultural form" (Morton 45; cf. Srivastava 70, 85) and even as advocating "a secularist conception of religion and the public sphere" (Neuman 28).

These interpretations are not without merit, as *The Satanic Verses* does at times appear to uphold the very binary – religious/secular – that postsecularism attempts to dismantle. Secular characters are portrayed much more positively and as having the power to transcend their circumstances. When Baal arrives at godlessness, he is suddenly no longer afraid of death (378-79). And when Saladin's father, Changez, dies, it is described as an admirable, secular death – one in which love is at the forefront as he finally reconciles with his son. In the end, the self-consciously secular Saladin seems to have a happy ending: he makes peace with his father, embraces his changing homeland, and enters into a new, promising relationship with Zeeny Vakil. The zealot Gibreel, on the other hand, succumbs to his madness and, after pushing his girlfriend to her death from a rooftop, shoots himself in the head. Yet, despite these secularist biases, there are others who interpret *The Satanic Verses* as dismantling rather than upholding binaries – most specifically the opposition of secular/religious that the text otherwise appears to foster. Neuman sees Rushdie's work as "an analysis of the complex and everywhere entangled modes of religious and secular being" (23), and Majumdar similarly claims that "rather than an aesthetics that enables moral and physical superiority or submission, there is an aesthetics that explores mutating and mingling conditions" (11). In many cases, critics apply the "irreverence and ironic challenge, even mockery, of the expected, the accepted, and the assumed" (Ratti, *Postsecular* 2) identified with Rushdie's fiction to both religious and secular metanarratives. For Clark, Rushdie's "love of the

metamorphic and inconstant … becomes a questioning of fundamental truths as they have been formulated by the great religions and myths of the past" (18). Tumminello makes a similar argument, though he extends this interpretation beyond religious truths to encompass "a critical ambivalence to essentialist ideas of both religion and secularism" (2). These arguments that *The Satanic Verses* is *not* simply a secular text – though also not simply religious – appear postsecular in nature. However, the critics who make them primarily view the novel as postmodern, given its tendency to deconstruct binaries by challenging conventions, including literary conventions and genres.

Postmodernity's challenge to essentialist metanarratives and centres of authority and representations is visible throughout *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie implements Gibreel's dream sequences as a vehicle for questioning assumptions by problematizing distinctions between "fact" and "fiction" and challenging the assumption that "facticity" is "sufficient ground for historical knowledge" (Mondal, "Representing" 423). Indeed, though *The Satanic Verses* is commonly viewed as simultaneously postmodern and secular (Tumminello 20), or postmodern and realist (Nasta 155), its postmodernist tendencies – its challenging of fact and authority, inclusion of unresolved contradictions, ontological play, and foregrounding of constructedness – apply to both realism (through the implementation of magic realism) and to secularism. The instances of magic realism that occur throughout the novel appear supernatural and also have religious connotations, thereby undermining the prominence that the novel, as a secular literary form, otherwise gives to the profane. *The Satanic Verses* includes instances of the magic and the miraculous that are framed in religious terms, challenging previous interpretations that frame the text as secular. For example, although Gibreel's schizophrenia renders his experiences questionable, the narrator complicates matters by

validating them through the reactions of others around him. Gibreel adopts the persona

of archangel – an archetypally religious figure – and after he blows Azraeel, his trumpet,

the shop attendants witness a halo over his head: "*Say what you like … but we saw what*

we saw" (448). This echoes the earlier episode when immigration officers find Gibreel

in Rosa Diamond's house:

> It became clear to *everyone* there that a pale, golden light was emanating from
>
> the direction of the man in the smoking jacket, was in fact streaming softly
>
> outwards from a point immediately behind his head. Inspector Lime never
>
> referred to that light again, and if he had been asked about it would have denied
>
> ever having seen such a thing, a halo, in the late twentieth century. (142,
>
> emphasis added)

The narrator acknowledges the unlikelihood of these occurrences, and particularly the

appearance of sacred images in a profane age. Yet, despite these doubts, he also

proposes that they did, in fact, take place (because "everyone" saw them), and that the

sacred and the profane – the religious and the secular – both inhabit the novel, however

unlikely this coexistence might be.

In *The Postsecular Imagination*, Manav Ratti presents Rushdie's novel as a

postsecular affirmation of "hybridity, the migrant's eye-view, literature, newness, and

love" (143) and as an attempt to "recognize and accept difference, whether religious,

racial, ethnic, or otherwise" (144). Beyond this, however, *The Satanic Verses* also

performs the postsecular function of dismantling the binaries upheld by the

secularization thesis and a long history of religious authority: the binaries of religious vs.

secular, or sacred vs. profane. While the novel itself has been deemed a secular form

(Morton 45; cf. Srivastava 70, 85), Ratti points out the inherently sacred status of

literature in western culture: "There was no public outcry against the burning of immigration laws, or against the burning of Rabbi Kaplan's prayer book re-defining Judaism. But when *The Satanic Verses* was burned, it became an affront to nothing less than the foundations of western civilization" (*Postsecular* 142). Given the simultaneously secular and sacred status of literature within Western culture, the form of the novel serves as a prime platform with which to present postsecular concerns, but it is in the content itself that *The Satanic Verses* proves itself a postsecular text.

Rushdie performs the postsecular function of decentring the authority of religious and secular metanarratives; however, he takes this practice one step further by decentring the authority of the text itself through narratorial intrusion, leaving readers with questions rather than answers. While this strategy could be considered postmodern, it becomes primarily postsecular through the identity of the Satanic narrator[23] who combines the postmodern questioning of authority, "truth," and tradition with postsecular imagery of the sacred and profane. Critics like Finney argue that *The Satanic Verses* is as "blind to its determination to establish its superior status" as the worldviews it contests (73). However, the narrator decentres textual authority in part by avoiding authoritative claims or statements. Rather, he[24] only hints at an identity and offers more questions than answers. In response to his own questions, "Who am I? Who else is there?" (4), the narrator asks, "Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?" (10) – an allusion, perhaps, to an older religious assumption that rock music is of the devil or to the common view that in *Paradise Lost*, at least, Satan is the most compelling character.

[23] This dissertation adopts the well-argued interpretations of Roger Y. Clark, who identifies the narrator of *The Satanic Verses* as Satan himself (129, 131, 136).

[24] Although the narrator's gender is never explicitly made known, this work will use male pronouns in reference to him/her/them, given the portrayal of Satan as male by religious tradition.

However, the narrator never explicitly claims a Satanic identity, and readers are forced to rely on conjecture rather than fact regarding the narrator's identity. As Majumdar argues, the "fugitive identity" of the narrator thwarts "divine certainty and the divine need for control" (114). Moreover, as Clark also points out, the intertextuality of *The Satanic Verses* and William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* frames Rushdie's novel alongside Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" (Clark 142), suggesting that while the novel houses the incident of the "satanic verses" in Gibreel's dream, its contents could also be interpreted *as* satanic verses themselves: the product of a satanic narrator.

The concept of the marriage of heaven and hell, referenced throughout the novel, embraces the combination of opposites, and although these opposites are both housed within a religious tradition, *The Satanic Verses* uses this foundation (of dismantling religiously inflected binaries) to lead into the dismantling of the binary between traditions. The Satanic narrator is a postsecular figure: he is taken from a religious traditional narrative, but he thwarts the very tradition he embodies, both upholding and dismantling a religious metanarrative in a secular literary world. While his framing voice brings a religious element into a work often deemed secular, he challenges the tradition he represents by confounding elements of it that have been widely accepted. For instance, he removes God as authority from the narrative: "Butbutbut: God isn't in this picture" (112). While the narrator claims to "know the truth, obviously" (10), he also refuses to provide answers: "I'm saying nothing. Don't ask me to clear things up one way or the other; the time of revelations is long gone. … Where's the pleasure if you're always intervening to give hints, change the rules, fix the fights?" (408). The Satanic narrator casts himself, rather than God, as Creator, and then removes the figure of Creator from the story, claiming, "I'm leaving now. The man's going to sleep" (409). By

consistently intervening in the tale, he draws attention to the authoritative function of the narrator only to then debunk it.

Directly contradicting the presumption that religious worldviews provide answers, the narrator deconstructs religious tradition by complicating, rather than upholding, the traditional dichotomies of Abrahamic religion: that is, angel/devil, God/Satan, and good/evil. After Gibreel and Saladin survive their fall, the narrator refuses to specify which of the two was the "miracle worker," and "what type – angelic, satanic – was Farishta's song" (10). By blurring the distinctions between binaries within the grand religious narrative of which he is a part, the Satanic narrator provides an internal deconstruction of a religious worldview. This is an inherently postsecular act, as the narrator embodies both the paradoxical presence and deconstructed absence of a grand narrative, rather than the secular deconstruction of a religious worldview, or vice versa. While it could be maintained that the text does not open its postsecular worldview to criticism, the pluralism espoused by postsecular theory and *The Satanic Verses* prevents the adoption of one grand narrative and combats essentialist tendencies.

The text's postsecular dismantling of secular and religious binaries is further apparent in the changes undergone by Saladin and Gibreel, both of whom come to similarly embody sacred and profane identities. Saladin, for one, comes across as secular. He himself acknowledges, "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" (135). However, Saladin undergoes a physical transformation that is both sacred and profane. As he mutates "away from manhood and towards – yes – goatishness" (275), he comes to embody the religiously inflected image of a devil. The narrator uses this occurrence to uphold a pluralist approach to culture and religion not

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only by referring to Saladin as a goatish devil but also by referring to "his continuing metamorphosis into some species of bottled djinn" (275). Through his transformation, Saladin is forced to acknowledge a reality beyond his secular worldview, and he comments that "what you believe depends on what you've seen – not only in what is visible, but what you are prepared to look in the face" (252). First, wondering if he is dead, Saladin realizes that "his long-standing rejection of the Eternal was beginning to look pretty foolish" (158). He is then forced to reassess reason and rationality, as "he felt a sharp kick land on his ribs, painful and realistic enough to make him doubt the truth of all … hallucination theories. He returned his attention to the actual, to this present" (158) – to the coexistence of his magical transformation and secular time. However, while Saladin metamorphoses into an iconic religious figure, his transformation is equally profane, affecting the corporeal body in grotesque ways. The narrator emphasizes the inherently physical aspect of Saladin's mutation:

> His thighs had grown uncommonly wide and powerful, as well as hairy. Below the knee the hairiness came to a halt, and his legs narrowed into tough, bony, almost fleshless calves, terminating in a pair of shiny, cloven hoofs, such as one might find on any billy-goat. (157)

Rushdie describes Saladin's phallus as large and erect, his voice like that of a pig (157, 161) – all elements contributing to John Clement Ball's reading of the character as grotesque and abject (*Satire* 149).[25] His greatest abjection occurs when he is forced by immigration officers to eat his own shit off the floor (160).

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[25] This reading employs Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theories of the grotesque as implemented in Ball's (2003) reading of *The Satanic Verses*; it also incorporates the concept of the abject as described by Julia Kristeva (1982). For a more thorough analysis of the grotesque in *The Satanic Verses*, see Ball (2003).

When Saladin comes to embody both sacred and profane elements simultaneously, the borders of his body are opened and rendered fluid by the process. In Bakhtinian language, Majumdar describes the grotesque as "radically express[ing] a problematization of the inside and the outside. Migration, as an act proceeding from within a defined space into another – as a movement from the inside to the outside – manufactures the conflation of the familiar and the unfamiliar that we find in the grotesque" (101-02). Thus, "It is in th[e] sense of the unfamiliar that the figure of the migrant is a form of the grotesque and the grotesque, an instance of migrant form" (Majumdar 102). Moreover, it is as a symbol of change and hybridity that the grotesque, sacred/profane body of the goatish Saladin is looked up to by other migrants. While aspects of the hybrid and the grotesque are often associated only with abjection, the fluidity of Saladin's body becomes a powerful, postsecular symbol of the (migrant) body's capacity to transcend essentialist identities, including the classifications of sacred and profane, allowing instead for a hybrid coexistence of multiple identities and forms. Moreover, the mutation of Saladin's body is doubly postsecular in its devilish form, as the symbol of the devil itself embodies the coexistence of the sacred and the profane. In Judaic, Christian, and Islamic tradition, the devil is an integral element of the religious narrative; however, it also symbolizes a challenge to the divine hierarchy around which the Abrahamic religions revolve. Although an indispensable facet of these religions, the devil is associated with elements deemed profane, rather than sacred.

Saladin finds his counterpart in Gibreel, and not because of the devil/angel identities associated with them. Whereas Saladin eventually comes to embody a hybrid migrant sensibility and cultural pluralism, Gibreel progresses toward essentialism and away from postsecularism. Initial descriptions of Gibreel place him in a sphere of both

magic realism and secularism, wherein he embraces both sacred and profane worldviews. For instance, Gibreel is fully accepting of the miracle of his survival after the airplane explosion, implying, as Morton states, "a way of understanding … through a non-secular epistemological paradigm" (51). Moreover, his background also combines sacred and profane imagery during his inexplicable illness. The hospital referred to his sickness, and later recovery, as not only a "freak mystery," but also "an act of God," "an act of the Supreme" (28, 29), framing it as a sacred occurrence, which is reinforced by the numerical symbolism of the "seven days" for which it lasted (28), as with the Biblical Creation story. However, Gibreel's illness is also a profane, highly physical occurrence. His body becomes grotesque as blood seeps out of his rectum and penis and threatens to burst from his eyes, nose, and ears (28). Furthermore, after asking for proof of Allah's existence, he recovers to realize that he had "lost his faith" (29).

Despite his "metamorphosis" from believer to atheist (30), Gibreel, like Saladin, is nonetheless confronted with irrational supernatural experiences: "The terror of losing his mind to a paradox, of being unmade by what he no longer believed existed…. Yet how else was he to account for the miracles, metamorphoses and apparitions of recent days?" (189). After being taken in by Rosa Diamond, the English woman who first discovers the men after their fall, Gibreel finds that Rosa's needs were "in charge" of his body (143): "At the very moment that his rational mind was considering the possibility of an ulcer or appendicitis, the rest of his brain whispered the truth, which was that he was being held prisoner and manipulated by the force of Rosa's will" (150). Gibreel functions as a secular character experiencing sacred, or miraculous, incidents for a time, but soon thereafter he becomes a singular, essentialist character whose madness and eventual demise can be attributed to his lack of compromise.

Whereas the eventual re-entry of religion into his life seems to signal a postsecular state of coexistence for this secular, atheistic character, Gibreel begins to uphold, rather than dismantle, binaries. Embracing the persona of the archangel, Gibreel also adopts the ideological dichotomies from his dream sequence. He "saw now that the choice was simple: the infernal love of the daughters of men, or the celestial adoration of God" (321). As he loses "the last traces of his humanity" (336) during his descent into schizophrenia, Gibreel finds himself unable to reconcile the coexistence of human love and divine love in his life. In what is perhaps a commentary on, or response to, the association of religious metanarratives with repressed sexuality, Gibreel perceives women as wishing to "bind him in the chains of desires and songs" (336). He comes to view his girlfriend Alleluia, in particular, as the "bringer of tribulation, creatrix of strife, of soreness of the heart! Siren, temptress, fiend in human form!" (321).

Majumdar interprets the novel's ending and Gibreel's suicide as affirming the "power of the repressive grotesque, even as the novel mourns the shaping factors for such power" (115); yet, it would appear that it is Gibreel's avoidance of the grotesque, rather than an embrace of it, that contributes to his demise (see Ball, *Satire* 123). Gibreel's first conversion experience in the hospital results from exposure to the abject nature of his own, fluid body and his mortality, after which he embraces both the sacred and the profane – refusing a specific religious narrative but nonetheless accepting miraculous, supernatural events as real. However, Gibreel's second conversion takes him from postsecular pluralism to essentialism and triggers a dismissal of his grotesque body, which in turn contributes to his illness; indeed, "the medical opinion was that starvation had contributed in no small degree to his hallucinations" (341). Gibreel refuses to participate in the grotesque act of swallowing, which places him in direct

contrast with other migrants like Hind Sufyan, who eats until she resembles "the subcontinent without frontiers, because food passes across any boundary you care to mention" (246). Gibreel, on the other hand, does not allow food to pass through the borders of his body and reveal its porousness and instability – both of which were made apparent during his first illness.

Gibreel's refusal to render fluid the borders of his body contributes to his madness and resultant inability to transgress other borders and binaries as well. When he decides to film a new version of the Ramayana story, he does not complicate the religious characters but merely inverts them: "The heroes and heroines had become corrupt and evil instead of pure and free from sin. Here was a lecherous, drunken Rama and a flighty Sita; while Ravana, the demon-king, was depicted as an upright and honest man" (539). Such examples of essentialism lead Saladin to observe of Gibreel (and by association Allie), "No compromises for them; they were going for broke. Whereas he, Saladin, had declared himself content to live under the same roof as his wife and her lover boy. Which was the better way? Captain Ahab drowned, he reminded himself; it was the trimmer, Ishmael, who survived" (435). Foreshadowed by this perception, the novel ends with Gibreel's manic murder of Allie and his own suicide, followed by Saladin's decision to turn away from the secularist historical and nationalist metanarratives to which he had previously subscribed and embrace a worldview of newness and cultural pluralism. In Saladin and Gibreel, we are presented with two complex characters that nonetheless become each other's antitheses. To classify either as merely religious or merely secular would be to impose a hierarchy of worldviews, but the portrayal of their evolving worldviews allows for a different hierarchy to be imposed

– one in which a postsecular coexistence of multiple narratives and identities trumps the final essentialist, reductive worldview of Gibreel.

Rushdie's alleged "rejection of subject-object dialectic" (Khan 43) occurs in his depiction of Saladin and Gibreel as the "twin protagonists" of the novel (Dawson 126) – a description that implies similarity, despite the differences that lead critics like Ratti to view them as opposites. Unlike the character inversion Gibreel pursues in his modern-day retelling of the Ramayana, Saladin and Gibreel are not simple embodiments of worldviews, or opposites of one another. In fact, as Rekha Merchant argues, the religious binaries represented by Saladin and Gibreel may not actually be opposites at all:

> This notion of separation of functions, light versus dark, evil versus good, may be straightforward enough in Islam… but go back a bit and you see that it's a pretty recent fabrication…. It isn't until the Book of Chronicles, merely fourth century BC, that the word *shaitan* is used to mean a being, and not only an attribute of God. (323)

Whereas Saladin and Gibreel represent different approaches to the adoption of a worldview, they are nonetheless complicated characters whose mutated personas as good/evil and angel/devil are deconstructed. The binaries they represent in their transformative states are dismantled through their joining and through their individual complexity.

As they fall from the sky and begin to mutate into angelic and devilish figures, Rushdie describes them as one, as "Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha," united in their "angelicdevilish fall" (5). During their time in the sky, they are surrounded by clouds "ceaselessly metamorphosing, gods into bulls, women into spiders, men into wolves.

Hybrid cloud-creatures pressed in upon them" (6). A mixture of both air and water, the clouds represent the opposite of fixity and physical boundaries. Moreover, the space of the air itself is significant, representing as it does the liminality of those travelling on and across it, similar to the function of the ocean before air-travel became the prominent means of travel and migration. In the space of the air – the space of their migration and consequently their transformation – Saladin desires to repel Gibreel from him, but "instead of uttering words of rejection he opened his arms and Farishta swam into them until they were embracing head-to-tail" (6). He then comes to recognize a "fluidity, an indistinctness, at the edges of them" (8) and is "seized by the notion that he, too, had acquired the quality of cloudiness, becoming metamorphic, hybrid, as if he were growing into the person whose head nestled now between his legs and whose legs were wrapped around his long, patrician neck" (6-7).

Their common experiences of migration and mutation unite Saladin and Gibreel, despite their differences. Further, their joining symbolizes the dissolution of the binaries and boundaries between hierarchies – good/evil, angel/devil, self/other – that can result from the state of "limbo" and "the syncretism of 'cultural impurity'" (Nasta 134) accompanying migration. Saladin's perceived connection to Gibreel continues throughout the novel, as he realizes that "he was forever joined to the adversary, their arms locked around one another's bodies, mouth to mouth, head to tail, as when they fell to earth: when they *settled*" (353). However, neither proves to be the direct antithesis of the other, debunking concepts of essentialism that accompany most metanarratives, religious or otherwise. Saladin – "evil Mr Chamcha" – selflessly runs into a burning building to find and save Mishal, Anahita, and Hind (466), and Gibreel "surrenders his zealotry" (Dawson 144) to save his adversary from the flames, revealing the complexity

of each man's character and relationship with one another. The narrator asks, "Is it possible that evil is never total, that its victory, no matter how overwhelming, is never absolute?" (467), and the complexity of Saladin and Gibreel as characters who, while symbolizing religious entities, nevertheless deviate from their roles illustrates this very possibility. Moreover, the narrator interjects, to define Saladin as "evil" and Gibreel as "good" sounds "dangerously like an intentionalist fallacy," and "such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, 'pure' – an utterly fantastic notion! – cannot, must not, suffice" (427). The fluidity of the lines of their bodies and their joining in the sky also contests the tradition of opposites and binaries upon which Abrahamic religious tradition rests. The symbolic union of Saladin and Gibreel performs the postsecular function of resisting a religious metanarrative while upholding religious tradition through the deployment of sacred imagery.

In "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie writes, "Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase" (12). It is perhaps to emphasize the fractured nature of human perception that *The Satanic Verses* challenges authoritative narrative and celebrates doubt over "divine certainties" (Srivastava 77). Critics agree that Rushdie is committed to establishing pluralism and overcoming boundaries in the text (Tumminello iii; Ratti, *Postsecular* 157; Khan 44, 67), and the narrator himself suggests what is perhaps the key message – if one can be said to exist – of the work: "Question: What is the opposite of faith? Not disbelief. Too final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief. Doubt" (92). Juxtaposing faith and disbelief – religion and secularism, sacred and profane – the narrator turns to another option: that

is, the questioning of certainties and a willingness to challenge, critique, and bend one's worldview. After Allie kicks Gibreel out of her home, the figure of "God" tells him, "We are not obliged to explain Our nature to you…. Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as *Oopar* and *Neechay*, or whether We be pure, stark, extreme" (319). Though the narratorial Creator-character does not explicitly validate either purity or plurality, the text itself offers a postsecular advocacy of fluidity, doubt, pluralism, and self-critique of one's worldviews, as well as a negative portrayal of essentialist beliefs. Voicing a question that is asked multiple times throughout the text, the female terrorist who eventually blows up the *Bostan* asks, "When a great idea comes into the world, a great cause, certain crucial questions are asked of it…. History asks us: what manner of cause are we? Are we uncompromising, absolute, strong, or will we show ourselves to be timeservers, who compromise, trim and yield?" (81). Saladin's internal response suggests the text's approach to metanarratives. "Unbendingness can also be monomania, he wanted to say, it can be tyranny, and also it can be brittle, whereas what is flexible can also be humane, and strong enough to last" (81). The unbendingness of characters is associated with violent outcomes throughout the novel, whereas Saladin's flexibility makes him strong enough to survive. Through his character outcomes, but also by problematizing religious and secular histories and worldviews, Rushdie illustrates how doubt provides a foundation for critiques of and transcendence over the traditional metanarratives that uphold the very binaries postsecular theory attempts to overcome.

The Postsecular vs. Religious Metanarrative

That Rushdie critiques religion is perhaps an obvious point to make; yet, he criticizes forms of secularism as well – something less discussed, given the common reception of *The Satanic Verses* as secular. Rushdie undermines aspects of both the religious and the secular in this work – though, to borrow Finney's argument, "To undermine is not necessarily to destroy" (71). In "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie comments that

> Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (12)

In *The Satanic Verses*, he attempts to shed light on the inadequacy of the materials, specifically the dogmas, upon which people base their meanings and their worldviews. Targeting religion – primarily Islam, although he never refers to it by name – and English secular nationalism, the text undermines the authority of each by questioning, and even rewriting, their originary narratives.

The Satanic Verses most infamously challenges the "narrative" aspect of (Muslim) religious metanarrative by problematizing the accepted purity of the origin story – the context upon which the majority of a religion's ideologies and beliefs are founded. Rushdie's text does this by challenging narrative history itself, revealing the fragmented, impure nature of history by incorporating controversial episodes from Islamic history into his fictional discourse. The most well-known are the passages in which the text suggests through Gibreel's dream sequence that the contentious "satanic

verses" were inspired by neither an archangel nor a devil, but by the prophet Mohammad himself (110-12, 123), as well as the portrayal of Salman the Persian tampering with the messages Mahound dictates to him, implying that the holy text is not fully divine (367-68). Though they are surrounded by fictional discourse, the aforementioned episodes function as a criticism of recorded history and an example of the multitudinous, impure nature of historical narrative, for both represent contested information that was present in some historical sources and absent from others. According to Morton,

> While some of Rushdie's critics take issue with *The Satanic Verses* on the grounds that the novel fails to present an accurate historical account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, *The Satanic Verses* states the impossibility of recovering such a coherent history by exposing the lacunae, contradictions and multiple meanings embedded in early historical sources such as al-Tabari's *Annals*. (54)

The incident of the satanic verses is mentioned by Muslim annalists al-Waqidi (c. 747-823 CE), ibn Sa'd (784-845 CE), and al-Tabari (838-923 CE), and it was later accepted as authentic by the medieval hadith scholar alAsqalani (1372-1448 CE); however, the episode was considered "inauthentic" by Bukhari (810-870 CE) and Muslim (818-874 CE), the compilers of the two canonical compendia of hadith (see Mondal, "Representing" 426). Salman the Persian's interference with Mahound's dictation is also present in al-Tabari's *Annals*, "in which Abdullah ibn Sa'ad, one of the Prophet's scribes, temporarily lost his faith after an incorrect transcription of the Prophet's words went unnoticed" (Morton 55).[26]

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[26] According to Mohammed A. Bamyeh, the incident of the satanic verses represents a "temporary ideological truce" (206) expressed in the *surah* of al-Kafirun, which asked "idolaters" to leave the

Incorporating examples of historical controversies highlights the inaccuracies that are always present in narratives, whether errors of inclusion or of exclusion. This postmodern challenge to narrative itself renders the resultant metanarrative less pure, and as such less commanding: an ironic outcome, as the incident of the satanic verses directly relates to the "*What kind of idea…*" questions that are scattered throughout the novel. Mahound considers whether Allah is so unyielding that he will not embrace the goddesses (111), whereas Salman argues that flexibility "weakens us, renders us absurd. We cease to be dangerous. Nobody will ever take us seriously again" (106). However, it is not flexibility but rather the insistence on traditional narrative authority and purity that, when faced with historical inconsistencies, weakens metanarrative. In yet another possible instance of "satanic verses," Rushdie suggests that the further one is removed from historical origin, the less certain of the facts one can be. Shortly before Gibreel takes his life, as the text switches from third-person prose to first-person verse narration, Gibreel recites, "It was so / it was not / in a long time forgot" (544).

Through the depiction of the Imam in particular, Rushdie also portrays essentialist, anti-secular religion as dangerous. The narrator argues that "from the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable" (95), and while the Imam does not explicitly set himself up against secularity and modernization, his clear position as such can be gleaned from his speeches regarding clocks, time, and history:

Muslims in peace with their new faith in return for the Muslim abandonment of "insistence on their ideological hegemony … that was inconsistent with the pluralistic ethic underpinning the function of the idols" (206). Different accounts suggest that this *surah* was a response to offers that all Meccans (Muslims and non-Muslims) worship the idols one year and Allah the next, or both simultaneously, which posed the threat of integrating Allah into "existing ontotheology by being assigned the status of a somewhat more prominent idol" for the sake of communal harmony (206). In contrast to many modern-day representations of Islam as rigid and essentialist, the incident of the satanic verses presents early Islam as open and flexible.

"We will make a revolution … that is a revolt not only against a tyrant, but against history." For there is an enemy beyond Ayesha, and it is History herself. History is the blood-wine that must no longer be drunk. History … 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. (210)

The Imam's pursuit of "the eternity, the timelessness, of God" and resistance to "calendars," "America," and "time" (211) places him in direct opposition to the secular (*saeculum*) as representing "the age, generation, or world to which humanity belongs, in opposition to the timelessness and world of God" (Ratti, *Postsecular* 5). His religious imperatives demand singularity and revoke pluralism – "Burn the books and trust the Book; shred the papers and hear the Word" (211) – and his commands are linked directly with violence and death. In response to the Imam's declaration that he will show them Love, Gibreel "sees the Imam grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole" (215).

It is important to note that even though Islam (or, Mahound's unnamed religion) is at the forefront, Rushdie's criticism encompasses authoritative religious narrative in general, rather than Islam alone. The unnamed religion of Hind, in which Al-Lat figures prominently, is equated with that of Mahound. Like the Imam, Hind is associated with eternal time. Her "physical unchangingness" and "eternal youth" give the illusion that she is invincible; and her "bulls" are "refusals of time, of history, of age," insisting on "the status of Jahilians as custodians of the divine" (361). Just as Al-Lat (*the goddess*) is

"Allah's opposite and equal" (100), Hind says to Mahound, "I am your equal … and also your opposite" (121). Because Al-Lat's opposition to Al-Lah is "implacable, irrevocable, [and] engulfing" (121), she declares there will be no truce between them: "Between Allah and the Three27 there can be no peace. I don't want it. I want the fight. To the death; that is the kind of idea I am" (121). In short, it is not difficult to understand why *The Satanic Verses* has so often been classified as a secular, or at the very least anti-religious text; yet, it is postsecularism, rather than secularism, toward which the novel gestures.

The Postsecular vs. Secular Metanarrative

The portrayal of multiple religions as problematic could easily be interpreted as a secular strategy. Some critics are loath to acquit Rushdie of such accusations, arguing that "secular fundamentalism … remains invisible to him because it constitutes the ideological ground on which he stands" (Mondal, "Representing" 432). Nonetheless, Rushdie does challenge a secular nationalist metanarrative in *The Satanic Verses*, problematizing concepts of cultural purity and narratives of racial (and to an extent religious) superiority. As discussed in Chapter One, one of the failures of most postsecular criticism is the tendency to group Western Christianity under the category of the secular, or else to approach it as the only religion indicated by the broad term "religious" – both tactics of framing "other" (i.e., non-Western) religions and/or secularisms outside narratives of progress. The postsecularity of Rushdie's work serves as a response to this, challenging the very narrative upon which incomplete postsecular theories sometimes base their assumptions – that is, upon the foundation of nationalism.

27 Here, Hind is referring to the three primary goddesses of Jahilia: Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Al-Manat.

While Rushdie briefly touches on Hindu nationalism, the secular nationalism that permeates *The Satanic Verses* is the continuing nationalism of Empire, which upholds a narrative of Western supremacy, whiteness, and English cultural essentialism, to the exclusion of all (i.e., non-Western, non-white) others.

