The Ambivalence of British Secular Culture:

Investigating Conflicting Principles in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017).

Sunniva Hallem Søvik

Master's Thesis in English Literature and Culture
Department of Foreign Languages
University of Bergen
May 2024

Abstract in Norwegian

Formålet med denne masteroppgaven er å utforske sekulær ambivalens i britisk kultur som beskrevet i de britiske samtidsverkene *Brick Lane* (2003) av Monika Ali og *Home Fire* (2017) av Kamila Shamsie. Masteroppgaven analyserer den ekskluderende dynamikken som påvirker kulturelle spenninger i Storbritannia styrt av sekulære antydninger og institusjoner. Sekularisme kan forstås som en underbyggende kompleksitet i den moderne, demokratiske, nasjonalstaten. Sekulær ambivalens overgår konseptets generelle forståelse av inkluderende prinsipper som toleranse, rettferdighet, likhet for loven, nøytralitet og religiøs frihet, samt skille mellom religion og stat. For å forstå kompleksiteten av den sekulære ambivalensen, bygger oppgavens teori på eksperter innen sekulær teori. Charles Taylor er nyttig for å forstå tvetydigheten i de inkluderende tendensene som omfatter sekularisme, mens Talal Asad og Xavier Scott er nyttige i å forstå de ekskluderende, spesielt i lys av islam og muslimske innvandrere.

Oppgaven utforsker ulike generasjoner av bangladeshiske og pakistanske innvandrere og deres erfaringer med å tilpasse seg et liv i Storbritannia. Oppgaven problematiserer sekulær ambivalens i møte med Muslimer og det sosio-politiske klimaet bøkene er presentert i. *Brick Lane* beskriver en britisk kultur som er påvirket av ulike implikasjoner skapt av post-imperialistiske og post-9/11 diskurser i perioden mellom 1985 og 2001. Boken presenterer spenninger fra et lukket etnisk samfunn i London som ønsker å bevare sin kulturelle identitet, samt spenninger fra det britiske storsamfunnet, samtidens multikulturelle retningslinjer, og press fra anti-immigrant bevegelser. *Home Fire* beskriver en britisk kultur som er påvirket av den islamske stats oppstandelse, «krigen mot terror», og den offentlige debatten som ledet opp til Brexit, i perioden 2014-2017. Boken presenterer spenninger fra et samfunn som er redd for terrorisme, noe som plasserer britiske muslimer i en prekær posisjon påvirket av forsterkede tiltak av sikkerhet og overvåkning, og en multikulturalisme som forventer fullstendig assimilering. Sammen beskriver bøkene et pessimistisk syn på Storbritannias håndtering as Muslimske migranter og den sekulære ambivalensen som overkjørt av ekskluderende tendenser, som skaper en kompleks situasjon av erfaringer med et samfunn som er både diskriminerende og undertrykkende, og som samtidig ligger til grunn et potensiale for muligheter av frihet, forsoning, og fellesskap.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to offer my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Erik Tonning. I am forever grateful for his inspiring ideas, invaluable feedback, and rapid replies. It has been a great pleasure being guided by such a remarkable academic and wonderful person.

Furthermore, I want to thank my fellow students for supportive conversations and motivation, and most importantly, all the breaks that did not include academic conversation.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for my family and friends. This year would have been unbearable without your unconditional love, unwavering supports, words of encouragements, and immense patience.

I want to dedicate a special thank you to my mother Helene, for always offering a listening ear in my moments of frustration; my father Kjell Morten, for always believing in me; my best friend Linn Tea, for laughs and silliness; and my boyfriend Eirik, for keeping me positive and at peace.

Sunniva Hallem Søvik
Bergen, May 2024

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Introduction

Both Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) are concerned with the exclusionary dynamics that fuel cultural tensions within a United Kingdom governed by secular assumptions and institutions. *Brick Lane* presents various perspectives on first- and second-generation Bangladeshi immigrants' approaches to adapting to a Western secular society in London in the period from c. 1985 to 2001. Ali problematizes the process of integration and assimilation in the contemporary socio-political situation pervaded by post-imperial and post-9/11 discourses. She does so by directing attention to the various tensions evident both within the enclosed ethnic community of London's East End and stemming from the British majority society in terms of the preservation of cultural identity, current policies of multiculturalism, and pressures from anti-immigrant movements. *Home Fire* similarly establishes a critical gaze upon the British secular culture by its portrayal of the socio-political climate of the UK in the period c. 2014-2016. The situation of the novel is thus affected by the discourse of the war on Terror and the debates leading up to the Brexit vote (2016). Shamsie problematizes the role of secularism as an integral part of the modern liberal-democratic nation-state by tracing its modes of exclusion of Muslim minorities. Both novels depict a pessimistic portrayal of multicultural Britain and tries to suggest alternative modes of coexistence in their respective conclusions. This thesis aims to follow Ali and Shamsie's critical gaze, by reading *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* through the perspective of the ambivalences that the confrontation with secularism can provoke. Ultimately, the dominance of secular culture constructs a complex situation for the characters which is perceived both as discriminatory and oppressive, *and* as carrying with it potential opportunities for creative freedom and reconciliation.

Contextualizing the Secular

Secularism constitutes a complex situation when understood as ingrained in the modern-democratic nation-state, especially in its relationship to the other cultures also present in a given country. The ambivalence of secularism goes beyond its generalized assumption of principles such as tolerance, fairness, equality under the law, state neutrality, religious freedom, and separating religion and state (De Roover 1-2; Mullins 73; Taylor, *A Secular Age* 8). Both Ali's *Brick Lane* and Shamsie's *Home Fire* emphasize the complexity of secularism by means of their portrayal of British Asian migrants' position in the secular society. This thesis aims to illustrate how the characters experience the secular both through its inclusive advantages and the complications raised by its exclusionary assumptions and pressures. To understand the levels of this ambivalent situation, this thesis will draw on three theorists of the secular: Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, and Xavier Scott.

Charles Taylor proposes an ultimately optimistic and inclusive understanding of secularism as woven into the fabric of the modern-democratic nation-state. Adapting Benedict Anderson's famous idea of the nation as an "imagined community," Taylor argues that the modern state is a revolutionized social imaginary based around core features of democracy, equality, and individualism ("Modes of Secularism" 39, 45). He explains that a social imaginary is how constituents of a society "imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notion and image which underlie these expectations" (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 171). Further, in the "imagined community" of the modern-democratic nation-state and its inherent diversity, Taylor proposes that secularism is inevitable to promote an accessible-to-all national identity as a means of preventing minority intolerance ("Modes of Secularism" 46-8). To some extent, this suggests to a rather harmonious image of coexistence in the secular state.

Taylor proposes three notions of secularism in *A Secular Age* (2007). The first concerns the public, socio-political sphere as no longer connected to religion, while the second concerns the decline of religious belief and practice in society (1-3). "Secularity 3," on the other hand, consider the underlying modern condition of *any* kind of belief, which including both religious and non-religious ways of life (3). The modern condition of belief introduces a society where belief and non-belief ranges from material atheism to religious fundamentalism (Abbey 12-15; Taylor, *A Secular Age* 3, 19). It is no longer possible to *assume* belief in any form of transcendence as a default; but on the other hand, even the staunchest atheist is prone to justifying their own stance in terms of "higher" values, even if these are conceived in immanent, exclusively human terms. What this essentially enables is a variety of individual options. One of the ways Taylor explains this development, is through his idea of the "ethic of Authenticity" (*A Secular Age* 473). He argues that in addition to moral, spiritual, and instrumental individualism, the modern condition of belief builds on "expressive" individualism (473). The individual is offered the possibility of living an authentic life, "as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority" (475). This ultimately leads to a mixed religiosity that often resists categorization. The individual is thus given the option of creating their own authenticity, and way of life. This in turn creates tension by means of positioning the individual in an ambivalent position. To freely choose one's path can be understood as both exiting and isolating at the same time, especially when moving between cultures, as is the case for most of the characters in Ali and Shamsie's novels.

In a secular society that nonetheless contains a range of options from atheism to religious fundamentalism, the inevitability of "cross pressures" appears as another salient feature of "Secularity 3" (595). Taylor notes that:

> The whole culture experiences cross pressures, between the draw of the narratives of closed immanence on the one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieux of religious practice, or just by some intimations of the transcendent. The cross pressures are experienced more acutely by some people and in some milieux than others, but over the whole culture, we can see them reflected in a number of middle positions, which have drawn from both sides. (595)

What can be understood by this is that "cross pressures" affect everyone. What he is describing is a forcefield with no neutral position; a field wherein every single worldview is fragile as everyone inhabits a potential to transition into something else. Moreover, to recognize the process of "cross pressures" and authenticity as something that shapes everyone, can lead to a growth in mutual understanding of one another's cultural positions. These kinds of experiences will be explored in our analysis of *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire.*

Talal Asad and Xavier Scott are helpful in terms of understanding the more exclusionary implications of secularism. Their work problematizes the optimistic idea of secularism, especially when the secular as an unquestionable ideology becomes dominant. Such a rigid ideological frame is problematic and can create problems for minority communities. Scott points to Taylor's description of the social imaginary of the liberal-democratic state as unable to reflect the breadth of modern secular politics, as he argues that the tenets of human rights, equality, and democracy are too unevenly distributed (113-118). Moreover, Asad is critical of Taylor's emphasis on "direct-access" as an integrated feature of the modern liberal democracy

(4). He argues that the directness between the electorate and its parliamentary representatives gradually diminishes, as the representatives to a lesser extent represent "the socio-economic interests, identities, and aspirations of a culturally differentiated and economically polarized electorate" (4). Moreover, he notes that this lack of political representation extends to extra-parliamentary institutions connected to governance, such as the mass-media (4). The media, he argues, has an important role in mediating the imagination of the national community, which to a broad extent is owned by "conglomerates and often cooperating with the state, mediating the political reactions of the public and its sense of guarantee and threat" (4). The experience of deprived rights, perceptions of equality, and the issue of misrepresentation of Muslims in the media will be explored in the following chapters.

Scott is particularly concerned with secular ideologies and the way they attempt to "reform society on the basis of rationally defensible principles, seeking to relegate religion to a private realm" (15). Scholars like Jacob De Roover argue that liberalism has successfully implemented toleration, religious freedom, and equal rights to all citizens in the Western nation-states (2). Scott questions the universality of this statement and argues that liberalism poses an ambiguous approach as to whom these principles are granted (126). Furthermore, he suggests that liberalism ignores its diverse communities in favour of the government and its economy (15). This in turn, he argues, results in the state principle of neutrality being seen as a sham, if the state ignores the rights of its minority citizens (15). Asad is also concerned with the minority position in the secular West. He directs attention to the absent/present positioning of Muslims in Europe, which he argues "is ideologically constructed in such a way that Muslim immigrants cannot be satisfactorily represented in it" (159). Muslims are included and excluded simultaneously, something Asad connects with the way Europeans conceptualize themselves (159). For Asad the notion of European identity is in part a projection or historical "symptom of anxieties about non-Europeans" (161). Throughout his discussion, Asad emphasizes the historical tension between Christians and Muslims as still visible in the way European brutalities are perceived differently than non-European brutalities by international law (162). Scott also directs attention to this, and claims that both religious and secular political ideas motivate and justify war (117). In terms of coexistence within the liberal-democratic nation-states, Asad argues that the connection between Europeanness and Christianity positions Muslims as external to the essence of Europe (165). Moreover, he argues that this results in a notion of coexistence that can only be defined by the dichotomy of us versus them (165). Both Ali and Shamsie are critical of the current condition of coexistence between the British majority society and its Muslim minorities.

Asad further argues that European civilization conceptualizes itself as being distinctive, universal, and the most advanced in existence (166). Moreover, in his discussion of European civilization, he introduces the concept of “de-essentialization,” which will be a central feature of the reading of both *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire.* Asad emphasizes the concept of “de-essentialization” of Islam as the paradigmatic mode of assimilation of non-Europeans to European civilization (169). Building on the principle of universality, Muslims need to strip themselves of what is essential to them in terms of history and tradition to sufficiently assimilate into European civilization (169). Issues related to the rejection of “de-essentialism” will be discussed in the following chapters. Furthermore, Asad points to the underlying conditions of what constitutes contemporary Europe by referring to the European aspiration of reconstructing the world, and how colonialism was only the beginning of this project (170). De-essentialism, or Europeanization, can be understood in continuity with this (170). Asad argues that Muslim minorities want to have their faith respected and protected by law, to be considered equal citizens, to have their cultural identity recognized, and attain the possibility of living “as autonomous individuals in a collective life that extends beyond national borders” (180). Asad stresses the secular state’s potential of echoing imperialism if it continues to deny the flourishing of multiple ways of life and continues to express anxious hostility towards Muslims both internally and externally (180). The political inclusion of minorities in the modern democratic state means accepting their historical narratives, which are shaped by “embodied memories, feelings and desires”, as well as their right to “maintain and perpetuate themselves as groups” (174).

The different perspectives of Taylor, Asad, and Scott depict the ambivalence of secularism. In establishing a perspective on the complexity of the secular from a Muslim minority point of view, the reader is introduced to the space that the characters of Ali and Shamsie find themselves in. Nicholas A. Mullins aptly summarizes some of the tensions at work here:

> Western secular “imagined community” as affixed to the modern democratic state as an inclusive model for society, with tenets of equality under law and fairness as universal, is in contest with exclusionary ideals for what comprises the nation and national identity. (65)

The ambivalence of secularism is not solely caused by the state and state action but can be understood as ingrained in secular culture. Its inclusionary principles of tolerance, fairness, equality under the law, state neutrality and religious freedom lays the foundation for the individual to live its authentic life. Its exclusionary implications complicate this harmonious picture. Power structures and ideologies has the potential to construct adversity and hostility. When the secular principles are unevenly distributed, questions of how equality is perceived and how human rights are regulated occurs. Moreover, underlying issues of imperialism, colonialism, and hierarchy complicates the inclusionary ideals further. When a culture professes to embrace its communities but demand cultural cohesion, it ultimately deprives the Other the possibility of authenticity. Based on this theoretical framework, this thesis argues that Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* exposes the ambivalent situation provoked by the confrontation with secularism, by the way they examine British secular majority culture in terms of its opportunities and its exclusions. The novels suggests that the socio-political environment in the United Kingdom complicates the experience of British Muslims in establishing a sense of equality, belonging, and authenticity in a secular British culture.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter One discusses the complex situation of secular culture as portrayed in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane.* Ali's novel establishes an understanding of secular tensions as especially distinct in the case of non-European immigrants. The chapter analyses the ambiguity of inclusion and exclusion through the different first- and second-generation Bangladeshi immigrant's perspectives of and approaches on British secular culture. The purpose of the chapter is to illustrate how the ambivalent situation is perceived as both liberating and oppressive. By emphasizing pressures created in the socio-political climate pervaded by post-imperial and post-9/11 discourses, this chapter aims to suggest that modes of exclusion stemming from racism and historically inherited hierarchies are dominating, creating a complex experience of adapting to British culture.

