



Us/Them—Our Values/Their Values: Representations of Islam and Modern Enlightenment in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English

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ABSTRACT

The binaries of Us/Them—our values/their values, broadly define the existing polarisation between the West and Islam. The purpose of this study is to analyse these binaries as well as representations of Islam in Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God*. Three fundamental areas analysed from these fictions are: Islam and radicalism; secularism, feminism and Islam; Islam, reason and modern enlightenment. In each case, however, the representation of Islam is starkly scant, political and Eurocentric. Islam is primarily seen in connection with Talibanisation, "Jihadism", while its egalitarian aspects remain thoroughly subdued in the fictions. Thus, the knowledge and images in *The Wasted Vigil* and *Home Fire* generate a particular kind of ideological representation of Islam which clashes with the secular, liberal and democratic West. It also analyses Islam, reason and modern enlightenment in *The Geometry of God*. The Islam presented in this fiction is an ideologically closed system, strictly orthodox, averse to modernism and rationality. Modern enlightenment, on the other hand, represents the positivists' acceptance of knowledge, education and rationalism. Thus Islam, reason and enlightenment are in a state of perpetual conflict. Furthermore, Khan also tends to construct an ideological disparity and collision between evolution and creationism. It will be argued that, in all cases, fiction restricts Islam to conservatism, irrationalism and orthodoxy, denying the progressive historical connections between Islam and modern science. The study applies Lacanian Dialectics to debate these issues. Lacan's dialectic, unlike the Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, projects a permanent state of collision between opposing world views. It also explicates that how we present ourselves is always subject to the interpretation of others.

Keywords: Pakistani fiction in English; Islamic fundamentalism, Lacanian dialectics, modern enlightenment

Introduction

Contrary to secularists' predictions, religion, especially Islam, has become a dominant factor in world academic and political debates, but principally in association with discussions of religious fundamentalism, radicalism and religiously instigated violence (Mazrui et al.; Wilson; Gabriel).¹ Religious fundamentalism is certainly not new to political and academic debates. Initially used to describe American Protestantism, it is now more often seen from modern and secular viewpoints to designate an attitude of religious reactionaries struggling to seize power and reverse the process of modernisation. It is also labelled with a closed system of beliefs and practices, which are not only averse to democracy and change but also signify a denial of the "notion of multiple truths or relative truths" (Salzman 322). Recent developments, however, tend to see fundamentalism in relation to violence and its convergence with Islam. "Since September 11, 2001", write Cox and Marks, "open almost any Western newspaper almost any day and you will find dramatic headlines describing 'The War Against Terrorism', highlighting Islamic or Islamist activities" (1). Notably, both 'Islamism' and 'Islamist' are "widely used to refer to radical, militantly ideological versions of Islam, as interpreted by the practitioners and in which violent actions such as terrorism, suicide bombings or revolutions are explicitly advocated, practised and justified using religious terminology" (6). However, such developments, along with specific Islam-centric pronouncements, have tended to "mask the sociological reality of Muslims ... [so that] a striking gap exists between the image of Islam as it is constructed in binary public discourse and the multifaceted reality of Muslims across countries and localities" (Cesari xiv). It has also tended to focus more on the collision aspect of Islam-West relations, giving rise to a range of intense political, administrative and academic debates concerning Muslims who have migrated to the West, further exasperated by concerns about the increased vulnerability of Muslim immigrant youth to religious fundamentalism/radicalism.² This study is a critical analysis of Islam as portrayed in selected Pakistani fiction within the framework of Lacan's Dialectics. It explicates how authors represent Islam in relation to the West. Three fundamental areas for analysis are: Islam and radicalism; secularism, feminism and Islam; reason and

¹Gellner identifies two broad variants of Islam: High and Low. The difference between the two, as Gellner argues, not only evolved gradually, but often remained obscure. High Islam is monotheistic and nomocratic in nature and is oriented towards puritanism and scripturalism (11). Low Islam is quite different. Its central characteristic is the celebration of a saint cult, and it is prominent among the tribal, the semi-tribal and the rustic. Asceticism, ecstatic rituals, mystical exercises, mediation between groups and the provision of symbols are prominent elements of this Islam.

modern enlightenment.

Lacan's Dialectics

Dialectics is deeply interfused in Lacan's thoughts on Desire, Aggressivity (integral to a child's ambivalent identification with his/her mirror image), ego development in association with child imaginary and symbolic stages, and Alienation. For instance, his thoughts on alienation as developed in *Ecritus* and *Foundational Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* fully reveal a dialectical relation between the self and the Other:

It is a way of describing the relationship of subject and other as well as the formation of a specular image of oneself which operates in the imaginary register, but borders also on the symbolic (how the Other and language define the subject). We cannot trust our knowledge of ourselves but must refer to an external criterion for knowledge. The subject defines him-/herself in the signifying chain and in terms of his/her jouissance (as related to the Other). Thus the subject receives his/her definition in a field that is exterior to him/her; he/she is radically dependent on the signifier. (Glowinski, Marks and Murphy 11)