In *Writing British Muslims*, Ahmed argues that "an overt valorisation of Saladin/secularism (as opposed to Gibreel/religion) within contemporary Britain … would come dangerously close to valorising hegemonic British culture and disturbing the anti-racist core of the Brickhall narrative" (81). This may be an oversimplification, as Saladin's and Gibreel's various conversions throughout the novel can be used to challenge interpretations of the pair as direct embodiments of religion and secularism. However, Ahmed's point should not be overlooked, as it does frame Saladin as a flawed character – something that is often passed over by focusing on each character's final outcome, rather than their growth and journeys. Through what Ahmed refers to as Saladin's assimilation (81), Rushdie portrays and problematizes the character's complex relationship with England as a colonial subject who nonetheless fetishizes English culture. Saladin's paradoxical English nationalism and anglophilia and his secularism go hand-in-hand, sparked by the rage he feels toward his father and his "determination to become the thing his father was-not-could-never-be, that is, a goodandproper Englishman" (43). When falling from the sky, Gibreel sings a song of globalization and trade (5), whereas Saladin sings "Rule, Britannia" (6). Not only does he love London above all, damning India and the "hooks" it has in him (398, 35), but his views of England are skewed, based on the myth of English nationalism rather than real, fluid, changing culture. His English wife Pam explains that "the place never stopped being a postcard to him. You couldn't get him to look at what was really real" (175). She even

realizes that, for him, she personified England: "Chamcha was not in love with her at all, but with that voice stinking of Yorkshire pudding and hearts of oak, that hearty, rubicund voice of ye olde dream-England which he so desperately wanted to inhabit" (180). In short, Saladin had succumbed to the narrative of the superiority of "true" English culture, though this metanarrative did not contain a space for him to inhabit.

Saladin's reverence for Englishness has dark, catastrophic implications for him. He fragments his own identity in an attempt to adopt an English one – something he ironically cannot accomplish, given English nationalism's exclusion of others. Saladin's migration in and of itself is not problematic; rather, it is his disavowal of doubleness (see Nasta 135) that causes issues. Saladin adopts the English nationalist view of India as a barbaric "other" (34), coming to detest its hold on him. His process of self-fragmentation begins when he shortens his Indian name Salahuddin to Saladin, something much easier for an English audience to grasp. His last name is later shortened from Chamchawala to Chamcha by a theatrical agent "for commercial reasons" (45), contributing to the further simplification, or amputation, of a complex migrant identity. After his fall, Saladin is subject to extreme incidents of racism, and his disillusionment with England finally heightens when he is subjected to the immigrant experience a second time over. From the beach, where "there were … fifty-seven uniformed constables … because nobody wanted to miss the fun, the thrill of the chase" (139), to his transportation in the police van, where he is forced to eat his own feces, to his time in the detention centre and later the Shaandaar Café, and finally to the visa queue, where he is "insulted" because of the very terrorists who had blown him up (511-12), Saladin is forced to reckon with his former idealization and the present realities of England: "'This isn't England,' he thought, not for the first or last time. How could it be, after all; where in that moderate

and common-sensical land was there room for such a police van in whose interior such events as these might plausibly transpire" (158).

By depicting the racism and violence inherent in London, Rushdie problematizes English nationalism's strategy of self-identity and exclusion. Instead of the land of polite civilization, the London in which Hind Sufyan lives is

> a demon city in which anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt like your ears drop off but when you turned in the direction of the words you saw only empty air and smiling faces, and every day you heard about this boy, that girl, beaten up by ghosts. – Yes, a land of phantom imps, how to explain. (250)

The evolving, multicultural make-up of London's neighborhoods reveals the nationalist narrative to be impure and insufficient, holding as it does to the essentialist perception of whiteness and cultural purity in England. Rushdie also critiques the media's role in the propagation of this incomplete narrative, explaining that a television camera "is limited to what klieg lights will show" (454) and "chooses sides" (455). The side chosen by the cameras in *The Satanic Verses* does not correspond with the narrative of the immigrant experience in London. When the police smash up Club Hot Wax, for instance, it "happens, however – as does a great deal else – in places which the camera cannot see" (457). Or, to rephrase the narrator' sentiment, it happens in places the camera *does not wish* to see. Club Hot Wax is a central hub for the immigrant community Saladin joins, and by overlooking the events that take place there, the cameras representing public awareness not only disregard the importance of the immigrant population but also censor images of police violence against immigrants.

Saladin's own belief in the English metanarrative is challenged when he finds himself among other Indian immigrants, from whom he had previously isolated himself, believing his Indian heritage to be averse to Englishness. When Muhammad asks the devil-bodied Saladin, "Where else would you go to heal your disfigurements and recover your normal health? Where else but here, with us, among your own people, your own kind?" (253), Saladin replies, "I'm not your kind.… You're not my people. I've spent half my life trying to get away from you" (253). Later, after learning that he thinks of himself as English, Anahita asks, "What about us? … What do you think we are?" (259). At this moment, Saladin is forced to reconsider the narrative of Englishness he had adopted. "But they weren't British, he wanted to tell them: not *really*, not in any way he could recognize. And yet his old certainties were slipping away by the moment, along with his old life" (259). By coming to accept a version of the English narrative that encompasses immigrants like him, Saladin makes a postsecular gesture toward pluralism – specifically a pluralism that encompasses Eastern and Western heritages, disavowing the exclusivist form of European secularism gesturing back toward the colonial era. Saladin should be valorized, though not for his secularism *per se*. Rather, his final acceptance of pluralism over singular concepts of belonging makes him a postsecular character.

Saladin's transformation into a devil because of English perceptions of him as evil harkens back to the Judeo-Christian religious foundation upon which English secularism is situated. Priests in London even link "the term *black* and the sin *blasphemy*" (288). Saladin is effectively rendered abject and other by his mutation, but his eventual acceptance of the pluralism of English society leads him to contest this status without attempting to change himself. Finally determining that "he would enter

into his new self; he would be what he had become: loud, stenchy, hideous, outsize, grotesque, inhuman, powerful" (289), Saladin embraces his otherness: "*I am*, he accepted, *that I am*. Submission" (289).28 Embracing his status as other, Saladin challenges the stigma he had previously avoided, "rejecting … a portrait of himself and Gibreel as *monstrous*" (408). As a figure of the devil, Saladin comes to represent "extremeness" (258); more than just an individual, he becomes a symbol for change: "Everyone began to think of him as *real*, as a being who had crossed the frontier, evading the normal controls, and was now roaming loose about the city. Illegal migrant, outlaw king, foul criminal or race-hero, Saladin Chamcha was getting to be true" (288). By making himself known and crossing the "frontier" separating the real (i.e., accepted narrative) from the unreal, Saladin visibly challenges the narrative of English nationalism, which leads to heightened attacks on people of "tint" (288) as others attempt to defend the narrative. Nevertheless, his existence, accompanied by his decision to claim that reality on his own terms, places ethnic pluralism onto the public scene as a force the secular nationalist metanarrative will have to recognize and with which it must contend.

As an essentialist, Gibreel is also confronted with (and confounded by) the fluidity and plurality of London's geography. Setting out on a religious mission as a self-perceived archangel to convert London itself, Gibreel takes with him the *A to Z* map of Geographers' London, a secular book he nonetheless approaches as the sacred text that will redeem the city (322). Using this book, Gibreel approaches the physical city geographically, holding to boundaries and street limits as elements that will guide him

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28 This terminology offers yet another interesting parallel between traditional separations of good and evil, as he makes the same statement made by the Abrahamic God to Moses (see *The Holy Bible*, Exodus 3:14).

through "Proper London" (326, 459). *A to Z* performs a secular, constricting function, allowing no room for growth or change. Likewise, the nationalist narrative of England is one of unchangingness; however, around Gibreel, London continues to change and fluctuate, revealing its "protean" and "chameleon" character (201). In Gibreel's eyes, London's instabilities and evolutions make it evil: "The city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for Gibreel to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred" (327). London becomes "vague, amorphous," allowing "stark, imperative oppositions [to drown] beneath an endless drizzle of greys" (459, 354). The colours highlight a challenge to the racial binary, and by extension the nationalist narrative, while the city's physical ambiguity resists identifying boundaries, accomplishing a postmodern, but ultimately postsecular, goal of challenging both sacred and profane metanarratives and opting instead for coexistence.

Alongside the question, "What kind of idea are you," Rushdie frequently asks, "How does newness come into the world?" (8). The first line of the novel introduces what quickly becomes a thematic phrase throughout: "To be born again … first you have to die" (3; cf. 547). For the new to be brought about, the old must move aside – in the case of postsecularism, the new involves the embrace of a multicultural, globalized society transcending borders and boundaries both physically and ideologically, which must be accomplished through the death of the old, or the binaries enforcing schisms between secular and religious individuals, communities, symbols, worldviews, and geographies. The birth of "newness" occurs at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses* with the explosion of the plane – "a big bang" echoing "the birth of time" on "New Year's Day, or thereabouts" (4, 3). Falling through the sky, Saladin and Gibreel undergo a

"watery reincarnation" (5). However, the narrator continues to uphold a postsecular dismantling of boundaries by pointing out that while "rebirth" is "God stuff," "there are secular reincarnations too" (17). Significantly, in the end, Saladin completes his metaphorical process of rebirth, accompanied by the death of Gibreel. The pluralism of Saladin lives, while (or perhaps even because) the essentialism of Gibreel dies. This is not to suggest that Rushdie devalues the past. Saladin, after all, lives "*perpetually in the first instant of the future* [and] in the *present moment of the past*" (535). In his poignant claim that "the past is a country from which we have all emigrated," Rushdie refers to the "loss" of the past as "part of our common humanity" ("Imaginary" 12). Without demeaning the past, or its significant impact on one's life, Rushdie naturalizes the need to move beyond it without forgetting it. Saladin's final return to Bombay is surrounded by death and endings that enable a new beginning. Falling in love with his father on his deathbed becomes, for him "a renewing, life-giving thing" (523). It is a "process of renewal, of regeneration" completed by the re-entry of Zeeny (534) and by his decision to let go of his childhood home: "Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born" (547).

What exactly the "newness" is that is being born is not specified in *The Satanic Verses*, but this lack is not problematic. What newness offers – what postsecularism offers – is what Ratti terms a "working *through*" (*Postsecular* 209), which is, in fact, the goal. The postsecular, like the postmodern and the magic-realist, aims not to inscribe "new ontological realities," but to destabilize those that already exist "in order to posit a different basis for the assertion of new cultural identities" (Warnes 119). *The Satanic Verses* accomplishes this by contesting (post)colonial binaries, challenging ideological metanarratives, and advocating on behalf of a newness that will enable the coexistence

of identities and ideas and represent an openness that has previously been hindered by the physical, cultural, and ideological borders that are now being crossed more than ever – in literature, and around the world.

Postsecularism in *The Assassin's Song*

The Satanic Verses presents itself as an obvious subject for postsecular analysis. Not only is it infamous for addressing both secular and religious concerns, but previous literary criticism has already attempted to either affirm or deny the postsecular status of the novel. M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*, on the other hand, has received remarkably little critical attention[29] and has yet to be considered through a postsecular lens. *The Assassin's Song* follows the life of Karsan Dargawalla, first-born son of the Saheb of the shrine of Pir Bawa in Gujarat. As he grows, Karsan pulls away from the religious traditions and beliefs of his family home, eventually embracing secularism when he moves to America for schooling. When Karsan returns home after the 2002 Gujarat riots and the death of his father, he chooses to adopt the role of caretaker of Pirbaag, upholding religious tradition though no longer a religious believer himself. On a general level, the text may be deemed secular by some because Vassanji himself is secular – not unlike Rushdie. When he visited the shrine of a pir during a trip to India, Vassanji experienced "a solemn feeling, some respect and humility," but nonetheless concluded, "Here stands a rational, a rationalized being who is acquainted with spiritual longing but cannot yield to it" (*Place* 297). Vassanji self-identifies as a secular individual; however, to interpret a work according to its author's personal beliefs is to

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[29] Most of the existing literary criticism on *The Assassin's Song* can be found in *M.G. Vassanji: Essays on His Works*, edited by Asma Sayed (2014) and *The Transnational Imaginaries of M.G. Vassanji: Diaspora, Literature, and Culture*, edited by Sayed and Karim Murji (2018).

limit the scope of literature and its ability to act as a foundation upon which discourse takes place.

Like *The Satanic Verses*, *The Assassin's Song* also appears to uphold, rather than dismantle, the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane through its representation of love (perhaps, once more, as a commentary on religion's often problematic treatment of women and sexuality). For young Karsan, sacred, divine love and profane, corporal love cannot, or at the very least do not, coexist. This is initially suggested through the historical narrative of Pir Bawa, which first appears to make a postsecular gesture by combining sacred and profane forms of love in the conversation between the Sufi and 'the lady' about attaining union with God through union with his creation – even by loving a woman (19-20). However, this possibility is contested immediately, as Nur Fazal's "profane" experience of seduction results in a disconnect from the sacred: "He had succumbed to the simplest of temptations; his link with his beloved Master was broken. In his meditations he could no longer see or hear him. It was as if a wall had come between them, which he could not surmount" (20). Although the impact of this story on Karsan's understanding of his family's religion is not specified, he grows up believing that the separation between the sacred and the profane is necessary, as upheld by Bapu-ji's proverb: "Saffron Lion forgot his true self / Living with goats, he became a goat" (186). Karsan initially believes a postsecular coexistence to be impossible, or at least impermissible, since even Mansoor's birthday party on Pir Bawa's death anniversary is deemed "sacrilege" (72).

When Karsan is a boy, the concept of the postsecular is absent from his home at Pirbaag. For example, when Karsan's mother wants to participate in the secular world by attending the cinema, she has to sneak out of the house in a burqa, for the wife of the

Saheb must uphold a sacred image (55). The purity of the sacred (in particular *sexual* purity) is a theme Karsan struggles with, finding it impossible to reconcile sacred and profane forms of love and yet impossible to keep them separate:

> What I really wanted to know was whether I had come into the world the same way as other people. Bapu couldn't have done the sex thing with Ma, surely. He was holy, he was the avatar. Buddha was born in a special way, so was Jesus. Why not I, and Mansoor? But Ma, who sneaked off to the cinema wearing a burqa and hid pictures of Dilip Kumar and Sunil Dutt in her dresser, was hardly Mary. (87)

As the son of the Saheb, Karsan is a religious figure who nonetheless finds himself embodying the coexistence of the sacred and the profane, which is symbolized by his very existence and supplemented by his human impulses. This leads him to question the humanity of his father and of religious figures in general, wondering if there would "come a time when I would become pure like him, unsusceptible to male stirrings and worldly desires" (111).

While *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* both contain such elements that can be used to challenge postsecularity, they share other similarities that in fact support a postsecular reading. Like the content of Gibreel's dreams of Jahilia, *The Assassin's Song* presents a religious origin story – the narrative *behind* the metanarrative informing Karsan's life as the son of a Saheb. For Vassanji, there is great value in recording such histories – not only as a literary tool but also as a means of cultural preservation. As he points out in "So As Not To Die," "Not only are the histories of the places we come from missing here, in Canada for example, they are often also missing there – in the not-West where our origins lie" (317). Positioning large portions of *The*

Assassin's Song around an origin story removed from Western interference performs the postcolonial function of decentring Western metanarratives; yet, while undoubtedly postcolonial, *The Assassin's Song* is also postsecular, and as such it challenges multiple metanarratives – religious and secular, Eastern and Western. Thus, while disrupting the imperial narrative of Western centrality, *The Assassin's Song* also offers a critique of the narrative replacing it, in essence deconstructing the role of metanarratives in general as harbingers of ritual and belief, rather than specific metanarratives associated with distinct secular and/or religious institutions.

The Assassin's Song* includes the story of Pir Bawa, a thirteenth-century mystic, or Sufi, also known as Nur Fazal and as Mussafar Shah, The Wanderer (4-5). Pir Bawa was not only the founder of Pirbaag but is also a direct ancestor of Karsan and his Bapu-ji. As Karsan explains, "He was our origin, the word and the song, our mother and father and our lover" (6). This combination of origin, word, and song in his ancestor is representative of the narrative form surrounding Pir Bawa's life, which remains a combination of myth, historicism, and folklore. The song of the novel's title is likely a reference to the tale of Pir Bawa, which remains preserved in song even "when memory falters and the pictures in the mind fade and tear and all seems lost" (7). However, it is the song's function of preserving the past that appears to present an issue for the historically minded Karsan. Commenting that "little was known [of Pir Bawa] and few really cared about his historical identity: where exactly he came from, who he was, the name of his people" (5), Karsan shows a desire for concrete knowledge that stands in stark contrast to the general acceptance of tradition. As a boy, he longs to know "the secret of the sufi," believing that his grandfather and his Bapu-ji know the true identity of Nur Fazal (5) and that learning the Sufi's identity would help him determine his own.

In chapters alternating with those of Karsan's own life, Vassanji begins the tale

of Pir Bawa in 1260 AD, when Nur Fazal, a wandering "Muslim mendicant and scholar

from Afghanistan or Persia," arrives in medieval Patan Anularra (in Gujarat, India) (8),

where he is treated as an "impure" Muslim by the Hindu pandits (9). The tale of Nur

Fazal in Patan Anularra is a tale of the disturbance of communalism, ritual, tradition, and

certainty. The arrival of the Pir is accompanied by instances of magic that disrupt the

regular flow of life: The statue of Shiva (upon which Nur Fazal was not permitted to

look) comes to life and fetches water for the Pir (8-10); the sacred space of the lake

empties; and Nur Fazal's magic defeats that of the local pandits, Brahmins, and Jain

monks in a showdown before the king (12-13). Welcomed to medieval Gujarat by the

king, Vishal Dev, Pir Bawa disavows the violent reputation of his homeland and claims

to be "but a scholar and a man of God" (11). In what is arguably a postsecular society

(according to myth, that is), Nur Fazal founds a strand of Sufism[30] in which both

Hinduism and Islam comprise elements of a new religion, giving this particular narrative

a postsecular direction in which the singularity of individual religions are overcome in

the name of plurality: "Through that path he had brought them Kashi and Mecca; he had

bathed them in the Ganges; he had given them the key to escaping the cycle of

8,400,000 repeated rebirths into this unhappy world" (170). However, by the time

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[30] Sufism, a major current in the history of Islam, can be traced back to the companions of Muhammad who established what is described as a spiritual connection by pledging allegiance to him. As a movement, Sufism later "came to understand itself as a systematic and well structured path to knowing God (*ma'rifa*) through a process of internal transformation, which attempts to transcend the ordinary human condition, usually by a means of ethico-spiritual discipline" (Shihadeh 1). It is this emphasis on an internal, transformative orientation that has further led to the classification of Sufism as a form of "mysticism." While early Sufi texts do contain "some formal theological content," there has been a historical divide between Sufism and Islamic theology, and though both approaches share a common goal of "knowing God" (Shihadeh 3), they developed different disciplines and traditions in this pursuit. It is perhaps the long history of distinction between Sufism and orthodox Islamic theology that lends itself to an interpretation of Nur Fazal's strand of Sufism as less essentialist than the surrounding theologies of the day.

Karsan is in line to be the next Saheb at the shrine, the religion of Nur Fazal had become a metanarrative in and of itself – a set of rituals from which the people of Pirbaag were not allowed to deviate.

Titus Hjelm comments that it is the *practice* of religion, rather than belief itself, that "counts" (218), or that makes religion more visible in the public sphere. In Pirbaag, rituals continue to uphold Pir Bawa's religion, which was founded on open-mindedness, limiting opportunities for further change within the boundaries of tradition. The community, history, and memory of the Sufi that inform the worldview of Karsan's family are characterized by enduring sameness (37), such as the "eternal lamp" that draws tourists to the shrine. The light of the Sufi, according to tradition, had unceasingly "burned there of its own divine energy, consuming neither oil nor wick," a miracle that Karsan claims "defies scientists from America itself" (35, 37). It is through the ritual of repeating the historical-mythical narrative of Pir Bawa and the tradition of the lamp, however, that Vassanji exposes the missing information and mythical additions to the history and legend of Pirbaag.

On two separate occasions – first as a boy and later as an adult scholar – Karsan learns of discrepancies in the religious metanarrative he had grown up accepting as truth, first by discovering the secret of the eternal lamp and later by coming across a historical document detailing the Pir's true identity. On the night after Karsan's investiture as the next Saheb of Pirbaag, he relates finding his mother pouring ghee into a vessel in the dark:

> Realization hit me, and I stared, the image clear in my mind, the oil travelling
> from the urn through an underground channel to feed the eternal lamp of Nur
> Fazal. The lamp which stood in his stead, its flame supposedly burning and

spreading its light through its own mysterious power. Ma saw me, smiled. She

saw the look on my face and lost her smile. She went back inside the house

without a word. The certainty of my realization sat on my heart like stone. (149)

From this moment onward, Karsan begins to wonder if "the ways of Pirbaag might be

mere superstition, based on an historical episode become vague and coloured with

mythology" (205). Faced with the lie of the eternal lamp, the rest of the rituals around

which he had structured his life become suspicious, and the religious metanarrative itself

cracks.

As the novel draws to a close, the adult Karsan discovers through his own

historical research that Nur Fazal had been "an extremely nonconforming Muslim

sectarian, a heretic. An Assassin" (304). This aspect of the Pir's identity had been left

out of the historical metanarrative – possibly on purpose, given the paradox between his

historical identity and the religious following he founded. Karsan describes the

Assassins, or the Ismailis, as a "mystical Shia sect" who not only "disdained the outer

forms of worship and the Muslim laws of Sharia for inner spiritual truths," but also were

feared for "their penchant for murdering their enemies with impudent and terrifying

facility," as well as their "dramatic political assassinations" (303, 300).[31] The Assassin

identity stands in contrast to the myth of Pir Bawa as peaceful and gentle, for even "the

[31] The Assassins (also known as Nizari Islamilis) were a group of Ismaili Shi'ite Muslims who first
formed in the 7th century and gained power until the 13the century, when they were defeated by the
Mongols. They were deemed heretical because of their belief that Ismail (the eldest son of the sixth imam
Jafar al-Sadiq) had been nominated as the seventh imam despite predeceasing his father. Orthodox Shi'ites
supported Ismail's brother Musa al-Kazim, rather than Ismail's son Muhammad al-Mahdi, who received
the support of the Nizari Ismailis. The Assassins were infamous for their strategy of murdering opposition
figures – often Islamic leaders and Crusaders – in secretive "knife-wielding teams" (Cartwright, para. 1)
across what is now known as Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Although the medieval
sect of Assassins is gone, Nizari Ismailis continue to follow their own imam (currently Prince Shah Karim
al-Husseini) (see Cartwright).

great Saladin is said to have checked for hidden Assassins under his bed before lying down to sleep" (303).

The problem of missing and non-factual information in the story of Pir Bawa stems not from Nur Fazal himself, but from later generations' manner of upholding his past as a religious metanarrative upon which unalterable traditions and beliefs were based. Moreover, it is a lack of interest in other narratives and worldviews (primarily non-Eastern, non-religious views) that brings about the essential singularity of his ancestors' religion. Karsan comments, for instance, that the only books he knew Bapu-ji to care about were "the leather-covered manuscripts that he constantly read and copied and preserved – because they contained our sacred knowledge, our special history" (210). Karsan, on the other hand, informs readers that he had access to a world of material through the magazines Raja Singh brought him; he even comments that perhaps that access alone made the major difference in the outcomes of his and Mansoor's very different lives. It is this same curiosity about and respect for knowledge outside of the familiar that differentiates Pir Bawa himself from the pandits of Patan Anularra, and "it amused him that they remained so happy in their ignorance of the wide world to the west" (16).

Karsan's exposure to multiple methods of approaching and interpreting history and religious metanarratives is perhaps a reflection of Vassanji's own attempts to "read history alternatively and recognize that historical accounts are a matter of perspective" (Sayed, "Introduction" 6). In *A Place Within,* Vassanji dwells on the complex, often violent history of Hindus and Muslims in India, commenting that "it is always instructive to remind oneself of this obvious fact: The boundaries and names of many places are only recent in origin and often hide richer, more complex truths than one

might imagine; the past then becomes inconvenient and slippery, far less easy to generalize" (56). The historical metanarrative in *The Assassin's Song* performs a dual function that complements the author's vision of the past as complicated and uncontainable. Firstly, the story of Pir Bawa challenges the more nationalist narrative of a previously peaceful, pre-colonial India put forward by Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India* as an attempt at establishing a secular heritage for the country by depicting a syncretic precolonial India as foreshadowing modern secularism (and interrupted by colonialism) (Srivastava 23-24). The communalist threats in medieval Gujarat mirror those of Karsan's time, with both Nur Fazal and Karsan worried that the violence and turmoil spreading through India will reach their province – which it does. This mythical legacy of peace is further complicated through Karsan's discovery of the Pir's Assassin identity, which also challenges assumptions of the purity of the religious narrative of Pirbaag, upsetting essentialist tendencies found in both religious and nationalist metanarratives.

Secondly, while Gibreel's problematization of the origin story in *The Satanic Verses* functions as a postsecular – arguably also postmodern – critique of metanarratives, Vassanji's portrayal of an incomplete, essentialist origin story in *The Assassin's Song* goes one step further to emphasize not only a challenge to historical metanarrative but also the importance of moving beyond the strictures of tradition. Further, Vassanji does all this without devaluing history itself, instead suggesting the value of recognizing and learning from one's past. Karsan's interest in the history of his family and heritage likely stems from Vassanji's similar interests, which he describes in as a consequence of incomplete migrations, colonial history, and "the process of extinction and reinvention by the exigencies of globalized living and modern politics"

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(*Place* 53). His description of his "perhaps vain desire to know and record who I am,"

through which he learns about himself (*Place* 53), is not dissimilar to Karsan's interest

in the "medieval world of Nur Fazal"; though Karsan recognizes the "legend and myth,

magic and mystery" embodied in the origin story itself, he nonetheless sees the world of

Pir Bawa as "a real, historical period and [him]self as a thread in its endless extension"

(63).

      The extent to which one's heritage can be dangerous is yet another key theme

throughout *The Assassin's Song.* This becomes apparent in the lives of both Karsan and

Mansoor, who appear to represent different aspects of the Pir's life story. Annie Cottier

points out that Nur Fazal's "possibly violent origins echo the violent present, in which

Mansoor, Karsan's brother, becomes part of a radicalized Muslim group after his

father's death during the 2002 Gujarat riots" (47-48). This interpretation adds even more

complexity to this dissertation's postsecular reading of the novel, for it also addresses

the problematic association between violence and religion that Hjelm describes as "the

most significant reason for religion's return to the public imagination" post-9/11 (204).

Mansoor's embodiment of a religious, Assassin-like character is similar to Nur Fazal's

identity before becoming Pir Bawa and advocating peaceful coexistence, thus reflecting

an entrenchment in one aspect of his inherited history. A similar relation between a

violent past and violent present is critiqued by Karsan in the story of the Gujarati

princess Deval, who was kidnapped and placed in a harem: "What's surprising is that,

old as it is, and historically vague, the story carries a bitter potency for the nationalist

fanatics of today, shames their modern manhood, goads them into states of rage and

hatred" (64). Vassanji reveals the disillusionment inherent in histories that depict India

as peaceful, indicating the value he places on accuracy above nostalgia in terms of

historical narratives. However, while deeming one's heritage important in the establishment of one's sense of self-identity, he also advocates the autonomy to deviate from the constraints of tradition and heritage – religious or otherwise.

Though Karsan values the sense of self bestowed by a rich, documented history, he also struggles against the claims the past has placed on the lives of himself and his father throughout his childhood. The "dark stain of history" (182) and religious obligations form a barrier around the lives of the Sahebs who succeed Pir Bawa, and Karsan comes to feel that his life is not his own. He wonders why his father does not set him free "from the burden of the past" if he truly loves him (150). Similarly, he sees his father as claimed by the essentialist demands of his religion: He "belonged to that history, to ancient Pirbaag and all the dead; to Pir Bawa and to the great unknowable Brahman. But not to me as I wanted him" (44). Vassanji extends this commentary beyond the religion of Pir Bawa's followers specifically, incorporating Christianity through David, the schoolteacher who gives Karsan a Bible. In the Old Testament story of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac,[32] Karsan sees a situation similar to that of himself and his father, and throughout his childhood he dwells on the plight he shares with the son: "Isaac didn't matter. He could not wish" (107).

In a postsecular turn, Karsan embraces his inheritance from Nur Fazal most fully when he refuses to be contained by the borders of the Pir's religion. Whereas Mansoor continues to embody the Assassin identity of Nur Fazal through apparent continued involvement with communal violence, Karsan transcends the demands of tradition, proclaiming, "There must have been someone called Nur Fazal, the Wanderer and Sufi.

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[32] While the Qur'an also contains the story of Abraham and Isaac, the version Karsan reads is found in the Bible, in Genesis Chapter 22.

But he lived hundreds of years ago and was a mere mortal. I am simply an ordinary, secular Indian studying in America. … [T]his is my truth" (222). While the revelation of Nur Fazal's Assassin identity exemplifies the unreliability of metanarratives entrenched in history and tradition, Nur Fazal also moved beyond his own heritage to found a more postsecular religion in which Islam, Hinduism, and an interest in the wider world all coexist – a postsecular element that is lost when later generations of the Pir's followers render his teachings of flexibility inflexible and his religion of acceptance and compromise essentialist. By providing the history of Karsan's heritage and Pir Bawa's life, Vassanji suggests that the problem is not religion itself, but its development into an overarching metanarrative that strictly controls the lives of its followers, containing them within the borders of tradition when, in fact, a breach of tradition itself was the primary basis of Pir Bawa's teachings.

Though a religious metanarrative is at the forefront of *The Assassin's Song*, Vassanji directs a subtler, though nonetheless pointed, critique toward the secular metanarrative of nationalism in the novel. This provides an interesting counterpart to *The Satanic Verses*, as the nationalist metanarrative that Rushdie problematizes is an imperial remnant of the colonial paradigm, whereas Vassanji targets Indian nationalism. *The Assassin's Song* does confront Western orientalism when Karsan's professor refuses to accept Karsan's argument that Indian ginans were similar to Western metaphysical poetry: "He said Donne had used worldly and scientific metaphors and wrote for a sophisticated reader, whereas Indian devotional poetry was written for simple, uneducated folk using folkloric mythology" (191). However, the majority of the novel's critiques of secularist nationalism centre on the communal violence engendered by the "deep yearning among some intellectuals for an essential Indian-ness, to do away with

these ancient divisions, the messiness of India," by which "exclusivity and division" are enhanced (Vassanji, *Place* 196). While there is a clear division between religious and secular metanarratives in *The Satanic Verses*, this is less true of *The Assassin's Song* – a fact reflecting the pluralistic reality of India, given the combination of public and private, secular and religious concerns in Indian politics and nationalism, as well as the "normalization [of dichotomies such as Hindu and Muslim] by the state" (Srivastava 40, 29). As Karsan asks himself, "what is an ordinary, secular Indian, after all? Is such an entity possible?" (223).

The combination of the religious and the secular in the elevation of Hindu identity as the majoritarian form of Indian nationalism as resistance against English – or more widely colonial – nationalism (see Ratti, *Postsecular* 9; cf. Srivastava 26-30) is problematized throughout *The Assassin's Song*, particularly through the communal violence Karsan witnesses in Gujarat, and in the nationalist party he joins as a boy. Under Pradhan Shastri, the National Patriotic Youth Party (NAPYP) is formed in the village of Haripir, with Karsan and other boys his age joining in a show of support for the nation of India. However, for Shastri, as for many others, the term "national" is interchangeable with "Hindu," and Karsan notices that "their message contained hate and exclusion" toward others (109), including the sons of the Muslim Salim Buckle, who were not welcome in the NAPYP and therefore, to borrow a phrase from Srivastava, were designated as "non-Indians" (40). While recognizing that "in the current mood in our country, it was clearly better to call yourself a Hindu" (126), Karsan voices the postsecular complaint that having to choose sides makes one feel "strangely incomplete; even when you try and cry pure hatred and wish death and destruction on those who live there, you sound false. Are you not patriotic enough?" (125).