Chapter Two discusses Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and its confrontation with the ambivalent situation of secular culture from the perspective of British citizens with Pakistani descent. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the socio-political climate as pervaded by the war on terror and the debates leading up to Brexit complicated the exclusionary assumptions in British culture. The chapter consider the construction of a more precarious position of British Muslims as a consequence of the distinction of "good" and "bad" Muslims. The chapter analyses the prevalent anxieties in the Muslim minority communities as a result of the war on terror and increased government focus on assimilation, security, and surveillance.

Finally, Chapter Three juxtaposes *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* by discussing their perspectives of a future notion of coexistence in British secular culture. The chapter directs attention to “a new generation of hope” in juxtaposing two representatives of the younger generation, by means of analysing what they suggest in terms of changing the trajectory of their older generation to enable Muslim citizens the inclusive opportunities of equality, reconciliation, and authenticity. Finally, the chapter juxtaposes the novels conclusions by discussing their optimistic and pessimistic depiction of a more sufficient and including approach to Britain’s diversity. The purpose of the chapter is to emphasize the authors ulterior motive of encouraging a redirected multicultural policy – and that the necessary means of inclusionary measures are already ingrained in the secular principles of society.

Chapter One: Interactions with the Secular on *Brick Lane*

1.0. Introduction

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) establishes a complex portrayal of the British Bangladeshi community of the Tower Hamlets area in London by presenting different perspectives on first- and second-generation immigrants' approaches to adapting to a Western secular society. The novel problematizes the process of integration and assimilation in a post-imperial and post-9/11 British cultural context. It illustrates tensions from within the ethnic community as well as from without, both in terms of current immigrant policies, multiculturalism, and anti-immigrant movements. The narrative of *Brick Lane* is focalized through Nazneen Ahmed, who moves from Bangladesh to London's East End in 1985 to live with her husband of an arranged marriage, Chanu. Through her life in England, Nazneen gives birth to three children, one of whom dies. Nazneen spends most of her time inside their apartment, and performs as a submissive wife, following in the footsteps of her mother and the culture of her birth country. Throughout the novel, Nazneen interacts with the different inhabitants of the community. Mrs Islam is the first to greet her, an older Bengali woman who aims to preserve the culture of their enclosed society. Then there is Mrs Asad, the westernized and assimilated wife of Chanu's good friend and family doctor; and Razia, Nazneen's best friend and pro-British subject. Finally, there is Karim, the British-born, radical second-generation immigrant who initiates an affair with Nazneen. Through Nazneen's narrative, the reader is presented with diverse insights to the British Asian experience of secular society in London.

The novel is set in 1985 and 2001, with the latter period of the novel being marked by racial and religious antagonism following the 11 September attacks in the US and the Oldham riots in the UK (Poon 429). Though racial politics and the general tension between Britain's white population and its immigrant communities remain in the background of the novel, the reader is still introduced to the diversity of the ethnic community's perception of current events and attitudes. The political situation in Britain influences the first- and second-generation immigrant experience of existing in a post-imperial and post-9/11 British secular culture. The older first generation of Bengali immigrants, like Chanu, was born in British India before the Partition in 1947 (Liao 90). His view on Britain is therefore influenced by the "image of Britain as the colonial motherland" (90). In the post-war period, Britain dealt with labour shortage by introducing the more open immigration policy of the 1948 British National Act, in which they welcomed a wave of immigration from the British Empire and granted them citizenship (Donmez and Sutton 680; Lee 347; Liao 90). In the latter half of the twentieth century, this policy was gradually more restricted, especially in terms of non-white immigration (Donmez and Sutton 680; Lee 349-350; Liao 90). During the Thatcher period,[1] the public sphere was still impacted by colonial and imperial racism, even with increased anti-discrimination legislation like that of the Race Relation Act of 1965 (Lee 352; Liao 94). Prime Minister Thatcher herself had a "reputation for anti-immigration rhetoric, radical policies, and political confrontation" (Ashcroft and Bevir, "British Multiculturalism" 32), like the incident in 1978 when she expressed "the possibility of the British people 'being swamped' by 'alien cultures'" on national television (Lee 351).

Following the 1997 election, New Labour supported a two-pronged approach to multiculturalism by giving more power to local governance, focusing on embracing diversity as well as strengthening the sense of citizenship and community (Ashcroft and Bevir, "British Multiculturalism" 34; Ashcroft and Bevir, "Multiculturalism" 6). This approach would eventually be considered a peak moment of British post-war multiculturalism, as it led to "the publication of the report by the Commission of the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000" (Ashcroft and Bevir, "Multiculturalism" 6; Meer and Modood 50). But, as Groes has pointed out about the political environment depicted in the novel,

> rather than New Labour's rhetoric of change and Tony Blair's promise that there would be 'no forgotten people' in New Labour's Britain, Brick Lane shows a painful continuation of similar policies through the lack of genuine interest in this particular section of the British population. (qtd. Liao 89)

New Labour changed its rhetoric following the 9/11 attacks in the US and the 2001 race riots in England, as well as the negative reactions preceding the Commission's report of 2000. They emphasized the need to assimilate British values and traditions alongside the implementation of “a new national test, tightened immigration and asylum law, and introduced draconian anti-terrorism legislation” (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Multiculturalism” 6). The socio-political environment in which the novel is set, is thus subjected to inconsistent and ambiguous immigration policies.

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[1] Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister from 1979-1997

This chapter argues that Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* criticises British culture and its conflicting modes of exclusion and inclusion through the British Asian immigrant experience in adapting to a secular West. The novel portrays an ambiguous position of its immigrant population in terms of integration and cultural deprivation. The secular ambivalence is particularly distinct in the case of non-European immigrants. The inclusionary modes of the secular profess a common national identity built on equality and tolerance, in a society that provides the individual opportunity of living an authentic life. The exclusionary modes conflicts with this imagination when the majority society demands cultural cohesion that ultimately deprives the Other the possibility of authenticity. The complexity of this image is not solely constructed by state action, but rather ingrained in British culture.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the ambiguity of inclusion. Even though some of the female characters depict a more positive perspective on secular Britain by the way they propose varied strategies of adapting to society, it is evident that these strategies presuppose a problematic secular inclusivity. Mrs Azad proposes an assimilationist strategy to life in England. She promotes the process of de-essentialism, which Talal Asad explains as a prerequisite to assimilate into European civilization (169). The process of de-essentialization includes stripping Muslims of their historical and traditional essence (169). Razia, on the other hand, offers a hybrid British Asian identity. She can be read as emancipated in secular Britain, though she still does not feel included as an equal citizen. Finally, Nazneen can be interpreted as acquiring a sense of individuality. Her process of establishing an authentic life echoes Charles Taylor’s notion of the “ethic of authenticity,” through Nazneen rejecting conformity to the imposed expectations of her cultural heritage.

The following section investigates the ambiguity of exclusion. Mrs Islam adopts an isolationist approach to the British culture which can be traced to her fear of the majority society and its attitudes towards British Muslims. Chanu, by contrast, exemplifies an initial optimism and hope for respect and a good life in England. However, throughout the novel Chanu feels more and more excluded and devalued. His initial strategy of Westernization fails, as he encounters racism and discrimination which evidently positions him as an unequal member of society. He struggles with the pressures towards assimilation and de-essentialism, as his cultural heritage is essential to his identity. Finally, through Karim and the Bengal Tigers, Ali problematizes the Western stereotype of radical Islam and Islamic activism. Karim feels alienated and misrepresented. Through the Bengal Tigers, Karim aims to construct a space where Muslims can feel included and express their concerns about being excluded from a society that does not recognize their rights. Ali also uses the portrayal of Karim to challenge the Islamophobic and racist discourse of far-right movements and the media following 9/11.

1.1. Female Optimism

British culture is perceived differently by the residents of Brick Lane, in which most of the female characters illustrate a more positive approach to the secularized society. Mrs Azad promotes Europeanness by the way she embraces Western culture. In her critique of the supposedly patriarchal and backward culture of Bangladesh, she ignores the unjust discrimination of the immigrant's position in her chosen society. Her approach to secular society can be defined in assimilationist terms, which can be viewed as either liberating or a strategy of survival. Razia, on the other hand, adopts a cautiously hybrid British Asian identity by means of embracing and supporting some elements in British society as beneficial to her, offering some degree of security and freedom. She suggests that prejudice and racism is nonetheless ingrained in the British culture, and that it is simply the price to pay for emancipation. Finally, Nazneen discovers and develops a sense of autonomy and agency in Britain, in opposition to her earlier presumptions of Fate defining her destiny.

1.1.1. Blinded Liberation

Mrs Azad depicts Britishness as a source of liberation by the way she embraces assimilation and Western culture. She is a first-generation immigrant, and the westernized wife of Chanu's good friend and family doctor. She describes her arrival in England as restrictive, in which they "lived in a one-room hovel [and] dined on rice and dal, rice and dal" (Ali 115). With her husband working as a doctor, their economic situation has changed. As an assimilated subject, Mrs Azad dresses in miniskirts, shows her cleavage, and drinks beer (110-112). When Chanu expresses his perspective on what he calls the immigrant tragedy, Mrs Azad bluntly rejects it:

> Why do you make it so complicated? … Assimilation this, alienation that! Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act

> more and more like Westerners. Fact: that’s no bad thing. Do I wish I had enjoyed myself like her when I was young? Yes! (Ali 115).

Both her appearance and perspective embody “her politics of uncompromising assimilation” (Germanà 73). She is thus promoting a simplistic explanation of the immigrant experience of adapting to a secular West. On the one hand, adopting to the norms and customs of the society one is living in is inevitable. On the other, in indirectly promoting assimilation as “uncomplicated,” she is nonetheless neglecting the challenges immigrants are experiencing when integrating into an unfamiliar culture.

Furthermore, Mrs Azad is distorting the immigrant tragedy. The immigrant tragedy in her perspective, is not the issue of racism, but the ethnic community’s tendency to self-segregate (Liao 115). By focusing primarily on the issue of immigrants preserving their cultural heritage, Mrs Azad is simplifying the challenges faced by the ethnic communities (115). Mrs Azad states that:

> Listen, when I’m in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go to work. If I want to come home and eat curry, that’s my business. Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English.’ … ‘They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don’t have to change one thing. That … is the tragedy. (Ali 116)

The way she is juxtaposing the different cultures can be interpreted as a means of promoting European civilization as the most advanced, and thus arguing that immigrants should be grateful for living in a modern and liberal society (Rezaie 70). There is a sense of resentment here towards her culture of origin, which comes across as backward and restrictive (70). The accusation against women overlooks the ways in which the female immigrant position can involve being dependant on their husbands both culturally and linguistically (Liao 115), and therefore just as disempowered as anywhere else. Furthermore, Mrs Azad points to an antagonistic perspective towards the use of traditional customs and garments by the way she juxtaposes herself covering up in Bangladesh with being a working woman in Britain (Germanà 72; Pereira-Ares 206). Based on this, Mrs Azad can be understood as suggesting that British culture is hierarchically higher than her culture of origin because her host-country is more progressive and liberal (Rezaie 70). She cannot comprehend why her fellow immigrants are not willing to assimilate and de-essentialize, based on her own understanding of the Western culture as superior and more advanced (70). Whether or not this actually promotes liberation is ambiguous in the novel.

Mrs Azad's assimilationalist approach can be seen as a survival strategy (Pereira-Ares 207). There is a sense of duplicity in her conformity to Western culture, by the way she is performing as a "good Muslim," and consequently demonstrating a form of "alliance" to Britain. Her reference to both clothes and food in the extract points to visual markers of Otherness, which potentially makes one more vulnerable to racism (206). In these terms, Mrs Azad's emphasis on assimilation can be understood as a response to the fear of being Othered. Mrs Azad, then, can be interpreted as strategically hiding her cultural background while simultaneously expressing and visualizing her British identity, by the way she is eating curry in her private home and wearing Western clothes in the public realm (206). Moreover, this strategy creates a backlash affecting the immigrant community by the way Mrs Azad is reinforcing "Western-centric" views on elements used to distinguish differences (207). Nonetheless, her conformity to British culture might also be perceived as in some ways liberating and a personal choice which offers her more benefits than costs, which is something Razia also agrees on.

1.1.2. Emancipated Hybridity

Razia is one of the more complex characters in relation to her stance on the secular society. She can be argued to represent both the duality and enforced duplicity of Muslim presence in secular Britain. After her husband's death, Razia is depicted as liberated and considers the British culture as beneficial to her new individualism. This is evident in the way she expresses a preference for Britain over Bangladesh. Razia nonetheless does not simply conform and assimilate British culture – but rather represents a middle ground in terms of a dual identity.

Razia's duality of Muslim presence in secular Britain is presented through her emergence of a hybrid British Muslim identity (Germanà 73; Pereira-Ares 208; Upstone, "SAME OLD" 342). This hybrid identity is illustrated both visibly and verbally. Because the novel is focalized through Nazneen's narrative, the reader is not introduced to Razia's inner thoughts. Razia's clothes, then, becomes a means to express her unspoken point of view. Clothes can be used to suggest political and social beliefs (Gunning 99). Across the novel, Razia's change of appearances can be identified in two steps. First, after her husband dies, she starts "wearing a garment she called a tracksuit. She would never, so she said, wear a sari again. She was tired of taking little bird steps" (Ali 97). This first step symbolized a form of liberation following her chauvinistic husband's death (Pereira-Ares 207). The second step is marked after Razia becomes a British citizen: "Since gaining her British passport she had acquired a sweatshirt with a large Union Jack printed on the front, and in a favourite combination paired it with brown elastic-waisted trousers" (Ali 190). Razia's fashionable changes, from saris to Union Jack sweatshirts, can be traced to her increased Britishness and British identity. On the other hand, Razia is not entirely rejecting her traditional clothes, as she is still depicted as "pull[ing] down her headscarf" (125). This can be understood as a residual resistance to complete assimilation. By mixing Western and Asian fashion, she is not hiding her cultural heritage, but instead visualizes her hybridity (Pereira-Ares 208). This hybrid identity, as signalled through her clothes, can itself be interpreted as an expression of her independence and individuality (Gunning 98), something she expresses verbally as well.