Etymologically, dialectics is "a mode of historical thought that stresses the interconnectedness of phenomena and unity of opposites" (qtd. in Homer 23). But it is the Hegelian exposition of the term which has given it preeminence in the philosophical and theoretical domains. Hegel posits it as "both a method of exposition and the structure of historical progress" (Evans 43) couched in "the triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis" (43); and "how consciousness progresses towards absolute knowledge by means of a series of confrontations between opposing elements" (43). However, Lacan's appropriation of the term owes much to Alexandre Kojève's explication of Hegelian Dialectics. He perceives it as a struggle of desire and recognition continuing till death. Kojève was particularly interested in how self-consciousness in Hegel emerges through "a process of developing self-consciousness through the activity of self-reflection" (Homer 23). But this self-reflection is not merely a state of being conscious of one's own distinctiveness. As explained in his Master/Slave dialectics, "it must be recognised as a human subject by another" (Homer 23). For Kojève, this master/slave dialectics though involves mutual recognition, which is in fact "a struggle of desire and recognition" (24), entangling both master and slave in a "mutual struggle for

² Funk and Said contend that the conflict between the two civilizations is confrontationalist in nature, spanning hundreds of years: "Narratives on each side of the cultural divide exhibit remarkably similar tendencies toward polarization of identity issues, adversarial framing of historical relations, and rejection of shared responsibility for contemporary conflict" (4). Funk, Nathan C., and Abdul Aziz Said. "Islam and the West: Narratives of conflict and conflict transformation".

recognition: neither can exist without recognition of the other but, at the same time, the other requires his/her own recognition” (24). Lacan, like Kojève, also diverged from Hegel on the ground that a final synthesis, the “concept of absolute knowledge” (Evans 43), is actually non-existent and if subjected to a psychological explanation of the “mirror stage” in the child’s psycho-sexual development, it postulates a connection between the Other and the Self as essentially conflicting in nature. This renunciation of an ultimate synthesis destabilises the concept of development itself. This differentiates Lacan’s explication of the concept from the Hegelian as “it replaces Hegel idea of Progress with “avatars of lack”” (Evans 43). Sarup argues that Lacan’s idea alludes to the condition of knowing “what we are from how others respond to us” (Sarup 13). But this knowledge always carries within it the likelihood of misinterpretation, a gap or misrecognition: “We can never be certain of the meaning of the other’s response” (13). Sarup further explains that, for Lacan, “there is no subject except in representation, but that no representation captures us completely. I can neither be totally defined nor can I escape definition” (13) and that “how we present ourselves is always subject to interpretation by others” (13). Lacan’s dialectics precisely define and explicate the existing state of the civilisational collision between Islam and the West and is applied here to debate Islam and radicalism; Islam and feminism; Islam and modern enlightenment.

Islam and Radicalism: Dialecticism in *The Wasted Vigil* and *Home Fire*
Explained in the spectrum of Lacan’s dialects, *The Wasted Vigil* and *Home Fire* unilaterally construct a relatively preordained stance of Islamic fundamentalism pitted against the cultured West, amplifying Lacan’s dialectics. Additionally, it is a re-embodiment of developing Islamic identity with respect to “how others [the West] respond to us” (Sarup 13). Naturally, this representation is marred by its own inadequacy and it plainly fails to “capture us [Islam] completely” (13). Moreover, the subject (Muslims) in these texts is analysed/defined only through the other (the West) as an exclusive criterion of “knowledge” about it. Additionally, it also reflects a radical dependency on the West as a signifier of knowledge about Islam. Thus the fundamental error lies in constructing an Islam which is not independent, objective and dispassionate. It is thoroughly political and unequivocally based upon popular Western discourses (the media in particular) about Islam. Furthermore, they tend to create a specific “knowledge” about the Muslim Self along with a range of specific images which set Islam apart from the secular/democratic and a destructive mechanism inimical to the West, autonomous thinking, modern education and tolerance.

In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam severs Islam from its cultural, educational and intellectual erudition and associates it with irrationality, and Taliban radicalism. In the process of fictionalising identification, however, Aslam concentrates on some particular practices as religion writ-large, sensationalised and dramatised, whereas practices which are democratic, transcultural and egalitarian in nature are completely silenced/displaced in the text.³ “At its core”, Islam “does not believe in the study of science and does not believe that the world runs according to rational and predictable laws” (Aslam 130). There is a consistent stress on the Taliban’s brutality and abhorrence to any original thought, reflected so strongly in their will to have burned the books and banned modern education. Furthermore, mosque, madrasah and Taliban clerics are intertwined in extremism and parochialism. Coeducation and Western liberalism are detested by the clergy for the reason that “three million bastards are born in Britain every year because of mixed education” (282), and clerics use the mosque as a platform to spread this message among the population (282). There is also an explicit alignment between suicide bombing and extremism with Koran and religious teachings. Likewise, a concordance between sanctuaries (*Madrasah*) and “holy” activism is emphasised through the example of Casa, who was trained in these institutions for war anywhere, even in Bosnia or Chechnya (120). At times, Aslam develops a mock-heroic pattern describing God and the angels. For instance, he describes an angel bending down in the act of smelling human (Muslim) feet “to ascertain from the odour whether these feet walked towards a mosque”, while others are described in the cat of bellies, “to check for fasting during the holy month of Ramadan” (120). Likewise, Casa’s uncultured upbringing is highlighted through his irradiant beliefs in such stories as blotting away the moon’s brightness by the “archangel Jibraeel”. Casa believes that the archangel “had been asked to blot away some of the moon brightness with his wings, mankind having petitioned Allah that it was too strong for the nights. The grey markings on the radiant white were caused when he pressed his feathers onto it three times” (135). Clements, in her dissertation, attributes the rigid representation of Islam in Aslam’s fiction to his subjective experiences. Recollections of Islamic “clerics beating the terrified boys who attended his Qur’an class when they forgot the incomprehensible words of