Despite his exploration of the pitfalls of metanarratives, Vassanji nonetheless champions Pirbaag and its religion during the episodes of communal violence accompanying and following Partition. Violence tears apart neighbourhoods in *The Assassin's Song*, and the pursuit of "Purity" (45) results in hate killings, including that of Salim Buckle. Describing the two "fundamentalisms" (i.e., Hindu and Islam) that tempt followers of Pirbaag to become "part of something bigger" (46), Karsan puzzles over his inability to comprehend "the pure hatred for a fellow human being that lies behind the quality of violence that is inflicted on the innocent each time," concluding that perhaps there is no easy answer: "We are too complex as a nation, too raw as a people" (263). It is important to note that although communities like the NAPYP combine religious, secular, and political motivations, they are not necessarily postsecular. A coexistence of the religious and the secular does fulfil one postsecular requirement, but the communal formations Karsan witnesses are neither tolerant nor pluralistic. Though driven by a combination of secular and religious motivations, they are nonetheless exclusivist toward *other* secularisms and *other* religions. In short, they uphold the division of "us" and "them" that defines Mansoor's world (67-68).

Karsan describes the challenges that Partition brought to Pirbaag, noting that "the question of Hindu or Muslim had never arisen before for its followers. Now they were forced to confront it" (45). His grandfather, like Vishal Dev, is approached by religious individuals asking him to "choose their path and drive the others away" (16-17), and he declares that his path is "spiritual, it did not give importance to outward forms of worship. Therefore Hindus and Muslims were the same" (45). Ball points out that Vassanji asks the "Hindu or Muslim?" question in *A Place Within* "not because he wants to make those distinctions but because he wants to resist them. … [H]e wants to show

how difficult making the distinction is and how irrelevant it ought to be" ("Open Wound" 21). This problematic distinction is addressed many times by *A Place Within*, in which Vassanji criticizes the "prevalent tendency … to essentialize – and therefore, in a certain way, to exclude" (83). The lack of true differentiation between forms of identity is highlighted by Vassanji's comment that if you were Muslim, "you spoke Urdu … which would be wonderful were it true, but it is not my language" (*Place* 83), as well as his questions: "Only Hindus are allowed into the temple, a sign says, but who is to check and how? What exactly is a Hindu? I have not denied any Hindu god" (15).

These light-hearted sentiments are supplemented by his more serious reflections on the trauma that accompanies essentialism. When confronted with the old belief that the Khojas would "catch a child and drive a nail through its head to drink its blood" (*Place* 10) and with the knowledge "of trains [being] stopped, people being stripped to check if they were one or the other, circumcised or not, Muslim or Hindu; then slaughtered or let go" (36), Vassanji acknowledges that he "feel[s] a trauma after all" (36), despite the fact that he is in many ways an "outsider" to India's violent present and history. However, the fear that he too will be essentialized causes him discomfort: "How am I looked upon? Would people see me as something other than what I am and feel, what label would they put on me?" (36). Vassanji reacts to the singularity of religious *and* national metanarratives, arguing that when people interact "almost exclusively" with their own communities, hatred spreads as a result ("So" 314), and he illustrates this through *The Assassin's Song*, in which the Hindu and Muslim communities around Karsan continue to enact violence upon one another, whether motivated by religion or nationalism or both.

In Gujarat, Karsan grows up witnessing what Tabish Khair terms "the construction of the Muslim as a problematic, violent 'body'" (25), starting most significantly with the murder of Salim Buckle and later encompassing the 1992 Ayodhya riots, the 2002 Godhra train burning, and the law enforcers' suspicion that Mansoor was involved in the violence in Gujarat (142, 261). Karsan's "shiver of apprehension" regarding his brother's adoption of a fundamentalist Muslim identity (66) might seem to suggest that he too was biased against the Muslim religion, aligning himself with the Hindu nationalist ideology espoused by characters like Pradham Shastri (93). However, Karsan clarifies, he is not averse to Islam *per se*, but rather to the fact that "if you chose one [religion] or the other, you were compelled to lose something of yourself, let it go – those were the rules" (265). For Karsan, as for the Khojas Vassanji describes in an interview, "there was no such thing as conversion. … conversion means rejecting one to become another" (Sayed, "History" 274). While the critique of historical metanarrative is a prevalent theme throughout *The Assassin's Song*, Vassanji's insistence on the importance of knowing the past appears to find its fulfilment in Karsan's relationship with the religion of his ancestors. Stressing the importance of agency to move beyond religious traditions and rituals, Vassanji nonetheless presents the religion of Pirbaag as having the capacity to be a postsecular alternative to the exclusionary, violent interpretations of religions that surround them.

For instance, Karsan does not ask his father if they are Hindus or Muslims because he knows the technical answer: "We are neither and both. We bow neither to Kashi nor to Kaaba, et cetera. And we are respected for that" (79-80). While Karsan admits as an adult that "it always troubled [him], this ideal of Pirbaag; it made [them] so different from the rest of the world, which required clean spiritual boundaries" (265), it

is this very characteristic that renders his religion peaceful, as well as a haven of tolerance and coexistence for other religions around them. Karsan witnesses this in the actions of his Bapu-ji, who stops a potential riot against the Muslims in Haripir, which had been instigated by Shastri's nationalist *Hindu Pride* bulletin (134). In the midst of violence, Karsan's father does not hide behind the statement that he is neither Hindu nor Muslim but remains engaged by offering sanctuary to any Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Sikh who seeks refuge (297). Yet, Vassanji points out in an interview, "Karsan's father is not liberal. He just is both Hindu and Muslim, or if you want to be pure, neither. In fact, he is conservative, with respect to his own tradition" (Sayed, "History" 277). While much more tolerant and respectful than the religious leaders around him, Bapu-ji is not fully postsecular because of his adherence to the rituals and traditions that govern Pirbaag and his relationship with his son. However, the pluralistic sentiments of his religion signify that Vassanji is taking a postsecular approach to the various binaries in the novel as neither anti-religious nor anti-secularist.

Though secular himself, Vassanji portrays the importance of religion for many of his characters, illustrating Marcel Gauchet's postsecular argument that although a complete departure from religion is possible, religion may still have things to say to individuals (Gauchet 200). The capacity for religion to enable individuals to cope with the "concrete and finite by referring to the absolute and infinite" (Grab 118) is apparent in the way young Karsan seeks comfort in the religious concept of the One to stave off the loneliness and existential terror he feels: "It is comforting to believe in an overarching pattern, an answer to everything, called the Universal Soul, or Brahman, the Om and Allah of that wanderer the sufi, our own Pir Bawa" (23). The value of religion is also represented by the pilgrimages of believers to Pirbaag, where they came in hope,

desperation, and grief "to be blessed and comforted" regardless of caste or creed (4, 34, 262). Mr. David points out that Karsan does not need to be a Christian to partake in his religious meeting because "it's just for comradeship and to think about spiritual matters. What's important in life" (85); similarly, the sacred space of Pirbaag serves as a gathering spot for religious believers to "elevate their souls to that state in which physical needs are meaningless" (283). Even after embracing secularism as an adult, Karsan sees the missing prayer call from the destroyed mosque as troubling: "To go there to look now is to feel sick to the stomach" (313). Even for a secular character like Karsan, or a secular author like Vassanji, religion can be viewed as serving a valuable purpose.

Vassanji simultaneously critiques and upholds the importance of secularism throughout his novel. Against the comfort of tradition and religion, he juxtaposes for Karsan "the terror of the unknown with the thrill of discovering [him]self and the world" (189). Although Karsan's conversion to secularism during his time in the United States might uphold the binaries of East/West and religious/secular that are problematically espoused by much postsecular criticism, these tropes are deconstructed through Karsan's complex status as a secular Indian in America. By embracing secular forms of knowledge through Raja Singh's reading material and by attending university, Karsan claims that he has overcome a singularity of mind and received new perspectives on the worldviews and lifestyles of others. Through reading, he "found out what they thought and did in Bombay and Madras, Ahmedabad and Delhi, and even in New York and London and Moscow" (33). He tells his father, "Sometimes, I think, living in a small place like Haripir we tend to forget that the world out there is much bigger and there is nothing special about us. Or that all people are special in their own way. Or that we are

all the same" (193). In the U.S., he embraces secularism in an act of agency through which he goes beyond the "restraints of the past" (172), and this "'*outside*' perspective" enables him to see the similarities between himself and other people – between the concerns and lives of his religious neighbours in India and of secular Americans (193, 191).

The Assassin's Song serves in part as a *Bildungsroman* in which Karsan develops into a more fully postsecular character. His propensity for a pluralism of worldviews is apparent in his combined awe and respect for both religion and secularism, which precedes even his conversion in the U.S. During his investiture, Karsan deviates from the expectations of his father by combining his religious speech with his views about science, technology, progress, and politics (146). In his thoughts, he grapples with the problematic borders separating sacred and profane and East and West, trying to determine the "relationship between the body and the soul of the Saheb (or Pir Bawa)" (192), and he recognizes similarities between English and Indian metaphysical poetry, even when an American professor and his Indian father deny this prospect of sameness (231). More subtle imagery, such as the cross Karsan hangs around a Ganesh (144), hints at his turn toward postsecularity. However, it is in his return to Haripir that Karsan fully embraces a postsecular identity by assuming, though secular himself, the role of "the last lord of the shrine of Pirbaag" (6), embracing his religious heritage while simultaneously deviating from the traditions surrounding it.

Recognizing the value Pirbaag holds for those around him (267), Karsan claims a heritage he had recently spurned, assuming a role Cottier describes as foregrounding "a cosmopolitan ethics of responsibility and solidarity" (50). As a postsecular atheist, Karsan both advises people on their worldly affairs in the secular realm and maintains

the mausoleum as a place of worship in the religious realm (314), combining within Pirbaag the spheres of public and private, sacred and profane. Moreover, though deviating from the traditions of his father and the ancestors who came before him, Karsan declares that he "must pick up the pieces of [his] trust and tell its story – and defy the destroyers, those who in their hatred would not only erase [them] from the ground of [their] forefathers but also attempt to write themselves upon it, make ink from [their] ashes" (6). In simultaneously moving beyond and remembering his heritage, he embodies the importance of culture, heritage, tradition, and identity while fostering autonomy and respect for other worldviews – all aspects essential to a truly postsecular way of being.

Through the actions of Karsan as secular Saheb and recorder of the history of Pirbaag, *The Assassin's Song* advocates on behalf of postsecular newness, reconstruction, and change. Like the postsecular itself, Karsan's actions are not dismissive of what came previously – of either the religious heritage of his upbringing or his secular disavowal of this heritage. Rather, the postsecular status he adopts values its multiple foundations, setting it apart from the purely postmodern. For instance, the novel begins in Shimla on April 14, 2002, shortly after an outbreak of violence resulting in the burning of a train in Ghodra and the destruction of the shrine of Pirbaag, among multiple other acts of violence. Yet, it begins on a note of hope with the words "*After the calamity, a beginning*" (3). This beginning is also a sort of continuance, as the story Karsan relates is a "memorial" constructed "out of the ashes" (310). The newness of the postsecular atmosphere Karsan creates for Pirbaag is a transformed reconstruction of the old – like the Khoja Ismaili religion of Vassanji's youth, which embodies newness by combining Hindu and Muslim traditions and beliefs – that maintains the importance of

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the past while augmenting previous metanarratives with multiple other narratives and worldviews. The postsecular in this novel is not a disavowal, but a combination of perspectives and viewpoints.

Conclusion

The Assassin's Song and *The Satanic Verses* both exemplify the potential for fictional works previously dubbed "secular" to encompass a much more nuanced approach to religiosity and secularism than may have been expected. Both novels address postsecular themes in their treatments of metanarratives, symbols, nationalisms, and the general intersections (and interactions) between the sacred and profane. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie employs techniques of narrative ambiguity and fictional historiography to decentre narrative authority through its association with secular and religious worldviews. Moreover, in the portrayal of Gibreel and Saladin as an angel and devil who are simultaneously disparate and linked to one another – neither one fully embodying the traits traditionally associated with their characterizations – *The Satanic Verses* presents the very essence of postsecularity. Gibreel's eventual demise in pursuit of exclusive religious singularity and Saladin's compromises in the name of migrant hybridity and multiculturalism depict the postsecular as a healthy alternative to the essentialisms of religion and English nationalism as portrayed throughout the novel.

The Assassin's Song similarly decentres narrative authority by debunking various aspects of the religious origin story of Pir Bawa and the political associations between Hinduism and national patriotism in Gujarat. Like Saladin, Karsan embodies postsecularity in his embrace of ideological plurality. His postsecularity is perhaps even more evident than that of Saladin, as Karsan eventually becomes both an atheist *and*

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groundskeeper and spiritual leader at Pirbaag – simultaneously. Both texts present

characters that embody religious and secular traits in a positive light, while those that

represent singularity are depicted negatively, often epitomizing racist, exclusivist, and

overall xenophobic tendencies as well. On top of the postsecular sympathies identified in

each text, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song* are also postcolonial, and the

postsecular themes present in each are inextricably linked with postcolonial concerns. In

The Satanic Verses, Saladin's postsecular turn involves both a shift away from strict

secularism toward belief in the supernatural and the abandonment of his previous

colonial-era anglophilia toward self-identification with other migrants in London. In *The

Assassin's Song*, Karsan's postsecularity hinges upon both his initial discovery of other

ways of thinking around the world and his decision to validate the beliefs of his heritage,

despite his American professor's refusal to equate Eastern and Western cultural

histories. Overall, both works enable postsecular interpretations that are truly

transnational in nature, calling into question not only the binaries of sacred and profane

but also the postcolonial dichotomies that continue to accompany them.

CHAPTER THREE
Postsecularism on the Subcontinent:
Traversing Sacred, Profane, and National Borders in
Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

Postsecularism – according to its well-known critics – is first and foremost a Western phenomenon. Habermas, for one, claims that "the controversial term 'post-secular society' can only be applied to the affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand" ("Notes" 17). Others echo these sentiments, seeing postsecularism as presupposing "Protestant [i.e., Western] secularism" (Lambropoulos 77-78): a "distinctly European or Western project" by "virtue both of location and heritage" (Camilleri 1020, 1031; cf. Kaufmann 20). Camilleri identifies postsecularism as "pre-eminently Western in the sense that it is primarily concerned with a chapter in European history, namely the origins and evolution of secularism in Europe and North America" (1031). Although some critics believe certain Western societies have never been secular (Robbins, "Why" 56), the identification of the recent resurgence of religion as "postsecular" definitively stems from the "modernist and secularist assumptions" of twentieth-century Western philosophies (Beaumont 8).

It is because of this perceived Western orientation that postsecular theory has been widely criticized by scholars who take a more transnational approach to issues of religion and secularity. Mufti charges postsecularism with mapping the "secular-religious antagonisms of the history of the West" onto postcolonial spaces ("Why" 19), Leezenberg accuses Habermas of ignoring "historical and conceptual particularities of the Muslim world" in his treatment of religion (92), and Norris and Inglehart call for a movement beyond "studies of Catholic and Protestant church attendance in Europe …

and the United States" (4) to understand broader trends in religious vitality around the globe. Fortunately, this last appeal is being answered. Certain critics acknowledge the complexity of religious resurgence around the world, as well as the diverse, even global, interactions between various forms of secularism and religiosity. Hetty Zock's claim that "cultural heterogeneity is the main characteristic of postsecular society" (131) highlights the transnational, multicultural face of the postsecular that is often overlooked. Similarly, Camilleri argues that for postsecularism to gain international traction, it must be applicable to and cognizant of "the unique cultural and political circumstances of highly diverse societies the majority of which are non-Western," while making space for "non-Western centres of power and influence" (1032).

Insularly Western approaches to postsecularism could derive from the assumption that a postsecular society must have been in a "secular" state at some point (see Camilleri 1031) – a status often aligned with the West to the exclusion of the East. This assumption denies the importance of religious resurgence abroad, refusing to recognize secular and religious ebb and flow in other nations around the globe. Understandings of secularism as a solely Western concept overlook multiple manifestations of secularism, including the version Nehru supported in post-Partition India. As definitions offered by Rosati and Stoeckl indicate (see 5), a postsecular society is one of religious pluralism, challenging conditions of religious monopoly and thus rendering postsecular theory particularly applicable to regions notorious for religious tension and religious pluralism, including the Indian subcontinent. Failure to acknowledge the growth and evolution of secular and religious ideologies in traditionally non-Western nations – such as the "growing presence of religion in the public spheres of South Asia" that Pasha addresses (135) – not only neglects to

challenge the monopoly of Western Christianity over postsecular theory but also overlooks the distinction between religion and religious resurgence, including political affiliations and postcolonial social movements associated with the latter (Pasha 135).

Examples of transnational postsecularism in literary analyses are rare, but the works of Manav Ratti offer a framework through which to approach postsecularism in South Asian diasporic novels. Perhaps Ratti's most valuable contribution to postsecular theory is his differentiation between "western postsecularism," which he associates with Christianity, and "Indian postsecularism," which he associates with Indian state secularism ("Rethinking" 57). In contrast to the distinction between the "secular West" and the "non-secular non-West" upheld by critics like Habermas, Ratti explores different manifestations of the religious and particularly the secular, addressing philosophical secularism and postcolonial state secularism ("Rethinking" 70). Such an exploration of "non-Western" secularism is key to any analysis of postcolonial postsecularism, as it not only dismantles the binary of the secular West and religious East but also challenges the singularity of typically accepted definitions of secularism in the West. Of course, Western authors also challenge the concept that the West is generally a secular space (Robbins, "Is" 259, Casanova 28), but even so, few decentre definitions of Western secularism by looking beyond Western borders for examples elsewhere. Transnational postsecularism is thus doubly postsecular, going beyond an exploration of the coexistence of secular and religious worldviews to pluralize the problematically singular approaches to secularism and religiosity in Western postsecular criticism.

Secularism in the West vs. Secularism in the Subcontinent

Secularism, as it has come to be understood by critics in the West, is usually

associated with the separation of church and state (Ratti, *Postsecular* 5), with church (or religion) relegated to the private sphere. However, some contemporary philosophers are quick to point out the historical dependence of secularism on Christianity, and vice versa (Gourgouris, *Lessons* 30-32). Ratti, for instance, highlights the Christian influence on the "spatial and temporal dimensions" of the word *secular*, which he says denotes "age," "generation," and "the world" (from the Latin *saeculum*) (5):

> Each of these is the age, generation, or world to which humanity belongs, in opposition to the timelessness and world of God. "Secular" also referred to clergymen who lived outside the monastery, and therefore in the "world." *Secular* thus can designate the observable here-and-now, the visible world, a category distinct from religion, given the latter's ideas of the transcendental. (5; cf. Casanova 15)

Even McNamara's argument that secularism does not replace religion pivots upon a Western understanding of religion as "Christian faith and obedience to God's law" (xv), which he sees as forming one half of modernity (that is, Western modernity).

When secularism is not tied back to Christian origins, there is still no question that it is a concept typically claimed by the West. Robbins defines secularism minimally as "the capacity for self-scrutiny" ("Is" 250), which he describes as "itself Western ideology" ("Is" 253). Even when secularism is not implemented to differentiate "us" from "them" (see Robbins, "Is" 248), the Western "us" nonetheless seizes on it because of its association with modernity and rationality. As Ratti argues, "secular" denotes being "tolerant, modern, and progressive" and is often linked with ideas of civilization (*Postsecular* 7). Thus, to imagine oneself as secular, he argues, is to imagine oneself as modern and progressive (*Postsecular* 7). Individuals claiming that the "globalized elite

culture" is "prone to secularization" (Berger 10; Norrris and Inglehart 5) are in reality

ignoring a multiplicity of modernities and are instead offering an "idealized model of the

West as the prototype for modernization in all societies" (Hefner 86). The dominant

discourse of Western secularization represents what Wemyss describes as the Western

liberal "ordering of knowledge and expressions of truth … over other forms of

knowledge" (7). These Western assumptions about secularism have led to a paradoxical

dismissal of religiosity in the modern world and a "distorted image of the Middle and

Far East by attributing to them religious phenomena which are not really in their nature"

(Hadden 606; Cipriani 278). It is this misconstrued approach to religion and secularism

in relation to dominant Western discourses that transnational postsecularism combats. In

part, this can be accomplished through postsecular analyses of religious and secular

coexistence beyond Western borders – in this case, on the Indian subcontinent.

Secularism in the Indian context is different from European secularism. Broadly

speaking, while secularism in the West indicates the separation of church and state,

secularism in India does not push religion into the private sphere (Ratti, *Postsecular* 11;

Chambers and Herbert 7). Instead, as a state policy, it is understood to "enable the

coexistence of different religions within a united polity" and "guarantee equal

citizenship" (Chambers and Herbert 7). To quote Srivastava's *Secularism in the*

Postcolonial Indian Novel, "In India, secularism is intended differently from how it is

conceived in Western political thought: not as an anti-religious state, but as a non-

sectarian one" (22). In other words, Indian secularism has always been premised upon

"communitarian and pluralist" ideas, rather than the individualism and liberalism of

Western secularity (Mondal, "Limits" 8, 9). The "unity in diversity" that McNamara

describes as the catchphrase of Indian secularism and the foundation of India's strength

(xii) sounds, by definition, more like postsecularism than secularism *per se*. However, the same could be said for the concept of tolerance associated with secular Western liberalism, which, as Wemyss points out, nonetheless upholds a hierarchy in the guise of egalitarianism (123, 132).

As a state policy, secularism in India was implemented in 1950, three years after Independence and Partition, though the word itself was not mentioned in the Indian constitution until 1976 (McNamara xii; Ratti, *Postsecular* 9). During colonization and through to Partition and the violent aftermath that ensued, secularism on the Subcontinent became linked to nationalist movements, many of which asserted difference from the culture of the colonizer by embracing the distinctness of Hindu culture (Srivastava 26). Thus, while religion was not "quarantine[d]" from politics the same way it (allegedly) was in Britain (Srivastava 29), Indian secularism nonetheless has not upheld the postsecular ideals of pluralism suggested by its very definition. The secular past that Jawaharlal Nehru constructed in *The Discovery of India* gestured toward equality (see Srivastava 23), but in fostering an "Indian" identity, secularism on the Subcontinent remained majoritarian in nature, in some ways mirroring – rather than solving – the problematic sectarian strife and communalism that gave rise to Partition (see Srivastava 29). In particular, as a result of appropriation by the Hindu Right, Indian secularism paradoxically served to "re-imagine the nation as a homogenous, sacred, Hindu space" (Chambers and Herbert 6), rendering India's Muslim population a minority community of "non-Indians" (Herbert 72; Srivastava 40; Biswas 114; Hefner 94).

Not only has Indian secularism been problematized as "implicitly communalist" and "specifically Hindu" in emphasis (Mondal, "Limits" 10, 5; McNamara xii), but even

the tolerance of minorities and "other" religions that it espouses serves an exclusionary function. In short, secularism in India "produces as normative the rights and identity of the nation or majority at the expense of those minorities who cannot articulate their own narrative with the same aplomb" (McNamara xvi). Much like Western secularism, Indian secularism is described as a "transcendent ideal" embraced by the "elite" (Srivastava 29). Viswanathan defines secularization as "a process of redrawing 'the boundaries of the self' around nationhood and citizenship rather than religion" (5), but by associating the nation and Indian citizenship explicitly with Hindu culture, Indian secularism – a term often interchangeable with Indian nationalism – invokes religiosity only on the public level of the modern state. Thus, communal conflicts on the Subcontinent – "Sikhs assassinating Hindu leaders, Hindus doing battle with Muslims, Buddhists oppressing Tamils, and Tamils striking back with guerilla warfare" (Hadden 607) – often lead to an understanding of religion only in terms of politically charged religious and ethnic communities.

> As Chatterjee points out,
>
> The idea that 'Indian nationalism' is synonymous with 'Hindu nationalism' is not the vestige of some premodern religious conception. It is an entirely modern, rationalist, and historicist idea. Like other modern ideologies, it allows for a central role of the state in the modernization of society and strongly defends the state's unity and sovereignty. Its appeal is not religious but political. In this sense, the framework of its reasoning is entirely secular. (110)

Although secularism in the West and in India developed through vastly different histories, they share a common feature in this postsecular analysis in that both integrate religious identity – Christianity and Hinduism, respectively – within a form of

nationalism. For Chatterjee, this occurs through endeavours to "rationalize and classicize tradition" (Srivastava 27). Religion thus becomes secularized and politicized in the public sphere.

In postcolonial nations such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, nationalism and communalism may not necessarily be as opposed to one another as they are construed to be (Mondal, "Allegories" 27). Connolly, who writes in reference to Western secularism in *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, claims that secularists "often convert the idea of a national center into that of a public sphere" (90). However, in the context of postcolonial secularism in particular, nationalism is often relegated to the private sphere. Partha Chatterjee delineates this process in *The Nation and its Fragments*:

> By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of state-craft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. (6)

Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial nation comes into being in the inner domain, first by classifying the domain of the "spiritual" as "sovereign territory" from which colonial and imperial powers are barred (6). However, though the inner, spiritual domain is

meant to embody an "essential" national culture, it is a constructed culture, which is

nonetheless "powerful, creative, and historically significant[:] … a 'modern' national

culture that is nevertheless not Western" (6). Moreover, the nationalist stance of the

inner, or private, domain implements religion as a "marker of belonging to a 'tradition'"

– not an organic tradition, however, as Morozov points out, but an "invented" one (40).

The inner, spiritual domain operates against colonial metanarratives not only by

upholding a culture that is distinctly not Western, but also by writing its own nationalist

account of its past (13). However, the "implicit equivalence of Indian nationalism with

Hindu nationalism" (Mondal, "Limits" 5) that accompanied Nehru's secularist intentions

and increased with the rise of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP)[33] resulted in a nationalist

narrative that "suppress[es] the multiple histories of ethnic and religious minorities

within the Indian state" (McNamara xvi). As Biswas argues, "the Hindu nationalist

reimagination of the Indian nation-state puts at peril subordinate and minority interests

in contemporary India" (117). The simultaneously secularist and religious face of Indian

nationalism may appear postsecular on the surface, especially given the breakdown of

barriers separating public and private spheres upheld by Western secularism. However,

while Nehruvian Indian secularism posits a non-sectarian state of equal religious rights,

the rise of primarily Hindu nationalism subjugates (and thus denies a voice to) other

religions on the Subcontinent, claiming Hinduism "less for its religious value than for its

cultural and civilization resources" (Biswas 116). This reduces belief to "mere

ideology," "codified and rationalized" (Srivastava 35; McNamara xiv-xv) – an evolution

not dissimilar to the "public manifestation of religious identity" used by the British to

establish a divisive mentality between Muslims and Hindus (Ratti, *Postsecular* 9),

[33] The Hindu nationalist organization that won the Indian elections in 2014.

transforming "faiths" into "religions" and consequently politicized, rather than postsecular, communities (McNamara xv).

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) challenge these essentialist narratives propagated by both Indian secularism and Hindu religious nationalism. Not only do they represent a reimagining of India as a more syncretic nation post-Partition, but they also embody a postsecular tradition that looks beyond divisive classes of Eastern and Western religiosity and secularism (i.e., Hinduism/Christianity vs. Islam; Enlightenment vs. Nehruvian secularism). Desai's and Ghosh's works are centred around violent events associated with Partition and the forming of a national consciousness. *Clear Light of Day*, which is partly set just before and after the 1947 Partition of India, focuses on the oppressive, restrictive nature of sacred and secular borders. However, I will argue that, unlike the other postsecular texts considered, Desai's borders are *nationalist*, rather than *national*, as her protagonist never actually leaves India – or even Delhi, for that matter. Rather, she is entrapped by the literal and figurative borders associated with the home, the private realm, and the sacred domain of national culture that became accentuated in an era of national identity crisis and postcolonial resistance (see Chatterjee). By revering cultural history while denouncing the often stagnant nature of the nation's inner domain, *Clear Light of Day* denounces the fabricated separation between sacred and profane time and between the spiritual and modern (i.e., secular) faces of the nation.

The Shadow Lines, which is set in a time period that encompasses the creation of the nation of Bangladesh, similarly interrogates borders, though Ghosh's are simultaneously national and nationalist. Through the narrator's retelling of Tridib's life story, as well as his theories regarding the illusionary nature of space, time, and

ultimately borders, *The Shadow Lines* presents postsecular arguments for a sameness

and equality that transcend lines of separation – physical, temporal, and ideological.

Further, Ghosh challenges the concept of authoritative national metanarratives by

presenting subjective histories in which postsecular characters and ideologies are

portrayed as an alternative to the secular and religious tensions and conflicts surrounding

the East Pakistan/Bangladesh border and accompanying religiously motivated

distinctions of "us" versus "them." In short, a postsecular literary analysis of *Clear Light*

of Day and *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates the existence and value of postsecular

concerns beyond the Western hemisphere, yet these works also challenge the secular and

religious ideologies of the Indian subcontinent. This argument may initially appear to go

against a postcolonial reading of Desai and Ghosh; however, their critique of existing

anticolonial nationalisms merely calls for a better method of resistance to imperialism –

one that does not subjugate and exclude minorities from a national consciousness. By

interrogating the separation between sacred and profane concepts of national culture,

Clear Light of Day and *The Shadow Lines* embody a transnational postsecularism that

posits a much more inclusive form of postcolonial, anticolonial nationalism.

Clear Light of Day: The Home and the Nation

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is an anomaly among the six South Asian texts

examined in this dissertation in that Bim, the main female protagonist of the novel, is not

a migrant. The protagonists of *The Satanic Verses, The Assassin's Song*, *The Shadow*

Lines, *Brick Lane*, and *Burnt Shadows* all migrate internationally – some of them

multiple times over, yet Bim does not do so even once. However, her immobility does

not detract from the theme of migration present throughout this study. Rather, this

element accentuates the complex variety of functions that can be served by borders. Postsecular analysis portrays borders – ideological, religious, secular, and otherwise – as porous 'lines' meant to be crossed. In contrast to the triumphant movements of other characters who span multiple nations, identities, and worldviews, the status of Bim as a "stayer" exemplifies the problems that can ensue when borders constrict, detain, and are essentially used to uphold antiquated views of separatism and Otherness – the very things postsecularism contests.

Clear Light of Day tells the story of the Das family and their home in Old Delhi, beginning before Partition and ending many years later. However, while Mr. and Mrs. Das together play a critical role as an allegorical representation of the British Empire, it is their four children – Raja, Bim, Tara, and Baba – on whom the novel focuses. As they age into adulthood following the deaths of their parents, the four Das children grow further apart, in some ways representing the various routes taken by the nation of India following Partition. Raja, Bim's older brother, becomes enthralled with the culture and poetry of their Muslim neighbours – the Hyder Alis – and joins them shortly after they flee Old Delhi for Hyderabad during the violent aftermath of Partition. Tara, Bim's younger sister, marries a wealthy Indian ambassador and spends her adult years living a cosmopolitan life and migrating with him to various places around the world. Baba, Bim's ghostlike youngest brother, never truly matures past infancy, embodying repetition itself in a silent, ritualistic lifestyle combined with his fear of leaving the house. In the end, Bim alone is left behind to take care of the Das family home and provide for Baba, and in many ways she becomes trapped by the garden walls enclosing the family estate, by the borders of Old Delhi, and by the confining role assigned to her by Indian nationalism itself.