One way in which Razia expresses her hybrid identity verbally is by comparing the British social system with her ethnic community and home country, Bangladesh. First, this is evident by the way she talks about the British welfare system:

> if you don't have a job here, they give you money. Did you know that? You can have somewhere to live, without any rent. Your children can go to school. And on top of that, they give you money. What would happen at home? Can you eat without working? Can you have a roof above your head? (Ali 75)

Razia juxtaposes the benefits of the British society with their enclosed community: "Will the community feed me? Will it buy footballs for my son? Let the community say what it will. I say this to the community.' And she flicked her fingers" (Ali 99). By comparing the benefits each cultural community has to offer, she is verbally expressing her loyalty to England, symbolized through her flicked finger. Furthermore, Razia is promoting herself a British ally by confronting Chanu when he complains about the reality of the immigrant conditions in Britain: "If everything back home is so damn wonderful, what are all these crazy people doing queuing up for visa?' And she would get out her new British passport and bend it between thumb and forefinger" (Ali 429). Yet again Razia's Britishness is symbolized by hand gestures. Lastly, in the finishing lines of the novel, Razia declares that "This is England … You can do whatever you like" (494). This declaration has been debated heavily, but one interpretation can be connected to Razia's sense of liberation and individualism. It can be understood as a political statement with an optimistic view of freedom in a multicultural society where Britishness can be defined expansively and not limited to complete assimilation (Poon 435; Upstone, “Representation and realism” 175). But this is only one side of Razia’s position.

Analysing the need for duplicity in Muslim self-presentation in Westerns societies, Talal Asad expresses concern by the way in which Muslims are included and excluded simultaneously (159). Asad argues that Muslims are repeatedly excluded by many of the assumptions implicit in a European identity (159). Though Razia’s approach to secular Britain can appear somewhat naïvely uncritical, it is evident in the novel that Razia’s relationship to the majority society is complicated. In response to Nazneen sharing her husband’s thoughts on the discriminatory nature of his promotion being withheld, Razia gets defensive on behalf of the UK: “Ask him this, then. Is it better than our own country, or is it worse? If it is worse, then why is he here? If it is better, why does he complain?” (Ali 74). Razia justifies the racist environment in Britain as inevitable and argues that those who do not want to accept it, has the option to leave. Her understanding of British culture is then defined by accepting her position as hierarchically lower, which complicates the matter of her presence in this society. Moreover, experiences with racism are not unfamiliar to Razia. In a conversation with Nazneen in a clothing store about the prices the English are paying for their clothes, Razia exclaims that “at the same time they are looking down onto me. They are even happy to spit on their own flag, as long as I am inside it. What is wrong with them? What is wrong?’ (Ali 396). Though Razia has been advocating an accepting approach to the reality of racism, she does not fully comprehend its presence.

Razia’s position as an absent/present member of society is evidently illustrated again with her clothes. When women of the ethnic community are gossiping about Razia’s appearance, she continues to wear her Union Jack jumper despite the weather being too hot. She explains that “I must wear it, from time to time. I hear what they are saying. Razia is a little touched. Crazy, crazy … Razia is so English. She is getting like the Queen herself” (Ali 231). Her Union Jack jumper thus becomes a symbol filled with social meaning (Gunning 99). She continues to wear her jumper to prove her British citizenship both to the Bangladeshi and the British community. In the climate of Islamophobia following the 9/11-attacks, this conviction is especially directed toward the racists (99). Moreover, Razia approach to British secular culture can be said to influence Nazneen.

1.1.3. The Discovery of Autonomy

Nazneen can be interpreted as positively impacted by British secularism. Even though Nazneen is spending most of her time inside their apartment and only interacts with a few of the other female residents of their enclosed ethic community on Brick Lane, Nazneen can be argued to be subtly influenced by the secular ideal that Charles Taylor terms the "ethic of authenticity." This secular feature is argued to build on the idea of "expressive individuation," meaning that the individual freely chooses their path of life by living according to what satisfies the self (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 475). Nazneen's agency acquisition is alluded to in the beginning of the novel when Nazneen reflects on the course of her life in England:

> So that when … for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waved a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (Ali 18)

In other words, Nazneen is surprised by her choice of forming her destiny by her own agency, as opposed to her earlier presumption that life is pre-determined by fate (Poon 433; Upstone, "Representation and realism" 171). In the course of the novel, Nazneen is deliberately fighting this secular influence, as when "the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited" (Ali 302).

Nazneen thus has to "unlearn" fatalism as her philosophy of life in order to develop a secular, liberal form of individual agency (Poon 433). Sarah Upstone argues that Nazneen's agency acquisition cannot be credited British liberalism, but that her agency is found in "lessons Nazneen learns in the village as a child, from the women who teach her that 'Everything is within you, where God put it" (Ali 67; Upstone, "Representation and realism" 175). Yet, the "lessons" Upstone is referring to are in fact *not* something Nazneen is taught by the women of her village. Rather, Nazneen is made aware of these "lessons" through Mrs Islam telling her the story of how *she* was lectured by the women of *her* village. On the contrary, Nazneen herself is taught by her people to submit to Fate:

> As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story of How You Were Left To Your Fate. … Fighting against one's Fate can weaken the blood. Sometimes, or perhaps most times, it can be fatal. Not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story. (Ali 17)

This conviction follows Nazneen's life throughout most of the novel. She is convinced that "Fate will decide everything in the end, whatever route you follow" (Ali 16), and that whatever Fate decides, "must be met with indifference" (258). What contributes to changing Nazneen's view on fatalism is in fact her exposure to British culture and its secular doctrines, as well as the letters from her sister Hasina.

Nazneen is indirectly exposed to British culture and its secular doctrines through her interactions with other British Bengali immigrants. This can be understood as an important part of her process of developing agency and a stronger sense of identity. Initially, Nazneen has internalized patriarchal ideology (Liao 105). She is brought up to be a submissive wife who throughout her life "has submitted to her father and married her husband; she had submitted to her husband" (Ali 301). Nazneen's more integrated friend, Razia, teaches Nazneen about the freedom of emancipation. Razia makes a comment on Nazneen's husband, leaving them in giggles, whereby Nazneen wonders whether "she should really allow Razia to be so free about her husband" (191), but resumes laughing. This scene can be understood as challenging Nazneen's submissiveness. Further, through Karim and the Bengal Tigers, Nazneen experience the power of her agency. In the meeting where they are electing a chairman, Nazneen raises her hand, and gives what would be the decisive vote. She reflects that she "have given [Karim] victory, … She felt a momentous thing. By raising her hand, or not raising it, she could alter the course of event, of affairs in the world of which she knew nothing" (Ali 244). Though the Bengal Tigers aim to challenge British norms and social order, most of them are British-born and are thus indirectly able to introduce Nazneen to the underlying principles of British culture. Nazneen's encounters can then be understood as widening her horizon, alter her perspective of herself through the influence of others.

Moreover, Hasina's letters to Nazneen can be said to be the decisive factor of Nazneen favouring a life in secular Britain. Hasina's letters are used as a means to persuade Nazneen to stay in England, "as well as to persuade the reader that this is the right decision" (Perfect 115). The day Nazneen and her family is supposed to move back to Bangladesh, Nazneen tells Chanu that she "can't go", in which Chanu replies by saying that he "can't stay" (Ali 480). Both statements are formed in the negative which implies that "they decide on their respective futures based on the negative knowledge of what cannot be for them rather than making a positive choice" (Poon 434). Chanu cannot stay in England because he finds no sense of acceptance or belonging. Nazneen, on the other hand, cannot leave England as she does not want to belong to Bangladesh. Indeed, it is the description of her sister's experiences in Bangladesh that constitutes the determining factor of why Nazneen cannot move back to her home country

(Perfect 115). When Chanu tells Nazneen that he had read that "Bangladesh ranks Number One in the Worlds Happiest survey" (Ali 352), Nazneen responds that she does not believe it (353). She then tells Chanu about the horrors described in Hasina's letters,

> beginning with Mr Chowdhury, the landlord, the one (Chanu had said) was respectable-type. When she spoke of the rape she named it in the village way, Hasina was robbed of her nakphool, her nose ring; and the selling of her body she did not name, saying only my sister had to stay alive and she saw that Chanu understood. (Ali 353)

Hasina's letters follow a horrible trajectory in describing her multiple defeats in Bangladesh. In contrast, Nazneen develops personal autonomy, independence, and a new sense of belonging in London (Perfect 119). Their stories are used "to contrast the empowering and disempowering effects of their respective social and cultural contexts" (Rezaie 67). What their stories are illustrating is that women in Bangladesh will be punished for pursuing freedom, autonomy, and agency – while Britain celebrates it (67). For Nazneen, living in a modern and secular society emancipates her from the restrictive manners of her home country's traditional culture (67). Nazneen's choice, then, is to either live in a liberal society where she is empowered – or move back to a traditional society where she is not (71). This juxtaposition distracts Nazneen from the exclusionary modes of the British society that the novel emphasizes trough Mrs Islam, Chanu, and Karim, which is the primary focus of the discussion below.

1.2. Rejecting Cultural Deprivation in a Post-Imperial, Post-9/11 Imaginary

The theme of exclusion pervades most of the novel's plot, which can be identified both from within and without the ethnic community of Tower Hamlets. Mrs Islam proposes an isolationist approach to the British majority society, as she is afraid of its impact and influence. In their enclosed society Mrs Islam comes across as a person of authority and is seen as "respectable" (Ali 30, 84). Outside their community, she might be concerned about exposing the powerlessness she inhabits as a marginalized subject. On another note, Chanu presents a willingness to strategically assimilate in order to be respected and valued in the secular society. When equality becomes unreachable, his initial optimism and ambitions decline, as multiculturalism fails him, and racism prevails. Furthermore, the misrepresentation of British Muslims is presented through Karim and the Bengal Tigers. He established the group in order for Muslims in Britain to have a place where they feel represented and heard. The Bengal Tigers represents a space where Muslims can utter their concerns about the maltreatment and exclusionary modes of society. Karim and the Bengal Tigers present an alternative approach to Muslims in the West by means of establishing a narrative which considers the position of the marginalized in light of the Islamophobic rhetoric and distorted picture presented by far-right movements and the media in the wake of 9/11.

1.2.1. Segregation and the Challenge of Sustaining Minority Culture

Mrs Islam represents the ethnic community of Tower Hamlets. Having "been in London for nearly thirty years" and thus knowing "everything about everybody" (Ali 30), she appears aware of her position as a Muslim migrant in secular Britain. She presents an interesting perspective on coexistence between the migrant community and the majority British society. It is plausible to argue that Mrs Islam is critical of the secular ideology of her host nation, based on her understanding of the British social imaginary. Talal Asad argues that Muslims are perceived as external to the essence of the West (165). If they are not willing to assimilate and thus de-essentialize, any notion of coexistence can only be defined by the dichotomy of "us" versus "them" (165). Mrs Islam's perspective on this is evident in a conversation with Nazneen prior to the Bengal Tigers' counter-march,[2] in which Mrs Islam explains that she does not believe that any white Britons will bother showing up:

> I will tell you something. Not more than ten white people will turn up tomorrow. Not more than ten.' … 'The rest will not come because they are too busy. When there is money to be made, why should they care about anything else? No. They will not come because they are not afraid. *They* have no respect for *us*. How can *they* fear *us*? (Ali 444 [emphasis added])

Thus, she is explaining that the British do not have respect for its Muslim communities and therefore are not afraid of them – on the contrary, they do not care about them. As Mrs Islam states, money is more important than giving them attention. To some degree, Mrs Islam is echoing the words of scholars such as Xavier Scott, who argue that the liberal state favours its economy as opposed to its diversity (15).

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[2] The Bengal Tigers are a Muslim self-organization group, with an aim of protecting their local Ummah and supporting the global Ummah (Ali 243). As a result of a leaflet war against the anti-immigrant far-right group "Lion Hearts", they are going to march against each other.

Furthermore, Mrs Islam is critical of the majority society and its norms. As a first-generation immigrant living in and favouring an enclosed ethnic community, she expresses her prejudice towards the British:

> 'The white people … they all do what they want. It's nobody's business.' 'If a child is screaming because it is being beaten, they just close the door and the windows. They might make a complaint about noise. But the child is not their business, even if it is being beaten to death' … 'They do what they want. It is a private matter. Everything is a private matter. That is how the white people live.' (Ali 90-91)

As the embodiment of social authority in her community, Mrs Islam is promoting norms and social codes that do not align with those of the secular majority society (Gunning 97-98). Some of these social codes include "relinquishing individual desire in favour of the communal norm," (98) something that opposes the liberal principle of individualism.

Moreover, it is plausible to argue that Mrs Islam is reluctant towards assimilation and de-essentialism based on her view of the majority society. When talking about a garment factory in England she expresses her concern about the inevitability of some degree of de-essentializing when "[m]ixing with all sorts: Turkish, English, Jewish. All sorts. … But if you mix with all these people, even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs. That how it is" (Ali 31). The garment factory thus exemplifies a hybrid space (Germanà 79). From Mrs Islam's perspective, this space can be considered threatening, as it has the potential to dilute cultural identity (79). Regardless of Mrs Islam's hostile attitude toward the mixing of cultures, it is possible to recognize that she herself has been influenced. In the same conversation she says that: "I am not old-fashioned … I don't wear burkha. I keep purdah in my mind, which is the most important thing. Plus I have cardigans and anoraks and a scarf for my head" (Ali 31). Noemí Pereira-Ares argues for the possibility of tactical assimilation in the case of Mrs Islam, whereby her clothes are one of many aspects of the Western culture she has adapted (206). Nonetheless, accepting something she sees as undesirable yet inevitable reveals a sense of powerlessness in her character. This same sense of powerlessness is evident in the case of Chanu as well.