³Ziauddin Sardar describes Islam as an equitable social order, a universal culture that welcomes debate on finding ways to come to terms with the contemporary crisis of modernity and postmodernism. Therefore, it should not at all be reduced to a naive formula for certain permissible or non-permissible acts, and the future of Islam in particular lies in moving on without compromising on what Islam as a faith enshrines. As a liberal modernist critic, he is more concerned with the universal values of Islam and the social relevance of intellectual and scientific endeavour.

Arabic which they were meant to learn by rote” or “the austere man smashing his “idolatrous” toys and threatening to thrash his mother for listening to devotional music – a pre-Taliban figure of Islamist menace as seen through the adult author’s eyes” coloured his understanding of Islam. (143). Furthermore, as Clements argues, it was also affected by the firm imposition of “Saudi Style” Islamic values during the Zia regime in the 1980s in Pakistan (discussed below), which led to the adoption of a severe standpoint on structured and conformist religion. Hence, Aslam’s representation is conditioned more by personal experiences than by any adherence to objectivity.

Shamsie’s latest novel, *Home Fire*, closely replicates Aslam’s representation. Like Aslam, Shamsie in *Home Fire* maintains rigid Us/Them binaries between radical Islam and the liberal West. Again like Aslam, there is a tendency to treat Islam in a generalised fashion, thereby conflating Islam with the militancy and terror of ISIS. But in all cases, the West remains the centre of defining Muslim identity. The structure of the novel comprises two parallel narratives which mutually reinforce Us/them binaries. The first narrative exposes the conflict between Natives and Muslim immigrants, especially due to the different dress codes of Muslim girls. The British Home Secretary Karamat Lone’s speech to the Muslim community in the UK is illustrative of how dress has grown into a site of constructing subjectivities and borders:

There is nothing this country won’t allow you to achieve ... you are, we are British. Britain accepts this ... don’t set yourselves apart in the way you dress, what you think, the outdated code of behaviour you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently – not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it. (Shamsie 87-88)

The speech is a simplistic account of the conflict level between Muslims and their Western hosts. It also categorises the entire Muslim community as involved or getting involved in “acts of difference” in the West. The second narrative structure runs in parallel with the first one, but it is exclusively focused on the network of Islamic “jihadists” and their global linkages with ISIS. This narrative is replete with idioms and jargons which build upon an explicit connectivity between Islam and terror organisations. Words and expressions like “No Quran” (3), “jihadi groups” (201), “Muslim Thing” (21), “suicide bombers” (5) and Muslimness (52) are explicitly related to the prevalent discourse about Islam.

Shamsie also focuses on terrorism-media connections, where Islam and terror are conjoined in a global network disseminating terror through digital

media technology. Seib and Dana's views on media-terrorist organisation compatibility closely explain Shamsie's account of this factor. New media, write Seib and Dana, are "collectively a transformative tool [for terrorists] that offers endless possibilities for communication and expansion" (ix). It "crucially helps terrorist groups to stabilise themselves and reach outside sources through it and develop ultimate virtual impenetrability to protect their manoeuvres. Besides, control over media enables terrorist groups to deliver their message in general and reach a larger public, which expands the level of their success. Furthermore, the ability to use technology to register and appeal for sympathy from a wider public disposes of the notion that networks of terrorists can only attract ignorant young people whose emotional and educational instabilities can be utilised for specific purposes. Now, membership of these networks can come from the middle class or higher, well-educated youth who are well aware of the possible repercussions of their actions and decisions on others and themselves" (Seib and Dana). "They act out of frustration, anger about perceived injustices, and a sense of disenfranchisement" (6). Being well cognizant of these debates, she reveals how organisations like ISIS work clandestinely in the UK to register disgruntled youth in the organisation. Pervez Pasha registered to work in the organisation's media centre at Raqqa (Syria) and his job is to disseminate terror through media and recruit "fighters" and "jihadi brides" to be married to so-called fighters under training in Raqqa. One of the most gruesome descriptions of his job is to record "sound effect of beheadings crucifixions, whipping" (169), obviously for creating terror and fear across borders. We have an instance of how a terrorist network manages to register disgruntled youth among their ranks exemplified in the specific case of Pervez Pasha. An important instrument for influencing the target is to focus on the history of conflicting relations between Islam and the West. Farooq, an ISIS agent in the UK, in particular makes Pervez understand the need to act against the Christian West with his resilient focus on history and the "the terror with which the world of Christendom had watched the ascent of Islam, the thousand years of Muslim supremacy...and then the bloodlust with which the Christians had avenged themselves for their centuries of humiliation: imperialism, with its racist underpinnings of a 'civilizing mission, followed by the cruel joke of pretending to give independence when really they were merely changing economic models via the creation of client states, their nonsensical boundaries designed to cause instability" (Shamsie 129). The fundamental point is the same as Shamsie does not distinguish between the radical practices of a political faction of dubious identity and Islam. Again, Western discourses are the defining categories