Set in the domestic sphere of the home, *Clear Light of Day* problematizes the (often gendered) division of spheres and duties – secular, religious, and nationalist. Depicting a home in which characters are haunted by a stagnant, unchanging atmosphere, premature old age, and even madness, Desai challenges the nationalist fetishization of what Partha Chatterjee calls the "inner" domain of a postcolonial nation: the private, feminized, exoticized, and often spiritual sphere of a nation's essential cultural identity. By presenting the domestic sphere of the Das family as a haunting rather than comforting space, Desai debunks the nation's exoticization of the inner domain. However, Desai does not criminalize the home or its memories of the past, as these hold Bim's family together. Instead, *Clear Light of Day* targets the social, patriarchal, nationalistic structures that fetishize the religious and cultural traditions of the past.

The novel's treatment of the division of national spheres into sacred and profane spaces is postsecular in nature, simultaneously validating the importance of the religious, spiritual domain associated with an 'authentic' (i.e., pre-colonial) Indian past while denouncing the disillusionment and entrapment of characters assigned to remain in this sphere and denied access to the more secular, progressive "outer" sphere of global trade and innovation. Moreover, by suggesting the problem is not with the inner and outer spheres of a postcolonial national culture but with the borders that contain individuals within one sphere or the other, *Clear Light of Day* marries postsecular and postcolonial theories, revealing the connection between a postcolonial desire for national authenticity and the implementation of religion as an element of cultural preservation in the face of globalization. It also – albeit to a lesser extent – shows the merits of secular nationalism in combating the Orientalist fetishization of a historic (often fictionalized) India that, as

Chatterjee suggests, is often grounded in narratives of the inner domain. The portrayal of the boundaries between the national spheres as confining and oppressive is a postsecular gesture toward the need for sacred and profane coexistences, rather than separatism and upheld binaries between the two.

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* has been the recipient of much literary criticism since its publication in 1980, though it has yet to be the subject of a postsecular reading. Over the years, the text has been approached primarily as a commentary on memory and historiography (Das and Jena; Jain; Thaggert; Reimenschneider), and more recently it has served as a progressive example of disability studies and postmodernism (LaCom). Yet, despite the range of theories in books and articles written about Desai's work, each has consistently been applied in intersection with postcolonial and feminist approaches that highlight the predicaments of the Das women in relation to national and political upheaval (Das and Jena; Jain; Thaggert; Reimenschneider; LaCom; Mohan). This dissertation's postsecular interpretation continues the critical tradition of incorporating a postcolonial feminist lens in its approach to *Clear Light of Day*, but it diverges in its consideration of religious and secular themes, which are absent from previous work. In doing so, it bridges an existing gap between a focus on the Das family as microcosm for the nation – which is often the main focus of the aforementioned criticism – and the broader nationalist and political setting informing the background of the novel.

Partition provides an essential backdrop to *Clear Light of Day*, although the novel does not extensively depict the politics and violence surrounding the partition of India. As Thaggert points out, "The closest view Bim, Baba, and Mira get of that turbulent history is from the verandah of the house from which they can see the distant flames of fire in the city" (93). Yet, the postcolonial search for an Indian national

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identity in the aftermath of Independence is directly aligned with the text's critique of essentialized inner and outer cultural spheres. Independence is sometimes described in postcolonial works as a coming-of-age for a nation, and *Clear Life of Day* adopts this trope, with the 1947 Partition of India coinciding with the coming of age of Bim, Raja, and Tara. Bim describes that summer as rounding off their youth (43), after which the siblings – like the newly partitioned nation – go separate ways. Bim and Baba stay in the family home, Raja moves to be with the Hyder Alis, and Tara leaves the country altogether. Importantly, this split occurs after the death of their parents, who are arguably the embodiments of British administrators. Not only are they always away at the club, which prompts mutiny among Raja and Bim (22), but they also approach both family and business with a "policy of neglect" (52) – particularly the father, whom they know "only as the master of the entrance and the exit" (53). The Das family thus appears to be a microcosm of the Indian nation. As the narrator points out, when Tara "turned the pages of Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *Early India and Pakistan* [she] thought how relevant such a title was to the situation in their family" (28). Though Partition itself does not receive as much attention as the Das family's personal matters, its representation through the lives of the children make it a central focus point as a watershed moment in the family compound's entrapment in time, which – like Old Delhi (see Desai, *CLOD* 5) – comes to represent problematic aspects of the nation's inner domain.

The concept of inner and outer national spheres is introduced in Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments* as an attempt by postcolonial nations to reassert and differentiate themselves from the colonial power. Previously discussed, Chatterjee's description of this process of "anticolonial nationalism" refers to the

division of society into two realms: the "outside" and the "inner domain." The outside domain encompasses the material, progressive, and modern, including elements such as the economy, science, technology, and so forth. The inner domain, on the other hand, is presented as more spiritual and primarily historical, containing "the 'essential' marks of cultural identity" that often revolve around religious tradition and ritual. As Rassendren explains in "Producing Nation: Gender and the Idea of India," the Indian nation is typically imagined as having been "born in the full flush of modernity on the one hand and the imperceptible traditional, social fabric on the other" (15). More specifically, Rassendren argues, the inner domain of the nation adopted traditional religion, language, and culture as homogenizing forces (15) that purposely challenged the concept of India as "an egalitarian, plural, secular, multicultural nation" (17). In short, the inner and outer domains of postcolonial Indian nationalism represent a postsecular binary, "impos[ing] the esoteric singularity of past ambiguities and the silencing of present pluralities" (Rassendren 19). Further, as Desai illustrates through Bim's confinement in her family home in Old Delhi, the cultural borders meant to keep colonial powers on the outside of the inner domain are often also used to keep her within. Through history, this specific anticolonial approach to nationalism typically is wont to regard women and the 'authentic,' unbending metanarratives of national culture as sacred, pure, authentic elements to be isolated from the profane reaches of the "modern economy, development, individuality, reason and public life in general" (Rassendren 17) – in short, from secular modernity.

On both sides of the colonial binary, women have long been regarded as vessels of national and cultural identity. Among settler colonizers, women were expected to uphold the imperial enterprise in the home (Mills 32-38) as "housekeepers and

homemakers[,]… symbol-bearers for the values of nation" (Strehle 15). Women have served similar nationalist roles as colonized subjects, "burdened as symbolic figures for cultural and national identity" (Hassan 113). Desai invokes this reality in her essay "Women and Fiction in India" when she states that women "were supposed to be the guardians of society, after all, not its destroyers" (27). Sangeeta Ray expands on this concept further, writing that "woman as repository of an untainted, unchanging 'Indian-ness' became the sign of the imaginary feminized nation whose chastity had to be safe-guarded by virile nationalists against Western penetration" (138). In short, women and the domestic sphere are often assigned the role of preserving cultural identity, especially cultural memory. This preservationist role of the home – itself often associated with femininity – is apparent in Tara's explanation that she must continue to visit Bim: "We *must* come – if we are not to lose touch, I with all of you, with home, and [Bakul] with the country" (5).

Problematically, the inner domain of India is exoticized by Tara's husband Bakul, who believes that "eternal India" – by which he means historic cultural monuments such as the Taj Mahal – is more important and representative of 'true' Indian culture than present-day, politicized India. As he states in an argument with Bim,

All of us abroad are, in varying degrees, ambassadors. I refuse to talk about famine or drought or caste wars or – or political disputes. I refuse – I *refuse* to discuss such things. 'No comment' is the answer if I am asked. I can discuss such things here, with you, but not with foreigners, not in a foreign land. There I am an ambassador and I choose to show them and inform them only of the best, the finest. … The Taj Mahal – the Bhagavad Gita – Indian philosophy – music – art – the great, immortal values of ancient India. But why talk of local politics, party

disputes, election malpractices, Nehru, his daughter, his grandson – such matters

as will soon pass into oblivion? *These* aren't important when compared with

India, eternal India. (35)

In a gesture of solidarity with the values of the inner domain, Bakul privileges the

problematic concept of the unchanging nature of culture over the alternative postsecular

championing of change, fluidity, and globalized cultural evolution. To apply

Rassendren's theories on nationalism, one could say that in doing so he propagates the

"troublesome nature of an undifferentiated past, mythical, traditional, almost orientalist"

(15). Bakul's physical and emotional distance from India makes it easier for him to

ignore the realities from which characters like Bim cannot escape. While Bim is

constantly faced with reminders of her nation's violent past, communal present, and

diversity in culture and politics, Bakul's India takes the form of an "imaginary

homeland" (see Rushdie, "Imaginary") – an incredibly problematic one.

It is through the disillusionment of her characters – apparent when Tara finds a

snail in the garden, rather than a pearl (2, 103) – that Desai targets the romanticism of

the inner, spiritual realm of the nation and its association with the women within. The

description of Tara "perform[ing] the rites of childhood" as an adult when she plays with

a snail in the family garden (2) emphasizes the connection Desai continually makes

between childhood and the past, as romanticization of the nation's cultural past is

consistently aligned with the romance of childhood. Yet, this particular element of the

domestic sphere and the nation's inner domain proves troubling rather than endearing.

As Bim asks Tara, "You wouldn't want to return to life as it used to be, would you? …

Do you know anyone who would – secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self – *really*

prefer to return to childhood?" (4). Further, while Bim compares growing up to "leaving

– going away – into the world – something wider, freer – brighter" (4), the concept of remaining trapped in the past takes on increasing associations with a threatening, grotesque symbolism and even death, rather than rosy memories of childhood.

When Mira-*masi* asks for a cow because the Das children were getting "no nourishment" (107), she is in essence asking for a cultural treasure representative of the values of the inner domain. The Das family, after all, is Hindu, for whom cows are sacred. Although Mira-*masi* may have been referring to literal, physical nourishment, her words can be interpreted symbolically as referring to cultural, spiritual nourishment – the kind of nourishment the private sphere is meant to provide to the nation through its well-protected culture. The cow arrives in the family compound among celebration and ecstasy: "There was something bride-like about her white face, her placid eyes and somewhat sullen expression … she was treated like a bride" (107). However, shortly after coming to the Das house, she breaks her rope and wanders through the garden "like a white ghost" and tumbles into the well (107), where she drowns. The drowning of the cow brings an element of disenchantment to perceptions of the home's inner domain, and the items and plants within the compound – all things deemed sacred to national culture – follow in her footsteps as they rot, decay, and eventually die.

Over time, the home to which Bim and Baba are confined – the glorified domestic space assigned to upholding the national culture – becomes more and more uncanny, or unhomely, as the familiar becomes strangely unfamiliar. Its unchanging nature – itself a characteristic of the aforementioned anticolonial nationalist agenda – renders it unnatural, eerie, and grotesque, making Desai's characters uncomfortable – a direct contradiction to what is normally associated with the concept of home. When Tara

returns home to Old Delhi, she comments often that nothing ever changes (1, 4).

However, this is not a comforting thought:

> A part of her was sinking languidly down into the passive pleasure of having
>
> returned to the familiar – like a pebble, she had been picked up and hurled back
>
> into the pond, and sunk down through the layer of green scum, through the secret
>
> cool depths to the soft rich mud at the bottom, sending up a line of bubbles of
>
> relief and joy. A part of her twitched, stirred like a fin in resentment: why was
>
> the pond so muddy and stagnant? Why had nothing changed? She had changed –
>
> why did it not keep up with her? (12)

Rather than merely familiar, the home is described as being in a "petrified state" (12), a "faded old picture in its petrified frame" (4-5), museum-like (21), and "dead and stale" (156). The house is not the only uncanny thing, however; Bim, who became "part of the pattern" of the house, is "inseparable" from it – "grey-haired, mud-faced, [she] was only a brown fleck in the faded pattern" (153). Like Mira-*masi*, Bim ages prematurely (104, 2, 67), and Baba is often described as spectral, a ghostly presence. Lacking substance, character, and even humanity at times, Baba is confined to the house, never to leave (8,40, 41, 62, 103) – his character dismally suggestive of what happens to an individual utterly consigned to the domestic sphere and to living in the past.

In many ways, *Clear Light of Day* achieves a Gothic atmosphere in its vilification of the inescapable grip of the unchanging past upon Bim and Baba's life in Old Delhi. To quote David McInnis, "The terror generated by Gothic romances stems primarily from the realization that what was previously accepted as safe, such as the domestic sphere[,] … is actually dangerously unstable" (86). Accordingly, it is in a Gothic strain that Desai not only depicts the house and surrounding garden as uncanny

but also as haunted and, in many ways, like a tomb. For instance, Bim is haunted by the

ghost of Mira-*masi*, white and naked, creeping toward the well (41). According to Tara,

the house is haunted by the spirits of their parents (22), after whose deaths the drawing

room became like "a vault containing the mortal remains of the departed" (65). Bakul

also describes the house as "a tomb in the moonlight" (159), and the narrator states that

"the house had an atmosphere – a chilling one like a cemetery" (159) – which dampens

"Bim's natural energy and vivacity" (123).

The house as symbol of an unchanging past is essential to the characteristically

Gothic theme of "the stranglehold of the past upon the present," which is typically

embodied in "enclosed and haunted settings such as castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy

mansions" ("Gothic Fiction" 429). Whereas many texts use Gothic architecture to

symbolize the threatening encroachment of previous, less progressive attitudes, Desai's

use of the house and domestic confinement as Gothic tools emphasizes the danger of

burdening the domestic sphere with cultural memory. The unnatural state of this burden

is apparent in Baba's records. Baba never plays new records, and the house is constantly

filled with music from the 1930s and 40s. The song mentioned most, "Don't Fence Me

In," is a reminder that Bim and Baba have been "fenced in" by literal and symbolic

borders and walls.

Along with the imagery of fences, walls, and borders, the image of the well is

further associated with madness, death, and drowning. When visiting the house, Tara

feels Bim's hold on her, "dragging her down, down into a well of oppression, of

lethargy, of ennui" (149). Similarly, when the sisters talk about the past, the narrator

says they "sat together as if at the bottom of a well, caught by its stone walls, trapped in

its gelatinous waters" (152). When speaking of her previous aspirations, Bim remarks

that the heroine she had aspired to be is "down at the bottom of the well – gone, disappeared" (157), and she feels that she "will … end up in that well … one day" (157).

Carol Margaret Davison argues that "if a single trope is obsessively reiterated in the female Gothic as crystallizing the experience of female terror, that trope is the confined woman" (206-07). Though central to Gothic literature in particular, the trope of the confined woman is implemented by Desai to emphasize the dangers of national and cultural confinement – even when the borders imposed upon women are ideological, rather than literal. Bim and Mira-*masi* are depicted as confined to the house and to the national sphere of the private, spiritual realm. Yet, Desai uses her female characters to bring about yet another critique of confinement – the even more literal confinement of their bodies.[34] One day, when Raja is not home, Bim and Tara sneak into his room and try on his clothes. Desai writes,

> They pranced about the room in their trousers, feeling grotesquely changed by them, not only in appearance but in their movements, their abilities. Great possibilities unexpectedly opened up now they had their legs covered so sensibly and practically and no longer needed to worry about what lay bare beneath ballooning frocks and what was so imperfectly concealed by them. Why did girls have to wear frocks? Suddenly they saw why they were so different from their brother, so inferior and negligible in comparison: it was because they did not wear trousers. Now they thrust their hands into their pockets and felt even more superior – what a sense of possession, of confidence it gave one to have pockets,

[34] The theme of women's bodies and confining clothing is addressed more thoroughly in reference to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* in Chapter Four.

to shove one's fists into them, as if in simply owning pockets one owned riches,

owned independence. (132)

Along with the other sacred objects of the inner domain, women's bodies have been fetishized, often resulting in a double confinement – not only confinement to the domestic sphere but also the physical confinement of the body by clothes designed specifically to be different than those of men, who stereotypically are assigned to the outer sphere. Desai equates these two forms of confinement in Mira-*masi* who, in her madness, claws off her clothes so that her breasts hang out (77). In the passages detailing her thoughts, we learn that she feels confined, wrapped in cloths "as if she was a baby, or a mummy" (77). LaCom comments that "bodies out of bound" threaten the project of nationalism, and "at such moments, individual bodies are often imbued with the metonymic power to represent the 'social body,' giving rise to a category of in/valid bodies which includes people with disabilities and women who refuse to enact 'appropriate' behaviors" (142). Exemplifying the national threat of the unbound female body, even after Mira-*masi*'s death, Bim is haunted by sights of her aunt's "shrunken little body, naked, trailing a torn shred of a nightie, a wisp of pubic hair" (100) – the ghostly memory of her aunt serving as a persistent reminder of Mira-Masi's attempt to free herself, and her body, from its entrapments.

The stark division of genders pervades the novel, from the Misra sisters' insistence that chairs *cannot* be red but *must* be pink *or* blue (161) to Bim's chagrin that her father did not teach her the insurance business: "For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and – and *cooked* for my living, or *swept*" (155) – and when she does go into the office, Sharma does not even talk to her because she embarrasses him (154). Meanwhile, Raja has the freedom to leave the family home, telling Bim, "I have to begin

my life some time, don't I? You don't want me to spend all my life down in this hole, do you? You don't think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you?" (100). Finally, there the main conflict between Bim and Raja stems from her desire for independence and his promotion to the status of her landlord (27-28) – the owner of the private sphere to which she is confined. This highlights her own powerlessness, for while queen of her house, she is also its prisoner.

It is through Desai's stark representation of gendered stereotypes that *Clear Light of Day* makes its most resounding critique of the division between national inner and outer domains as representative of sacred and profane dichotomies. The character of Raja, for instance, initially appears to be an ideal ambassador for the postsecular. In the time leading up to Partition, he is described as "one Hindu who actually accepted the idea of Pakistan as feasible" (57), and his relationship with the Hyder Alis embodies not only an ideal coexistence of religious worldviews but also the aesthetics of religion, which are often forgotten in violence. While Raja's friends want to defend "their country, their society, their religion" (57) as interconnected national elements, Raja sits in his Muslim neighbours' library turning over valuable "holy" (48) manuscripts and memorizing Urdu poetry. However, although Raja has great sympathy toward Muslim politics and the Hyder Ali family, he has no sympathy whatsoever for the plights of his sisters and their entrapment in the private sphere of the nation and, indeed, the private sphere of his own life.

Raja, who begins to think "beyond his body … to the outer world and [is] restless to set out into it" (95), becomes so absorbed in the public sphere of the nation that he denounces any involvement in the private sphere of Old Delhi, much less in the home: "The city's burning down. Delhi is being destroyed. The whole country is split up

and everyone's become a refugee. Our friends have been driven away, perhaps killed. And you ask me to worry about a few cheques and files in father's office" (66-67). Bim and Mira-*masi* are left in charge of the concerns of the private sphere, which comes to take on a general religious symbolism, as do the women who remain in it. The well in which the cow drowns becomes a central image in the depictions of the Das family compound, and the memory and existence of the well haunts the remaining characters, representing the dangerous stagnation of the never-changing inner domain as the central aspect of the home. For Mira-*masi*, the well takes on sacred, mythical status and comes to represent a creationist origin story for the household:

> But there was no milk, the cow had died, drowned in the well. In that well, deep
> and stony and still, in which all must drown to die. The navel of the world it was,
> secret and hidden in the thick folds of grass, from which they all emerged and to
> which they must return, crawling on their hands and knees. (90)

The well combines sacred imagery with haunting imagery, as does Mira-*masi* herself in her death. After Mira-*masi* dies in truly horrific fashion, succumbing to madness and literally falling apart, Bim dresses her in her only silk sari like "an idol on an altar" (99), representing her sacred feminine status rather than the more realistic grotesque madness surrounding her death.

Bim herself also becomes a victim of the status of sacred femininity assigned to her as both prisoner and representative of the fetishized private domain, which Mohan describes as her "Christ-like abnegation of self" (63). Dr. Biswas, in prophetic fashion, declares that Bim has "dedicated [her] life to others – to [her] sick brother and [her] aged aunt and [her] little brother who will be dependent on [her] all his life. [She] ha[s] sacrificed [her] own life for them" (97). Recognizing the spiritual imagery thrust upon

her through the terminology of sacrifice, Bim's mouth falls open in horror (97), likely recognizing an "assertion of the masculine ideal through the skewed worship and rejoicing over female sacrifice" (Rassendren 18). This ideal is problematically supported by Reimenschneider in his argument that Bim bases her decision to stay on Dr. Biswas's enlightened opinion (see 206), which overlooks the fact that Bim is "stuck" in her childhood home, which Thaggert points out mirrors Bim being "stuck in a beehive" (95).

Desai expounds upon the realities surrounding Bim as sacrificial woman when, in a tomb, a boy throws a pebble at a bees' hive, and Bim is swarmed while Tara escapes. The general language of religious tradition that Desai employs in describing this scene evokes a sense of sacred ritual: "It was a bees' festival, a celebration, Bim their appointed victim, the sacrificial victim on whom they had draped the ceremonial shawl, drawing it close about her neck as she stood drooping, shivering under the weight of their gauzy wings, their blue-black humming" (135). The great contrast between the spiritual terminology and the threatening reality of Bim's situation depicts the dangers underlying a sentimental fixation upon the inner domain. Bim's life is surrounded by themes and images of entrapment that do not apply to Raja, with even Tara escaping – though, it should be noted that Tara is removed by her husband, rather than leaving on her own. While at home, Bim and Tara live in a state of suffocation within "some great grey mass" keeping them away from an atmosphere of "colour and event and company … rich and vibrant with possibilities" (120); only Raja manages to break free of the greyness and thus enters the public atmosphere denied to his sisters.

Critical interpretations of the end of the novel vary greatly, and for good reason. Bim has the epiphany that she loves her siblings deeply, and the family home and the history it represents contains the roots of that love. Yet, this realization cannot erase the

multiple earlier descriptions of the Das compound as repulsive, stagnant, and dangerous. Significantly, despite the Gothic imagery she employs, Desai upholds the importance of the domestic sphere, national culture, spirituality, or the past – all of which are essential elements of the nation's inner domain. For Das and Jena, reconstructing the past through Tara's visit helped the two sisters "find the[ir] interiority" (60), presenting the past in a positive light. Likewise, Jain reads this past revisited as containing "a happiness which had escaped their notice" (420). In fact, Bim – in spite of her entrapment – embraces the role of national and cultural preservation that had previously been thrust upon her and makes it her own through her job as a history teacher. Presenting positive images of Bim as teacher, Desai suggests that the past should be preserved. Further, even though the Das family home is still Gothic and threatening in its unchangingness, Bim comes to see

> how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as
> her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences – not binding
> them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send
> down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new
> experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same
> secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark
> with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest
> selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her.
> (182)

On the other end of the critical spectrum, however, Mohan comments that "the source of this rich fecundity is nothing less than the female labour and sacrifice embodied in Mira-*masi* and Bim herself" (64). Although Bim reaches a new appreciation for her home and

her family, the positive connotations of her realization should not obscure a critical analysis of the troubling gendered expectations that plagued her and Mira-*masi*'s pasts.

At the end of *Clear Light of Day* – when Bim realizes that "together [her siblings] would form a whole that would be perfect and pure" (166), she recalls a line from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "*'Time the destroyer is time the preserver'*" (182). This concept perfectly encapsulates Bim's relationship with Time and its embodiment in the family house. While dangerous and malignant to those trapped within the inner, private domain, the compound nonetheless contains the roots of her existence. Moreover, it is only the postsecular coexistence of the sacred, originary Time of the inner sphere with the secular, present-day Time of the outer sphere and the associated breakdown of the borders keeping Bim within and Raja outside that promises the opportunity for a reunion and a perfect "whole" (166). In short, *Clear Light of Day* upholds the value of the private, spiritual realm and its preservation of the nation's history and anticolonial culture; yet, it also lauds – though to a lesser extent – the secular time of the outer sphere and its emphasis on the ever-evolving globalized nature of the nation and its significance in current-day world politics – national, secular, and religious. Thus, it is neither the inner nor the outer domain of national culture that Desai censures, but the borders – symbolized by the literal walls and fences of the Das household and the less literal grey mass surrounding the Das sisters' lives – that refuse migration not only between cities and nations but also, more specifically, between sacred and profane national spheres.

The Shadow Lines: Personal and National Historiography and Memory

Like *Clear Light of Day*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* engages the intersecting topics of history, nation, and memory while exploring related disconnections between the personal and the national. However, whereas *Clear Light of Day* primarily interrogates the function of gender in relation to national history, Ghosh's work focuses on challenging the authoritative status assigned to national history, as well as the distinctions upheld between objective truth and subjective understanding. Set both before and after the separation of East and West Pakistan and spanning the globe through characters' travels in India, London, and Dhaka, *The Shadow Lines* follows the lives of Tridib, May, Ila, Robi, and the unnamed narrator himself. Significantly, the narration relies largely on characters' memories, detailing a time before the narrator is born and addressing events for which he was not present, most of which are centred around the short life of his uncle Tridib, including Tridib's childhood in London during World War II; his correspondence and relationship with May Price; his philosophies on space, time, and perception; and eventually his death during a communal riot in Dhaka. By writing the story of Tridib, the narrator gives voice to a personal narrative absent from personal and official histories of communalism. Moreover, the contents of this narrative challenge literal and figurative separations of space, time, and ideologies upheld by more nationalist approaches to memory and identity.

The Shadow Lines has not been the focus of much postsecular criticism to date, save five pages of analysis by Manav Ratti in "Rethinking Postsecularism Through Postcolonialism," in which he makes the postsecular argument that the violent events of the novel enact a challenge to state secularism (67). The novel has, however, received ample critical attention in relation to its treatment of historiography. In many cases,

Ghosh is lauded for his novel's postcolonial resistance to Eurocentric historicism (MacLennan 12-13; Mondal, "Allegories" 21; Sankaran xxi; Khan 71). However, such simple interpretations of *The Shadow Lines'* engagement with history overlook the ways in which the text also challenges non-colonial manifestations of nationalism. To quote Roy, "Ghosh attempts to fill up the gaps in nationalist histories by telling alternate revisionist stories, suppressed or elided by nationalism's dominant discourse, even as he interrogates the validity of the nation, nationalism and nationalist identity in an era of global capitalism" (35). Whereas the writing and telling of postcolonial revisionist histories decentre Eurocentric historiography, *The Shadow Lines* offers an alternative history not only to the narratives of Empire but also to anticolonial, Indian nationalism, which similarly silenced and overlooked certain histories (see Ratti, "Rethinking" 63). In this way, *The Shadow Lines* paradoxically functions as a postcolonial text that nonetheless challenges the concept of a "glorious past" (Khan 3) founded on a Hindu, rather than English, cultural nostalgia and the resultant "fabrication of a new past for the nation" (Khan 14).

The narrator is subject to misconceptions of his life, seen by some as "lived out in the silence of voiceless events in a backward world" (102). Nonetheless, the context in which Tridib's history becomes eclipsed is not necessarily colonial but distinctly Indian. In many ways, there is only one scene in which any of Ghosh's characters come across as overtly religious: having been taken by his father to the "great temple of Ma Kali at Dakshineswar" to make their offerings (233), the narrator's father tells him about Tridib's death, followed by an invocation: "Remember you're holding Ma Kali's flowers in your hands, so you can't ever go back on your word. Promise me that you'll never talk about this anywhere" (234). Importantly, in a text in which devout religiosity

and Hindu tradition are rarely mentioned, Ghosh chooses this setting for the moment at which Tridib's history is silenced, thus interrogating overarching national metanarratives in general – even postcolonial ones – when they become exclusionary in nature.

The deliberate silencing of this aspect of the narrator's family history gestures toward the unreliability of officially sanctioned history. However, Ghosh takes this one step further and depicts personal, subjective histories as equally unreliable. Not only does the narrator at times present other characters' sources as if they were his own – collating and "streamlining" historical accounts (S. Singh 163) – but as Lauret points out, "The narrative appears as a litany of 'I remember' and 'I cannot remember'" (79). The narrator is aware of the subjectivity of his own memories, describing, for instance, the "difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale" (47). Moreover, he describes some of his memories "as though [they] were a film running through [his] head in slow motion" (161), while at other times he admits remembering very little of events (151). Much of his narration also involves channeling other people's memories, including Tridib's, Ila's, and Tha'mma's. The narratorial unreliability is accentuated by the narrator's tendency to make himself and Tridib indistinguishable at times. Because he does not know what Tridib looked like as a boy, he claims, "I had decided that he had looked like me" (3). Further, as S. Singh points out, he slides into "meta-narrativity" through his "assumed omnipresence" in details of Tridib's distant life (166, 165). Finally, the unreliability of the personal narrative is complicated one degree more by Tridib's acknowledgement of his own faulty memory (141), including one element S. Singh describes as the "illusion of knowledge created by a deceptive weight of remembered detail" (66).

Although the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* is unreliable, the story of Tridib is not meant to be discounted. Rather, the text performs a postmodern function not unlike that of *The Satanic Verses* in casting a healthy amount of doubt on two opposing structures, destabilizing both instead of promoting one over the other. This aspect of the novel gives way to a discourse on truth and knowledge that purposely blurs distinctions between reality and fiction. While Tridib cautions his listeners on the street corner against believing everything they are told (12), he and the narrator propagate tales that others insist cannot be true and which, rationally speaking, appear to be false. For instance, Tridib was not in London at the second time he claimed he was, nor was he related to the Prices (13); similarly, Robi insists that the bombs the narrator describes – which were first mentioned by Tridib – did not exist in 1940 (55). Ghosh thus challenges the possibility of truthful representation (see Mondal, "Allegories" 22) echoed in the text: "Nobody knows, nobody can ever know, not even in memory, because there are moments in time that are not *knowable*" (67).

Butalia writes that "the way people choose to remember an event, a history, is at least as important as what one might call the 'facts' of that history" (8), and it appears that Ghosh would concur. The tales and "truths" Tridib tells the narrator, and others which the narrator himself records, are described in manners similar to the sacred histories described by Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*:

> The myth relates a sacred history, that is, a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time, *ab initio.* But to relate a sacred history is equivalent to revealing a mystery. For the persons of the myth are not human beings; they are gods or culture heroes, and for this reason their *gesta* constitute mysteries; man could not know their acts if they were not revealed to him. The myth, then, is the

history of what took place *in illo tempore,* the recital of what the gods or the

semidivine beings did at the beginning of time. To tell a myth is to proclaim what

happened *ab origine.* Once told, that is, revealed, the myth becomes apodictic

truth; it establishes a truth that is absolute. (95)

Significantly, the silenced, unknowable, sacred histories of Tridib's life *and* of life in

London in the early days of the war subscribe to neither existing religious nor secular

worldviews.

The treatment of Tridib's life as an unknowable truth throughout *The Shadow*

Lines does not correspond with a "documented version of history," as Khan points out

(70). Importantly, this statement applies to both religious and secular records of history,

which are used, as Anderson describes, in the formation of imagined communities.