1.2.2. Ambiguity, Despair, and Neglect: The Failures of the British Colonial Motherland

Chanu presents an ambivalent perspective on existing in secular Britain. Chanu's initial optimistic perception of Britain as a place of opportunities is crushed by his realization of being stuck in a system that constrains him, which makes him feel alienated and out of place. Chanu cannot find a sense of belonging in the UK, as he ultimately claims England as "their country" (Ali 257). His optimism is thus redirected towards his home country Bangladesh, that he then idealizes and romanticises as a place of opportunities and empowerment. Chanu ends up leaving England as he no longer sees it as a place where, as Razia put it, "you can do whatever you like" (Ali 494).

Chanu initially came to England with optimism and hope. He is a first-generation immigrant from Bangladesh, who arrived in London in his early twenties (Ali 36, 291). After leaving what constituted former East Pakistan at the peak of the conflict with West Pakistan in 1970, Chanu arrives in England with confidence (Liao 90). This is evident in the way he recalls his arrival in London:

> 'When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.' … 'That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. What can you do?' (Ali 36)

Chanu is disappointed by the society that meets him when he arrives. He cannot comprehend why the British cannot distinguish between him and the other "peasants." The reality of the immigrant struggle is thus what replaces Chanu's initial optimism and ambition with pessimism and shattered dreams. This can be understood as a result of the exposure of the false promises held out by his adopted country, making it harder and harder for him to culturally assimilate to a British society still permeated by colonialist and racist attitudes (Liao 91).

Throughout the novel, Chanu presents an ambiguous position in society which is illustrated through his daughters' dressed bodies. To some extent, he does not want to affiliate fully with any culture – European nor Asian. In the heat of the leaflet-war between the Muslim self-organization Bengal Tigers and the white far-right group Lion Hearts, Chanu uses his daughters to visualize his political point of view (Germanà 77; Pereira-Ares 213):

> If he had a Lion Hearts leaflet in his hand, he wanted his daughters covered. He would not be cowed by these Muslim-hating peasants.
> If he saw some girls go by in hijab he became agitated at this display of peasant ignorance. Then the girls went out in their skirts.
> Sometimes he saw both sides of it. 'The poor whites, you see, are the ones that feel most threatened. And our young ones are rebelling. Young ones will always rebel. If the parents are liberal then how can they rebel except by becoming illiberal themselves?'
> On these days it was left to Nazneen or the girls to decide what they should wear. (Ali 267)

To Chanu, both cultures are either racist or ignorant. What is evident is that Chanu struggle to take a firm stand in cultural affiliation. He is thus confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, the British majority culture is the one able to comply him respect and a chance for success. On the other hand, the Muslim minority culture is the one he is able to recognize, both in terms of values and customs. Yet, neither ultimately enables him to establish a sense of purpose in a secular Britain.

Chanu's issue with identity is a consequence of his performed assimilation strategy. This strategy positions him in a precarious and ambiguous position of "in-between" cultures. Chanu presents himself as a "westernized" Muslim intellectual that mimics the Englishman: "I am westernized now" (Ali 47; Majed 121; Upstone, "SAME OLD" 337). In Nazneen's eyes, Chanu has given up important cultural aspects, exemplified by her reflection of her husband that "does not say his prayers … and now he is drinking alcohol. Tomorrow he may be eating pigs" (Ali 112). Chanu's perception is that this is "part of the culture here. It's so ingrained in the fabric of society. Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don't drink you risk the same thing" (Ali 112). He has understood, for example, that in order to get a promotion, you have to go "to the *pub* with the boss" (Ali 39 [original emphasis]). His western performance is a means to gain respect, and something he works hard to accomplish. Unfortunately, this is something he is never granted, which can be interpreted by Nazneen reflecting on Chanu's situation: "But he was slighted. By costumers, by suppliers, by superiors and inferiors. He worked hard for respect but he could not find it. There was in the world a great short-age of respect and Chanu was among the famished" (Ali 205).

Chanu's failed westernization strategy can further be understood as reflecting his own notion of a British imaginary. He imagines British culture as both racist and hierarchical (Liao 92). Driven by the ambition of being considered higher up in the hierarchy, Chanu ends up humiliating his own community and fellow Bengali Muslims to "prove his unique willingness to be respected by the English" (Majed 121):

> 'You see' … 'most of our people here are Sylhetis … Most of them have jumped ship. That's how they come. They have menial jobs on the ship, doing donkey work, or they stow away like little rats in the hold.' … 'And then they jump ship and scuttle over here, then in a sense they are home again. And you see, to a white person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan. But these people are peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition' … 'I don't look down on them, but what can you do? If a man has only ever driven a rickshaw and never in his life held a book in his hand, then what can you expect from him?' (Ali 30)

Chanu replicates a British stereotypical image of Bengali Muslims, and thus dehumanizes his own ethnic community (Liao 91). Though he seems to include himself in the depiction of his people as "dirty little monkey," he does not in fact recognize himself in that picture, as he is "an educated man" (Ali 47). Nonetheless, while harshly degrading his own community, Chanu is simultaneously feeling degraded by the British (Majed 121).

Chanu's strategic performance as an assimilated subject is failing. He is aware of his fragile position in society as a Bengali immigrant, which is evident in the extract above. The more he is denied respect and opportunities, the more he emphasizes that "racism is built into the "system" (Ali 74). One defining factor crushing Chanu's hopes for a future in Britain is the rejection of the job promotion which he had been stiving for. He says to Nazneen that, in Britain, "it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem" (Ali 74). Chanu does not want his children to "grow up in this racist society" (113), based on his experiences with "racism, ignorance, poverty, all that" (322). Nonetheless, Chanu expresses concerns with assimilation:

> I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the

> terrific struggle to preserve one’s sanity while striving to achieve the best for one’s family. (Ali 115)

Chanu is presenting the cultural dilemmas of immigration. Western society cannot preserve essential parts of the immigrant culture, and the restrictions he is facing while rejecting to assimilate haunt him. Chanu is simultaneously admitting that his westernized performance is a pretence, and that this pretence has led him nowhere. At some point, Chanu’s publicly westernized identity is replaced with his earlier hidden Bengali one (Majed 122).

In response to the racist and prejudicial attitudes in England, Chanu affirms a part of his identity by defining himself a Bangladeshi Muslim (Roupakia 652). Chanu’s grip on Bengali culture is evident throughout the novel. He is obsessed with preserving his cultural heritage and transmitting it to his daughters (Rezaie 67). He only allows Bengali language in his house (Ali 195). He goes from reading English literature to teaching his daughters about the great Bengali poet, Tagore (182). He is happy with his Bengali “unspoilt” wife (24), and he does not want to risk his children being influenced by the dominant British culture: “We will go back [to Bangladesh] before they get spoiled” (34). Furthermore, he belittles the white working class, expressing that “they feel so threatened … Because our own culture is so strong. And what is their culture? Television, pub, throwing darts, kicking a ball. That is the white working-class culture” (256). Feeling out of place in, and alienated by, the majority culture, Chanu realizes the importance of his home country in defining his identity (Rezaie 70). He states that “Bangladeshis are the most deprived ethnic group in the whole of the UK” (Ali 355), while also arguing that the Bangladeshis living in Bangladesh “*are the happiest in the world*” (352 [original emphasis]). Chanu then convinces himself that a better life awaits him in his home country.

Moreover, Chanu’s concerns with the exclusionary modes of the secular nation-state presented from a decolonized, first-generation immigrant perspective, can be argued as somewhat egocentric. Karim and the Bengal Tigers, on the other hand, presents their concerns with Britain and the West from a more allocentric perspective – in that they are concerned with both the local and global Ummah. This will be discussed in what follows.

1.2.3. Islamic Activism, Islamophobia, and Media Misrepresentation

Ali challenges the Western notion of radical Islam through her presentation of Karim, a radical fundamentalist who is resistant towards the British majority culture. Karim is a second-generation Bangladeshi immigrant who has "never even been to Bangladesh" (Ali 451) and recognizes England as "my country" (214). Karim struggles for belonging in his home country, as his generation is caught between British and Bangladeshi moral values and cultural spheres (Liao 93). His childhood is marked by ambiguity, as he is "born a foreigner" (Ali 451). He reflects on early experiences with racism, as when they "used to be chased home every day [from school]" and being "beaten up the whole time" (262). In terms of Bangladeshi affiliation, he describes a somewhat embarrassed approach to his parents' heritage:

> If you wanted to be cool you had to be something else – a bit white, a bit black, a bit something. Even when it all took off, bhangra and all that, it was Punjabi, Pakistani, giving it all the attitude. It wasn't us, was it? If you wanted to be cool, you couldn't just be yourself. Bangladeshi. Know what I'm saying? … There was no one to look up to. (Ali 265).

Throughout the novel, Karim gradually feels more and more out of place in his home country England (Liao 96). Karim changes his perception of Bangladesh as he learns more about his parents' culture of origin, his religious background, and the fragility of the local and global Ummah. He reads a ton of magazines, but, as he says, "the internet was where things got really radical" (383). Karim thus depicts a more political approach to religion, by the way his concerns are directed to "the political and economic suffering of Muslim communities around the world from Chechnya to the Gaza Strip" (Poon 431). As he tells Nazneen, "It's a world-wide struggle, man. Everywhere they are trying to do us down" (Ali 245). Nazneen's initial conception of her lover as having "[a] place in this world" (266) is later revised: "Karim did not have his place in the world. That was why he defended it" (451). Karim's radicalization can be argued as fostered by his understanding of his position in the Western social imaginary, where he feels alienated and misrepresented. As Karim does not consider British society capable of representing Muslims, he uses his frustration to establish the Islamic fraction named Bengal Tigers as a means to feel included and heard.

Karim contributes to establishing the Bengal Tigers, as a result of feeling misrepresented in the socio-political sphere of Britain. Karim invites Nazneen to join, telling her that "[they] want everyone to be represented" (Ali 237) and that the "meeting is open to all Muslims" (240). Thus, Karim aims to create a space where British Muslims can feel included and freely express and address concerns about their local and global situation (Gunning 100). For the British Muslims in the Tower Hamlets area, the Bengal Tigers is a place where they get acceptance for their shared minority narrative of embodied memories, feelings, and desires (Asad 174). Moreover, Jane Hiddleston argues that Monica Ali “presents the characters’ anger not as mythical, incomprehensible hatred of the West but as a desperate reaction to their unequal status in the society” (66). Their group is not about resisting the liberal doctrines of Britain, but rather to criticize the society for not recognizing their rights (66). In their meetings they all share a common goal of reinforcing “Muslim rights and culture” and “protecting [their] local ummah and supporting the global ummah” (Ali 243). Simultaneously they are explicitly against “any group that opposes [them]” (243). The final utterance might seem hostile, but Karim is implicitly addressing the world-wide prejudice Muslims are receiving, and explicitly opposing the white, far-right faction Lion Hearts who are spreading their exclusionist discourses around Brick Lane and the Tower Hamlets area (Pereira-Ares 212).

The novel emphasizes the tensions between anti-racist and anti-immigrant politics. Muslim activism, represented by the Bengal Tigers, affirms a sense of Muslim presence in a society where hatred and hostile attitudes flourish. As is pointed out by one of the Bengal Tigers’ members, racism is more implicitly alluded to by the way “they is [sic] getting more sophisticated. They don’t say *race,* they say *culture, religion*” (Ali 243 [Original emphasis]). Pei-Chen Liao points out that, while New Labour opened up for a new era in Britain, there was a parallel increase in “extreme right-wing accusations of the incompatibility between multiculturalism and Britishness” (95). This is visible in the leaflets distributed by the Lion Hearts, in which they are spreading and reinforcing fear, intolerance, and prejudice, not least by rhetorically arguing for a “clash of civilizations” (Roupakia 651). In one of the Lion Hearts’ leaflets, they express their concern about the British policy of multiculturalism:

> *In our schools … it’s multicultural murder. Do you know what they are teaching your children today? … For his history lessons your son will be studying Africa or India or some other dark and distant land. English people, he will learn, are Wicked Colonialists … 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.* (Ali 253)

The Lion Hearts are proposing an imperialistic view of civilizational differences, characterized by their anxious hostility towards Islam and Britain's Muslim population. Thus, they are promoting a Western notion of Islam as a threat to Western civilization, by the way it encapsulates "all that Western society is not" (Hiddleston 66). Nonetheless, Monica Ali is exposing the damaging effect of promoting such a reductive Orientalist stereotype of Muslims (Rezaie 69). These attitudes are challenged by the way the novel emphasizes that Islamic activism does not need to be based on violent fundamentalism, but rather, that their political activism is rooted in the society's neglect of minority insufficiency of preserved equality and rights (69). In other words, Islamic activism can be understood as a reaction to their precarious position in Western culture.

Brick Lane depicts how the events on 9/11 affected the already precarious position of Muslim immigrants in the West. The aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11 is gently described in the novel as "[a] pinch of New York dust [that] blew across the ocean and settled on the Dogwood Estate" (Ali 370). The toxic dust settling in the estate is symbolic of enhanced Islamophobia (Liao 99). While Chanu is fearing "the start of the madness" (Ali 368), Karim is acknowledging that "[o]ut there, right now, are people who are twisted with hatred for us and for Islam" (419). The "Backlash" that Chanu had anticipated, is entering the Tower Hamlets area, as "Sorupa's daughter … had her hijab pulled off" and "Razia … was spit on" (370). The Islamophobic dust circulating in the air of Brick Lane is verbalized through the Lion Hearts' leaflets, in which they are writing that "*the truth is clear. Islam burns with hatred. It gives birth to evil mass murderers abroad. In our own towns, it spawns vicious rioters"* (Ali 408). The Lion Hearts are demonizing their Muslim neighbours, turning them into potential terrorists, making the international event national (Liao 100).

Moreover, the novel depicts the resurfacing of the historical tension between Christendom and Islam, in which 9/11 strengthened European anxieties toward non-Europeans. The Bengal Tigers' initial idea of a march against the Lion Hearts is cancelled, as Karim notes that it would not look right when "The American President is preparing his Crusade" (Ali 376). When the march eventually happens, and the "boys were fighting themselves" (474), one of the members cries out that "George Bush is laughing at you" (476). Pei-Chen Liao directs attention to George Bush's remark on September 16, comparing the war on terror to Crusade (99), harking back to a painful history of conflict that, as Talal Asad argues, has indeed contributed to the construction of a European identity (Asad 162).