and modes of establishing the public discourse about the Islam-West conflict in terms of “an essentialized West and an essentialized Islam” (Cessari iv).

Representing Islam in this particular fashion raises a few questions about the role of Pakistani Western diaspora writers. On the basis of this analysis, it is apparent that they are not preoccupied with what Safran calls any “collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievement...” (qtd. in Samers 351-352). Safran highlights a number of characteristics that minority expatriates in Europe share. Prominent among them are those related to their memory, myth or vision of their homeland – and its geographical location, history and accomplishments, accompanied by a penetrating sense of alienation. These conscious considerations are further penetrated by a belief that they should jointly pledge themselves to the preservation or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and stability. They also continue relating individually or collectively to that homeland in one way or another, and their community awareness and cohesion are prominently defined by the presence of such a relationship (qtd. in Samers 351-352). Besides, Pakistani authors are not equally concerned with a desire to bring about some type of national movement back home, as Kostantaras argues. Kostantaras writes about factors which reveal how the literary responses of diaspora intellectuals from Eastern Europe, colonial Africa and Asia to their experiences in Western Europe have been effective in developing national movements back in their native lands. Moreover, they are not mainly concerned with a deeply alienated self in the foreign land, as Nasta puts it. Nasta focuses on the concept of “Home” in relation to the diaspora imagination to explain how they develop the unfulfilled desire for a lost home, “a desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it” (8). The collective unconscious in their fiction is at most distressed by some radical religious practice or fundamental application of Islamic teachings, as in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, rather than any emotional and nostalgic desire for the retrieval of a Muslim past.

Secularism, Islam and Feminism

A similar dialectical pattern is apparent in Islam, secularism and Feminism. Secularism, to be precise, is a way of life in the contemporary world, and it is nowhere better expressed than in female liberation, sexual autonomy and status.⁴ The confluence of these perspectives has predisposed dialectical debates about the role of religion and women’s emancipation from patriarchy, dress codes and interracial marriages. Liberal Western democracies have comfortably adopted

⁴See Talal Asad’s *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*.

secularism as an acceptable standard principle; even unilaterally presuming secularism to be a complete emancipatory principle to deal with such issues as the intersection of feminism, gender equality and the sociology of religion (Reilly). Fatima Bhutto, in her latest novel *The Runaways*, pulls down myths surrounding hijab and the piety of Muslim women in the West. Hanif also demystifies it in *Red Birds* through humour and parody.

Representations of women and religion in Afghanistan in this context assume significance. Here, burqa as a means of women's oppression is focused and broadly coincides with the Western reservations about hijab and covered female bodies. Fadil draws attention to how veiling has become a site concerning "the various significations of this bodily practice, both in its gendered dimensions, its identity components, its empowering potentials, as a sartorial practice or as part of a broader economy of bodily practices which shape pious dispositions in accordance with the Islamic tradition" (83). Contrary to this discourse, writes Fadil, unveiling/not veiling has not received focal attention. "If and when attention is accorded to the latter [unveiling], it is often grasped as a product of integration or an effect of secular governmentality, but only rarely as a bodily practice" (83). Therefore, drawing on "secular and religious Maghrebi Muslims narratives in Belgium", Fadil "pursues this second perspective by examining to what extent not veiling can be understood as a technique of the self (Foucault) that is functional to shaping a liberal (Muslim) subject" (38).

Aslam affiliates his stance with the discourse of hijab as an oppressive practice. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is identified in terms of emblematising the oppressive codes of hijab/burqa and Islam writ large. Women are represented as the worst victims of power, holy intransigence and religiously supported patriarchy. Qatrina is an instance of how brutally women are treated because of her secularist ideology regarding multiethnic marriage that clashes with the rigid religious injunctions of the Taliban. Qatrina's death through stoning is emphasised to demarcate boundaries between the ferocious Taliban and the secular Marcus. Her death is followed by ruthless treatment of her body, where the burqa emerges as a symbol of the stranglehold of patriarchy and fundamentalism. It involves dragging her blood-spitting body brutally like a bundle by Taliban mercenaries. Later on, when Marcus visits her death site, he recalls the whole episode: "afterwards, as she lay on the ground, a man had gathered the hem of her burqa and tied it into a knot and dragged her away as he would a bundle and he grinned at his own ingenuity the while, as did the spectators. Blood was draining, steadily through the holes of the embroidered eye-grille" (Aslam 132).