Ghosh gestures toward the function of both secular and religious concepts, institutions,

and symbols in the formation of a national consciousness, but he more importantly

undermines the positive connotation associated with the word "community" by revealing

the violence associated with its formation. He emphasizes this in relation to both

secularism and religiosity, exposing not only the sameness of their treatments of others,

but also the interwoven nature of each. Pandey describes Indian nationalism as

simultaneously sacred and profane, even echoing Habermas's terminology regarding

language when he claims, "On the one hand nationalism must speak the language of

rationality … on the other, it needs the language of blood and sacrifice of historical

necessity, of ancient (god-given) status … which is part of the discourse of community"

(209). Ghosh reveals the presence of these sentiments through the character of

Tha'mma, whose desire for a "modern middle-class life … believing in the unity of

nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power" (77) is founded on a history

of blood and violence.

Eschewing the transnational perspectives of many of Ghosh's characters, Tha'mma opposes her granddaughter's life in England:

> Ila has no right to live there, she said hoarsely. She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders in blood. Hasn't Maya told you how regimental flags hang in all their cathedrals and how all their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what *you* have to achieve for India, don't you see? (76)

Ghosh suggests that all space is invented, from Tha'mma's "invented country" (134) to the narrator's "secret map of the world" (190; cf. Roy 36), but he also highlights the power of a shared imagining – both good and bad.

In what is perhaps a nod to Rushdie's short story "The Prophet's Hair," Ghosh centres one of the main plot points of *The Shadow Lines* around the theft (and later reinstallation) of the sacred hair of the Prophet Mohammad from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar in 1963 (219). Srivastava writes that Rushdie's story "problematized the conflict between sacred and secular meaning attached to iconic objects such as the sacred hair of the prophet" (71), and though she does not refer to it as a postsecular tale, Rushdie's presentation of the varying outcomes – holy and profane – for the characters

who encounter the hair performs the postsecular function of revealing the simultaneously sacred and secular manifestations of the religious and cultural symbol. Moreover, it offers no clear judgement regarding the sacred nature of the object, merely presenting a pluralist coexistence of secular and religious meaning in characters' approaches to the symbol. Ghosh does something similarly postsecular with his treatment of the theft, which, as in Rushdie's story, produces different outcomes for different people. On the one hand, the loss of the relic positively reinforces a cross-border sense of community: "There is a note of surprise – so thin is our belief in the power of syncretic civilisations – in the newspaper reports which tell us that the theft of the relic had brought together the people of Kashmir as never before …. in a collective display of mourning" (221). On the other hand, collective mourning is overcome by protest and communal violence in Khulna, East Pakistan (222).[35]

Srivastava sees this aspect of *The Shadow Lines* as portraying "the underlying and resilient power of religion to divide and unite above and beyond mutual expressions of 'secular'" (70), though the narrator perhaps describes it more realistically as "a reminder … of that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments" (225). Though the narrator presents this theory in relation to violence, his concept of transcendent community can be extended and applied to religion, and more generally to concepts of space and time. By invoking moments of syncretism and sameness across secular and religious lines, Ghosh continues to expose

[35] The communal violence Tridib experienced in Khulna is one of many incidents referred to as the 1964 East Pakistan riots: a direct response to the theft of the Prophet Muhammad's hair from the Hazratbal Shrine and Abdul Hai's related declaration of a *jihad* against Hindus and other non-Muslims in East Pakistan (Bhattacharyya 89). Tridib was killed two days into the Khulna riots, which began on January 2, 1964 when mourning processions for the loss sacred relic began to adopt violent chants of "Kill the Hindus" (Mukhopadhyay 56). Not only did the East Pakistan riots prompt a mass exodus of Hindu, Christian, and other non-Muslim refugees to India, but they also contributed to the heightened political atmosphere leading up to the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

the imagined nature of national and ideological communities, thus breaking down

barriers and binaries separating them. His protagonists thus transcend spatial, temporal,

and ideological lines of separation, which he addresses through the unique history of the

Indian Subcontinent and its violent colonial, communal histories.

In what is perhaps the novel's most obvious depiction of the futility of borders

(see Khan 71), Tha'mma prepares to fly to Dhaka and wants to know if she will be able

to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the air (148). When her son

informs her there are no physical lines, she retorts, "But if there aren't any trenches or

anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's

no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before …. What

was it all for then – Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something

in between?" (148-49). According to Khan, "the moment of national separation never

actually takes place" (86); and it is this idea that Ghosh goes on to demonstrate, from

Tha'mma's surprise at the "bare glass-and-linoleum airport, so like the one she had just

left" (190) to the connected troubles experienced in both Calcutta and Dhaka (189). As

the narrator explains, not long ago, people had "drawn their borders, believing in that

pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their

borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the

shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland" (228). However, in his

narrative of Tridib's life and in his own experiences, the borders separating India, East

Pakistan/Bangladesh, and even London function as metaphorical mirrors, rather than

dividers (see Fu 289-90).

Throughout *The Shadow Lines*, borders and even physical distance itself are

subverted from their usual status of separators and are instead depicted as mirror-like –

separation and distance only serving to heighten the similarities between people, nations, and elements on opposite sides of their 'lines.' Of course, the mirror function throughout the novel is metaphorical, rather than supernatural or literal. The narrator makes this apparent when he describes Mayadebi and Tha'mma as smiling "exactly the same way, as though there was a mirror between them," despite Robi's remark that "they hadn't looked at all like each other; they were completely different" (35). Likewise, though the narrator describes Nick Price as "a spectral presence beside [him] in [his] looking glass" (49, cf. 186), they are not identical in his mind, as Nick was always bigger, better, and featureless apart from his yellow hair and blue eyes (49). The mirror metaphor does not imply identical sameness but rather likeness, a similarity between persons in terms of their shared humanity, common histories and experiences, and interconnected cultural and political realities. But the differences are equally important: as Ball points out in *Imagining London*, the "logic of all the novel's resemblances" is "Exactly the same except that" (218). In this case, the logic of likeness applies to the similarity between distant places.

The mirror analogy spreads from individual characters' recognition of themselves in others to national similarities. In London during World War II, Alan Tresawsen likens England to Germany: "People don't believe me, he said, but it's the same over there – in Germany – though of course in a much more grotesque way. It was odd coming back here – like stepping through a looking glass" (65). While the first mention of mirror-like similarity (in Mayadebi and Tha'mma's meeting) encompasses a happy moment, the representation of borders as mirror-like becomes increasingly troubling, even haunting as *The Shadow Lines* progresses. The narrator's description of Nick as a spectral presence in his mirror emphasizes the unnatural, uncanny relationship

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when one's very own image – simultaneously representative of Self and Other – is obscured or made threatening or unrecognizable. On a more specifically national level, the uncanniness of this separation and opposition is further emphasized through the narrator's description of the fear he felt during the Calcutta riots:

> That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the fear of the victims of an earthquake, of people who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth. And yet it is not the same. It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the fear of nature, which is the most universal of human fears, nor to the fear of the violence of the state, which is the commonest of modern fears. It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (200)

The sense of unease that accompanies the unfamiliarity of the otherwise familiar is apparent in depictions of religious worldviews and secular-national borders as unnatural, which in turn problematize the divisions upheld through national and ideological borders and boundaries.

In *Post-Colonial Transformation*, Bill Ashcroft argues that "effective resistance to the concept of the boundary is not another boundary but its opposite: what we may term *horizonality*" (183). It is in horizonality that the true force of transformation becomes realized, for whereas the boundary is about "constriction" and "regulation," the

horizon represents "extension" and "possibility." As Ashcroft argues, "Horizonality is, possibly, the *only* way in which the predominance of the boundary in Western thought can be resisted" (183). Though Ashcroft writes specifically of borders in relation to Western colonialism, his theory of horizonality is transferable across nations. The concept of horizonality presents an interesting alternative to the act of "interpenetration … between once rigidly separated borders" that Rosati and Stoeckl define as "essential to the making (and understanding) of a postsecular society" (4). As the "constant limit of vision, the always present yet always receding 'boundary' of perception," the horizon is "an unattainable line" (Ashcroft 183) – instead of measuring the world through binaries of Self and Other, or Here and There, the horizon measures scope and distance as, above all, merely relative.

There may appear to be a disconnect between Ghosh's mirror-border analogy and Ashcroft's theory of horizonality, as one seems predicated upon shadowy, porous borders and the other upon the absence of borders altogether. However, Tridib's, and later the narrator's, pursuit of horizonality allows them to overcome the boundary separating themselves from their reflection, or their Other Selves. In contrast to the prominence of Self that dominates colonial theory, Tridib relates real knowledge to "a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (29). Tridib's "desire" (29) for neutral, undivided space and the narrator's figurative "journey … into … a land of looking-glass events" (219) – which occurs when he realizes the connection between the riots he experienced as a child and the riots across the India/East Pakistan border that killed Tridib – overcome spatial and temporal

lines of separation, but more importantly, they overcome ideological lines of separation. Thus, these characters – along with May Price – embrace a postsecularity that challenges religious communal violence and state secularism simultaneously.

The Shadow Lines does not depict the events of Partition in a direct way. Nonetheless, by "meld[ing] pre-Independence India, Britain in the Second World War, and post-Independence India" (Khan 71), it simultaneously overcomes temporal and spatial lines of separation so that history – including the history of Partition – is always present in characters' lives. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia writes, "If I was reading them right, it would seem that Partition was now over, done with, a thing of the past. Yet, all around us there was a different reality: partitions everywhere, communal tension, religious fundamentalism, continuing divisions on the basis of religion" (6). More importantly, she adds, "How do we know this event except through the ways in which it has been handed down to us: through fiction, memoirs, testimonies, through memories, individual and collective, through the communalism it unleashed and, only as one of these aspects, through the histories it has produced" (8). Similar – nearly identical – sentiments are present in *The Shadow Lines*, which itself functions as fiction, memoir, testimony, memory, and narrative history pertaining to the legacy of Partition.

Just as the narrative of Tridib's otherwise silenced life and death challenges official histories of communal conflict, so too does Tha'mma's narrative of her childhood home add further dimension to the history of Partition. The "peculiarly vicious, legalistic" quarrel (120) between her father and his brother mirrors that of India and Pakistan: "Soon things came to such a pass that they decided to divide the house with a wooden partition wall: there was no other alternative" (121). Descriptions of the wall bisecting commodes and blocking doorways (121) are humorous, as are Tha'mma

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and Mayadebi's shared belief that, on the other side of the wall, the house is "upside-down" (123), as are the people in it (124). However, the "strange, eerie silence" (121) in the house, Tha'mma's eventual near-belief in her own fiction (124), and the "habits engendered by decades of hostility" (122) reflect on a more serious level the extent of the Othering across their own familial partition border. The use of houses as metaphors for nations throughout the novel ties together public and private spaces, yet another challenge to Western secularism and secularity more generally. However, in Tha'mma's story, she eventually crosses the partition and gleefully concludes that nothing was, in fact, upside-down. Moreover, she crosses the boundary to reunite with and "rescue" her uncle Jethamoshai who, unlike his two nieces and even his caretaker, stubbornly clings to the house as representative of Partition and land ownership out of fear that "his brother's family would come back to claim their share" (206).

Although *The Shadow Lines* in many ways offers a retelling – a reshaping – of history, and therefore a challenge and an alternative to how the past has been understood, the inescapable impact of the past upon characters' presents is also emphasized. The narrator's reference to "the world that [he] had inherited" (90) alludes to the stories of the past that have been handed down to him – many by Tridib himself. In contrast to Ila, for whom "the current was real" and the present was "like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates" (30), the narrator sees objects "through Tridib's eyes," making their past seem concurrent with their present (31). Just as Tridib was working on a PhD in archaeology (7), and thus was immersed in the past, so too is the narrator immersed in the fragments of history. According to Lauret, "The narrator is in between two countries, but he also oscillates between past and present, secrets and revelations. Reading this novel may

consequently be compared to joining an archaeological excavation" (79), although, "Right from the beginning, the reader understands that the boundaries between the past and the present are porous" (81).

The narrator is haunted by his past, from the letter that arrives from his Tha'mma after she has died – "her resurrected hand, reaching out to [him] after her death" (91) – to the empty corners of the cellar that "filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to [him] by time" (178). While the prevalence of the inherited past has an important function in relation to narrative history and therefore to the genre of the postcolonial novel, it also challenges a secular representation of time. The ghosts of the past that the narrator mentions throughout may be real, figurative, and/or imaginative, but his description of a ghost as "a presence displaced in time" (178) signals his postsecular conception of time. In *The Shadow Lines*, time collapses between various narratives, with past often melding into present, and vice versa. Not only is time non-sequential and non-linear, but it is also not entirely secular while not entirely enchanted, or religious. The impact of the past upon the present of the individual is not an uncommon theme in literary studies or in philosophy more generally. In *Imagining London*, Ball writes that "individual identity emerges out of the entwined relations between old and new selves, between those selves and various others, and between present and distant (or past) places" (29). In a similar strain, Eliade's contemplation on the sacred and the profane describes man as "an inheritor. He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he is himself the product of his past" (204).

Many definitions of the secular relate the concept to time, and specifically the time of the present, of "now," versus transcendental, divine time. The description of time in the novel as porous (Lauret 81) comes across as a description of enchanted time, as

does the narrator's tendency to conflate past and present as inseparable. Neither suggest secularity or the importance of the individual and the present over the communal, pre-ordained spiritual dimensions of the past. Yet, as Khair argues, and as is key to Ghosh's treatment of nationalism and narrative history, "the 'past' that comes into being ... has been created by much in the present" (Khair 26). The extent of the narratorial unreliability indicated throughout the text indicates the narrative, or subjective, aspect of history, decentring not only authoritative history but also the authority of Ghosh's narrator in *The Shadow Lines*. All narrative (and therefore metanarrative) is destabilized in a postmodern gesture calling all notions of historical truth into question. This further gestures toward the postsecular, as the sacred past is challenged by the impact of the present, while the secular present is also destabilized by the overbearing presence – and porous border – of the past.

It is through the symbol of ruins that the conflation of past and present indicates, first, the postsecular properties of time in the religious and secular imaginations of the nation and, second, a postsecular alternative to the tensions surrounding their interpretations. In Ghosh's depiction of the ruins of London architecture during World War II and the later ruins of Empire in India, the conflicts between spatial, temporal, and ideological narratives are overcome by the complexity of their symbolic coexistences within the sites of ruins, with all three concepts intertwined throughout the novel. While the narrator, for instance, is happy to be "bound" by his inheritance of family, culture, and the narratives of his home (87-88), Tridib longs for a neutral space that contradicts the binding natures of these elements. The narrator describes Tridib as "happiest in neutral, impersonal places" (9), as is reflected when Tridib relates the story of Tristan and Isolde, which he describes as the "best story" because it occurs in "a place without

borders and countries" and features "a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman across the seas" (183). Neutral space is championed by Tridib and the narrator throughout the novel. However, their concept of neutral space extends beyond the literal and encompasses the personal, through which Ghosh presents a postsecular reclamation of space laden with secular and/or religious meaning.

When the narrator claims that Tridib had given him "worlds to travel in and … eyes to see them with" (20), he is referring to his uncle's ability to "experience the world as concretely in [his] imagination … as [others] did through [their] senses" (29-30). Whereas Ila refers to Tridib's "imaginings" of areas around the world as "fairylands" (24) in contrast to "real places" on maps, the narrator retorts that Tridib was not interested in fairylands but in using imagination "with precision" (24). Tridib's approach to imagination in relation to the spaces and places of the world challenges the authoritative nature assigned to historical, geographical, national, and other metanarratives. As the narrator explains to Ila, "A place does not merely exist, … it has to be invented in one's mind" (21). This stands in contrast to Fu's interpretation of the underground scenes in the novel, which he describes as occurring in "nether spaces" and the dark "liminal areas where the children tell their stories and participate in forces of the realm of the imagination and the non-rational" (290). Rather, Ghosh's protagonists approach all space as liminal in a way; or, at least, they take down the barriers separating rational and non-rational space, real and imagined places. By doing so, they complicate the meanings of neutral, sacred, and profane space.

Despite Tridib's alleged preference for neutral space, he is clearly, and paradoxically, drawn to places already laden with history and national, social, and cultural meaning. His fascination with ruins in particular, and the exploration of the past

in the present, goes beyond his studies in archaeology and becomes a central element of his relationship with May Price. Inspired by his childhood experience of climbing through the wall of a bombed theatre in London – which is rendered a sacred, forbidden place in its new status as a ruin of war (136) – and witnessing a sexual meeting between two complete strangers, he writes to May that he wants to meet her in a similar space:

> But he did know that that was how he wanted to meet her, May – as a stranger, in a ruin. He wanted them to meet as the completest of strangers – strangers-across-the-seas – all the more strangers because they knew each other already. He wanted them to meet far from their friends and relatives – in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers. (141)

Tridib's description of a ruin as a neutral space – a place without a past, without a history – seems self-contradictory, as the very thing that constitutes a ruin is its function as a visible reminder of something that once was and is no longer. In other words, a ruin is a standing memorial to history. Yet, Ghosh's complex treatment of ruins in *The Shadow Lines* overcomes this paradox through the reclamation of ruins as a postsecular space.

Interestingly, Tridib tells May that if they are to meet at a ruin, she must come to India (141), implying a freedom from the control of history in his home country. However, when he takes her to the statue of Queen Victoria – a symbol of English colonization and a history in which May and Tridib would never have met as equals, much less as lovers – she retorts, "It shouldn't be here, she blurted out. It's an act of violence. It's obscene" (167). Tridib's insistence that this is "*our* ruin" (167), in spite of – perhaps even because of – its oppressive historical connotations, represents a

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reclamation of history, space, and the sacred and profane narratives informing both. Khan writes that "Tridib's story is a defiance of meta-narratives, because human knowledge will always be tentative and arbitrary. He inspires the narrator to construct his own narratives in order to avoid getting incarcerated in someone else's oppressive stories that reflect ethnic and religious jealousies" (77). Tridib's treatment of ruins is no different, but it challenges not only ethnic and religious stories but also nationalist and secular narratives.

In many cases, ruins come to denote a sacred space and are often associated with the inner, private sphere of the nation and with the national and cultural portrayals of history and myth as sacred. It is important to note, however, that not all ruins are sacred spaces – at least, not initially. Rather, it is the preservation of ruins over time and the adoption of some as symbols of history, national resiliency, and so forth that gradually renders them sacred within a national narrative. Through the association of secular, national history with sacred time as "*primordial mythical time made present*" (Eliade 68), these ruins oppose the organization of Western secularism into public secularism and private religion by promoting religiosity, myth, and origin narratives within public space. The fact that Tridib chooses the statue of Queen Victoria for his and May's ruin is even more paradoxical than his interpretation of ruins as neutral space, as the history represented by this statue is a colonial past. Eliade refers to sacred time as "a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites" (70), and throughout history the visitation of ruins has served as a rite of historical recall and the upholding of historical narrative. Significantly, however, Tridib vests the site of the ruin with new meaning. The "physical occupation and control of space" that was crucial to British imperialism and represented by the Queen Victoria statue (Ashcroft 124) relates

to the formation of borders, but Tridib oversteps this meaning of the statue by reclaiming it and its meaning. No longer does the statue represent a colonial relationship, but he designates it to represent a romantic, crosscultural one – the very thing it previously would have opposed. Tridib's and May's ruin had a metanarrative; yet, a ruin by its very nature represents a past no longer maintained.

Though sacred, the ruins are also rendered profane through Tridib's association of them with sex. While marketed as representations of the nation to tourists, ruins exist in the public, global sphere; yet, they are also part of the inner, spiritual domain of the nation. In short, they overstep all boundaries, serving as simultaneously sacred and profane, past and present, and even timeless, representing inner and outer domains, nationalism and globalism. In short, ruins are postsecular, and it is this element of their character that Tridib draws on in his assignation to them of the status of neutral space. Tridib and May successfully rewrite the history of the ruin for the narrator, though without meaning to: "It became a haunted site: I could not go there without hearing Tridib's soft voice whispering: This is our ruin; this is where we meet" (167). To quote Lefebvre, "What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?" (44). Space is a central tenet of organized religions around the world, as implied through the ubiquitous importance of temples, mosques, churches, tabernacles, and shrines. Tridib's postsecular ideology, therefore, follows the tradition of creating sacred spaces but moves away from traditional religious spaces to embrace a space that is, in itself, postsecular.

By reclaiming the ruin and rewriting its significance, Tridib assigns a new, postsecular ideology to the space that overcomes the secular and religious nationalist

narratives it previously embodied. He goes beyond the Western secularist approach that separates sacred and profane elements, described by Durkheim through "the division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane" and his insistence that "a rock, a tree, a spring, a stone, a piece of wood, a house, in other words anything at all, can be sacred" (36). Yet, Durkheim believes that the "state of dissociation" between the sacred and the profane "in human consciousness" makes communication between the two impossible (39). Tridib challenges this belief by imputing the ruin with religious and secular meaning – both sacred and profane associations, including national, colonial, and postcolonial symbolism. He takes the uncanny arising from the ruins (see Liao 5) and renders it familiar through appropriation. He rewrites the history of the ruin, endowing it with a new, postsecular meaning in which past and present, sacred and profane, and East and West are combined and coexist within the space.

The manner in which Tridib approaches the ruin as a postsecular space reflects his outlook toward space more generally – a worldview he passes on to the narrator, his nephew. The narrator describes him to Ila and Robi as

> the Tridib who had pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the
> Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at
> least we could try to do it properly … that we had to try because the alternative
> wasn't blankness – it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never
> be free of other people's inventions. (31)

The other "inventions" he refers to encompass authoritative metanarratives in general, but spatial narratives in particular, given his fascination with distance and time and the real and imagined crossing of both. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib's geographic inventions

allow him to surpass the borders and boundaries upheld by national, religious, secular, and political narratives of "other people's inventions." By developing a worldview that transcends those of mapped spaces, Tridib is able to identify with friends, family, and mere strangers across national and religious borders.

The narrator similarly "learn[s] the meaning of distance" fifteen years after Tridib's death when, using Tridib's old atlas, he discovers that the distance between Khulna and Srinagar is no greater than the distances separating "Tokyo … from Beijing, or Moscow from Venice, or Washington from Havana, or Cairo from Naples" (226). The circle the narrator draws in the atlas to illustrate this distance encompasses, he believes, "more than half of mankind" (227), and he conjectures that the only event that could happen in one place and affect those in another of equal distance could only be war (228). Fu claims that "the tragedy of Tridib results from an underestimation of the weight of the line" (290), suggesting a certain naiveté in Tridib's actions and, above all, in his approach to distance between spaces. However, the postsecular language employed by other characters in relation to Tridib's death suggests his death was not the result of an error in judgment but instead a calculated decision representing the culmination of his own worldview representing – like the narrator's – an other space.

Indeed, terminology of the sacred fills May's and the narrator's recollections of Tridib's life and death, infusing it with significance transcending rationality. When attempting to relate the riots of 1964 through which he lived, the narrator describes every word as "the product of a struggle with silence" that "lies outside the ready of [his] intelligence, beyond words…. [I]t is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words" (213). The silence pervading his narrative signifies a lack of meaning; meanwhile, May's telling of the silenced story of Tridib's death, and by

extension his postsecular gesture, endows both with meaning and significance. May tells the narrator,

> I thought I'd killed him. I used to think: perhaps he wouldn't have got out of that car if I hadn't made him, if I'd understood what I was doing. I was safe, you see – I could have gone right into that mob, and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib, but he, he must have known he was going to die. For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now I didn't kill him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery. (246)

The language of sacrifice is echoed in the narrator's claim that May had given him a glimpse of "a final redemptive mystery" (246).

In "Rethinking Postsecularism through Postcolonialism," Ratti briefly addresses the use of religious diction in *The Shadow Lines*, situating the term "redemption" in line with both religious and secular ideologies without attributing it with transcendentalism (64). The language of sacrifice associated with Tridib's death echoes an earlier instance in which May cuts the throat of a dog whose back was broken when Tridib hit it with a car, after which she washes herself in the water for a long time (170), both actions signifying the association of sacrifice and redemption, or cleansing. Although May kills the dog out of a sense of mercy and the rioters kill Tridib out of anger and violence, the manner in which they are killed – their throats cut from ear to ear – mirror one another (245), as do their sacrificial overtones. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade writes that "a territory can be made ours only by creating it anew, that is, by consecrating it" (32). Tridib's fascination with claiming and rewriting narratives of space

stems from witnessing the two strangers physically 're-consecrate' the bombed theatre in London, and he similarly sets out to re-consecrate the Queen Victoria statue in his relationship with May. The streets of Dhaka are likewise consecrated and created anew by Tridib, though this is accomplished through his death, rather than through intercourse or relationship.

The sacral language used to describe Tridib's death assigns it mythic status, which Durkheim describes as "translat[ing] some human need, some aspect of life, whether individual or social" (4). Above all, though, Tridib's death signifies what Sankaran sees in Ghosh as "a profound aversion for 'borders' of any kind" (xxiv). By rushing to the aid of his Hindu uncle Jethamoshai and Muslim caretaker Khalil to share their fate, Tridib throws his lot in with an instance of postsecularism in the communal Subcontinent *and* runs toward the Other in the mirror – overcoming "Self-division" (Mondal, "Allegories" 29) by breaking through the border between one's self and one's image in the mirror, even though doing so leads to his death. Tridib sacrifices himself for the postsecular values he holds, challenging religious, secular, and overall nationalist divisions between Self and Other throughout the postcolonial Subcontinent. By doing so, he further challenges the resultant association of essentialist nationalism and postcolonialism, for which Roy describes him as possibly "post-nationalist" (40). Importantly, the novel does not end with the death of a postsecular character, but it is brought to fruition through the actions and narratives of other postsecular characters who carry on after he is gone.

Tridib's desire for cultural exchange around the world is present in his argument that "everyone lives in a story … because stories are all there is to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose" (179). The metanarratives referenced here are plural,

signifying multiplicity beyond the binaries of East/West and religious/secular, both of which are often conflated. As Rosati and Stoeckl describe them, "The multiple modernities approach holds that the Western trajectory of modernization must not be seen as the only possible pathway to modernity" (2). Tridib's postsecular metanarrative of exchange, plurality, and traversing ideological borders is upheld through May, who looks beyond typically English ways of living by fasting and sleeping on the floor: "After all," she states, "this is how most people in the world sleep. I merely thought I'd throw in my lot with the majority" (155). Like Tridib, she also looks beyond borders, which she evinces through her work with relief agencies around the world (16).

Mondal argues that "'Postcolonial' critics are … unsurprisingly sympathetic to the postmodern concern with 'identity politics' given that it was on the basis of 'identity politics' – i.e., nationalism – that formerly colonized societies have hitherto articulated their most successful challenges to European dominance" ("Allegories" 19-20). Ghosh, however, problematizes the limits of this affiliation in *The Shadow Lines* by highlighting the violence that resulted from the formation of postcolonial nations through the essentialism of Self versus Other – the other in the mirror, as his narrator points out. The application of postsecularism to postcolonial theory in South Asian literature – including Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* – addresses the problematic metanarrative of nationalism and its religious and secular manifestations through communalism and secular politics on the Subcontinent. The postsecular ideologies apparent in Tridib, May, and the narrator posit a sameness that transcends physical, temporal, and ideological lines of separation. Ghosh challenges authoritative national narratives through the presentation of characters' subjective histories as alternative narratives to the secular and religious tensions and conflicts surrounding the East Pakistan/Bangladesh border and

accompanying religiously motivated distinctions of "us" versus "them." From the reclamation and rewriting of history and the national narratives signified by ruins to the sacrifice of Tridib at the hands of rioters in the streets of Dhaka, *The Shadow Lines* critiques existing anticolonial nationalisms – as paradoxical as that may sound. Instead, by interrogating the concepts of sacred and profane used by national narratives to uphold separation and distinction between places and people, *The Shadow Lines* advocates a postsecularism that posits a much more inclusive form of postcolonialism.

Conclusion

Neither *Clear Light of Day* nor *The Shadow Lines* is as obvious a candidate for postsecular literary criticism as *The Satanic Verses* and *The Assassin's Song*. However, while Desai's and Ghosh's novels do not overtly discuss the tensions, oppositions, and intersections between various religions and secularisms around the globe, such postsecular themes can be found in the underlying structure of each text. In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai only briefly discusses specific religions through the characters of Raja and Hyder Ali, who form an unlikely friendship in the midst of pre- and post-Partition violence in Old Delhi. However, it is not through their Hindu-Muslim relationship that *Clear Light of Day* is most readily open to postsecular analysis but through the private and public – or, in Chatterjee's terms, inner and outer – domains of the nation and the problematic division upheld between them. Desai's implementation of these domains, and the entrapment of Bim within the borders of the private, domestic sphere, both celebrates their different roles and censures their divisive borders.

While the inner domain as the spiritual core of the nation is constructively portrayed as the roots and memories holding the disparate members of the Das family

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(arguably the microcosm of the nation) together, it is also problematically exoticized by Tara's husband Bakul, who caters to Orientalist views of India only as it used to be, rather than reflecting on how it has evolved. The borders of the inner domain are perhaps most critiqued, though, through the unchanging state of the Das family compound, which stagnates and even haunts its inhabitants in a truly grotesque, Gothic fashion. Ultimately, the concept of Time – encompassing both the mythical sacred time of the past and the secular time of the present – pervades Desai's depictions of Bim and Baba as they continue to live largely unchanging lives in the old house; and it is through Bim's particular inability to migrate across the borders separating past from present, sacred from profane, and the spiritual inner domain of the nation to the modernized, secular outer domain that *Clear Light of Day* presents the need for the postsecular through its absence.

   The Shadow Lines, on the other hand, demonstrates a positive state of postsecularity through characters that transcend the ideological and national boundaries leading to political upheaval, resulting in both secular and religious conflicts. Unlike Bim, who serves as a warning through her immobility, Tridib embodies plurality and a fluidity of movement that renders him postsecular. Interestingly, both Bim and Tridib are the subject of sacrificial terminology: Tridib by losing his life to uphold his postsecular values of inclusion, and Bim by her subjection to the oppressive (gendered) boundaries separating the sacred and profane domains of the nation. Whereas Tridib's sacrifice is heroic (albeit sad) as an act of postsecular autonomy, Bim's is problematic, resulting from the lack of mobility that accompanies the essentialist binaries postsecularism attempts to dismantle. The postsecular themes and concerns present throughout *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* are also postcolonial in nature –

particularly those in *Clear Light of Day*, which stem from the essentialist boundaries of the anticolonial inner and outer domains. While the positive presence and problematic absence of the postsecular in these texts is generalizable to Eastern and Western contexts, the specific use of Partition and the creation of the nation of Bangladesh as settings crucial to their respective plots demonstrates the need for a more transnational form of postsecular criticism that deals with situations more prominent in nations outside the Western hemisphere, such as the communal violence of Partition and anti-imperial strategies in the formation of postcolonial national culture. By depicting common postsecular themes present on the Subcontinent, this reading of *Clear Light of Day* and *The Shadow Lines* depicts the need for a postsecular lens that is not Eurocentric at its core. The development of such a transnational postsecularism is perhaps the only method of overcoming the last of the postcolonial binaries the postsecular purports to deconstruct but – ironically – still supports.