Moreover, the novel also challenges the Western discourse of justifying violence and brutalities towards non-Westerners. This is alluded to in a group discussion in the Bengal Tigers, about the 11 September attacks:

> A few weeks ago, persons unknown launched an attack on American soil. Innocent people were killed. Civilians. Men, women and children. The world wept and sent money. Now, America is taking her revenge and our brothers are being killed. Their children die with them. They are not any more or less innocent. But the world does not mourn them … Some collateral damage … The most powerful nation on this planet attacks one of the most ravaged countries in the world. (Ali 416-417)

On the one hand, it is evident that the members acknowledge the horrific nature of the event and by no means support it. Karim, for example, questions the reason behind the attacks, asking "[w]ho benefits? … No Muslim, anywhere in the world. We are the ones who're going to suffer" (Ali 384). On the other hand, the group is challenging the notion of grievable bodies, in which violence on innocent civilians is perceived differently. On a similar note, the members of the group are reflecting and directing attention to the somewhat difficult dilemma they are facing in the aftermath of 9/11, in which British Asian Muslims must distinctly prove their alliance to Britain while simultaneously watching the brutalities facing the civilians in the Middle East as a consequence of the US attack (Roupakia 651). Furthermore, the novel depicts the diverse responses to this dilemma in the post-9/11 environment, as in Karim changing his style to visualize his Muslim affiliation, putting on "Panjabi-pyjama and a skullcap", while others "were telling their daughters to leave their headscarves at home" (Ali 378).

Ali's novel shows how the media is used to mediate Islamophobia. The mass media has a key role in influencing public opinion and constructing the imagined community of the majority population (Asad 4). By referencing the media, Ali denounces the racist rhetoric that occurs in its depiction of issues regarding British immigrants (Hiddleston 68). Karim reflects on the toxic spiral between racists and the media, in which he comments on the rumoured gang-environment in the Tower Hamlets area: "All these people going around talking about gangs, all they're doing is feeding the racists. The newspapers *love* it. But the truth is there are not gangs" (Ali 409 [Original emphasis]). On the contrary, Karim argues that "The white press had made [the gangs] up to give Bangladeshis a bad name. The *Tower Hamlets Bungle* was the worst offender (but all white newspapers were culprits)" (390). What we can interpret by these extracts is that the newspapers are neglecting their responsibility and objectivity, and instead are more concerned with provoking toxic debates. This is evident in the way journalists approaching the residents of Brick Lane, attempting to portray them as threatening, violent subjects (Liao 100). Building on the gang-narrative, the novel shows how the press enters the estate in hope of proving their accusations, but that they unfortunately do not find anything:

> In the meantime, reporters equipped with notebooks and tape recorders roamed the estate looking for gang members. They accosted Tariq. ‘Where are the gangs? Are you a member?’ ‘No,’ he said. ‘There are no gangs here.’ ‘Fundamentalists, then. Are you one of those?’ (Ali 487)

The extract above provides evidence of how the press attempts to produce, or reproduce, the portrait of British Muslims as extremists and potential terrorists (Liao 100). Furthermore, it demonstrates the media’s power in mediating a certain image to the state population. Nonetheless, these images are especially dangerous in a post-9/11 society, by the way Muslim immigrants already suffer a fragile position. The consequence is that the media contributes to construct a hostile environment and an even more insecure home for its Muslim minority populations (Liao 100).

1.3. Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the ambivalence of inclusionary and exclusionary modes as conflicting through the Bangladeshi immigrants’ experience in adapting to a British secular culture. Through its different perspectives, *Brick Lane* shows that the secular inclusions and opportunities are matched by different exclusionary implications stemming from racism and historically inherited hierarchies. Ali’s novel has allowed to explore the different coping strategies and approaches to adapting to a British secular culture from various perspective. In seeing the different perspectives in the context of the community of Brick Lane in conjunction with one another has allowed to explore and understand contrasting attitudes and choices in their complexity.

The first section of the chapter depicted how some of the female immigrants favoured a life in England as opposed to their home country Bangladesh. Mrs Azad, Razia, and Nazneen all portray themselves as emancipated and free in secular British culture. Each thrive on the individual choice of choosing their authentic life. Yet, both Mrs Azad and Razia acknowledge their position as Bangladeshi immigrants as hierarchically lower. They are both aware of the racism that pervades British culture; and accepts it. This depicts their ambivalent position in England, whereby their approach to society can be seen as coping strategies. While Nazneen develops individuality and confidence in her encounter with secular Britain, her reasons to stay in England are based on the negative knowledge of Bangladeshi culture, not the positive in British. This in turn makes Nazneen unable to acknowledge her fragility in England.

The second section illustrated the complications of living in Britain. The ambivalent conflicts of Mrs Islam, Chanu, and Karim's encounter with secular culture are perceives differently. Mrs Islam' choice of an isolationist approach to society stems from her desire to preserve her cultural heritage and to maintain a sense of pride and power. Her inclusionary choice of an authentic life is thus constructed through her fear of cultural deprivation. Moreover, Chanu's perspective of Britain as a place of opportunities and attraction changes when he recognizes himself as an unequal citizen. He reflected that neither conforming nor rejecting an assimilationist approach to society would reward him respect or a sense of belonging. Chanu cannot feel a sense of common identity in what he perceives a racist society. Hence, Britain is unable to provide him an authentic life. Karim and the Bengal Tigers directed attention to the British-born. Karim depicted the exclusionary position of the national Ummah by means of emphasizing Muslims in Britain as misrepresented. The year of 2001 symbolized a new discourse of reinforced Islamophobia and anti-immigrant forces. Ironically, the novel portrays British multiculturalism as insufficient both from the perspective of immigrants and anti-immigrants. Moreover, the novel illustrated the power of the media in influencing attitudes by means of deconstructing the image of British Muslims as violent and potential fundamentalists.

The next chapter aims to discuss the ambivalence of secular culture in a British imaginary pervaded by the rise of ISIS, the "War on Terror," and strengthened security measures in the ongoing debate leading up to Brexit. The next chapter will discuss the conflict of inclusion and exclusion through the British Muslim experience of reinforced Islamophobic tensions.

Chapter Two: *Home Fire* – Burning Experience of the Secular West

> given the context of the world we live in, the issue isn't just being a minority; it's specifically about being Muslim. Of course it can get exhausting or upsetting to be part of a minority that's so demonized in the country where you live – but it does make you look quite closely at the society you're in, and how different groups interact. (Shamsie, *Interview*)

2.0. Introduction

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) establishes a critical gaze upon Western secular society by its portrait of the post-7/7 British culture in the years leading up to the Brexit vote (2016). The novel problematizes the role of secularism as an integral part of the modern liberal-democratic nation-state by tracing its modes of exclusion of Muslim minorities. The novel is constructed in five parts, each part being focalized through the narrative of one of its British Pakistani characters – Isma Pasha and her younger twin-siblings Parvaiz and Aneeka, and Karamat Lone and his son Eamonn. The novel thus depicts contrasting British Muslim communities, in which the Pashas, orphaned by their mother and jihadi father, are believing, non-assimilated, lower-class citizens, whereas the Lones are non-believing, assimilated, upper-class citizens. *Home Fire* follows the merging of the families' narratives, introduced when Isma, going to America to study for a Ph.D., coincidentally meets Eamonn in a café. Like her, he is escaping from family history and entanglement. She is striking out on her own after years of raising her younger siblings; he wants to distance himself from the negative press around his father's new position as Home Secretary. Prior to Isma's departure, though, Parvaiz has been persuaded to join the Islamic State through his newly developed friendship with the ISIS recruiter Farooq; he will eventually be stripped of his British citizenship by the Home Office on the unrelenting Karamat's orders. His sisters are subjected to surveillance and the need to somehow demonstrate their loyalties to their home nation, Britain. The story unfolds with Eamonn and Aneeka falling in love, following her initial plan of using him to influence the Home Secretary to repatriate her repentant terrorist brother. Karamat, also in a precarious position as a former Muslim, sees it necessary to emphasize his mercilessness towards people leaving the country to join its enemies, in order to maintain his reputation as a fully assimilated champion of ‘Britishness’. The novel thus deals with minority issues of belonging and identity, radicalization and assimilation, loyalty and sacrifice, and Islamophobia and immigration.

The post-7/7 British imaginary is determined by the political climate in which the novel is set. The period c. 2014-2016 is marked by political tensions leading up to Brexit, alongside the rise of ISIS. The Brexit referendum and the debate leading up to it, was closely connected to diversity and nationalism (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism” 355). In the aftermath of the race riots in northern England in 2001 and the 9/11-attacks in the US, the UK re-evaluated multicultural policy by changing its focus from integration to assimilation (Ashcroft and Bevir, “British Multiculturalism” 35; Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism” 355). As a response to the London bombing in July 2005 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the British government implemented more assimilationalist policies, emphasizing the necessity of minority citizens to assimilate British values and traditions (Ashcroft and Bevir, “British Multiculturalism” 35). Multiculturalism has been perceived by many as a threat to the nation, and concerns about its negative effect on social cohesion has been expressed in the public debate (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism,” 355). Former Prime Minister David Cameron expressed his opinion on the failures of the state doctrine of multiculturalism at the Munich Security Conference in 2011, stating that multiculturalism had promoted a weaker collective identity and believed it to be one of the causes of domestic terrorism (355). It has been argued that radicalization of British Muslims is a result of alienation caused by segregation, something that strengthened the necessity of embracing British values (Lynch 242).

Following the 2015 election, the Prime Minister took a strong stance on religious fundamentalism by introducing “anti-extremism legislation and adopted further immigration restrictions” (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism” 355). The new laws proposed to powerfully ban “orders for extremist organisations which “undermine democracy” or give “hate speeches” – even if they do not break the law” (Dominiczak and Prince). Moreover, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), expressed a radical right appeal by claiming a Eurosceptic position while promoting anti-immigration by means of their belief of an English identity in crisis (Hayton 402). A month before the Brexit referendum, Nigel Farage of the UKIP unveiled an anti-migrant poster titled “Breaking point: the EU has failed us all” over a picture of a non-white crowd (Stewart and Mason). Even though this campaign received criticism, this kind of resistance toward multiculturalism and immigration contributed to Brexit (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism” 355). Under the May government, both the stance on immigration and rhetoric on shared British values hardened (355). Furthermore, with terrorism as the highest priority of

British national security, and British Muslims becoming increasingly prone to public and governmental suspicion, the position of Muslims in Britain became more precarious (Ashcroft and Bevir, “Pluralism” 355; Lynch 242).

In response to the development in Syria and Iraq in 2014, Home Secretary Theresa May raised the UK terror threat from substantial to severe (Travis). The British government predicted that ISIS, together with foreign fighters from Britain and Europe, were preparing attacks against the West (Travis). A year before, on 8 April 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of Isis (Chulov). The organization increased as the group conquered its way from Aleppo in Syria to Mosul in Iraq, with Baghdadi proclaiming his caliphate from the Great Mosque of al-Nuri on June 15, 2014 (Chulov). The capture of Mosul and ISIS terrorism in Europe[3] revealed the Caliphate’s “political military strength and global reach” (Guttmann 689). Foreigners from Europe and elsewhere were drawn to join the violent caliphate (Chulov). The number of foreign fighters from the UK, in particular British Muslims, increased drastically after ISIS was proclaimed (Guttmann 698). ISIS recruitment and radicalization tactics has been deemed ‘sophisticated’ by means of their efficient use of social media and strategically targeting young people (701). A political debate on how to deal with British extremism circulated the mass media following the release of a video of ISIS militants with British accents beheading an American journalist mid-2014 (Gander). British politicians such as the Home Secretary Theresa May, UKIP leader Nigel Farage, Senior Tory David Davis, and the major of London Boris Johnson, all expressed their opinion of the need to consider stripping British extremists of their citizenship as a preventative approach to terrorism (“British in Syria”; Gander; Sparrow; “Theresa May”). The Shamima Begum case got a lot of attention the following years. After leaving for Syria in 2015, Begum still lives in bad condition in a refugee camp in Syria, wanting to come home (McMillan). The Home Secretary of the time, Sajid Javid, took a strong stance on stripping Begum her UK passport (McMillan). Though acknowledging that it would be illegal to render her stateless, he remarked that she might be entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship – something the Bangladeshi foreign ministry declined (McMillan). The British imaginary of which the novel is set is thus impacted by anti-immigration tensions articulated through the Brexit debate, as well as Xenophobia resulting from the rise of ISIS.

The British socio-political climate as marked by the rise of ISIS can be understood as approaching its Muslim citizens with hostility in the way they are vulnerable to suspicion. This chapter argues that Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* criticises the ambivalence of secular British culture, by means of its portrayal of British Muslims experience of being constrained in society. As mentioned in Chapter One, the secular ambivalence is defined in inclusionary and exclusionary terms which constitute a complex situation ingrained in the culture. The modes of inclusion point to the possibilities of individual choices and attraction of authenticity by means of believing or not believing in whatever soothes the self. Secular culture proffers a common identity in terms of equality, tolerance, and freedom – which conflicts with its exclusionary feature of adversity or hostility constructed by power structures and ideologies. By demanding cultural cohesion, the state ultimately prevents its minorities the option of authenticity.

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[3] ISIS’ terrorism in Europe: Brussel synagogue shooting in 2014, suicide bombing in Paris in 2015, Brussel airport 2016, Manchester pop concert 2017, Westminster and Borough Market in London 2017 (Chulov; Guttmann 689).

The first section deals with characters that can be identified as "good Muslims." Karamat Lone' atheistic and assimilationist approach to British culture can be argues as a survival strategy. He finds it essential to prove his Britishness, something he does by promoting an assimilationist, Islamophobic rhetoric and thus becomes an advocator of the attitudes he so strongly seeks to escape. Isma Pasha, on the other hand, portrays a different approach to her precarious position in contemporary British culture. With both her father and brother being tied to terrorism, Isma performs as a "good Muslims" by following the underlying guidelines for visibly and precarious subjects like herself, something that restrains her identity. Isma's rejection of complete assimilation position her vulnerable to suspicion. Moreover, this section argues that Eamonn Lone rejects to recognize the challenges within British culture, which makes him ignorant. The following section deals with characters that can be identified as "bad Muslims." Parvaiz Pasha's radicalization can be argued as a result of his vulnerable position of feeling disconnected both on a personal and a communal level. Influence of new friendships is what ultimately develops Parvaiz's radical convictions. Aneeka Pasha, on the other hand, rejects British society as a response to its unjust and inconsiderate treatment of her jihadi brother's death. Her narrative depicts an excessive Islamophobic rhetoric in the mass media used to dehumanize the Pasha siblings. Finally, the chapter argues that Farooq as an ISIS recruiter symbolizes a direct critique of secular, liberal ideology.