A great body of literature about the marginalised position of women in Afghanistan emanates from the dominant Western scholarship on Afghan women, which presumes legitimate and ‘authentic’ voices on Afghan women, as Spivak maintains in her critique of Western feminism. Uniformly, these dominant Western discourses represent Afghan women as silent and flaccid victims of their culture, their men and their politics. Occasionally, an extraordinary Afghan woman is brought forward who has flouted her culture to become a symbol of progress and hope for advancing women’s rights in Afghanistan. Following the 9/11 attacks, Washington, supported by NATO, used this impression as “partial justification” (Rostami-Povey 1) for a bombing campaign against Afghanistan on the promise that after the fall of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan and women will have “peace, security, development, democracy and liberation” (1). The US think-tank, writes Rostami-Povey, “characterized gender relations in Afghanistan in ways that legitimated their action and they made an analogy between the defeat of Taliban and Al-Qaida, and women’s liberation” (1). But the voices absent from dominant Western discourses on women are those of women who have endured decades of war and continued to find ways to survive under growing insecurity, poverty and patriarchal oppression. Rostami-Povey highlights the silent voices of such Afghan women, who have been ignored, appropriated and marginalised in the dominant discourses. “Despite daily tragedies”, writes Rostami-Povey, “Afghan women know how to struggle for their rights. They refused the gender identities that the Taliban attempted to impose and now they are refusing to conform to those imposed by invading forces. In their own way and according to their own culture, religion and ethnicity, they have been resisting the social control that the family and community try to impose on them” (2-3). Mother Dear, in *Red Birds*, alone seems to qualify as a new woman in Afghanistan. She epitomises domesticity, reproduction and motherhood, but also has the strength to lead a tribal war against the imperial USA. Qatrina, in *The Wasted Vigil*, cannot be given this status as she is more akin to Western secular (albeit Muslim) feminists in her desire to conduct a Nikah ceremony (Qatrina challenges this to make room for a kind of marriage that is even conducted by females). Her contention is, “we have to help change things,” she said. ‘Nowhere does the Koran state that only men may conduct the wedding’ (Aslam 39).

Attributing a particular mindset (of either the state or clerics) to religion itself is unjustifiable. Barlas argues, “patriarchal structures and gender relationships, are a function of multiple factors, most of which have nothing to do with religion” (2). More often it is a textual misreading or uncritical adherence to assumed

Islamic norms and strictures, as Barlas argues, that has led to textual (Quranic) oppression of women, producing a kind of “interpretative reductionism” (5) and constructing the popular vision that images of women in the Muslim unconscious are essentially misogynistic (5). This has been followed by a lack of any approach, principally theoretical, to question patriarchal misreadings of the holy text, “few question their legitimacy and fewer still have explored the liberatory aspects of the Qur’an’s teachings” (2). However, until what Fazal Rehman calls the “basic questions of method and hermeneutics” (qtd. in Barlas 4) are resolved, both women and the world will continue to appropriate women’s oppression in the name of religion and to support the causes of radicals.⁵

The burqa is replaced with the hijab in Shamsie’s *Home Fire*, with similar practical implications. In one of the most provocative phrases, “The Covered Head and the Naked Body” (*Home Fire* 88), Shamsie captures conflictual relations between liberalism and orthodoxy in the psyche of a Muslim female immigrant to the UK and the way the female body develops into a definitive expression of these conflicts in a Muslim woman. Here, the covered head definitely symbolises orthodoxy and the will to maintain a separate cultural identity, while the naked body reveals desire. In the novel, she is constrained to experience both simultaneously. In her sexual love for Emmon, her hijab gives way to nakedness for sexuality (Shamsie 68). And putting the hijab back on after a sexual experience signifies her return to normality and the maintenance of orthodoxy. In one of the most expressive descriptions, Shamsie unearths the underlying dichotomies in her character:

At daybreak he woke to discover she’d risen from the bed to which they’d finally made their way. Hearing the sound of the shower so early, he thought she was planning to leave ... Eventually he swung himself out of the bed and walked into the living room to find her praying, a towel as her prayer mat, the hijab nothing more alien than a scarf loosely covering her head ... he should have left immediately, but he could not help watching this woman, this stranger, prostrating herself to God in the room where she’d been down on her knees for a different purpose [sexuality] just hours earlier. (70)

Later on, Emmon is found reflecting on the speech in connection with his relationship with Aneeka, “... ‘don’t set yourself apart in a way you dress’ played over a video grab of Aneeka standing up from her prayer mat and walking into his embrace, shedding her clothes along the way until only hijab remained. The video wouldn’t reveal the things that were most striking about her in those moments:

⁵ Also see Badran, Margot. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oneworld Publications, 2013, and Badran, Margot. Engaging Islamic Feminism. In Kynsilehto, Anitta. “Islamic feminism: current Perspectives.” A. Kynsilehto 96 (2008): 9-13).

the intensity of her concentration, how could it completely swerve from her God to him... Or her total lack of self-consciousness in everything she did – love and prayer, the covered head and the naked body” (88).