CHAPTER FOUR
Postsecularism in a Post-9/11 Context:
Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

September 11, 2001 is a watershed date for postsecular criticism. Many postsecularists refer to 9/11 and its aftermath as the primary context that gave rise to postsecular theory. A handful of theorists challenge this view (Beaumont 5; Reder and Schmidt 1), but overall, the majority of critics writing about a modern-day resurgence of religion (postsecular or otherwise) isolate 9/11 as the defining moment in which religion re-entered society with a bang.[36] Even Jürgen Habermas, who argues that the postsecular reflects a change of consciousness rather than a literal resurgence of religiosity, links postsecularism to the presentation of global conflicts as hinging on religious strife ("Notes" 20). Similarly, for many, 9/11 constitutes *the* moment of global conflict and religious violence that prompted a "reevaluation" of the importance of religious attitudes (H. Singh, "Insurgent" 25; Huggan 751; Mavelli and Petito 934), broke down the "mutual ignorance pact" between secular culture and religious tradition (King, *Postsecularism* 5), and "dramatically disturb[ed] the religious-secular détente" (King, *Postsecularism* 9).

Of course, not all works of postsecular theory refer to 9/11 as the catalyst of religious resurgence. Nonetheless, those that do not (mainly, those published before 2001) still refer to the association of global conflict with religious violence as key to the evolving "importance" of religion. For José Casanova, JoAnn Chirico, and Jeffrey K. Hadden, the 1979 Iranian Revolution is the main event that marked the re-emergence of religion into the public consciousness (Casanova 3; Chirico 262; Hadden 606).

[36] See Esmer 36; Gardels 4; Huggan 751; King, *Postsecularism* 9; Mavelli and Petito 934; and Norris and Inglehart xiii.

Significantly, these authors also attribute the return of religion to the rise of Christian

fundamentalism in 1970s America (Casanova 3; Chirico 262-62, 328; Hadden 606). As

Chirico points out, the term "fundamentalism" was originally coined in reference to

Protestants who preached strict adherence to the Bible (328), and the political ascension

of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority in the United States was just as influential in

changing public perceptions of the significance of religion as the overthrow of the Shah

of Iran (261-62; cf. Hadden 606). Following these occurrences, the 1989 Rushdie Affair

also came to symbolize the clashes between secular and religious worldviews, and at one

point it was described as "the most massive national and international fight ... since the

Magna Carta" (Dhondy 183). However, in more recent years, these historical episodes

have been eclipsed by 9/11 as *the* great turning point in the public awareness of religion

and therefore as *the* foundational context for postsecularism.

The "Post"-9/11 Problem

The basic tenets of postsecular theory are not problematic in and of themselves.

The coexistence of religiosity and secularism, the embrace of ideological pluralism, and

the critique of essentialist worldview narratives all sound commendable, if perhaps a

touch idealistic. However, the application of postsecular theory has rendered the theory

itself questionable. Many recent manifestations of postsecular criticism have fallen back

on contexts, vocabularies, and approaches that are themselves Eurocentric and

imperialist, upholding the very binaries that postsecular theory purports to break down.

Habermas, for one, identifies only the "affluent societies of Europe or countries such as

Canada, Australia and New Zealand" as postsecular ("Notes" 17), suggesting that

postsecular criticism will primarily deal with the experiences of these nations and

peoples while marginalizing others (cf. Camilleri 1031). In "Why I am Not a Postsecularist," Aamir R. Mufti castigates this type of postsecular criticism for its "philanthropic orientation," which closes off engagement and critical involvement with postcolonial subjects and frames the Western subject alone as self-critical (16). Exemplary of white liberal discourse, the majority of postsecular criticism "privileges and naturalises white experience … [and makes the] 'ethnic other' homogenous and passive, an object of analysis and political debate" (Wemyss 3-4). This is perhaps most apparent in postsecular criticism's tendency to view religious violence propagated by "others" as key to understanding the relevance of religion in a global society.

Not all postsecular criticism manifests these problems. Nonetheless, the regular referral by critics and authors to 9/11 as ushering in postsecular theory establishes problematic associations of religion with violence; religion with Islam; Islam with violence; and, in general, non-Western, non-white persons and religions with both violence and "otherness." Titus Hjelm points out that "in the post-9/11 world, the most significant reason for religion's return to the public imagination has been the fact that it has been associated with political violence" (204), which casts religion only as "problematic or useful" (Hjelm 205), rather than personal or authentic. Moreover, the suggestion that one event represents a resurgence of religion further isolates the focus of such criticism to one religion – Islam (See Cooper 25; cf. Mufti, "Why" 10-12). Not only is this a reductive treatment of religion in general, but it also oversimplifies the multiple forms and complexities of Islam around the world. One resultant assumption frames Islamist practices as "an expression of religious consciousness directed against the inroads of secularism, which itself is viewed simply as an ideological impulse of the ongoing projects of Western imperialism"; this leads Mufti, for one, to criticize

postsecularism for attempting to close off the possibility of understanding and engaging with Islam in the present day ("Why" 11).

Meanwhile, subjecting Islam to Eurocentric assumptions couples the oversimplification of Islam with the stereotype of "the Muslim as a problematic, violent 'body'" (Khair 25). A colonialist, Orientalist binary associating Muslims with "backward, unenlightened and premodern modes of thought and forms of life, and with violence, intolerance and sexual repression" (Leezenberg 109-10) is upheld in particular by media representations focusing on Muslims' "acts of physical protest," while the "other side" – the Western, white, non-Muslim side – is shown to use "non-physical means," specifically their words (Khair 25). This tendency has led critics like Kamila Shamsie to lash out against the more popular representations of Otherness in Western media. In *Offence: The Muslim Case*, Shamsie claims that the West is interested only in Muslims who articulate "Offendedness" in the form of violence and threats of violence, rather than those who shed private tears or write protest in their poetry (4-5). The growing Western public perception of Muslims as "problematic" (Mavelli 1), and the association of paranoia with Islamophobia and Islamism with terrorism (Beaumont 5), reflect what Aroosa Kanwal describes as an accelerated "shift from Orientalist epistemology to terrorist ontology" (186), by which the colonial paradigm continues to evolve with the times.

The framing of 9/11 as a turning point for a postsecular return of religion also functions to other "religion" – which, again, means Islam – from Western society while implicitly differentiating between one religion as "Other" and another religion as "normal" and culturally acceptable. The history of postsecularism includes a complex approach to and treatment of religion in the West. On the one hand, religion is viewed as

an outside, marginal source brought to the centre by Others (Habermas, "Notes" 20),

upholding an erroneous secular/religious binary of the West/non-West (see Robbins,

"Is" 259). On the other hand, postsecularism – which Mufti identifies as "majoritarian"

("Why" 18) – normalizes Christianity and Christian social practices as representative of

Western secular society, protecting what is often deemed a Western religion from the

stigma attached to an Eastern religion as Other. Kristina Stoeckl points out that "in many

cases … what we call 'secular' has never been 'really secular', … [and] most of the

arrangements we call 'secular' are in fact accommodations of Christian religion"

(Stoeckl). Either way – by depicting "religion" as synonymous with Islam and vice

versa, or by approaching Christianity as *the* religion representing the inhabitants of the

West – these essentialist attitudes propagated under the guise of postsecular criticism

displace the multiplicitous nature of religion: a concept that is postsecular at its core.

     Finally, the fixation on 9/11 by Western postsecular critics reflects a national

narcissism that disregards the prominence of violence in other nations throughout the

world. Alfred J. López identifies 9/11 as the beginning of a new era, or as

"globalization's mythic before-after moment: The Day When Everything Changed"

(512). Of course, it would be ignorant to claim that nothing significantly changed when

the Twin Towers collapsed, as 9/11 did indeed have a global impact; however, the

intense concentration on America as the victim of a terrorist attack tends to overshadow,

perhaps even purposely ignore, Western involvement in violence both at home and

abroad. In *The Invisible Empire*, Georgie Wemyss delineates the first characteristic of

white liberal discourse as the suppression of alternative histories, particularly histories of

white violence (3, 85). Alongside Monica Ali and Kamila Shamsie, various South Asian

authors have addressed this absence in Western discourse. Hanif Kureishi laments a

Western lack of understanding of oppression and desperation: "We think of these acts as mad, random and criminal, rather than as part of a recognisable exchange of violences" ("Arduous" 91). Similarly, after Osama Bin Laden was discovered hiding in Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid comments that "America's 9/11 has given way to Pakistan's 24/7/365" ("Osama" 164). Rather than acknowledge the plethora of destruction affecting both sides of the conflict, the ubiquitous portrayal of America as more victim than perpetrator has led to the growth of "moral panic."

Harleen Singh points out that the "war on terror" that followed 9/11 "must invoke the original event and the possibility of its recurrence, thereby ensuring a constant and steady state of panic" ("Insurgent" 32) if it is to continue. This sense of panic, described by Scott A. Bonn, George Morgan and Scott Poynting, and Greg Noble as "moral panic," refers to a "condition or situation in which public fears and state interventions greatly exceed the objective threat posed to society by a particular group who are claimed to be responsible for the condition" (Bonn 84). Moral panics can happen naturally, but many are "elite-engineered" (84), with the media functioning as the most influential facilitator in their creation (85). In the wake of 9/11, Islamophobia, or "an irrational fear of Islam" (96), embodied and was fuelled by the state of moral panic in the West, which positioned the "racialized 'Muslim Other'" as the "pre-eminent 'folk devil' of our time" (Morgan and Poynting 1) – as responsible for creating the threat to society. The resultant culture of fear continually feeds on the racialization of the image of the "folk devil," strengthening colonialist binaries of White/Black, West/East, civilized/barbaric, and good/evil. As Noble points out, the symbolization of the Muslim "face of evil" fixes evil as an "identifiable physicality" (216), moving from "the idea of a specific act being evil, to the perpetrator being evil, to a cultural community being

evil" (220). More specifically, the concept of the "evil" folk devil in post-9/11 Western society has led to the identification of the racialized Muslim Other as "terrorist."

In 2012, Pei-Chen Liao counted 164 novels dealing with 9/11 and published or distributed in the United States, not accounting for those published elsewhere (13). Of course, this list includes South Asian works as well, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, among others. Yet, as Liao points out, the majority of the most well-known 9/11 novels are European and/or American, and they fall into categories of narratives of recuperation, first-hand witnessing, the great New York novel, and the novel of the outsider (14), using terrorist attacks for advancing "propaganda purposes," exploiting Muslim stereotypes, and demonstrating "the extent to which 9/11 has penetrated deep into the European psyche" (Liao 15, 17). For instance, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) depicts a day[37] in the life of the fictional protagonist, neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, who is haunted from morning to night by the spectre of 9/11 and, a result, a nationally shared moral panic – "the possibility of [the recurrence of monstrous and spectacular scenes the] one thread that binds [his] days" (176). While Perowne's description of London "waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (276) could bear reference to non-Western nations anticipating Western-led retaliation, McEwan's focus on the localized violence of Baxter – the driver with whom Henry collides – toward the Perowne family overshadows the large-scale violence committed by Western powers in Iraq and approaches the anti-war demonstrations in London as mere traffic inconveniences to the doctor.

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[37] Specifically, Saturday, February 15, 2003: the day of a large demonstration in London against the invasion of Iraq.

Meanwhile, it is the portrayal of the Other, rather than a Western Self, that proves problematic in Martin Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006), a short story reimagining the final moments of the man who flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower on 9/11. As Sylvie Mathé points out, Amis presents Muhammad Atta not only as a terrorist, but primarily as a "horrorist" (24), relying on his features and grotesque physical afflictions to naturally signify his difference from Western readers. Describing the "disgusted lineaments" of his mouth and "frank animus" of his underbite, Amis relies on the abject to dehumanize his main character: he dwells on objects such as Muhammad Atta's hangnail, his constipation – which makes his stomach "as taut and proud as a four-month pregnancy" (153) – the shaving-induced gash that resembles a cold sore, the endless stream of blood flowing from a cut on his nose, the ache in his scrotum, and even his breath, which is described as smelling like a "blighted river" (153). Interestingly, Amis describes his character as neither religious nor political (154), disassociating him from existing worldviews and providing no facet of identity beyond that of "terrorist."

Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007) only enables the protagonist Zits to witness the relationship between Jimmy and Abbad – flight instructor and student – through Jimmy's lens of betrayal and regret after Abbad purposely crashes a plane in Chicago, omitting Abbad's own subjectivity and concrete identity from the story. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) provides a complex exploration of a Muslim youth's struggle with faith and doubt, but its narrow, singular representation of Islam maintains a dichotomy of religiosity versus secularism throughout. Even Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), which is rife with postsecular challenges to the centrality of the American psyche, frames 9/11 as – to quote López's phrase once more – "The Day When Everything

Changed." The list of literary examples can go on and on. However, alternative approaches to these Eurocentric depictions of 9/11 and readings of the meeting of secular and religious worldviews do exist and can be found in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009). *Brick Lane* tells the story of a Bangladeshi family living in Tower Hamlets in London, UK, and the acts of racism and Islamophobia they witness and experience both before and after 9/11, among other things, and *Burnt Shadows* presents the different effects 9/11 has on two transnational families – one English-German-American and the other Japanese-Indian-Pakistani. Both texts address the meeting of secular and religious worldviews while decentring 9/11, highlighting the complexities and multiple ways of being religious, and deconstructing the binaries of East/West, religious/secular, and violent/civilized that continue to be perpetrated by certain other works of fiction.

Brick Lane and *Burnt Shadows* are post-9/11 texts in a temporal sense, but they are also post-9/11 in the manner delineated by Pei-Chen Liao in *'Post'-9/11 South Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror*. Liao's use of the term "post" is similar to that of theories of postsecularism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism, referring not to a time after but rather a positioning "against." Despite how this may initially sound, Liao does not present arguments against the significance of 9/11, but against the "uniqueness" of 9/11, going so far as to identify her work as "anti-9/11" (1). She looks to South Asian authors to go beyond the narrow category of Anglo-American 9/11 fiction – most of which she, like DeLillo, describes as revealing the "narcissistic heart of the West" (18). As Liao suggests many South Asian diasporic authors tend to do, Ali and Shamsie juxtapose the violence inherent in 9/11 and the American War on Terror with racial discrimination and other forms of violence often perpetuated by the West. By doing so,

they highlight the presence of white violence that Wemyss has identified as absent from white liberal discourse. Moreover, they decentre the significance of 9/11 as a world event, questioning the "linear development of the sequentially pre-9/11, 9/11, and post-9/11 stages" (Liao 19) by which some Anglo-American novelists organize Western experiences of fear and trauma.[38]

Brick Lane situates 9/11 near the end of the novel, allowing the comparison of a pre- and post-9/11 timeframe that challenges the myth of 9/11 as the beginning of a new, drastically different era. While the immigrant Londoners of Ali's story are directly impacted by the aftermath of 9/11 in the form of increased hostilities and moral panic, *Brick Lane* nonetheless emphasizes that the inhabitants of Tower Hamlets and Brick Lane were subject to British racism from the Lion Hearts and media stereotyping long before the attacks in New York. Effectively functioning as a "post"-9/11 novel, *Brick Lane* also presents a postsecular challenge to the conflations of nation, race, and religion that inform the division of communities throughout the novel. Utilizing clothing as a commentary on religious and secular symbols and female agency (or lack thereof), Ali presents Nazneen skating in a sari as a postsecular alternative to the secular/religious binary upheld by the society around her. Finally, by portraying the different worldviews of characters such as Chanu, Karim, and Nazneen to demonstrate the complexity and various forms of religious belief, *Brick Lane* challenges the idea of the religious monolith and presents the fluid, pluralist religiosity of Nazneen (the protagonist and symbol of postsecular sentiment throughout the novel) as a preferable postsecular alternative to the confining religious sentiments of the male characters in her life.

[38] For a thorough explanation of various kinds of post-9/11 Anglo-American novels, see Liao pp. 13-17.

Like *Brick Lane*, *Burnt Shadows* also decentres 9/11 by positioning it within a larger timeframe; however, Shamsie addresses a much longer historical period than Ali and excludes the day of September 11th from her work altogether, depicting only the aftermath. Situating 9/11 in a long line of violent events such as the 1945 bombing of Nagasaki, the 1947 Partition of India, the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff, and the American War on Terror, *Burnt Shadows* presents 9/11 as one of many world tragedies, rather than the primary event. Moreover, by focusing on Nagasaki in particular, it emphasizes the West's participation in violence abroad – something often overlooked in post-9/11 discourse. Although *Burnt Shadows* decentres 9/11, Shamsie's treatment of the aftermath is nonetheless key to a postsecular interpretation of the novel. The text's emphasis on global languages and voice as harbingers of agency and cultural understanding in various contexts around the world alludes to Habermas's approach to postsecularism as a "complementary learning process" in which translation and discourse are key, and the multicultural, linguistic unity Hiroko experiences in New York pre-9/11 gestures toward the Twin Towers as symbolic Towers of Babel, connecting the secular capitalist function and sacred national status of the World Trade Centre with religious narrative. However, the combination of post-9/11 misunderstanding and Shamsie's portrayal of Hiroko and Raza's search for linguistic knowledge rather than translation problematizes Habermas's teachings regarding secular and religious language and proposes a new approach to postsecular discourse. Finally, addressing the concept of the "postnation" through the character of Hiroko and her many migrations, Shamsie presents a postsecular approach to the globalized world and its problematic conflations of race, nation, and religiosity as an alternative to the nationalist strategies of risk management and moral panic responding to 9/11.

When interpreted through a postsecular lens, *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows*

emerge not only as texts that decentre 9/11 and challenge Eurocentric approaches to

Islam, religion, secularism, and violence, but also as works exhibiting a postsecularism

that exists apart from a literary fetishization of 9/11. Challenging certain previously

localized approaches to postsecular theory and criticism, this reading of Ali's and

Shamsie's works offers, as an alternative, a form of postsecularism that is both

postcolonial and transnational in nature.

"You Can't Skate in a Sari": Traditional and Postsecular Approaches to Clothing in *Brick Lane*

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* tells the story of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi woman

who, at eighteen years of age, undergoes an arranged marriage to a much older man

named Chanu and returns with him to his small home in Tower Hamlets in the Brick

Lane community of London. The novel follows Nazneen's life as she grows from a

timid immigrant who speaks barely any English to a self-confident woman who carves

out a postsecular space for herself by embracing elements of her Bangladeshi heritage

alongside her new homeland, while incorporating religious and secular worldviews

simultaneously. Over the years, Nazneen experiences the ever-failing but well-

intentioned economic endeavours of her educated husband, the death of her son Raqib,

and the birth and growth of her daughters Shahana and Bibi; she becomes involved with

politicized Islam and race relations in London when she has an affair with Karim, a

second-generation Bangladeshi immigrant who leads a local Muslim organization

positioned against English nationalist ideals. As instances of racism increase following

the events of 9/11 across the Atlantic, Chanu plans to move his family back to

Bangladesh. However, when faced with the decision to either accompany Chanu and embrace tradition by returning to her homeland or run away with Karim and embrace his understanding of Islam as a powerful, reactionary force, Nazneen refuses to allow her life to be dictated by others. Instead, she remains in London with her two daughters and her friend Razia, supporting herself by sewing and tailoring clothing, and finally going skating – an activity she had never believed she would do – in her sari.

Brick Lane is described as a post-9/11 novel not only in terms of its publication date but also its content. Liao calls the text post-9/11 – specifically, "post"-9/11 – in her analysis of uncanny South Asian fictions. López also approaches *Brick Lane* as post-9/11, though he refers to it as "postglobal" instead, a term he uses for those writings that are "produced in the aftermath of 9/11 [and] contain either manifest or latent material informed by 9/11 and other globally felt crises, or that directly or indirectly refer to these and, most importantly, … *focus on the lives and struggles of those most exposed to the vicissitudes of globalization and its impact on the world's subalterns, especially those living in global urban centres*" (512). As a "postglobal," post-9/11 work of fiction, *Brick Lane* fills a gap López identifies in the majority of narratives related to 9/11. Specifically, it stands out because its protagonists are "women, immigrants, visible minorities, [and] the poor generally," in contrast to the "invariably white and affluent" protagonists of works by Oates, McEwan, Price, and others (511). Joining the ranks of other "post"-9/11 fictions, *Brick Lane* deviates from the Westernized norm by presenting the experience of 9/11 from an often-overlooked point of view.

López approaches *Brick Lane* as centred around 9/11 and even as foreshadowing it, acknowledging that while this trope might be criticized as "yet another recentring of the West and/or the United States," it nonetheless signals an "epistemic break" in time

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(512). This interpretation is debatable – which is not to say that 9/11 is *not* important to the story. Indeed, 9/11 has a profound impact on all of Ali's characters. When the attack in New York takes place, Chanu, "who would not sit if he could lie, would not stand if he could lean," moves "faster than Nazneen had ever before witnessed" (304); and although Nazneen's family watches the catastrophe on their television across the Atlantic from where it occurred, Nazneen nonetheless feels as though she, her husband, and her daughters have "survived something together, as a family" (306). Ali does not mask the international impact of the event, nor the aftermath, including the "unavoidable psychological traumas" Margarita Estévez-Saá and Noemí Pereira-Ares see as developing into "cultural traumas" (268). When a metaphorical "pinch of New York dust" blows across the ocean and settles on the Dogwood Estate, racialized hate crimes begin to happen more frequently, targeting in particular the religious and cultural symbolism attached to people's clothes. Sorupa's daughter has her hijab pulled off, and Razia's Union Jack sweatshirt is spat on (306). Some Bangladeshi parents actively disassociate themselves from clothing associated with Islam by telling their daughters to leave their headscarves at home, while other characters, such as Karim, adopt even more traditional dress in protest (313). It is apparent that 9/11 has serious international implications that directly impact Nazneen, her family, and her neighbourhood. Yet, it would still be inaccurate to argue that *Brick Lane* is centred around 9/11. In fact, the inclusion of 9/11 near the end of the novel allows for a comparison between pre- and post-9/11 Banglatown that shows how moral panics directed toward immigrant communities existed long before "The Day When Everything Changed" (López 512).

The inhabitants of Dogwood Estates and Brick Lane are subject to increasing physical hostilities post-9/11, but they are bombarded by racist, anti-immigrant

sentiments before 9/11 as well, particularly in the form of leaflets depicting the moral panic affecting a group of their "English" (i.e., white) neighbours who refer to themselves as the "Lion Hearts." As Chanu points out, the "Multicultural Murder" leaflet directed against immigrant families immediately associates the concept of violence with multiculturalism (205), indicating on a deeper level that "in their minds [the Lion Hearts] have become an oppressed minority" (206). Examples of the types of moral panic embedded in racialized anti-immigrant discourse fill the Lion Hearts' nationalist leaflets, calling on the "English" – or, the Caucasians living in England – not to allow pluralism within their country:

> In our schools… it's multicultural murder. Do you know what they are teaching your children today? In domestic science your daughter will learn how to make a kebab, or fry a bhaji. For his history lesson your son will be studying Africa or India or some other dark and distant land. English people, he will learn, are Wicked Colonialists…. And in religious Instruction, what will your child be taught? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? No. Krishna, Abraham, and Muhammad.
>
> Christianity is being gently slaughtered. It is 'only one' of the world's 'great religions.' Indeed, in our local schools you could be forgiven for thinking that Islam is the official religion…. Should we be forced to put up with this? When the truth is that it is a religion of hate and intolerance. When Muslim extremists are planning to turn Britain into an Islamic Republic, using a combination of immigration, high birth rates, and conversion. (205)

This propaganda is accompanied by calls not to "tolerate" Muslim culture and to instead uphold an essentialist nationalist identity; after all, the Lion Hearts protest, "This is England!" (210-11).

Other more widely publicized forms of media present images of Muslims by emphasizing their physicality – using heightened depictions of physical violence and biological reproduction as the primary mode of racialized difference between white English citizens and the "Muslim Other." Televised images of Muslims in *Brick Lane* show "hooded young men, scarves wrapped Intifada-style around their faces, hurling stones, furious with the cars that they set alight" (226). Ali describes news crews searching for similar instances of sensationalism in Muslim communities, noting that they do not interview Nazneen once they realize with disappointment that she has only two children and therefore does not uphold the "biocultural" stereotype of South Asian women as "overtly fertile" (Chakravorty 156-57). Looking for gang members, fundamentalist terrorists, and other stereotypes, the television crews "returned after dark and filmed the boys riding around in cars. They found the disused flats where the addicts gathered to socialize with their addictions, and filmed the grotty mattresses and the bits of silver foil. It was a sensation. It was on the local news" (408). By purposely portraying images of Muslims that reflect racist stereotypes, these Western media outlets uphold the perception that their subjects are a dangerous archetype of the Muslim immigrant community as a whole.

On the other hand, when the Muslim body does not fit the stereotype of the offending and/or uncivilized Other, it is ignored. For instance, Nazneen realizes that she is invisible to those around her when she first arrives in London "without a coat, without a suit, without a white face," and she knows she will not be seen "unless she did

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something, waved a gun, halted the traffic" (40). In the meetings of the Bengal Tigers,

the "Questioner" makes a similar point about invisibility, discussing how the world

mourns for 9/11 but does not mourn for the children dying in other countries (348).

However, it is important to note that Ali is careful not to idealize this concern. While

one girl in a hijab points out that "there was another big tragedy on September eleventh.

On that day thirty-five thousand children also died through hunger," a woman in a burka

wants to know how many of the dead children were Muslims (349). Ali thus signals the

perpetuation of Self and Other in oppressed communities as well, though without

minimizing the scope of racism directed toward the immigrant community.

Initially, the women's clothing mentioned in the previous paragraph may not

seem important, especially since the passage in question deals with media coverage of

9/11 and the tragedy of starving children. However, these and other descriptions of

clothing litter the pages of *Brick Lane*, and though they might come across as

background or "filler" information, characters' clothing choices serve important

symbolic functions that contribute to a postsecular reading of the novel. The clothing in

Brick Lane has not been interpreted through a postsecular lens before, but its

significance has not gone unnoticed. Pereira-Ares points out a "language of clothes" that

informs the subtext of the novel (205); but it is specifically the clothing of Muslim

women that has received – and will continue to receive – the most analysis. As was

briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, the veil, or *hijab*, has long served as an identifying

symbol of "Islamist politics worldwide and a synecdoche for passionate secularist

resistance to religion in the public sphere" (Neuman 9). Pereira-Ares further notes that

most empirical and interview-based studies reveal the veil as viewed positively within

the Muslim world, and it is often regarded as an "element of cultural identification"

transcending the religious sphere (202). However, despite different Islamic views of

veiling – as either a positive or a negative practice – the Western media has developed

an "obsessive focus" on the veil (Ahmed 8), which in turn has been used to evoke fear

and anger and even in part to "justify" the invasion of Afghanistan (Germaná 67; cf.

Ahmed 8). The image of the veil has typically been viewed (by Western feminists in

particular) as a repressive element from which women must be liberated.[39] Politics aside,

however, the veil also serves as a sacred image,[40] not only as a representation of Islamic

traditional dress, but also by eclipsing the profane corporeality associated with the

human body.

Ali offers a nuanced approach to Muslim veiling practices, and she explores the

ways in which women's bodies as sites of "conflicting discourses" (Germaná 67) uphold

what Partha Chatterjee identifies in *The Nation and its Fragments* as the highly

feminized, sacred, inner, or private sphere of religion and culture. Sangeeta Ray expands

on this concept, writing that during the colonial era, "woman as repository of an

untainted, unchanging 'Indian-ness' became the sign of the imaginary feminized nation

whose chastity had to be safe-guarded by virile nationalists against Western penetration"

(138). This trope of pure, feminized culture continues in the postcolonial world as well,

where both women and the domestic sphere are still assigned the role of preserving

[39] In *Writing British Muslims*, Rehana Ahmed comments that "the obsessive focus on Muslim veiling
practices by political and media commentators over the last two or three decades can be traced to the
powerful signifying function of this simple item of clothing; to its use as a means of discrediting
multiculturalism and legitimising liberalism's exclusions, as well as of justifying the invasion of
Afghanistan as a mission to rescue President Bush's poor, benighted 'women of cover'" (8). In a similar
manner, Pereira-Ares presents a variety of discourses on the veil, ranging from "religious discourses that
base the use of hijab on a strict interpretation of the Qur'an" to "Western liberal feminist discourses that
see the veil as an oppressive element" (215).
[40] It should be noted that although the veil does not serve as a "sacred" cultural signifier throughout the
Indian subcontinent, this study approaches it as a sacred symbol as a means of emphasizing the
intersections between culture, religion, and female dress in *Brick Lane*.

cultural identity, especially cultural memory, from inside an inner, sacral domain. Traditional female cultural dress draws on this trope, embodying a sacred function not only in its usage by religious communities to obscure the physicality of the body but also in its association with the sacred inner domain of tradition and culture. Even Chanu – who embraces "modernity" and disavows tradition by choosing to never beat Nazneen – resorts to this belief, using his daughters' bodies as a "discursive weapon, a means of resisting misinterpretation" (Roupakia 652). When Chanu receives a Lion Hearts leaflet, he insists his daughters' legs be covered as an act of defiance to the "Muslim-hating peasants" (217). However, when he sees other Muslim girls wearing hijab, he sends his girls out wearing skirts that show their legs as a means of defying another form of "peasant ignorance" (217). In each instance, Chanu exerts patriarchal authority over his daughters' bodies to exemplify his opposition to the worldviews of others. While Chanu's resistance to both secular and religious essentialist metanarratives partially aligns him with postsecular theory, he is unable to find a middle ground and instead uses female clothing as a temporary, alternating symbol of solidarity with each group. This may elicit a desire for a postsecular alternative, but it is a desire Chanu does not seem to realize. Karim similarly judges women according to their clothing choices: the uncontrollable "Westernized" girl wears makeup and short skirts; the argumentative "religious" girl wears the scarf or the burka; and Nazneen, the "real thing," wears the same kind of sari his mother once wore (321, 172).

References to mothers' saris accentuate symbolic ties between veiling, religion, female oppression, and lack of agency. Nazneen's mother Rupban, for one, follows the stoic worldview that "we must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it" (3). She subjects the newborn Nazneen to this principle, and the latter grows up

hearing the "story of How You Were Left to Your Fate" (4). Nazneen's childhood under

her mother's mantra that "what could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing

could be changed, everything had to be borne" (5) leads her to accept a lack of female

agency in her own life as well: "It was her place to sit and wait. Even if the tornado was

heading directly towards her. For her, there was nothing else to be done. Nothing else

that God wanted her to do" (78). In Nazneen's mind, lack of action and feelings of

constraint are related to traditional Bengali women's clothing. When burying her mother

in a sari and veil, Nazneen thinks of it as "the final, all-encasing winding sheet that it

was Amma's fate to wear" (109). Her own struggles against a passivity that she believes

is her fated inheritance are also linked with clothing in her dreams: "Sometimes she

dreamed the wardrobe had fallen on her, crushing her on the mattress. Sometimes she

dreamed she was locked inside it and hammered and hammered but nobody heard" (12).

At times, Nazneen herself feels interchangeable with objects of clothing. The same

invisibility she feels shrouding her in London (40) haunts her subtly throughout the

novel. And even when she is seen, she is objectified, as with the blond-haired woman

who looks at Nazneen "the way she might look at a familiar object … [with] a blankness

reserved for known quantities like pieces of furniture or brown women in saris who

cooked rice and raised their children and obeyed their husbands" (327).