2.1. Loyalty and Cooperation

The novel criticises secularism by the way it presents the Muslim individual as pressured, directly and indirectly, to culturally adapt and conform. This section argues that some of the characters feel the need to display and even parade their loyalty and cooperation with the state in order to feel safe. The construction of "good" and "bad" Muslims in the onset of the war on terror, pervades the British imaginary. The "good Muslim" is modern, assimilated, and secularized, while the "bad Muslim" is culturally marked, a premodern fanatic, and a potential extremist (Banerjee 292; Dunn 561). Karamat Lone promotes himself a "good Muslims" by demonstrating his assimilated character in the public, and harshly preaching other British Muslims to do so as well. While Isma Pasha rejects to visually prove herself an assimilated subject, she does perform as a "good Muslim". When being interrogated at the airport, for example, she has rehearsed answers to prove her Britishness, and deliberately not brought her Qur'an or family pictures, as these could invite questions (Shamsie 3-7). By different means, they are aspiring to be considered "good Muslims" in the British imaginary where the Muslim stereotype is subjectively prone to extremist suspicion (Pishotti 351). While Isma is acting according to what is expected to avoid being suspected as a sympathiser of religious extremism, Karamat is actively trying to persuade the public of his loyalties. In terms of the us/them dichotomy, Karamat strives to be identified as part of the "us," meaning British citizen, while Isma is identified as "them," meaning Pakistani – symbolizing the divide of British Pakistani citizens (352). Finally, Eamonn represents the ignorant bystander, initially a "good Muslim", who is ignorantly performing his "Britishness."

2.1.1. Strategic Assimilation and Politics

The socio-politic environment of the United Kingdom is imbued by the on-going war on terror and debates about on whether to leave the European Union. In this British imaginary Karamat sees it as a necessity to assimilate by strongly distancing himself from the believing Muslim community in order to be considered a trusted state official. As a politician and as Home Secretary, he must "prove he's one of them" (Shamsie 34). He is "the grandson of the colonised" (214), who has "boldly stridden away from [his Muslim background]" (34) to become a critic of "the backwardness of British Muslims" (35). He aspires to be considered a "good Muslim" and a "model citizen," roles which he continually has to reinforce (Banerjee 291). Lau and Mendes argue that the creation of categories that distinguishes Muslims as "good" or "bad" is a result of the communities being forced to subdivide "in order for some to feel safe in Western host countries, by denying and refusing their kin and community, in a public demonstration of embracing new loyalties" (65). This is exactly what Karamat does. As an aspiring politician, with a purpose of "Public service, national good, [and] British values," he had to act careful and do "things he regretted" (Shamsie 51). In proving his loyalty to Britain, he claims to "hate the Muslims who make people hate Muslims (231) and acts in accordance with the politics of the "powerful government … that has very bad PR in the matter of Muslims" (228).

Karamat's hostility toward Islam can be connected to the secular condition of belief and its cross pressures – combined with his public desire of being considered a model citizen. Karamat's atheistic worldview can be seen as a result of cross pressures. Moreover, the power of cross pressures can be seen in combination with Karamat's awareness of the fragile position of Muslims in society, in that Islam is considered a less desired worldview in the recognition of the majority culture. Growing up a believing Muslim, he notes, "[d]idn't harm anyone but [himself]" (107). In the preliminaries of his political career, he had been faced with racism, as "when a section of the press tried to brand him an extremist" (59). In other words, he fell victim to the British imaginary my means of being portrayed by the press as a "bad Muslim" with the wrong sympathies (Lau and Mendes 58). As a response, Karamat saw it inevitable to express "a completely enlightened preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque" (Shamsie 59), in complying with Western culture and history. On occasion, though, he recites Islamic prayers which he has to keep private because one would "be nervous about a Home Secretary who's spoken openly about his atheism but secretly recites Muslim prayer" (Shamsie 107).

The creation of "good" and "bad" Muslims is a product of the managed assimilation of the state (Banerjee 292). In a multicultural Britain posing values of liberty and toleration, citizens are expected to obey the law, contribute to the community, and learn the language (292). Karamat tries to convince both himself and others by acting as a secularist – or a de-essentialized Muslim – when he gives his son "an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name," and marries an Irish American woman, "another indicator of this integrationist" (Shamsie 15-16). The secular challenge with Islam is its strong communal identity. The secular state implies the inevitability of its Muslim communities to distance themselves from this essential part of their identity (Carnes and Williams 139). Karamat represents British homogeneity by firmly advocating assimilation in a way that fits Asad's notion of de-essentialization. This is evident in his speech at a predominantly Muslim school:

> You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: don't set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes 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)

He is arguing for European universalism by promoting that the Other should strip themselves of their essence, both history and tradition, "if they want the rest of the nation to treat them with respect" (Shamsie 59). Karamat performing as the "good Muslim," implicitly evokes the colonial ideal of submission to the superior state's dominant culture (Lau and Mendes 63). Aneeka finds the speech distasteful and stigmatizing, describing Karamat as an "idiot [because he] stands in front of a group of teenagers and tells them to conform" (Shamsie 90). Carnes and Williams argue that the liberal-democratic state cannot require intellectual, moral, or idealistic conformity based on its secular principles, but that it can "legitimately try to inculcate key elements of the public democratic culture through the educational system" (Carnes and William 144). Using this speech as an educational tool, this is exactly what the Home Secretary is doing. While encouraging diversity he is in fact reinforcing British anti-Muslim attitudes, emphasizing that the only option is to conform in order to succeed in this country (Banerjee 292; Pishotti 352).

Karamat is practicing what he preaches and has turned away from his religious and familial background, which can be seen as a sacrifice in his pursuit for a powerful voice, state power, and benefits of protection (Moynagh 199; Weiss 259). Isma Pasha's presence made him feel dangerous familiarity, "a reminder of a world he'd lost" (Shamsie 238). In a "momentary lapse" this made him use hysterical "rhetoric of angles and wings of fire – the language of his parents" (238), the same parents who had given up "family, context, language, familiarity – because the nation to which they first belonged had proven itself inadequate to the task of allowing them to live with dignity" (215). Karamat has suppressed his past to the extent that, when reminded of it, he looks at it through a Western gaze which could resemble xenophobia.

By taking on the role of the state, Karamat is feeding Islamophobia through rhetoric and policies that reinforces the post-9/11 British imagery of the Muslim Other as a potential enemy (Pishotti 352). His political role gives him an increased pressure to perform and mark himself as the "good Muslim," something that is expressed in the novel through his exaggerated, radical politics (352). The Pakistani High Commissioner reinsures the Home Secretary that he "really [is] as British as they say [he is]" (Shamsie 228), by the way in which he "has a point to prove about Muslims" (187). This point he is trying to prove, regarding exclusive loyalty as opposed to any forms of divided loyalties, is emphasised through his hostile anti-migrant policies (Moynagh 201). The Home Secretary promises to be "strong on security," by being strict on surveillance and citizenship-policies (Shamsie 34). By directing this toward Muslim citizens, he is amplifying the British imagery of Muslims as potential extremists (Pishotti 351). He values citizenship as “a privilege not a right or birthright” (Shamsie 198) and intended to “expand the Home Secretary’s power to revoke British citizenship so that it applied to British-born single passport-holder” (214), in which “someone’s fitness for citizenship [should be] based on their actions, not on accidents by birth” (214), especially those “who left Britain to join our enemies” (188). His strict policies can be seen as another argument of Karamat needing to prove his loyalty to Britain and omit any thought of him as an accomplice or sympathiser (Banerjee 298). By introducing the possibility of stripping “any British passport holders of their citizenship in cases where they have acted against the vital interest of the UK” (Shamsie 198), he is also introducing statelessness as punishment (Banerjee 297; Rutkowska 885). This mimics the Shamima Begum case, when Home Secretary Sajid Javid wanted to render her stateless (MacMillan). This creates fear and tension in the minority communities as the distinction between the “good” and “bad” citizens are threatened by state violence which has turned inward and constructed a second class of British citizenship (Ahmed 61; Moynagh 204). The “bad Muslim” deserves to be discriminated against and banned (Ahmed 65). Banerjee directs these policies to identity politics as opposed to the mere prevention of radicalization, as citizenship is connected to the definition of Britishness (298; Ahmed 61).

The Home Secretary is “unforgiving, particularly of people who betray his country” (Shamsie 80). In its own way, Karamat’s Britain arguably mirrors the radicalism of Islamic State. The corpse of the radicalized Parvaiz Pasha will not be returned to Britain, as the Home Secretary “will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death” (188). Aneeka Pasha, seeking justice for her brother, uses imageries associated with ISIS in her appeal to get his body home: “stories of wicked tyrant men and women are punished with exile, bodies kept from their families – their heads impaled on spikes, their corpses thrown into unmarked graves” (224). In this case, it is ironically Britain that uses exile as punishment and keeping corpses from their family which will be buried in unmarked graves (Rutkowska 880). Statelessness and rightlessness used as means to punish, frighten, and discriminate against citizens is something Banerjee argues to be “the most dangerous consequence of the post 2001 radicalization in Britain” (297), which “points to a dangerous trajectory in line with totalitarian modes" (298).

Nonetheless, Karamat can be understood from another perspective. His assimilationist performance can be interpreted as a survival strategy. From one point of view, he evaluates this performance as the only option to be considered equal in the British imaginary and thus a means to achieve his professional goals. From another point of view, this performance is a result of his own fear of society by the way in which he acknowledges the British imaginary as hostile and threatening in the perception of the minority other. As a response to the mass media dehumanizing the Pasha siblings, Eamonn posted a video in their defence. Karamat's reaction to seeing the video exemplifies his anxious approach to society, which is echoed in his comment: "Oh don't, son, don't make [Parvaiz] out to be a hero. They'll never forgive you that" (Shamsie 244). This extract expresses Karamat's deeper perception of secular culture as unforgiving. Further, this second perspective is evident in the way he has chosen to raise his son. As will be argued below, Eamonn is depicted as ignorant, something that is a result of his privileged upbringing. Throughout the novel it is made clear that Karamat has an ambiguous perception of the person Eamonn has become, which can be exemplified by Karamat looking at his son, a "posh English boy with [his] face, … sometimes with disappointment, sometimes with pride" (104). This ambivalence is nevertheless expressed by his confession of being "the one who never wanted [Eamonn] to know what it feels like to have doors closed in your face. To have to fight your way in" (110). The mixture of disappointment and pride is thus a result of the secular culture he finds himself in. Disappointment can be read as a longing for parts of a culture he had to give up in order to gain wordiness in a culture that "is unwilling to change in order to acknowledge and recognize the Other" (Lau and Mendes 63). Pride, nonetheless, can be understood as the relief of a father anxious for his beloved son's wellbeing in a challenging, complex society. To Isma, the challenges of secular culture are similar and different all at once.

2.1.2. Political Obedience in the "War on Terror"

Muslim minorities in liberal societies are often faced with higher expectations compared to other religious communities (Carnes and Williams 162). This can be traced to the changes of the imagined community where expectations of demonstrating loyalty have been amplified. The binary between the "good" and the "bad" Muslim as constructed in the post-9/11 imaginary has increased the necessity to perform in particular ways to rid themselves of a predetermined label of "bad" (Lau and Mendes 58). Isma is rejecting assimilation and de-essentialization but compensates by proving to be a good citizen (58). She is acting and speaking in a practiced and anticipated manner as to not be seen as a threat to the government and avoid suspicion of sympathizing with extremism (58). During an airport investigation, Isma is questioned on her Britishness. When answering the interrogators questions, she is following a practiced pattern of not saying more than actually asked, because "the more you say the more guilty you [sound]"

(Shamsie 4). This indicates a fear of being portrayed as something other than an ally. During the same interrogation, after being questioned on “Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the *Great British Bake Off,* the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, [and] dating websites” (5) for two hours, she made sure to “not [allow] even a shade of sarcasm to enter her voice” (7) when being handed back her belongings. Both in voice and action her appearance is as expected of the migrant citizen, and of someone who is “denied a political voice” (Weiss 259). Isma is aware of her position in the secular society and “the fragility of her place in the world” (6) as a pious individual who would “find it … difficult not to be a Muslim” (21).

Isma’s position in society can be argued as both absent and present. In the public domain, she can be argued as both absent and present at the same time – by means of performing both on her Muslimsness and her Britishness (Ahmed 1153). Isma’s “Muslimness” is what ultimately makes her “absent” in the public sphere in the way that essential parts of her identity distinguish from how the English conceptualizes themselves (Asad 159). This absent/present has been reinforced in the climate of terrorism in the twenty-first century. Isma feels “suppressed anger … about the sociological impact of the War on Terror” (Shamsie 39). Academia offers her a relatively safe “opportunity to challenge the dominant public discourse through sustained research and argumentation” (Chambers 215). Here, for instance, are Isma’s reflections on secular politics as presented in her sociology class:

> … 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 unBritish. … 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. (Shamsie 38)

Isma’s statement implies that the prefix “British” is something that is merely added to the Muslim citizen, not something that defines the individual. When acting against the interest of the state, what the state considers the defining essence of that individual is thus added in order to disassociate, and thus depriving them from their Britishness. The “British” in British Muslim or British Pakistani can then be understood as an indicator of privilege that has the potential to be denied, and further – by terms of citizenship – a means that the state can use as a weapon against its own subjects, something that Isma is well aware of (Moynagh 210).

As a political means, the production of the binaries between the “good” and “bad” Muslim is used to strengthen the superiority of the West (Banerjee 292). At the same time, this situates British Muslims in a challenging position of constantly demonstrating their trustworthiness to the secular society (Lynch 257). For the Pasha family there is an underlying issue of opposing loyalties after Parvaiz joins the Islamic State, where Isma is feeling the pressure of siding with the British authorities. Isma repeatedly explains to her sister why she turned their brother in, arguing that “[w]e are in no position to let the state question our loyalties. … If you co-operate, it makes a difference” (Shamsie 42), “[w]hy can you never understand the position we are in?” (196). Appearing as symbol of compromise, Isma is claiming her loyalty to the state by being a law-abiding citizen, something she is required to do post-9/11 (Banerjee 294). Karamat, as the embodiment of the state, believes “she was amongst those who could be saved” (Shamsie 235), despite her having “[t]errorism as a family trade” (108). This conclusion is drawn from the statement Isma gave to the press about her brother’s death. In the interview she expressed the sisters being “shattered and horrified” by their brother joining “the enemies of both Britain and Islam,” and she had immediately informed the “Counter Terrorism Command” (197). Her action is received by her family as betrayal, which is evident in Aneeka angrily accusing her sister of “playing the good citizen even now, dragging her sister’s name into that shameful act” (199). Isma’s acceptance of the state’s injustice can be understood as an act of obedience on the one hand, while on the other it can be interpreted as reflecting her assessment of the degree to which actual justice is attainable to her (Rutkowska 879): “Accept the law, even when it’s unjust” (Shamsie 196). Despite Isma suppressing her anger toward the state and publicly displaying cooperation and loyalty to the government, she loses both to her family and the state. This can be inferred from the last interaction the novel has with Isma, in which Karamat tells her “[y]ou won’t matter tomorrow. Do what you want” (Shamsie 239).