The hijab and the female body from a psychoanalytic perspective refer to the dichotomous entities within an individual. While the body is the manifestation of desire as a psychic reality and is constituted/constructed in a given timeframe, the hijab refers to some primordial or pre-established realities which are related to birth in a specific culture, where dress codes are a pre-requisite for the moral order and moral codes. Thus it is difficult to presume a unity of totality emerging when body and hijab pull in opposite directions. Furthermore, the body is an external place of inscription with an eroticising effect, and therefore alien to the hijab which carries an inscription of subduing eroticism. To fall prey to the body would mean alienating the self from moral codes and to wear the hijab would mean identification with primordial moral codes. To the West, however, as specified above, the hijab is a signifier of female oppression or a lack (lack of being a human subject equal to a male) and is therefore bound to carry negative inscriptions. Aneeka’s mind and self is the exact manifestation of different inscriptions and this lack. Culturally, it places Islam once again in the pigeonhole of being oppressive and masculine.

Islam, Reason and Modern Enlightenment

The dialectical pattern is also explicitly constructed in the domain of Islam, reason and modern enlightenment. Generally, the Enlightenment helped people to develop a very ambitious project of secularism, humanitarianism, cosmopolitanism and freedom from a vast array of oppressive regimes to carve out an individualistic standpoint in the world. Though Sorkin argues in favour of compatibility between the Enlightenment and religious beliefs with a claim that the advent of Enlightenment weakened neither the place nor the authority of religion in European society, predominant scholarship on the subject tells a different story; a story of the rise of modern secular culture at the cost of conventional religion. Historically, modern enlightenment was constructed on the premise that as “neither the certainties of religious faith nor the a priori constructions of metaphysical systems could any longer provide reliable guidance”, so “philosophical inquiry had to turn to the world given in experience” (Vogel 2). Israel prefers to categorise the movement as a “radical enlightenment” that virtually replaced monarchic, aristocratic and ecclesiastical power and the theological domain of education across Europe. At another place, Israel writes about how the rise of philosophy further complicated the already deadly unresolved

schism between Catholicism and Protestantism as well as the fragmentation within the Protestant churches, so that scores of dissident Protestant sects like spiritualism, collegians and remonstrants emerged in parts of Germany, Poland, Hungary, Brazil and North America to challenge the authority of the three major Protestant churches: Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican (63). The cultural upheaval this development caused is essentially secular and very appropriate in accepting science, education, art and philosophy as separate entities, quite distinct from religion. Explaining the origin of the Enlightenment, Zafirovski writes, “The Enlightenment represents the paradigmatic exemplar of cultural or spiritual revolution within Western civilisation. It is especially an axiomatic (by definition) intellectual and rationalistic, including scientific, revolution, a revolutionary vision and process of enlightening, rationalising, and liberating via human reason, science, knowledge, and societal progress overcoming unreason, superstition, ignorance, stagnation, and oppression” (107).

In this context, what is the relation between science and Islam? Or science and modernism? There are two contrasting views on the subject: outright rejection of “the prospect and feasibility of a compromise between religion and science” (Kamali 116) and “a compromise as not only reasonable but necessary if equilibrium of values was to be kept in perspective” (116). The impact of this division is enormous and visibly distracts from the social fabrics of almost all contemporary Islamic cultures, splitting them between following the tenets of Islam and/or adopting science and technology to use it to their benefit. In Turkey, as Karasipahi writes, “The crisis of the Kemalist modernisation process ushered [in] the creation of a new kind of intellectual class in Turkey, who are distinguished by their Islamist stance and rhetoric in contrast to the conventional Kemalist, secular, or leftist intellectual elite” (1). The principal cause of the rise of Islamic intellectuals against the modern secular establishment in Turkey is that the Turkish version of secularism, modelled after secular Western culture, denotes a division between the church and the state which is neither experienced in Islam nor is a secular culture that is irreconcilable with Islam (Karapashi 4). It has developed into a counter-movement to re-establish ‘authentic’ Islamic thought as an alternative to the Kemalist ideology” (2). Jung and Sinclair also explain the condition of Islamic modernities in the 19th and 20th centuries. During the 19th century, a group of Islamic reformers created an intellectual reservoir to imbue conventional Islamic concepts with new meanings, “transforming the language of religious traditions into the semantics of an authentically modern Islam” (31). This modern semantics was an attempt to undermine the traditional religious