Nazneen views clothing as a display of personal identity – chosen or otherwise.

Moreover, she is surrounded by women in various styles whose attitudes toward clothing

undermine stereotypical approaches to "Eastern dress." Pereira-Ares identifies these

female characters' positions toward traditional clothing as ranging from "rejection to

celebration, from compliance to defiance, from enforced acceptance to voluntary

adherence" (214). Above all, however, their reactions are not necessarily reactions to

clothing as objective pieces of material, but to the ideas and stereotypes they symbolize.

Importantly, not all the Bangladeshi women wear saris and veils like Nazneen does.

Whereas Pereira-Ares suggests that Ali uses *Brick Lane* to "fictionalize . . . many of the

competing discourses which have surrounded the question of hijab in recent decades"

(201), Ali's treatment of female dress goes even further than that to address broader

questions of cultural, religious, and national forms of assimilation.

Mrs. Azad, who embraces Western society and wears short skirts, advocates on

behalf of full assimilation, arguing the "tragedy" is that immigrant women do not join

English society but remain separate by being covered "from head to toe, in their little

walking prisons" (89). Her speech gives the intimation that she sees wearing the hijab or

burka as anti-English, or anti-nationalist, and she continues to defend English society

from accusations of racism. Meanwhile, Nazneen's friend Razia also adopts nationalist

Western dress by wearing a sweatshirt with a large Union Jack on the front to celebrate

receiving a British passport (151). Her experiences contrast those of Mrs. Azad, though.

She is spit upon when wearing "their own flag"; paradoxically, she notices, some

English are willing to pay exorbitant amounts of money to own a salwar kameez (330),

reflecting their continuing fetishization of the "Orient" alongside fears of the immigrant

threat. Finally, Ali portrays female Muslims whose decision to wear the veil is

interpreted not merely as a reaction to British nationalism or assimilation practices but

through their involvement with political Islam. Despite most Western views of veiling as

repressive, the girls who attend the Bengal Tigers meetings simultaneously upgrade their

hijabs to burkas while arguing for sex education, women's rights, and the inclusion of

"sisters" in the meetings' vocabulary (229, 236). In each instance, characters use their

clothing to reflect self-chosen identities that align them with various political, religious,

and national ideologies, all of which differ from the stereotypes of Islamic immigrants upheld by media sources that prompt moral panic in the West.

For Nazneen, the clothing she wears and the clothing she envies have symbolic sacred and profane connotations not dissimilar to those of her acquaintances. Her sari and veil – representative of her childhood, homeland, and religion – are seen as indicators of religious, Islamic identity – not necessarily by Nazneen herself, but as a facet of the narrative assigned to "Others" by a mainstream British society. As a brown-skinned immigrant in a sari, Nazneen embodies a threatening difference from the national narrative, which associates the post-9/11 Other with violent Islam. Although Nazneen is a Muslim and a Bangladeshi woman and an individual who struggles with passivity, these separate aspects of her identity become correlated under the umbrella symbol of the sari. This problematic generalization and simplification of Nazneen's identity reflect the nationalist sentiments seen in groups like the Lion Hearts, whose Eurocentric approach to Bangladeshi cultural dress and the practice of veiling turns into a leaflet war over the covering, or lack thereof, of women's breasts (210-11). Nazneen is similarly guilty of a reverse generalization of clothing, however, as she comes to view ice skating – and particularly the outfits associated with female figure skaters – as emblematic of Western society, female agency, and freedom from cultural and gendered constraints.

When Nazneen first sees "ice e-skating" (112) on the television, she is enraptured by the "urgent, intense … declarat[ory]" movements and clothing of the skaters (22, 27), but particularly of the woman who, in her sequins, had "conquered everything: her body, the laws of nature, and the heart of the tight-suited man who slid over on his knees" (23). Above all, it is the idea that the figure skater – the "fairy-tale

creature, a Hindu goddess" (71) – is unafraid and skates on even after her partner lets go

that captivates Nazneen, who has a hard time imagining the "ice e-skating woman"

leaving the profane, public sphere of the skating rink and going home to do the dishes in

private (24, 71). She eventually concludes that "clothes, not fate, made her life" and "if

she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well" (228). Envisioning herself

in the outfits she has seen various British women wearing, she pictures herself adopting

their thoughts and behaviours naturally, "And if she had a tiny, tiny skirt with knickers

to match and a tight bright top, then she would – how could she not? – skate through life

with a sparkling smile" (228).

At the end of *Brick Lane*, Razia, Shahana, and Bibi surprise Nazneen by taking

her skating, and the last words of the novel are Razia's reply to Nazneen's protest that

"you can't skate in a sari": "This is England . . . . You can do whatever you like" (415).

Critics who focus on the symbolism of clothing in *Brick Lane* unanimously see the

ultimate combination of sari and skating at the end as a "final message" (Pereira-Ares

210), suggesting that "as long as your body is ideologically liberated . . . traditional

clothing cannot *per se* constitute an impediment" (Germanà 78). Sarah Upstone refers to

this "declarative confidence" as the book's "underlying theme" (171) and notes that

Nazneen does not give in to South Asian patriarchal or British Islamophobic pressures,

therefore going against what "popular reporting and dominant media discourse would

prescribe for her" (167). Indeed, this moment goes beyond the idea of compromise

between two essentialist worldviews to embody a postsecular plurality of secular and

religious identity, English and Bangladeshi nationality, and sacred and profane imagery

associated with the veil as a religious-cultural symbol of the private female body and

figure skating as a public act revealing and celebrating the capabilities of the physical

body. However, while this moment is certainly an important instance symbolizing multiculturalism, agency, and global pluralism, it is not at this moment that Nazneen embraces agency. In fact, though a beautiful, empowering sentiment, figure skating in a sari – or figure skating at all – was not Nazneen's idea, but Razia's. This recognition does not rob Nazneen of her agency, though. Instead, it is beneficial to decentre this moment in the novel as a means of focusing on earlier instances in which Nazneen autonomously makes her own decisions.

From her initial lack of confidence upon arriving in England, and the lament that "All the signs … only tell you what *not* to do" (46), Nazneen gradually adopts a sense of self-confidence and agency, both of which are exhibited by her use of clothing and movements reminiscent of figure skating. Significantly, when she decides to put on Chanu's trousers – a moment reminiscent of a similar scene in Desai's *Clear Light of Day*[41] – she does so only momentarily before experimenting with wearing her own skirt at different heights, indicating a range of possibilities for herself without completely abandoning the sari for pants. Raising her underskirt to her knees, Nazneen imagines swinging a handbag like a white girl; when she pulls the skirt even higher, she spins like a figure skater before deciding to "float free for a while" and take a break from her chores (112). Of course, the greatest moment of Nazneen's agency occurs when she tells Chanu she will not be returning to Bangladesh with him – a conversation she has only

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[41] When Bim and Tara secretly try on their brother's trousers in *Clear Light of Day*, they feel "grotesquely changed by them, not only in appearance but in their movements, their abilities. Great possibilities unexpectedly opened up now they had their legs covered so sensibly and practically and no longer needed to worry about what lay bare beneath ballooning frocks and what was so imperfectly concealed by them. Why did girls have to wear frocks? Suddenly they saw why they were so different from their brother, so inferior and negligible in comparison: it was because they did not wear trousers. Now they thrust their hands into their pockets and felt even more superior – what a sense of possession, of confidence it gave one to have pockets, to shove one's fists into them, as if in simply owning pockets one owned riches, owned independence" (Desai 132).

after telling herself, "*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one*" (339). Yet, the little assertions of self-confidence surrounding this large decision are just as significant. After Chanu leaves, she dances in the kitchen: "She swooped down and tucked her sari up into the band of her underskirt. *Shout!* Nazneen put her hands on her waist and kicked her legs high. She turned and kicked, turned and kicked, jumped and kicked, and her foot went over her head" (412).

These instances of spinning, kicking, and jumping align Nazneen with the freedom she associates with figure skating and from which she believed herself barred by her clothing – itself symbolic of sacred restraints on the profane female body. Nazneen's actions, however, also position her in contrast to more harrowing forms of jumping in the novel. When 9/11 occurs, Nazneen and her family watch horrific televised images of people jumping from the highest floors of the Twin Towers: "Another figure jumps and at that moment it seems to Nazneen that hope and despair are nothing against the world and what it holds and what it holds for you. . . . Men, doing what little they can" (306). This image not only highlights the devastation of 9/11, but also gestures beyond 9/11 to parallel an earlier occurrence Nazneen learns of when she first arrives in Tower Hamlets – that of the woman who fell from the building. Imagining the terror that must have entered the woman's mind as she fell, Nazneen wonders how such thoughts would differ if the woman had jumped. "Suddenly," Ali writes, "Nazneen was sure that she had jumped. A big jump, feet first and arms wide, eyes wide, silent all the way down and her hair wild and loose, and a big smile on her face because with this single everlasting act she defied everything and everyone" (26). Jumping from the building and jumping on the ice both serve as acts of agency and defiance in Nazneen's mind, though with strikingly different outcomes. Like the men

who jumped from the Twin Towers, the woman who jumped/fell from Nazneen's building was doing "what little [she could]" to escape entrapment. In contrast, Nazneen's decision to jump, and later skate, in her own traditional, restrictive clothing signals a critical alternative.

Clothing can take on many modes of cultural significance, symbolizing national identity, family background, religious identity, political statement, group membership, and so forth. According to common Western media depictions of "Eastern" women, items of clothing such as saris, hijabs, and burkas – or, "the veil," more broadly – symbolize religious, or sacred, attempts to hide the profane, sexualized body from the profane male gaze and inhibit it from performing profane behaviours or from enacting physical female agency altogether. Yet, despite this negative association, Nazneen continues to wear a sari and veil, retaining cultural ties to her homeland, upholding aspects of her identity, and refusing to assimilate entirely to English cultural norms. By doing so, she undermines stereotypical, Islamophobic perceptions and exemplifies the coexistence of both religious and secular, sacred and profane, modes of thought and behaviour while in her sari. Embracing secular aspects of English culture and retaining her religious South Asian identity simultaneously is a postsecular gesture that allows Nazneen to skate, and jump, without fracturing her cultural-religious sense of self symbolized by her choice of clothing. Finally, by opening herself to a postsecular plurality of worldviews and transgressing the fluid border between Eastern and Western, sacred and profane worlds, Nazneen reveals the boundary between the two to be an essentialist construct, and crossing it enables her to confidently accomplish much more than "what little" she previously thought she could.

The Scholar, the Radical, and the Housewife: The Complexity of Religious Sentiment

Along with the vast complexity of attitudes toward the practice of wearing the veil, *Brick Lane* also portrays "varying approaches to Muslim faith and practice" (Germanà 72). Critics have argued that the text "foregrounds the role of artifice in shaping our understandings of religion and cultural practice" by emphasizing the "apprehension" of religion through signs, symbols, and stereotypes (Hiddleston 70, 66), and while this may be the case, it also emphasizes the often important – though sometimes contrived – roles religion plays for various groups and characters. On perhaps the shallowest level, religion in *Brick Lane* functions as a marketing strategy for the Days of the Raj restaurant, which caters to white customers by displaying multiple statues of disparate gods "for authenticity" (75). For Chanu, religion is more important for serving a cultural function than as a private, individual practice. Nazneen describes her husband's religion as "education" (213) and notes early on that Chanu never prayed or read the Holy Qur'an (27), a habit that changes only when he becomes serious about taking his family back to Bangladesh (206). Before that, Islam functions in his eyes as a reminder of the cultural and historical prestige of his country and his lineage – the "Golden Age of Islam" against which he compares the "Dark Ages of the English" (174). Moreover, Chanu opposes the essentialist teachings of the madrash close to his home, arguing that his children should learn not only the Qur'an, but also "Hindu philosophy, Buddhist thoughts, Christian parables" due to the layers of other religions extant in Bengal before the nation became Muslim (158).

For other characters – especially women – religion provides a conduit for political voice and self-empowerment. Like the girls in hijab who defiantly attend

Bengal Tigers meetings to advocate for women's rights and sex education for girls (195, 235), Nazneen comes to see organized religion as a platform for female agency. Voting at meetings makes her feel powerful: "By raising her hand, or not raising it, she could alter the course of events" (197). Moreover, she receives information during the meetings about the lives of Muslims in countries all around the world; and later, when Karim brings her Bengali newspapers, she reads them as a "sweet and melancholy secret," half wishing her husband was aware he is not *the only one who knows things*" (198). However, religion also provides rules – some of which are not so liberating for women. For instance, Rupban and Nazneen both relate their gendered roles of passivity to God's will for their lives (60, 146). Yet, for others, such rules are desirable. The multicultural officer of the Bengal Tigers, for one, explains that he had previously tried "Pentecostal, Baptist, Churcha Englan', Cat'olic, Seventh Day, Churcha Christ, Healin' Churcha Christ, Jehovah Witness, Evangelical, Angelical, and the Miracle Church of our Savior," all of which were "too … loose *and* lax" for him (230). The officer, like others, also sees religious organizations as opportunities for belonging. For him, the Bengal Tigers provide a platform for "black, brown, and white people" to mix together (236). Karim likewise looks to the organization to provide a sense of belonging and identity. The name suggestions for his group all include terms of communality, such as "League," "United," and "Society" (194), and the mission statement "We are for Muslim rights and culture. We're into protecting our local ummah and supporting the global ummah" (196) identifies the society-building function of the Bengal Tigers as a primary organizational motivator.

Finally, as an extension at times of the community-building aspect of religion, some characters use religion as an exclusionary technique for othering individuals who

subscribe to different belief systems. Like Mrs. Islam, who advocates for separatism to preserve cultural purity (16), Karim defines the Bengal Tigers as "against . . . any group that opposes [them]" (196); and while Nazneen asks why they can't march without directing the act against someone else, Karim explains that it simply "doesn't work like that" (286). Similarly, the Lion Hearts equate religion (specifically, Christianity) with national identity as a strategy for othering Muslims and presenting the latter as un- or anti-English. By delving into the intricacies and different approaches to religion, and the many diverse functions it serves, Ali presents the complexity of religious beliefs, showing readers that religious experience is not unitary (Roupakia 650) and ultimately contesting perceptions of Islam as violent at its core.

Brick Lane presents approaches to religiously motivated violence as subjective and ultimately divisive. As self-appointed leader of the Bengal Tigers, Karim announces, "I say what is radical and what is not" (214); Nazneen discovers that "radical" is "simply another word for 'right'" (214). Multiple characters take issue with Karim's subjective interpretations of the Qur'an, as well as his teachings. For instance, the multicultural officer announces, "If it's violence you're advocatin', I shall have to renounce me vows to Allah" (235). Nazneen's discussions with Karim are particularly poignant, interrogating Islamophobic assumptions about the general teachings of Islam. Not only do Nazneen's descriptions of her "un-Islamic deed" (249) with Karim and her portrayal of Karim and the Questioner's fights as similar to "Shahana and Bibi fighting over their toys" (214) discredit Karim's religious authority, but her references to the Qur'an itself on matters of violence also challenge his very beliefs. Regarding suicide bombers, Nazneen argues, "Allah does not allow it," to which Karim reasons, "It's not *suicide*, yeah? It's war" (199). She believes, however, that the issue is

"incontrovertible," and to Karim's insistence that "It's not as simple as that," Nazneen turns to Scripture: "*He who kills himself with sword, or poison, or throws himself off a mountain will be tormented on the Day of Resurrection with that very thing*" (319). *Brick Lane* challenges perceptions of religious (and secular) authenticity by undermining the sacred/profane binary upheld by characters such as Karim and Mrs. Azad – both identifying with opposite sides of the dichotomy. Not only does the novel "attempt … to translate Nazneen's experience of faith to a secular audience," as Roupakia argues (653), but it does so by disentangling religion from "a blanket identification with authoritarianism, intolerance and censorship" while "disturbing the normativity of secularism" (Ahmed 16). By dealing with and promoting coexisting elements of both the sacred and the profane, the novel performs the function of a postsecular space.

As has already been suggested, Nazneen is a postsecular character performing both sacred and profane actions and embodying religious and secular worldviews. On the one hand, she is deeply religious. She reads the Holy Qur'an fervently, recites the suras she had learned in school, and prays frequently (8). Critics tend to regard her as a true Muslim, arguing that even her agency and disobedience to her husband is in favour of a "more considered life" through prayer (Upstone 174-75). However, others see her relationship with Islam as neither religious nor political, but as "a symbol of reassurance or hope" that provides her with identity or certainty (Hiddleston 66). Significantly, Nazneen herself is aware of and troubled by this additional function of religion in her own life, noting that she recites suras as a method of centring her mind, as "the rhythm of them soothed her" (9). Similarly, when she thinks of Raqib, she uses prayer "to stupefy herself like a drunk with a bottle" and "to dull her senses and dull her pain" (103, 166), concluding that "this was not the correct way to pray. It was not the correct

way to read the suras. It was not the correct way to live" (103). Yet, religion for Nazneen functions as both a personal set of beliefs and a coping mechanism, combining sacred and profane concerns and allowing an intermingling of both aspects of her life. Her struggle against this intermingling is informed by essentialist forms of religiosity surrounding her, which she eventually transcends.

Nazneen's religion is postsecular in its embrace of pluralism, hybridity, and fluidity. As Sara Upstone argues, Nazneen's turn to Islam throughout the novel "privileges the importance of undiluted belief structures within the more fluid possibilities of hybrid cross-cultural encounter" (174). Surrounded by various conflicting forms of Islam, she does not give herself over to unbending, essentialist religious worldviews but turns toward pluralism – not only within religious belief but regarding both religious and secular endeavours. As Alistair Cormack notes, Karim's religion offers Nazneen "no space for her own identity," and "to fall in with him would be to reject one form of pedagogy and to accept another" (706), despite the exercise of her own autonomy this decision would require. Meanwhile, Nazneen also turns away from the religion of her mother, which dictated passivity as a result of "religious formalism" (Roupakia 654). Neither does she accept the culturally and historically motivated religion of Chanu, who nostalgically pursues a past, a homeland, and a religious identity that have irreversibly changed over time.

Instead, as symbolized by the final skating scene, Nazneen chooses independence from externally imposed pedagogies, from passivity and religiously inflected rules, and from the cultural separatism often associated with Islam and its followers. Moreover, the act of skating in a sari signals a break from the religious metanarratives of her past and acceptance of English and secular symbols, though

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without fully disavowing her religion or her original culture. Yet, as significant as this final scene is, the postsecular extent of her decisions comes across in an earlier passage. Nazneen reads from the sura "The Merciful":

> *He has let loose the two oceans: they meet one another.*

> *Yet between them stands a barrier which they cannot overrun. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?*

> *Pearls and corals come from both. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?*" (340)

Nazneen's refusal to choose one and not the other with the declaration "None of her Lord's blessings would she deny" (340) frames the pluralistic attitude she adopts and motivates the fluid imagery of the ending.

The ending has been the subject of much criticism, as may be expected. Some literary critics view it as "unrealistic" (Upstone 165), and others suggest it may be meaningless. After all, Nazneen skating in a sari "does little to change the material conditions under which she continues to live, both within the British state and within the community of Brick Lane" (Chakravorty 159). On a deeper level, Rezaie argues that Ali deploys a liberal perspective, which he sees as highly problematic. This view of the novel as "dismissing traditional cultures and religions" through a "rather superficial and evolutionary conception of traditional cultures and religions that makes [liberalism] unable to sympathize with the importance non-Western people and immigrants attach to the survival of their cultures" renders *Brick Lane*, in Rezaie's understanding, "reductive … about the immigrant experience" (63). However, while Ali does to a certain extent problematize the essentialist preservation of cultural traditions and beliefs, she nonetheless does not eclipse her migrant characters' struggles. Nazneen's invisibility

and the racist, Islamophobic leaflets sent to the Brick Lane community by the Lion Hearts both illustrate this to a small extent. Chanu in particular waxes eloquent (as he would no doubt be pleased to hear) about the "tragedy of [their] lives: "To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy…. The clash of cultures…. And of generations" (87), which he further elaborates as "the clash between Western values and our own[,] the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage[,] children who don't know what their identity is[,] the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent" (88).

To address further criticisms of the ending, it is not "unrealistic" for a woman such as Nazneen to go skating in a sari. Terms such as "cold," "difficult," and "physically awkward" would be more accurate, but the feat is by no means unattainable. What is unrealistic, however, is the idea that the ending signals a decisive change in Nazneen's living conditions and the xenophobia present throughout London. Although readers cannot see what happens to Nazneen on the ice or after the skating escapade, the novel's ending seems to signal a positive change. Estévez-Saá and Pereira-Ares read it as suggesting that "a transcultural Britain where a Muslim woman can enjoy Western life without renouncing her 'Muslimness' is possible" (274). It would appear, however, that the significance of the ending is not that England has changed, but that Nazneen has changed. *Brick Lane* details the evolution of the protagonist's growth, beginning with her early elation that "she ha[d] spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something" (43). This experience, like Nazneen's later skating excursion, does not signal a marked difference in society's treatment of her, and yet, her reaction indicates the incredible hope and possibility this social, inter-cultural interaction leads her to feel:

Anything is possible…. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To

use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile, probably

around the whole of London, although I did not see the edge of it. And to get

home again I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked

directions. See what I can do! (45)[42]

When faced with the later decision to choose between flight with Chanu or jihad with

Karim (López 524), Nazneen creates an alternative and claims a space for herself in

English society – an option that she, and perhaps Chanu and Karim, would previously

have believed impossible.

Nazneen makes a postsecular decision to embrace her own understanding of

religion alongside a secular activity she sees as representative of Western culture

without turning away from her own cultural background. This gestures toward a

pluralism growing with England, and possibly a future of postsecularism in the country.

The "*utopian realism*" of *Brick Lane's* ending can be read as meaningless, or it can be

seen as "gestur[ing] beyond rather than simply reflect[ing]" the prevailing conditions in

London (Upstone 169). *Brick Lane* is a novel that not only houses secular and religious

characters and concerns – as well as promoting the breakdown of binaries between these

elements and contesting forms of essentialism in Nazneen's life – but also offers a

picture of what a postsecular, more multicultural England could look like. And while

this does not signal or immediately prompt vast social change, as a work of literature it

offers readers yet another alternative to the increasingly divisive secular, religious, and

cultural politics of the globalized twenty-first-century world.

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[42] Nazneen's elation is similar to that of Tanty in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), who also experiences a "triumph in conquering unfamiliar space" when first using public transport (Ball, *Imagining* 134).

"Words in every language": The Twin Towers of Babel and the Postsecular

Practice of Translation in *Burnt Shadows*

Similar to *Brick Lane*, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* depicts the home life and close family ties between prominent characters and, like many other works of post-9/11 South Asian fiction, spans a timeframe that begins before 9/11. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), possibly the most famous South Asian post-9/11 novel, employs this same tactic as a means of preventing characters from being "overwhelmed by an event that spoke so much more loudly than any individual's story could" (Hamid, "My Reluctant" 92). Shamsie decentres 9/11 from her novel by omitting the day itself from her text and using what Shazia Sadaf terms "alternative representation" (116), addressing the aftermath from multiple points of view. However, she does not privilege the "individual story" to the same extent as Ali. *Burnt Shadows* is much more international and historical than *Brick Lane*, covering a larger timeframe, more generations of characters, and multiple migrations around the world. In *Brick Lane*, the neighbourhood is Nazneen's world; in *Burnt Shadows*, the world becomes Hiroko's neighbourhood.

Hiroko Tanaka, the protagonist, witnesses the destruction of her home as the novel opens with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan (and death of her German fiancé Konrad Weiss) on August 9, 1945. Carrying the literal scars of the bomb with her, Hiroko leaves Japan for India, where she meets Konrad's sister Ilse and her husband and son, James and Henry Burton, forming a lifelong connection between their two families. After converting to Islam and marrying Sajjad Ashraf, Hiroko ends up living in Pakistan, as her husband loses his home ("Dilli," aka Delhi) when he is no longer allowed to

return to post-Partition India. The novel follows the tangled relationship between the Burton-Weiss and Tanaka-Ashraf families as their children Raza and Kim (Henry's daughter) grow up surrounded by different sides of the same conflict. Raza's eventual involvement with an Afghan *mujahideen* training camp leads to Kim's role in smuggling Raza's friend Abdullah from New York into Canada, where her nationalist post-9/11 sentiments lead to the arrest of Raza, who allows Abdullah to escape. Emphasizing the global alongside the local by depicting the threats and insecurities facing her Japanese, German, Indian, Pakistani, and American characters as they move around the world, Shamsie discusses the implications of moral panic on the world stage while promoting a postsecular discourse in which Hiroko and Raza's process of learning languages embodies an alternative to the one-way translation techniques proposed by Habermas and represented by Kim.

Like Lei in *Uncanny Terror*, Shamsie problematizes the mythologizing tendency to treat 9/11 as the "Ground Zero" of history by framing her novel around a long period of time (beginning in 1945), illustrating that history "precede[s]" 9/11, rather than "proceeds" from it (H. Singh, "Legacy" 158). In her own words, she "skips" 9/11 (H. Singh, "Legacy" 159), though its spectre is still present in her work: to Kim Burton, three months after 9/11, the "jagged metal debris, eight storeys high" still serves as a "reminder or testimonial" (251). However, in response to Kim's fixation on 9/11, Hiroko states, "That's not the world, it's just the neighbourhood" (254), and Ilse reminds her granddaughter that the recovery from 9/11 is not "the world's most significant event" (255) – referring to the nuclear standoff between Pakistan and India. Kim's fixation on the gap in the New York skyline embodies the Western audience's "close-up views of the '9/11' tragedy" that Shamsie disrupts with her "widescreen" novel, which Sadaf

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describes as a response to the "cinematic falling-tower trope of the 9/11 novel" (119, 118). A similarly insular view of 9/11 is held by Kim's father Harry – known as "the American" – who is "stunned by his reaction to it, the depth of his fury, the wish for all the world to stop and weep with him for the city which had adopted him when he was eleven" (276).

Shamsie poignantly contrasts Harry's reaction to 9/11 with his response to genocide in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where he was stationed during 9/11. Although Harry calculates the number of deaths from the war to be "more than two thousand deaths a day, each day, for over three years," we are told he simply "couldn't find any way to connect those numbers to his emotions" (276). Yet, Shamsie does not frame this issue solely as a Western problem. Rather, she uses various characters' responses to their own nation's tragedies to critique insular approaches to calamity. Maja Zehfuss emphasizes Hiroko's description of Nagasaki as the end of her world (62), which parallels her to Kim and Harry – both of whom view 9/11 as representative of the end of their world. While Kim does not use the exact phrase that her "world had ended" with the attack on the Twin Towers, she nonetheless sees the event as a pivotal moment separating the world "as it had been" from the world post-9/11.

In response to Kim's views, *Burnt Shadows* "deterritorialises terror" (Zinck 45) by placing the 9/11 attacks in a wider historical timeframe. Importantly, Shamsie does not overlook the significance of 9/11 as a world event, nor does she deride characters who mourn as Harry does. Rather, Shamsie contextualizes 9/11 as one of many world disasters, thus relegating America to one of many wounded nations – one of many victims – rather than the prime example. By incorporating multiple other historical tragedies throughout, *Burnt Shadows* dismantles the Us/Them, Victim/Perpetrator

narratives so rampant after 9/11. Besides 9/11, the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff, and the Second Congo War, *Burnt Shadows* also depicts characters in the midst of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, the Partition of India, and America's War on Terror. In contrast to Kim's longing for the world to be "as it was" (270), older characters comment on how the world actually was: "I've lived through Hitler, Stalin, the Cold War, the British Empire, segregation apartheid, God knows what" (271). Echoing Ilse's description of her experiences, Abdullah's voice in Kim's head also says the world she misses "had never been" (366).

Not only does Shamsie's depiction of extreme violence worldwide show that terror has been "*incorporated everywhere*" (H. Singh, "Legacy" 25), as she suggests, but also that it existed long before 9/11 and comes from several different sources. Adriana Kiczkowski sees the novel's long timeframe as an attempt to answer Raza's opening question, "*How did it come to this*" (1; Kiczkowski 128), and the historical contents gesture toward the complex history informing his eventual arrest. This pluralistic approach to history and violence that Shamsie presents in *Burnt Shadows* advises against a "narrow vision of war" (Sadaf 117) and, by extension, the dichotomous perceptions informing both sides in a conflict. For instance, in one of Hiroko's dreams, "Raza was speaking to an Afghan boy but the boy, although an Afghan boy, was also her ex-student, the kamikaze pilot" (228). Fusing the identities of these boys across time and space, Shamsie emphasizes the timeless, transnational nature of the violence and terror that had only recently become associated with Western fears of Middle Eastern terrorists. In a similar manner, Raza's description of the bodies of smuggled men resembling "the mass grave in Kosovo" (342) highlights troubling similarities between

ethnic cleansing and racist and nationalist North American migration policies – blurring the lines of victim and perpetrator in the American War on Terror.

The characters in *Burnt Shadows* come from and/or migrate to Japan, Germany, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the United States, England, and Canada, and they pass through other places in between. As a result, *Burnt Shadows* reminds readers of "history as seen from non-western eyes," as Ahmed Gamal suggests (601); however, it does so without totally eclipsing Western experience. In *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*, J. Edward Mallot writes,

> If we turn to "silenced" or "forgotten" voices because we believe nationalist, statist, or other politically motivated accounts to be deliberately false, we cannot expect any narrative we champion in its place to contain any higher degree of "what really happened," but merely "and this happened too." (Mallot 21)

Burnt Shadows addresses 9/11 and other world disasters from a point of view that has often been silenced, or forgotten, but it does not perform the fallacy of simply reversing the binary. Instead, Shamsie tells her tale from multiple characters' viewpoints and in multiple national settings, including the West.

In an interview with Harleen Singh, Shamsie states, "I continue to be quite annoyed when people say – and a lot of people say this – that my novel starts with the bombing of Nagasaki and ends with 9/11. It ends with the War on Terror. That's an important distinction" (H. Singh, "Legacy" 159). Rather than ending with America situated on the receiving end of an attack, *Burnt Shadows* ends with America's involvement in war overseas. Moreover, through Harry, the novel complicates the Us/Them binary typically invoked during war by noting the CIA's involvement in smuggling arms through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency to jihadi training

camps along the border (165). According to Pascal Zinck, Shamsie's decision to use Guantanamo as the starting point for her novel "challenges Pax Americana" (52) from the outset. In fact, despite Kim's longing for the world as it had been, *Burnt Shadows* pinpoints what many American 9/11 novels fail to acknowledge: "that American life has continued at an unabated pace – whereas life in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan has been radically destabilized" (H. Singh, "Insurgent" 23). By exploring the tragedies of 9/11 but also Nagasaki, Partition, and the War on Terror, Shamsie provides an Eastern *and* Western view of the entwined nature of world violences, which inevitably decentres 9/11 without discounting its importance from the world stage.