2.1.3. Privileged Ignorance and Deprived Comprehension

As opposed to Karamat and Isma’s acknowledgment of their position in society and its expectations, Eamonn is presented in the novel as an ignorant supporter of the secular regime. He is depicted as a privileged non-believer, who “saw the state as part of himself” (Shamsie 49), which ultimately makes him a “good Muslim” (Banerjee 293). The privileged position Eamonn finds himself in is closely tied to his ignorance. In describing Eamonn’s appearance, Isma notes that his looks were common in the streets of Wembley, “though rarely attached to such an air of privilege,” which made him exceptional (Shamsie 14). Eamonn’s naivety is a construction of his privileged upbringing (Moynagh 203). Wealth and political security have always been self-evident to him. For example, he can live off his mother's wealth (Shamsie 32). Further, he is a person who "isn't accustomed to being asked to account for his own character" (29). Based on his looks and his father's background, Isma initially "assumed that in some way, however secular, however political rather than religious, he identified as Muslim" (21-22). However, this was quickly refuted by his juxtaposing Islamic faith to cancer (21). Although withdrawing his joking comment as something that "came out really badly," (21) and acknowledging that "it must be difficult to be a Muslim in the world these days" (21), his casual mockery of a marginalized group is either degrading or simply ignorant. Eamonn is unaware of the discrimination facing British Muslims in the secular society. Among other things, racial profiling is something he has never experienced, which can be explained by "his acceptable performance of "Britishness" like his father, his status as the son of the Home Secretary, or simply wilful ignorance" (Pishotti 352).

Eamonn's initial view on Islam can be tied to his father's relationship to his Muslim background and the general Muslim communities. His childhood has portrayed Islam as something estranged and embarrassing. It is alluded to the family following the Christian traditions of his Irish American mother, as opposed to his father's traditions that is described as gradually lost in favour of his father's political campaign (Shamsie 58-59). As the son of an assimilated father, Eamonn grows up in a secularized household without the need to assimilate. Eamonn, who has "never even been to Pakistan" (98), is assumed to possess knowledge about his father's past and home country (Chambers 211). This absent knowledge, "a piece of his father – which he's been too ready to forget" (61), had been defined by "his own embarrassment about it" (61). This mixture of estrangement and embarrassment can be understood as expanding by the influence of the rather hostile tension developing between Karamat and the Muslim community. Considering this conflict, Eamonn is justifying his father's strong enactment of pro-British ideal and other political choices by explaining it as a necessity in order for his father to get in a position to promote his ideas of "Public service, national good, British values" (Lau and Mendes 63; Shamsie 51). The Muslim population, on the other hand, had "tuned their backs on Karamat Lone and voted him out, despite the good he'd done for his constituents" (Shamsie 59), when all his father wanted was for people like the Pasha's "to suffer less from [racists], not more" (91). Eamonn's ignorance is evident in the way in which he is surprised by the oppositional response to his father's Enlightened comment "of the need for British Muslims to lift themselves out of the Dark ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect" (59). Rather than considering the possibility of the reason why the

Muslim community didn’t support his father, Eamonn is naively supporting and promoting the need to instil the value of Britishness (Banerjee 295).

Eamonn’s privilege paints an ignorant picture of the British imaginary. He shows little comprehension of how policies and strategies of security and surveillance affected the lives of people differently (Banerjee 295). This can be exemplified by Eamonn admitting that he had never heard of “GWM … Googling While Muslim,” an abbreviation that the Pasha family jokingly uses to indicate its presence (Shamsie 65). Nevertheless, Eamonn does not acknowledge the policies his father is advocating. It is plausible to claim that he has not reflected on either reason or cause for the harsh policies, based on him being unable to get his head around “how such a man as Adil Pasha could have existed in Britain to begin with” (58). It can thus be argued that his politician father’s greatest concerns rarely cross Eamonn’s consciousness. On the contrary, Eamonn unconsciously imitates his father’s performance in the public sphere. This can be understood by Eamonn’s pattern of walking past a mosque: “He was nearing a mosque and crossed the street to avoid it, then crossed back so as not to be seen as trying to avoid a mosque” (59). In his father’s perception of Britishness, this would signal the acts of a “good Muslim” (Ahmed 1153). Eamonn can thus be understood to not acknowledge his surroundings nor allowing himself the awareness of the contemporary socio-political situation in Britain. Rather, Eamonn continues his path of privileged ignorance in the way he follows his father patterns.

2.2. Resistance and Injustice

The novel criticises secularism through the way in which the characters of Parvaiz, Aneeka, and Farooq by different degrees and by different means are showing resistance to the British Imagined Community, and thereby positioning themselves as “bad Muslims” – the enemy of the state. I argue that Parvaiz’s radicalization results in his vulnerable position caused by his lack of a sense of belonging. His resistance towards the state can then be seen a consequence of a complex situation, in which Parvaiz experiences the exclusionary modes of British culture. Further, I argue that Aneeka’s narrative criticises the universality of secularism and Taylor’s notion of a direct-access community. This is extensively evident in the novel’s portrayal of the alarming Islamophobic rhetoric being mediated through the mass media. Aneeka models the “bad Muslim” by publicly rejecting and criticising government demands. Lastly, I argue that the ISIS recruiter Farooq represents the Islamic State. He is directly resisting the secular liberal-democratic nation-state by persuading individuals in vulnerable positions to join the most extreme oppositional force and promoting its ideological ideals.

2.2.1. From Suspect to Guilty: ISIS Recruitment and Utilization of the Precarious Subject

The position of British Muslims in the socio-political environment is drastically changed after the 9/11-attacks and the following terror attacks in Europe. A general assumption of British Muslims as a national security concern, prevails the current British imaginary (Lynch 257). This generalisation has led to issues of suspicion concerning their loyalties (257). Total assimilation has replaced the notion of cultural integration, which has resulted in an enhanced necessity to demonstrate support to the British society (257). Nevertheless, this notion of Muslims places them in a vulnerable position of being presumed "bad" until proven "good" (Lau and Mendes 58). The British imaginary is further affected by what Nalini Iyer argues as a tension between "a secular British culture that is xenophobic and a radical Islam that proffers a seeming home for diasporic Muslims alienated in their Western homelands" (140). Following the encounters with the ISIS recruiter Farooq, Parvaiz alters his view of the British society. He tells Aneeka that "[t]hey only gave you a scholarship because you tick their "inclusive" and "diverse" boxes" (Shamsie 132). This indicates that he considers the inclusivity of the state's educational system a sham. In the same conversation he opines that "Muslim women, particularly the beautiful ones, need to be saved from Muslim men. Muslim men need to be detained, harassed, pressed against the ground with a heel on our throat" (132). Influenced by Farooq, Parvaiz comes to consider himself stigmatized in the public sphere as a Muslim male. This resonates with his experiences of being racially profiled by police officers on two separate occasions (Chambers 207; Pishotti 352; Shamsie 132). His encounters with Islamophobia can therefore be understood as contributing to Parvaiz's feeling of alienation within British society.

Parvaiz is cross pressured by the influence of the ISIS recruiter and supposed friend Farooq. He utilizes Parvaiz's longing for a father figure and a sense of belonging in his manipulation of Parvaiz's view of the British government. His radicalization process is thus fuelled by different personal and political circumstances, as opposed to religious justifications (Chambers 207; Banerjee 296). In an interview with Vanessa Thorpe, Kamila Shamsie states that:

> I was really intrigued by the way most people assume Islamic State propaganda is built on violence. Research by Charlie Winter [senior research fellow at King's College] that

> I looked at shows much of it is about a sense of belonging and of state-building. It is not that I believe IS are really planning a welfare state equivalent out there, or anything like that; it is the fact this side of it has not been told. I also felt we are accused of sympathising if we say that a young man who goes out there is anything other than a monster. There is more sympathy for the girls, as if grooming can only apply to girls and be about sex. (Shamsie, "Kamila Shamsie")

Farooq, representing the Islamic State, is "the enemy of both Britain and Islam" (Shamsie 197). As a representative of an extreme milieux, he is less vulnerable to experiencing cross pressures. His firmly hostile opinion of all secular alternatives makes him able to cause a pull-effect on others, especially individuals like Parvaiz who are in vulnerable positions. Farooq uses Parvaiz's desire for a father figure as a means to establish trust, in order to manipulate him to develop aggression toward the British society and its supposedly emasculated version of Islam (Chambers 207). Moreover, as Shamsie states in the interview extract above, Parvaiz can be understood as "groomed."

Parvaiz's feelings of homelessness, betrayal and despair is what has put him in a position for Farooq to exploit (Moynagh 203). After being robbed in the park and realizing that both his sisters were to leave their family home, he muses: "How he hated his life, this neighbourhood, the inevitability of everything" (Shamsie 123). The feeling of disconnecting with his siblings unlocks a curiosity towards his estranged father. Farooq replaces the notion of Adil Pasha as "a shameful secret" (Shamsie 126) to someone heroic (135), a "great warrior" who in "the fight for justice [had] called himself Father of Parvaiz" (125). By telling stories of his father, showing him pictures, and even inflecting him the same pain of torture his father had felt, Farooq is giving him the opportunity to connect with his father: "*I am you, for the first time*" (140). Feeding the boy who "had always watched boys and their fathers with an avidity composed primarily with hunger" (127), Farooq is establishing a twisted form of safe space for Parvaiz, and performing as an attentive "listener," as Claire Chambers argues (207). Promising to "help [him] find people who knew [his] father" (Shamsie 150), Parvaiz agrees to join Farooq.

The bond established through the encounters between Parvaiz and Farooq enables the recruiter to advocate his extremist ideology and Parvaiz being susceptible to it (Chambers 207). Farooq is building his propaganda on an idealistic picture of Parvaiz's jihadi father, which he uses in order to manipulate Parvaiz into questioning his existence in secular Britain. This manipulation is used to depict the Caliphate as a contrasting, wonderful place, where "skin colour doesn't matter. … rich and poor have the same facilities. Where men are men" (Shamsie

144). Britain on the other hand, is a "mirage of democracy and freedom" (148), who no longer "understood that a welfare state was something you built up instead of tearing down, when it saw migrants as people to be welcomed, not turned away" (144). Parvaiz being critical of the Caliphate at first, eventually falls for Farooq's misinformation. As a consequence of their close friendship and established trust, Parvaiz develops an antagonistic perspective of his home country (Chambers 213). He ultimately starts seeing "evidence of rot and corruption, lies and cover-ups" everywhere (Shamsie 148), and feeling "the wrongness of it all, the falseness of his life" (149). Nevertheless, Parvaiz radical convictions is lured on him.

Jaine Chemmachery argues that Parvaiz by no means portrays a "despicable terrorist" (4). He is guilty of bonding with a terrorist, but not guilty in committing any terrorist acts (4). Parvaiz's reasons for radicalization can to some extent be understood as naïve, or as a path he was destined to follow as he has "[t]errorism as a family trade" (Shamsie 108). His father, Adil Pasha, is portrayed as immoral by the way he "tried his hand at many things in life – guitarist, salesman, gambler, con man, jihadi – but he was most consistent in the role of absentee father" (47). Parvaiz, on the other hand, setting aside the fact that he *did* join the Caliphate, is depicted as morally good through his volunteer work with the library campaign, and his love for his twin (Chambers 209). He also reflects on the wrongness of his choice, realizing that "he was his father's son in his abandonment of a family who had always deserved better of him", something that "made him blubber into his pillow at night" (Shamsie 167). The contrast between his own values and those of the Islamic State is illustrated by Parvaiz feeling sick when filming a beheading (166). Moreover, his values are evident in the portrayal of Parvaiz challenging the Islamic State's customs, when he wants to offer a helping hand to an unveiled woman, with a Londoner's voice, asking if it "surely … isn't a greater sin than leaving a sister to suffer?" (173). Thus, Parvaiz realizes that neither his morals, values, nor worldview correspond with the extremist ideology he has encountered. Parvaiz acknowledge his mistake and wants to return to Britain: "I made a mistake. I'm prepared to face trial if I've broken laws. Just let me go to London" (171). With a feeling of despair, Parvaiz recognizes his dilemma of being "the terrorist son of a terrorist father. … He didn't know how to break out of these currents of history, how to shake free of the demons he had attached to his own heels" (Shamsie 171). This kind of reflection cannot be said to define a "despicable terrorist."

2.2.2. Wrong Sympathies and Media Outrage

The narrative of Aneeka resists British culture by challenging the exclusionary implication of state action and secular ambivalence. Aneeka is aware of her position in the British secular community. Her sister describes her as "not quite nineteen, with her law-student brain, who knew everything about her rights and nothing about the fragility of her place in the world" (Shamsie 6). Yet, it is evident in the novel that Aneeka does know about her fragility in the world. In contrast to her sister's public performance of conforming to the expectations of the "good Muslim," Aneeka develops "an agonistic attitude towards the state and its institutions, acting so as to demonstrate the limited protections of her citizenship" (Rutkowska 880). This attitude is especially triggered by the way she is feeling mistreated by the UK government by the way in which it refuses to return the body of her deceased brother back to his home, and instead sends him to Pakistan. Aneeka's perception of her stigmatized position in the British imaginary is made clear in the aftermath of Karamat Lone's pro-assimilation speech, in which she expresses that,

> among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice. (Shamsie 90-91)

Speeches like Karamat's are dangerous in the way they contribute to normalizing the stigmatization of minority groups, especially when it is presented by people in a position of power (Lau and Mendes 63). Karamat, who can be interpreted by the majority society as a representative of the Muslim minority, is by no means representing the interest, identities, or aspirations of the group he is speaking for.