establishment and its monopoly over the interpretation of Islamic tradition” and can be seen in the various Islamic ideologies that have been “used consciously and unconsciously in the articulation of subsequent forms of modern Muslim subjectivities” (31). Jung and Sinclair principally mention the Egyptian Grand Mufti Shaikh Mohammad Abduh (died in 1905) and Hasan Al Banna (founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and organised Muslim Modernity). Abduh attempted to free Islam from the strangles of rigid orthodoxy to make it adaptable to the demands of modern life. He was deeply influenced by Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani, who resided in Egypt till 1879. Abduh was particularly interested in reconciling the fundamental ideals of Islam with Western scientific ideas and his thought had deep influence over the course of time in Egypt and the Muslim world in general (Adam). Recent years, as Jung and Sinclair argue, have seen the emergence of scholars inspired by the preacher Amr Khalid, a “postmodern Creative entrepreneur” (34) who is “more concerned with personal morality, individual improvement and community development than with Al Banna traditions of political reforms” (34). Facilitated by new media like the Internet, Amr Khalid represents “an element of religious reorganisation in the context of the technological revolutions by digital media closely associated with extended liberal modernity” (34).

The Geometry of God, however, explicates the incompatibility between modern European enlightenment and orthodoxy, which is superior to revealed knowledge. Khan also creates evolution and creationism as two contradictory poles. This pattern is established from the start of the narrative in the form of a conversation between religion-minded Junayd and the heretical Zahoor, which reveals how religion and science do not match even on some fundamental issues, as discussed below. In a talk on the observatory, “considered the last great achievement of a Muslim scientist” (Khan 6), Zahoor comments, “It was constructed and used by Muslim scientists, but they were driven by an urge to learn about the world, not prove their faith” (6). This is not, however, completely true of Islamic science. Kamali argues that the fundamental difference between modernism in the West and Islam lies in the fact that unlike the Western positivist dissociation of science from religion (“Positivism or the denial of reality to anything not perceived through the senses or not measurable by mathematics has become the tacit postulate of all that goes under the name of modern or western science. This attitude and outlook has pervaded all branches of science, including the humanities and social sciences” (117)), Islamic epistemology is not inclusive of traditional and scientific knowledge, thus the Islamic “perception of knowledge

is value oriented, informed by ethical and theological concerns” (116).

A similar conflict is apparent in the dispute about the exact meaning of the Arabic word “Alif”. While orthodox Aba is inclined to teach “Alif” for Allah (God), Zahoor insists on its association with “Aqal” (reason). Can “Alif” not be inclusive? Is Islam restraint a reason as inimical to faith and a belief in God? Obviously not. Therefore, Khan’s position is a deliberate ideological manifestation of dialecticism between Islam and reason with dark implications for inter-civilisation conflict. Furthermore, Zahoor’s interest in archaeological excavations of the dog-whale in Margala valley Islamabad signifies an evolutionary explanation of biological growth on earth. It is a declaration in support of the evolutionary idea in the sense that Pakistan and all those living there are the result of the intricate process of evolution that was scientifically explained by Darwin’s evolutionary thought: “Pray five times a day and be real Pakistani! Speak Urdu and be a real Pakistani! or English and half Pakistani! well, here’s my answer. Study whales and be Pakistani” (5). Khan’s use of the geometrical pattern inside the dome of a historical local mosque in Lahore also reiterates science, logic and reason as an absolute source of knowledge, even about God. Geometry is about patterning shapes, sizes and the relative position of figures, as well as the properties of space, signifying the physical properties of a given phenomenon. Khan’s use of geometrical shapes inside the dome is significant and symbolic. First, it conjoins shapes and patterns to describe the metaphysical/transcended reality. Second, it merges metaphysics with geometrical shapes in a way that signifies a denial of the metaphysical. Amal, the protagonist, on her visit to the mosque observes geometrical patterns running into each other inside the mosque dome. Her focus on the description of geometrical patterns is on “sifrs” (Zeros). “The patterns/lines run into each other to create ultimate zero, signifying nothingness, denial, void, evolution, cycles and time: the three parley domes of the mosque started floating towards me. Three giant sifrs with the smaller sifrs of sums swirling inside each like flies in the stomach. The giant one burst, releasing the small ... I look at the marble dome inside which Aba prays, with made-up lines, made-up sifrs. Inside me, a devil is unleashed. Like Alkwarzmi, God needs empty space to create. Without it, he faces an impasse. His intersections get crammed, like the roads in Lahore” (16).

Several other instances also support a rationalistic approach to interpret a worldly phenomenon. Amal’s sister, Mahwish, is blind at birth. A family discussion on her blindness fully converges on oppositional thoughts between rationalistic free thinking and determinism. For religious Aba, “everything is decided by God” (Khan 27), therefore Mahwish’s blindness needs to be accepted as the will of