While *Brick Lane* addresses oppression and power through the context of clothing and the female body, *Burnt Shadows* looks primarily to language and voice as indicators of agency, or lack thereof. In a postcolonial gesture, Shamsie presents language – or "dominant discourses" (Wemyss 7) – as a form of control during the English Empire. When Sajjad corrects James Burton's pronunciation of Hiroko's last name from "Tanker" to "Tanaka" (54), the latter continues to mispronounce it, showing a reluctance to relinquish the power associated with English as the dominant language. In "The Word and the Bomb," Kureishi describes a "deliberate mutual incomprehension" between cultures (10), but in *Burnt Shadows*, this incomprehension, though deliberate, is not entirely mutual. James, who refused to read *Twilight in Delhi*, tells Sajjad that Englishmen are no longer "interested in entering [his] world" by writing in Urdu (40); Sajjad, however, knew "what to do with an Urdu masterpiece written by an Englishman. He'd read it" (40). Although their conversation occurs during a colonial era, James's willing incomprehension of Other literature and languages mirrors the incomprehension Kiczkowski ties into the post-9/11 desire for hegemonic interpretation,

by which the "condition of the terrorist" is based on a lack of interpretive processes, such as those represented in the "failure of a civilizing dialogue" in the character of Kim (134).

This failure finds its counterpart, however, in Hiroko and Raza, for whom learning languages doubly signifies understanding and cultural acceptance, moving beyond the insularity of hegemonic discourse associated with James and Kim Burton. It is, after all, through translation and language lessons in Nagasaki and Delhi that Hiroko develops relationships with Konrad and Sajjad (Gamal 607), and when James tells Hiroko it is not necessary to learn the language in Delhi because "English serves you fine" among "the Oxbridge set," "it was the oddest thing Hiroko had ever heard" (58). Even young Raza is aware of "the weight attached to language lessons" (203), which overcome the separation between people. When Elizabeth and Hiroko speak in German about Konrad, for instance, "doing so felt like sharing the most intimate of secrets" (71). Likewise, while working in Dubai, Raza acquires multiple languages like a collector, but "he stayed away from the Afghans. To take even a word from them seemed an act of theft" (262). Having encouraged his Afghan friend Abdullah to go to the *mujahideen* training camps, Raza feels a burden of guilt that leads him to avoid speaking with Afghans – not out of a desire for ignorance or incomprehension, but from a feeling of betrayal and unworthiness.

The approach to language and communication in *Burnt Shadows* overlaps with postsecular theories of communication. The "deliberate mutual incomprehension" Kureishi sees as generating cultural conflict finds its opposite in Habermas's description of postsecularism as a "*complementary learning process*" ("Relations" 258). Although Shamsie does not define language as secular or religious, as Habermas does, her

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characters nonetheless undergo the same learning process as a necessary step to coexistence in a globalized world. The act of translation is framed by Habermas as a key component to postsecularism, and he argues that all legal institutions in a state should be "*publicly justified* in a language that all the citizens can understand" ("Notes" 28). Habermas does – it should be noted – write that secular citizens "may neither deny out of hand the potential for truth in religious conceptions of the world nor dispute the right of believing fellow citizens to make contributions to public discussions that are phrased in religious language" ("Relations" 260). However, like James and Kim Burton in *Burnt Shadows*, he nonetheless maintains a dominant, hegemonic discourse by calling for the translation of religious utterances into "a secular discourse" (29). This in many ways calls for a reversal of postsecularism, which was first described by John Richard Neuhaus as "the collapse of the 200-year hegemony of the secular Enlightenment over public discourse" (309). Many critics have picked up on this recentring of secularism and have critiqued its exclusion of religious discourse (Blond 13, King, *Postsecularism* 5, Haque 804), noting "the assumption … that there is a standard public discourse whose language is readily accessible, while religious language is odd, obsolete, and esoteric" (Dallmayr 965), which does not call for any understanding of the religious.

Though Habermas's works constitute the leading definition of postsecular theory, not all postsecularists agree with his approach to language. King, for instance, suggests that the term "postsecular" can describe a discourse which "moves beyond both secular reductionist assumptions and presecular renunciative assumptions" ("Art" 4), and Gregor MacLennan sees the need for a new politics of translation that does not require belief and experience to "pass through some neutral, superior set of terms designated … to establish the subordination of these phenomena to alien (secular)

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norms" (15). The postsecular condition that people must speak with and not about one another (Reder and Schmidt 13-14) presupposes mutual comprehension, but for Habermas, the contributions of religious citizens are "monolingual" and must be translated "if they are not to fall on deaf ears" ("The Political" 26). The requirement that religion be translated into secular terms mirrors the colonial discourse of hegemonic language, which prioritizes English rather than calling for the complementary learning of different languages, which Hiroko and Raza both accomplish. Moreover, while privileging the secular as synonymous with reason and therefore approaching religious convictions as "irrational" (Schmidt 14, 61), the description of the "deaf ears" of the secularists suggests the latter have not developed "strong communicative skills and imaginative, creative capacities in order to be able to deal with diversity," which Hetty Zock sees as a requirement of a postsecular society (132). It is important to note that people do not translate things for Raza, and he takes on the role of learning and therefore understanding, remedying the problem of his own "deaf ears" and becoming active, rather than passive, in the act of intercultural communication. Raza says that what he wants out of life is "words in every language" (148) – not the translation of other languages into his own.

Zinck sees Hiroko's ability to speak Urdu, English, Japanese, and German as potentially elitist, along with her embrace of "the fluidity and mobility of Manhattan in Mary Poppins-like fashion" (49). Indeed, Hiroko's description of New York initially appears somewhat rose-coloured: "A city in which she could hear Urdu, English, Japanese, German all in the space of a few minutes. The miracle of it!" (295). However, this represents her experience of New York before 9/11, and the utopian description of the city as a hub of languages provides a valuable comparison to the aftermath of the

attack. When combined, Hiroko's descriptions of the multilingual, multicultural aspect of New York and the role of the World Trade Centre in connecting international traders from around the globe frame the Twin Towers as a metaphorical Tower of Babel, representing human progress toward a utopian state of progress through common understanding and coexistence. When the towers fall, the multicultural, multilingual cooperation they embody also topples. In the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, God confounds the speech of the builders so they can no longer understand one another. With the advent of 9/11, a similar thing occurs, and while people's languages are not literally affected, a sense of mutual comprehension and learning so essential to cultural, religious, and secular coexistence also comes under attack.

Sadaf describes the "cinematic effect" of the towers falling as "not only extremely shocking and symbolically important, but also challenging to articulate" (117), gesturing toward the confounding of language by tragedy. Kristiaan Versluys similarly describes 9/11 as a "semiotic event, involving the total breakdown of all meaning-making systems" (2), comparable to a loss of language. In a conversation with Elizabeth (Ilse), Hiroko describes August 9, 1945 in similar terms: "Nothing in the world could ever be more unfamiliar than my home that day. That unspeakable day. Literally unspeakable. I don't know the words in any language" (100). Kim and Hiroko both experienced unspeakable days, but while Kim allows her experience with terror and moral panic to cloud her conversations with Abdullah, Hiroko strives for more language and understanding, "retrieving forgotten knowledge" (62) in pursuit of the same kind of world in which she and Konrad had lived, spoken, and understood one another. Through the valorization of Hiroko and her mastery of language, Shamsie calls for a continuation of the learning process that partially came to a halt in the wake of 9/11.

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A large part of Hiroko's multilingualism is due not only to study, but also to migration and encounter with Others. The definition of translation as "to transfer something across a line" (Vitolo 5) emphasizes the correlation between language translation and the physical translation across borders; moreover, the act of translation Vitolo sees Hiroko performing when she "uses the languages she speaks to cross the cultural borders she comes across" (5) is not unlike the act of translation Ratti sees in the embrace of a religious identity, which "critically involve[s] a movement not unlike that of border-crossing migration" (*Postsecular* 25). Hiroko's movement from one place to another implies "a movement through linguistic and cultural barriers" (Vitolo 2), and movement back and forth through religious and secular boundaries implies acts of translation between both, prompting understanding rather than the translation of one set of beliefs for adherents to the other.

Profane Religiosity and Sacred Bunny Rabbits: Dismantling the Secular/Religious Binary in the Postnation

Like Ali, Shamsie presents multiple manifestations of religion in her novel, emphasizing the complexity and plurality of a worldview often reductively seen to be merely the opposite of Western secularity. In *Burnt Shadows*, religion is not only personal, but it has political and cultural facets as well. Michael Reder argues that religion must be thematized as a "substantive, rationally reconstructible element of ethical and cultural reflection on society" (49), and while critics like Steve Bruce argue that it is important to "distinguish between the social significance of religion and religion as such" (3), the argument can also be made that "if it appears that the majority of the followers of a religion now profess ideas that are … essentially political or

sociological, then we must be prepared to accept that this is in fact what religion signifies in our time" (Ghosh, "Fundamentalist" 285). On the one hand, as Mustapha Kamal Pasha argues, religion serves as the "defensive core of traditional society" (141). On the other hand, it becomes a moral pointer, such as when Hiroko tells the Red Cross nurse who states that intention matters, "The Prophet Mohammad made exactly that point" (295).

In other ways, religion represents "a burst of adventure and camaraderie" (214) for the youths in Hiroko's life, as is apparent in Raza's perception of jihadi training camps in "the vast, thrilling playground of the north where the terrain seemed designed for boys to execute grand adventures" (216), which Abdullah also believes will be "so much fun" (215). For Hiroko, the wave of aggressive religiosity appearing among her students in Pakistan mirrors the aggressive nationalism of the teenage boys she taught in Nagasaki (144), suggesting that the fervour of young Afghan *mujahideen* and Japanese kamikaze pilots is socially rather than politically motivated. Finally, the performative aspects of religion – not unlike political rituals and secular ceremonies – combine sacred and profane qualities in *Burnt Shadows*, not only signifying identity, but also blurring the public and private dimensions of a person's faith (Kanwal 192-93). For instance, while offering prayers, Raza partakes of a sacred ritual which combines with the profane in the way his body "comes to bear cultural meaning" (Kanwal 194) in a post-9/11 context.

Although Shamsie depicts religion as often politically, culturally, or socially motivated, her secular characters show a respect and appreciation for the religious, the enchanted, and the sacred. Kureishi describes rationalists, or secularists, as always underestimating the need people have for belief and the comfort it can bring ("The

Road" 58), but Raza, Sajjad, and Hiroko, while not devoutly religious, are shown to recognize the value of religion. When Raza prays for the first time, "All at once, [he] saw the beauty in the moment and it was with a true sense of reverence, such as he had never felt before, that he laid his pattusi on the ground and stepped on to it" (233). Immediately afterward, "Raza Hazara woke up, looked upon the world, and found it extraordinary" (234). The awe Raza feels when looking upon the world through a sacred, rather than secular, lens mirrors that of Konrad when he first encounters Nagasaki, feeling as though he was "entering a world of enchantment" (6). In contrast, Hiroko notes, the secular, rational characteristic of the war distills and distorts everything in Nagasaki into its "most functional form" (7), closing off the previously enchanted view completely (6).

In times and places of duress, both Raza and Sajjad turn to prayer as a ritual of comfort. For Raza, prayer in the camp brings him to feel "pure faith," and while he inaccurately translates the Arabic prayer in his mind as *"Lord, Allah, let me escape this place, deliver me, deliver me*," he also feels a sense of connection through the experience, adding, "*Give these men Your blessing*" (234). While Raza prays in the training camp, Sajjad also turns to prayer as a ritual to comfort him as he drives back and forth looking for his missing son (239). Meanwhile, Hiroko exhibits the most postsecular attitude of all when she offers to drive Abdullah across the Canadian border so Kim does not have to violate her conscience: "I won't be the reason for you to go against things you believe in" (335). Hiroko "felt about people who believed in the morality of their nations exactly as she felt about those who believed in religion: it was baffling, it seemed to defy all reason, and yet she would never be the one to attempt to wrestle the comfort of illusory order away from someone else" (335). Her sentiments

reflect the similarities between secular nationalism and religiosity – both of which have essentialist tendencies criticized in earlier chapters – but they nonetheless do not disparage either as systems of meaning-making and identity for their adherents.

Despite Émile Durkheim's argument that "religious life and profane life cannot coexist in the same space" (228-29), *Burnt Shadows* depicts an overlap in objects that take on sacred or profane meanings for various people, often symbolizing both and blurring the boundaries between religiosity and secularism. In "The Fundamentalist Challenge," Ghosh argues that in laying claim to the modern world, religious adherents are now "products of the secularly oriented, modernist institutions" (270), and "all have recourse to the same language of difference – a language that is entirely profane, entirely devoid of faith or belief" (273). While this description aligns with Habermas's call for the religious to be translated into a universal, secular language, it overlooks the opposite occurrence, which Shamsie portrays throughout *Burnt Shadows* in characters who draw on sacred language in reference to objects typically viewed as profane.

Themes of childhood and "fairy tales" permeate *Burnt Shadows*, with Harry owning "at least eight copies of *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes*" (330) and Hiroko using fairy tales to explain the indescribable history of herself for Raza. For Harry, reading Mother Goose is the only thing that can keep a man sane while in Afghanistan, bringing comfort and meaning to him through the invocation of cultural stories and myth, much as a religious belief system brings comfort to Sajjad when searching for his son. For Hiroko, the fairy tales she invents but never tells Raza serve as origin narratives and myth through which she can understand her own self-history, thus imbuing her stories with sacred significance. Even Kim applies religious sentiment to the profane when she hears Abdullah's story of the truck that spilled plush rabbits onto the road. She

"envisioned something almost reverential about the way all cars slowed and swerved, not daring to run over a little blue tail or a soft pink ear. It would have been a moment of silence, of wonder, she knew, uniting everyone on that dark dark highway" (349). The assignation of sacred status to the pink and blue rabbits not only destabilizes understandings of the sacred and profane as concrete, separate concepts, but it also emphasizes the extent to which secular society can approach its institutions in a religious manner, such as the overtones of reverence attached to belief in the capitalism represented by both the plush rabbits and the sacred symbolic status of the World Trade Centre (see Quinn 120).

Although the nation may seem to champion secularity (see Chapter Three), it is also regularly regarded as sacred through its capacity for identity and meaning making; and, like religion, this function of the nation is used to create barriers, rather than promote coexistence. *Burnt Shadows* contests the exclusionary tactics that accompany strategies of belonging employed by adherents to secular or religious worldviews. Throughout the novel, characters group together through common identifying factors of either religion or nationalism. For instance, Kim notes that after 9/11, there was a new profusion of flags in New York:

> Flags stuck on back windows of cars; flags on bumper stickers; flags impaled on antennae; flags on little flag poles adhered to side mirrors; flags hanging out of windows; flags waving a welcome at service stations; flags painted on billboards (with some company's logo printed discreetly yet visibly at the bottom in a patriotically capitalistic gesture). (348)

The exhibition of national flags gives individuals the greater sense of security that comes from belonging. Yet, as with religiosity, nationalism can become too large a defining

characteristic of identity. For instance, when Raza throws his passport and green card into the sand in the desert, he no longer officially belongs to a nation and feels "the terror of unbecoming" (314).

Burnt Shadows also identifies the risk of conflating national with racial identities. For instance, Harry Burton is called "the American" (150), even though he was not born there. It is his whiteness that identifies him with the United States, as characters around him point out. For example, as a boy Harry fits in well at school and believes that "America allowed – no, insisted on – migrants as part of its national fabric in a way no other country had ever done" (174), which his father challenges by asking, "And do all the Negro students at your school agree with this assessment, Henry?" (174). Likewise, when Harry states that "in America, everyone can be American. That's the beauty of the place," Raza counters: "Not me…. You look like Clint Eastwood and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. So of course you can be American. I look like not this and not that" (188-89). From the New York immigration officer "look[ing] quizzically from [Hiroko's] face to her Pakistani passport" (293) to Raza "flinch[ing] every time a Pakistani asked him where he was from" (208), and from Kim identifying Abdullah with the man who killed her father to Hiroko asking if she should "look at [Kim] and see Harry Truman" (369)*, Burnt Shadows* is rife with narrow, essentialist understandings of nationality that define belonging according to skin colour rather than citizenship. In fact, as Emilia Quinn points out, Kim is more willing to give trust and affection to a collie she meets on the sidewalk – a symbol reminiscent of the iconic, American Lassie – than she is to Abdullah, despite their common humanity (118).

The loss of homelands is certainly a recurring theme in Shamsie's work, as is the nostalgia characters feel for other places and previous times (see Kiczkowski 132).

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However, the nostalgia and rootlessness that accompany migration are also associated with gain. To quote Rushdie, "The frontierless nation is not a fantasy" ("Writing and the Nation" 61), and *Burnt Shadows* certainly flirts with the concept of postnationalism. It would be unfair to describe the novel as a postnationalist utopia, as nationhood continues to divide characters from the first pages to the last. However, the postnation is something certain characters strive for. Konrad searches through Nagasaki for "a world in which … Germanness and Englishness were not all that mattered (70). Sajjad's perception of home similarly transcends borders in the midst of Partition: "I will die in Dilli. Before that, I will live in Dilli. Whether it's in British India, Hindustan, Pakistan – that makes no difference to me" (40). To him, Dilli – or, home – is a concept greater than that of nationalism, and he refuses to let his identity be determined by the politics of borders.

Yet, it is Hiroko above all who "disrupt[s] all hierarchies" (84) and confounds narrow understandings of nation. Despite James's perturbation by "this woman who he couldn't place" (207), Hiroko "had no interest in belonging to anything as contradictorily insubstantial and damaging as a nation" (207). Daniela Vitolo argues that Hiroko "uses her body to free herself from the scheme in which her body has been framed" (as *hibakusha*), being "an East Asian with a modern westernised look in India, a barelegged woman in Pakistan at the time of the Islamisation policy, and a Japanese with a Pakistani passport in the United States," which makes it "impossible to place her within a geographical, cultural, and social frame" (4). Instead of holding to a national identity, Hiroko finds her identity in movement and fluidity. Like her friend Rehana, she is "at home in the idea of foreignness" (143) and thinks of "departure" rather than "destination" (50). Shamsie even gives Hiroko's migrancy and reconstruction of self as

plural a sacred, mythical status – that of "the character who loses everything and is born anew in blood" (50). Thus, Hiroko takes on a postsecular status, occupying both sacred and profane roles as a mythical character who nonetheless veers away from the behaviour and identities of religious and secular metanarratives and advocates for plurality – the very concept against which Hamid sees the war on terror being waged ("Introduction" 7).

Hiroko's migrant status endows her with an identity founded on pluralism, allowing her to "benefit from an engagement with the cosmopolitan acknowledgement of difference [and] deconstruction of sameness" (Gamal 605-06). And it is Hiroko who shows Sajjad and the Burtons that "there was no need to imagine such walls between their worlds … [and that] barriers were made of metal that could turn fluid when touched simultaneously by people on either side" (83). In stark contrast to the barriers of metal that Hiroko desires to dismantle, Kim Burton, the professional engineer, designs barriers of metal that ideally cannot be destroyed. In response to 9/11, Kim's profession takes on new significance, and her anticipation of disasters and stress suddenly expands beyond storms, earthquakes, and floods to involve calculations of "the effect of a bomb or an aeroplane … What size of plane? What weight of a bomb? If a man walked into a lobby with dynamite strapped to his chest? If chemical gas was released into the ventilation system?" (298-99). After 9/11, Kim's understanding of risk becomes entwined with her feelings of terror.

Mary Ann Tétreault sees an association between risk management and religiosity for "modern persons" (8) coping with dread: "They return to religious principles and behaviors as a means of taking control of their personal lives and of protecting their communities" (8). As an engineer in post-9/11 New York, Kim's job provides her with a

secular alternative to religious strategies of dread-amelioration, and her unbending national essentialism and risk-management strategies contrast with the fluid postsecularity of Hiroko. Though both women experienced unspeakable national tragedies, Hiroko seems able to transcend the binary of Self/Other that accompanies discourses of violence and war, whereas Kim remains mired in the moral panic of the post-9/11 American psyche. *Burnt Shadows* does not belittle the tragedy of 9/11, but it nonetheless interrogates the centralization of the event in Kim's mind, along with her risk-management coping strategies, which invariably involve deliberate incomprehension toward the threatening, voiceless Other. Kim upholds the binaries of Self/Other, West/East, secular/religious, and verbal/violent that Shamsie breaks down through the character of Hiroko. Neither overtly religious nor secular, Hiroko embraces a postcolonial, postsecular ethic of translation that simultaneously challenges both the colonial paradigm and the Westernized, postsecular writings of Habermas. By crossing literal, physical, ideological, and linguistic borders, she illustrates the natural fluidity of each and ultimately espouses a postsecular worldview that stands as a promising alternative to the post-9/11 fear that defines Kim.

Conclusion

As post-9/11 fictions, *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows* expand the genre across multiple borders, refusing the West/East and America/Afghanistan binary oppositions so prominent in more well-known Eurocentric works. Their complex depictions of nation and space are accompanied by lengthy timeframes that provide a "widescreen" approach to the events of 9/11 and situate it as one of many instances of terror around the world. While *Burnt Shadows* decentres 9/11 by comparing it to the bombing of Nagasaki and

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other events, *Brick Lane* contests the framing of 9/11 as *the* transitional moment of modern history by showing continuities between the pre- and post-9/11 acts of racism experienced by Nazneen's Bangladeshi community in London. Neither novel challenges the significance of 9/11 nor attempts to belittle the international effects of the aftermath, but both works do interrogate the centrality of 9/11 in the Western nationalist metanarrative.

By refusing to privilege 9/11 in their treatments of secular and religious symbols, worldviews, and characters, Ali and Shamsie avoid the recent postsecular trend of associating religious resurgence solely with religiously motivated violence premised upon 9/11. While religion and violence find an association in Karim in *Brick Lane* and the *jihadi* training camp in *Burnt Shadows*, both texts offer much more nuanced approaches to religiosity, including Chanu's conflation of religion with history, Nazneen's implementation of religion as self-care, and Sajjad's turn to religion as comfort in uncertainty. *Brick Lane* and *Burnt Shadows* challenge ideological metanarratives by presenting multiple religious and secular worldviews but also by blurring the boundaries separating essentialist understandings of the sacred and the profane.

In *Brick Lane*, the final scene depicts Nazneen preparing to skate (*profane*) in a sari (*sacred*), portraying her as a postsecular character embracing cultural elements of her homeland and her new home while exhibiting agency in her choice not to disavow either secular or religious symbols in her life, thus blurring the separation between each. *Burnt Shadows* similarly breaks down ideological and national boundaries through Hiroko's multiple migrations and language acquisition, both of which mirror the complementary learning process Habermas outlines as key to a postsecular society.

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Meanwhile, the assignation of religious or mythical status to such diverse objects as the Twin Towers and plush bunny rabbits further confuses the distinction between sacred and profane elements. In the end, both texts offer a form of postsecularism that is postcolonial and transnational in nature, disrupting the secular and religious postcolonial stereotypes typically associated with West and East and exhibiting a postsecular pluralism that challenges the essentialist binaries contributing to constructions of Self and Other.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has simultaneously performed and advocated for a more transnational and postcolonial form of postsecular criticism than has yet been developed. While its focus has been primarily on South Asia, the importance of postsecularism can also be seen in recent events much closer to home, such as in political decisions being made in the province "next door." Quebec, it appears, is facing an identity crisis, and the rest of North America may not be far off. In an attempt to "affirm … the Quebecois people's secular identity" ("Quebec," para. 3), the provincial government passed Bill 21 on Sunday, June 16, 2019. Referred to as the "secularism bill," Bill 21 "prohibits public servants in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols on the job" and pertains to teachers, police officers, lawyers, justices of the peace, and others in public positions ("Quebec" para. 1, 3). According to Quebec Premier François Legault, the bill has allowed many Quebecers to "regain a sense of pride," reflecting the "wishes of the Quebecois nation" ("Quebec" para 17; Valiante para. 1). Simon Jolin-Barrette – the province's Immigration, Diversity and Inclusiveness Minister – similarly describes Bill 21 as "an affirmation of Quebec's distinctiveness and its decades-long drive to separate church and state" (Valiante para. 2). In short, the provincial government has framed Bill 21 as an affirmation of Quebec's secular values and a proclamation of its secular identity.

However, opponents of the contentious secularism law argue that Bill 21 violates human rights and "targets religious minorities" ("Quebec" para. 3), directly affecting Muslims and Sikhs in particular, who will be prohibited from wearing the headscarves and turbans their faith requires while working in positions of authority (Valiante para.

3). Robert Leckey – dean of McGill University's Faculty of Law – warns that Bill 21 "reinforces the idea that a person can be judged based on his appearance" (Valiante para. 23) and is likely to make it even more difficult for visible minorities to obtain jobs – especially Muslim women, who are already being "targeted for discrimination based on the intersection of their religion and gender" (Montpetit para. 42). Motions to overturn Bill 21 describe the law as "contrary to Canadian values, which include freedom of religion and acceptance of diversity" (Pawson paras. 7-9), whereas proponents of Bill 21 portray it as upholding national values of secularism and equality.

The disjunction between these two approaches prompts many questions regarding national and provincial self-definition. Most importantly, one could ask, are the concepts of secularism, religiosity, and multiculturalism in Canada at odds? The incorporation of Bill 21 into provincial law is but one of many recent instances in which questions regarding postsecularism rise to the forefront. It opens a discussion on whether secularism and religiosity can coexist on an equal plane. In other words, does postsecularism exist? Should it exist? And, finally, how do religiosity and secularism interact in an increasingly politicized, globalized world? As the situation in Quebec indicates, postsecularism is a salient and controversial topic in Canada, especially in regard to approaches to nationalism in Canadian politics. Yet, despite the presence of postsecular debate only one province over, this dissertation takes a more transnational approach to postsecularism. The case of Bill 21 exemplifies *why*.

Both within and outside of the literary realm, contemporary Western imperialism is apparent in decisions pertaining to acceptable and unacceptable religious and secular symbols. For example, the issue at the heart of Quebec's secularism law is more complex than it may initially appear. Instead of determining whether Quebec is secular,

religious, or postsecular, the passing of Bill 21 prompts questions regarding what *kinds* of religiosity and secularism represent provincial and/or national values and what kinds do not. In other words, are Western and non-Western religions equally unwelcome in the public sphere, or does Bill 21 target non-Western religiosity rather than religion in general? Ryan Flanagan notes that the bill does not explicitly define "religious symbols," though the government has previously suggested that these will include symbols of the Muslim faith, such as the hijab, niqab, burka, and chador (paras. 14-15). Meanwhile, Legault's decision to keep the crucifix hanging in the provincial legislature as "an important part of the province's heritage" (Valiante paras. 10-11) suggests that Bill 21 is targeted against visible religious minorities, rather than all religious affiliations – such as those of white Quebecois Christians.

I have already described the debates over Bill 21 as postsecular in nature – yet, as I have argued in this dissertation, instances of postsecular criticism that focus only on Western instances of secularism (i.e., rationality evolving from the European Enlightenment) and religiosity (i.e., white Christianity versus fundamentalist Islam) are improper, fractured applications of the theory. It is by taking a transnational, pluralist approach to the various forms of religiosity and secularity and their unique positions in different nations around the world that a more inclusive and nuanced form of postsecular criticism can occur. This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate both the need for less West-centric characterizations of the sacred and the profane and the vast plurality of postsecular themes and issues present in South Asian diasporic literature. By performing postsecular literary analyses of six postcolonial, South Asian novels about migration, this work contributes on a basic level to the current (extremely small and extremely Western) canon of postsecular literary criticism. Moreover, in doing so, it challenges

previous, overly simplistic understandings of postsecularism as a Western phenomenon

grounded in the advent of 9/11 and manifest in the colonial paradigms of West/East,

Self/Other, rational/superstitious, "white"/"black," and now secular/religious.

The six novels analyzed in this work have, of course, been addressed through

other types of criticism. All are fairly well-known works of fiction, and *The Satanic*

Verses in particular has been the subject of myriad books. Both *The Satanic Verses* and

The Shadow Lines have already been discussed in relation to postsecular theory (see

Ratti, *Postsecular Imagination* and "Rethinking"), and the works as a whole have been

interpreted through a variety of literary lenses: feminist, postcolonial, postmodern,

poststructuralist, magic realist, and historicist; and they have been examined via race

theory, disability studies, and so forth. It is easy to make the argument that the

postsecular readings present in this dissertation are valuable; yet one can ask, given the

place of postsecularism at the end of a long line of preceding literary critiques, what do

postsecular readings of these works offer that has not been already accomplished by

postmodern, postcolonial, or other types of readings? After all, as was argued in Chapter

One, the postsecular draws on and is similar to postmodernism, and the analyses

presented in the preceding chapters are purposely postcolonial, as well as postsecular.

Moreover, postsecular arguments for religious and secular pluralism *can* be classified

under a broad postmodern umbrella. Thus, is there any value in the postsecular beyond

the argument that it is "new"?

Most theories and philosophies come into being as reflections of, commentaries

on, and challenges to their times, and the same is true of postsecularism. This is not to

suggest that the concerns of race studies, feminism, or postcolonialism are being

"phased out" or have lessened to any degree. Rather, the addition of postsecularism to an

already large theoretical canon highlights a somewhat more recent development in society – that is, the displacement of certain prejudices and fears onto identities defined above all by belief. As much as this dissertation attempts to decentre 9/11 as a watershed moment in postsecular theory, it is important to note that even though postsecular concerns arose long before 2001, the post-9/11 era in which we now live is one of religious and secular polarization, and postsecular theory both reflects and confronts that reality.

The postsecular interpretations of South Asian diasporic fiction in this dissertation narrow one's focus specifically to the interactions and intersections of the sacred and the profane in the literature and use each text to emphasize the presence and importance of secular-religious concerns in the midst of other readings. The postsecular critique of secularism in these novels – often depicted as a form of secular nationalism – promotes a secular-religious pluralism that not only holds religiosity and secularity as equal in importance but also portrays both as equally problematic when manifested in prejudicial, or singular, ways. Above all, though, the presented literary interpretations hold a somewhat unique value in their treatment of the religious in particular. This is not to say that the postsecular privileges the religious over the secular – to do so would defeat the general purpose of theory. Rather, by advocating for equality between secular and religious worldviews, postsecularism raises religiosity to a higher standing than has been typical among secular criticism over the last couple of centuries, including criticism of the books at hand.

From the lunatic dreams and ravings of Gibreel to the communal and international acts of religious violence embodied by the Imam in *The Satanic Verses*, the NAPYP and the riots of Gujarat in *The Assassin's Song*, the violent desires of Raja's

Hindu schoolmates in *Clear Light of Day*, the Dhaka and Calcutta riots following the return of the prophet's hair in *The Shadow Lines*, the radical politicization of Karim and the Bengal Tigers in *Brick Lane*, and the *jihadi* training camp in *Burnt Shadows*, religion is apt to appear as an antagonist in these novels. Without an exploration of the other, often subtler instances of religion and sacred themes in each text, the truly complex role of the religious and the value of the sacred can be overlooked, resulting in a trivialization of peaceful personal beliefs and a reductive understanding of the significance of religion beyond the stereotypes fueled by post-9/11 moral panic. Finally, the application of postsecular literary criticism to works that are manifestly postcolonial furthers my argument that the most comprehensive form of postsecularism is postcolonial in nature. This not only emphasizes the extent to which postcolonial concerns are evolving, rather than disappearing, but it also positions the postsecular within the theoretical canon, signifying both its relevance and its immediacy. In short, postsecularism is present, it is global, and it is essential.

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