God. Zahoor and Amal (both rationalists), on the other hand, hold an opinion contrary to this. For Amal, God shouldn't have given her eyes, if she was not going to need them (27). Zahoor retorts, "Maybe, or started something He no longer wished to continue" (Khan 28). "If he knew it was going to get boring, why did He start"? "Maybe He didn't know. Or did know but still wanted to try" (28). Against a deterministic belief in blindness, "Nothing is an accident. Everything is decided by God" (Khan 27) and "you cannot question His will... " (27), Zahoor presents a rational explanation of the cause of her illness: "Why is this poor child's deformity an excuse for deformity?" (25) "Who was that buffoon you took her to? The sun blinded her! Maybe she crawled into one of your husband's workshops and a piece of rock flew into her sockets... ". Aba (father) retorts by saying, "She was blinded not by man. She was blinded by God" (25). Zahoor does not like it. He responds angrily to this deterministic belief, saying: "Next you will say God was taking your sins out on her" (25). When religiously inclined uncle intervenes with her deterministic statement that "you know it is pointless looking for a cause" (26), Zahoor again replies angrily, "this is worse than the boastings of the superpowers" (26). Furthermore, the Koran and modern scientific discoveries are paralleled with the obvious inclination towards a preference for the scientific. Orthodox Aunt Farzana, while reciting a few verses from the Koran, comments on God's injunctions on human sexology. In her commentary on one of the verses, Farzana says that the word pair in it is "a lovely reference to sex. It was always written, hmm? What clever people say they discovered today, it was always known about all things must have sex, things we cannot know and are not supposed to know... " (32) Amal, however, drifts onto tadpoles to question the "pair" theory in reproduction. Tadpoles, she reflects, are born not in pairs but in mobs and look identical. How could opposites be defined in tadpoles and if there can be no society without opposites, how could tadpoles be studied in this context, "The tadpoles looked identical? What's the opposite of tadpoles" (32). In response to Aunt Farzana's recitation of, "Now let the man, but think from what he is created! He is created from spurting fluid proceeding from between the backbone and the ribs" (33). Amal is keener to offer a scientific and biological explanation in terms of human genitalia. She points her finger at sperm ducts on a picture/chart ... this gland makes the sperm duct spermy, her fingers follow a green arrow, "It's all in here, the sperm whips around here", "They go in her ... she is so many tubes and arrows and circles, she's geography, I can't imagine... " (45). For Amal, the Muslim practice of ebullition each time before prayers is nonsensical and replete with fun and laughter. Parodying ebullition, "Then we have a wuzoo match, in

which you press one nostril and spurt fluid out the other three times. Whoever blows hardest, wins” (45); she questions the traditionalists’ adherence to religious practices. This sense of parody multiplies when spurting liquid from the nostril runs in parallel with the spurting of fluid from male genitalia. A similar dichotomy between science and religion is evident when verses from the Koran are placed side by side with modern scientific discoveries which might not exist together or exist at all with the denial of others. Quranic verse, “It is He who holds celestial bodies in their orbits, so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His will” (117) is placed in parallel with the scientific law of Newtonian gravity: “If an apple falls from a tree it is His will. If it stays it is His will. Delete all references to Newton and his so-called gravity” (117). Similarly, the verse: “And all the beauty of many hues which He has created for you on earth: in this, behold, there is a message for people who are willing to take it to heart.” (117) is paralleled with another Newtonian Law of wavelengths, “And all the beauty of many hues which He has created for you on earth: in this, behold, there is a message for people who are willing to take it to heart” (117). “If colour is perceived it is His will. If it is unseen it is His will. Which we can’t question or understand. Delete all references to Newton and his so-called wavelengths” (118). In one of the verses and its parallel scientific explanation, there is once again stress on how religious and rationalistic approaches vary. Khan quotes: “Think of the Day when a violent convulsion will convulse the world to be followed by further convulsions” (Khan 118). The scientific parallel is: “If energy is released it is His will. If it is stored it is His will. Which we can’t question or understand. Delete all references to Einstein and his so-called relativity” (118).

The paper has analysed some dialectical discourses between Islam and the West in selected Pakistani fiction. Islam and radicalism have been blindly blended together, especially in *The Wasted Vigil* and *Home Fire* with reference to the popular Western perception of it. Thus a relatively preordained stance has been pursued and maintained in both fictions, embodying a relation of collision between the two civilisations. On the question of hijab/burqa too, specific Western discourses have been pursued and maintained in both fictions. While Aslam represents the burqa as an oppressive emblem of women’s subordination, Shamsie implicates it as a sign of Muslim identity crises in the West. The representation of Islam and enlightenment dichotomy in *The Geometry of God* is also far-fetched and sensationalised beyond historical facticity. It is unilateral, monolithic, Eurocentric and broadly political, which encircle Islam with anti-rationalistic ideologies and practices. The knowledge/images constructed through these literary narratives

generate a particular kind of representation which undermines historical/temporal facticity and the authenticity of Islam. Aesthetically, the representation is neither tragedy nor comedy, but humorously dark, bordering on sacrilegiosity in Aslam's and Khan's fiction in particular. Post-colonially, it does not support the canon of "the empire writes back to the centre" (in essence, Tiffin in her post-colonial literature and counter-discourse denotes the "radical dismantling of European discourses", followed by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between colonisers and colonised, with its pandemic brutalities and cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable (17). There is no dismantling of the "European discourse" in the analysed fiction. Contrarily, a Eurocentric image has been consciously maintained.

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