Further, Aneeka is depicting her existence in secular Britain as anxious, by the way she expects discrimination and harassment. As a member of the Muslim community, she is living the consequences of marginalization and prejudice because of the actions of a few individuals responsible for those "terrorist attacks" that involve specifically "European victims" (Banerjee 295; Shamsie 90). Aneeka illustrates several examples of anxiety in the public "everyday" sphere. When Isma went through airport security, Aneeka felt relieved, texting her sister: "now that I know they've let you through, Aunty Naseem can stop praying and I can stop pacing" (Ali 8). Even on public transportation, Aneeka is not unfamiliar with experiencing harassment, as when “[s]ome guy spat on [her] on the Tube” (90). Moreover, she is also experiencing being under surveillance, as the MI5 is listening on her phone calls, monitoring her messages, and viewing her internet history (94). She is jokingly aware of the dangers of “GWM”, or “Googling While Muslim” (65). This anxiety is a result of “the enormous weight of policies, overarching governmental strategies of surveillance, security, and community engagement that was put in motion [in post-9/11 Britain]” (Banerjee 295).

The mass media as a mediator of popular opinion is criticized in Aneeka’s narrative. It illustrates the contrast between those possessing a powerful political voice, and those who are denied one (Weiss 258-259). Karamat poses authority as a politician in office, while the Pasha’s lack credibility as ordinary citizens marginalized by their ethnic position and inevitable connection to extremism. Karamat’s statements can thus be understood as reflecting the attitudes of the state, which are echoed through the media. This echoes Talal Asad’s critique of Charles Taylor’s notion of the liberal-democratic nation-state as a “direct-access” community, in which Asad emphasizes the state’s power in influencing what is mediated (4). The death of Parvaiz sets in motion a debate on citizenship, mirroring the Begum case as described above. The debate evidently presents some of the anxious and antagonistic views on British Muslims that circulated the media, pointing to a common interest ingrained in “post 2001 ideological racism and homogeneous nationalism” (Banerjee 298). The Home Secretary had already “revoked the citizenship of all dual nationals who have left Britain to join our enemies” (Shamsie 188). He refuses to return Parvaiz’s body to Britain because he “will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death” (188), and thus “repatriated [the body] to his home nation, Pakistan” (188). Karamat is praised for being “brave” as he has “taken a strong stand against extremists at risk of his own life” (204). Nevertheless, the media urges enhanced anti-migrant policies and strategies. For instance, one columnist opines that “[i]t’s a cause of profound concern that the children of jihadist, many of them British-born, are not closely watched by the state. How many more Parvaiz Pashas will it take for things to change?” (201) and for “THE GOVERNMENT TO WAKE UP?” (201). The normalizing tendency mirrored by the media is dangerous (Banerjee 298). As a response, human-rights activists took to the media to express their concern: “Washing our hands of potential terrorists is dangerously short-sighted and statelessness is a tool of despots, not democrats” (Shamsie 198).

The Islamophobic rhetoric in the different news articles, interviews, tweets, and hashtags serves as a means to dehumanize the Muslim subject by portraying them as terrorists, placing them in a fragile position that ultimately eliminates them from the national body

(Chemmachery 6; Iyer 144; Pishotti 351, 353; Rutkowska 882). This is particularly evident in the hashtags that "[j]ust started trending: … "#DONTSULLYOURSOIL, #GOBACK-WHEREYOUCAMEFROM" (Shamsie 190), which symbolizes the recalcitrant xenophobia of multicultural Britain (Iyer 144). Nevertheless, the different extracts of the different media, Naomi Weiss points out, is reflecting the Islamophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric prevalent in contemporary Britain (253). Moreover, the Pasha twins' resistance to assimilation is used to justify their worthlessness by the public. The media reconstructs their identity by illustrating them as less human and perverted, by the way in which Parvaiz becomes "Pervys" (Shamsie 204), and Aneeka is renamed "Knickers" and "Hojabi" (204) as well as portrayed as "an accomplice" and "the terrorist's Twisted Sister" (204). Their characters are reimagined as deviant, objectified, and dehumanized in the public eye to emphasize their unwantedness (Chemmachery 6; Iyer 144; Pishotti 353). The media consequently dissociate the siblings from their Britishness in order to proclaim that radicalism has nothing to do with Britain – but rather, must be linked to their Pakistani heritage (Iyer 144).

The media storm illustrates the consequences of showing the wrong sympathies, and the way in which this is perceived as resistance toward the state. In an attempt to recapture Parvaiz's humanity in the midst of the media's ugliness, the Pasha siblings' neighbour, Gladys, expresses to the media that,

> [h]e was a beautiful, gentle boy. Don't you tell me who he was. I knew him from the day he was born. Shame on you, Mr Home Secretary. Shame on you! Give us our boy to bury, give his mother the company of her son in the grave. (Shamsie 191)

As a reaction to her statement, false accounts are made in her name, spreading repulsive Tweets like "Come on boys, look at me, I can do things those 72 virgins don't know about. #MaybeThisIsntHeaven" (192). The popular hatred for British Muslims as depicted in the media following Parvaiz's death, illustrated the depth of Islamophobia in the ongoing debate, presented both by private persons and the established media channels alike (Banerjee 298; Iyer 144; Weiss 253).

Aneeka aims to use the media to claim her narrative. She uses the TV channels in her last attempt to seek justice for her brother in Pakistan and gain a sense of compassion. By acting out her grief on television she visualizes her rejection of the unjust treatment she has been receiving by home country's government. When in Karachi, the ambulance with Parvaiz's body is delivered to the park where Aneeka, "white in mourning, sitting cross-legged on a white sheet covered with rose petals that had been laid on the ground" (Shamsie 219), opens his casket and starts howling in grief, "[a] howl deeper than a girl, a howl that came out of the earth and through her and into the office of the Home Secretary, who took a step back" (224). With cameras pointed towards the scene of "the whole apocalyptic mess of the park [in which] the only thing that remained unburied was the face of the dead boy" (224), Aneeka draws the attention of the world to her moment of grieving resistance, emphasizing the unjust treatment experienced by the siblings (Iyer 145). In her portrayal as embodiment of grief, Aneeka changes the narrative of what she considers an unjust policy (Rutkowska 357). She is illustrating that the state, in its attempt to punish the enemy, is rather punishing his innocent family who is already grieving his loss; first in abandonment, then in death (357). By mediating this scene to the British public through the TV channels, Aneeka strives to rehumanize herself and re-depict Parvaiz as a person worthy of mourning (Rutkowska 357). This strategy of resistance is described as "impressive" by the Home Secretary watching the event unfold on his television (Shamsie 224). Nevertheless, Aneeka's innocent resistance should not be the main concern of the state.

2.2.3. Beyond Controversial: Deconstructed Images of the West

Farooq is representing the Islamic State, both in terms of recruitment but more importantly in terms of the ideology he is advocating. This can be seen as a direct criticism of Western secularism. Farooq is using different approaches to recruit Parvaiz; he develops a trustworthy friendship, teaches him about his deceased jihadi father, and convinces him that he is being emasculated by both his sisters and British government. Farooq needs to change Parvaiz's perception of British culture and its ideological underpinnings in order to persuade him to leave his home and join the Islamic State. Acting as an attentive listener, Farooq advocates his ideology by questioning Western history amidst everyday conversation (Chambers 207). Farooq presents two significant speeches that attempt to construct an antagonistic image of the West. Through his speeches, Farooq illustrate the exclusionary implications of secularism ingrained in western culture as a continuance of colonialism. Moreover, he presents the Islamic State as capable of realizing the inclusionary ideals that the secular West has failed to implement.

The first speech emphasizes Farooq's view of the historical tension between Christendom and Islam and how imperialism is the root of the racisms concealed within the Western democratic nation-state:

> [T]he terror with which the world of Christendom had watched the ascent of Islam, the thousand years of Muslim supremacy, which was eventually squandered by eunuch-like Ottomans and Mughals who has lost sight of the moral path, 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. There didn't seem to be any part of the Muslim world Farooq didn't know about. (Shamsie 129)

The second speech can be interpreted as a means of using Western history and its promotion of ideals to justify the use of violence to realize a higher purpose:

> The French Revolution. … The cradle, the bedrock, the foundation of enlightenment and liberalism and democracy and all the things that make the West so smugly superior to the rest of the world. … Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. … Accept those ideals as ideal. But where would those ideals be without the Reign of Terror that nurtured and protected them with blood, eliminating all enemies, internal and external, that threatened the new Utopia, and did so in full view of the public? It might have been regrettable – a man would rather fish with his friends than cut off the heads of his enemies – but it was necessary. Eventually the terror ends, having served its purpose of protecting a new – a revolutionary – state of affairs that is besieged by enemies who are terrified of its moral power. (Shamsie 147)

Both speeches serve a purpose of Islamic propaganda by preaching global injustice (Chambers 209). This injustice can supposedly only be conquered through the engagement of heroic, bloody struggle (Banerjee 297).

To entice Parvaiz, Farooq builds his propaganda by exploiting the fragilities of the liberal-democratic model. He does so, firstly, by directing attention to the historical tension between Christendom and Islam, constructing an idea of how the West has humiliated Islam (Asad 159). Thus, he uses this idea to emphasize Parvaiz's marginalized position in society as a Muslim who is not satisfactorily represented in secular culture. Moreover, Farooq strategically depicts the European state's secular principle of state neutrality as a sham. He argues that a false promise of independence is used to hide the state's true interest in economics as opted in favour of its minority citizens (Mullins 65; Scott 15). Farooq uses the violent trajectory of the French revolution to justify ISIS violence as a means to realize their ideals. To some extent, this can be interpreted as Farooq challenging the Western discourse of justifying violence. Talal Asad argued that European brutalities toward non-Europeans has been perceived differently by international law, especially when violence has been conducted by non-Europeans (162). What Farooq is doing then, is juxtaposing Western examples where violence has been used for the greater good, to justify why terrorism is a necessary means in what he believes is a cause of purpose. Nevertheless, these speeches serve to recruit extremists in the same manner that other militaries recruit soldiers – by the promise of doing higher order things in order to achieve a higher purpose (Banerjee 297). Nonetheless, Farooq's depiction of the Caliphate *is* dangerous, and the astonishing image he portrays is utopian. Farooq excludes important details in his stories. On arrival, for example, Parvaiz is caught off guard when told he is required to undergo Shariah- and military camp (Shamsie 160), that he would never get his passport back (158), and the hard suppression of women (173). The details omitted by Farooq's stories about the Caliphate are essentially more excluding and restrictive than failed secular promises.

2.3. Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the ambivalent situation of British secular culture from the perspective of British-Pakistanis of different positions in class and belief. The chapter presented a culture that has evolved from 2001 to c. 2015, in which the climate of terror has made Muslims in the UK more precarious, especially in terms of suspicion. This complicates the already ambivalent situation of Muslim immigrants' experience of secular society. The opportunities provided the individual are, like in Chapter One, matched by exclusion and historically inherited hierarchies and racisms. As discussed in this chapter, the inclusionary modes of secular culture are complicated by a more antagonistic religious discrimination.

The first section of this chapter dealt with a more cooperative approach to the British imaginary. Karamat illustrated an ambivalent experience of the inclusionary and exclusionary modes of secular culture in conflict. His experience of inclusion comes as a result of his assimilationalist approach to society, and by being cross pressured from Islamic faith to atheism. As a secularist, his political career thrives. Karamat's ambivalent experience of secular culture is evident in the way he reflects on his earlier affiliation to Islam; how he had to act more careful than other politicians, and how he did not want his son to experience challenges of inequality and racism as a Muslim. The complexity of Karamat's situation is even more complicated by the way he promotes the same Islamophobia he seeks to avoid. Isma approaches the ambivalent situation in different terms than Karamat. In order for her to live an authentic life, Isma rejects complete assimilation. Because of this, and the fact that she has terrorism in her family, Isma is especially prone to suspicion. Isma has to prove her loyalty to the state, something she does by performing as a "good Muslim" in fear of being considered otherwise. This complicates Isma's experience of secular culture in different means. By cooperating with the cultural expectations, she is accepting not only the maltreatment she is receiving, but also the fragility of her position as inequal. Yet, this essentially prevents her from living her authentic life. Eamonn, on the contrary, has an ignorant approach to secular culture. He is raised atheist and performs his Britishness perfectly. Eamonn can be understood in terms of not acknowledging the ambivalent situation of secularism like the other characters. Eamonn's development of awareness and understanding, will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The second section considered characters that resisted Britain because of the exclusionary modes of British secular culture and state actions. Muslims are in a precarious position in contemporary British culture, in which they are under suspicion until proven otherwise. In turn, the government demand complete assimilation. Parvaiz's situation is complex. His radicalization process is influenced by a variety of factors, none of which are heavily rooted in religiously fundamentalist convictions. On the contrary, Parvaiz's process of rejecting British culture is because of factors *within* British culture. Parvaiz feels stigmatized in what he perceives as a racist society. He considers the inclusionary modes of the state unbalanced by means of confronting the definition of equality. He tells Aneeka that she got into her school of choice based on the school checking of their inclusivity boxes. Moreover, he feels neglected at home. Feeling alienated in society and out of place at home, Parvaiz is especially vulnerable to the potential of cross pressures. The ISIS recruiter Farooq utilizes Parvaiz fragile position to influence and propagate Parvaiz in joining the Islamic State. **Moreover**, Aneeka's experience of secular culture is illustrated through a tragical trajectory. Initially, Aneeka is depicted as a law abiding, law school student, who embraces secular culture and its inclusivity. Britain enables her to live an authentic life. Aneeka's approach to Britain changes when the state rejects to return Parvaiz's corpse. In addition to experiencing "everyday" racism, Aneeka questions the state's ability to maintain its principles of equality, tolerance, and human rights. Moreover, her innocent rejection of state mistreatment turns into a toxic debate in the media that spread hate and Islamophobia through its misrepresentation of the Pasha siblings. Thus, the ambivalent situation is reinforced, when both state and public opinion reveals their exclusionary assumptions. Finally, Farooq's total rejection of secular culture is complicated by the way he utilizes its exclusionary implications to propagate others. He presents an image of Western culture and its ideological underpinnings as hostile by rejecting the possibility an authentic Muslim life in the West.

Chapter Three: Future Modes of Coexistence in British Secular Culture

3.0. Introduction

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) each establish a critical gaze upon Western secular society in their portrayals of British culture. Both novels problematize the issue of coexistence in multicultural England, by challenging exclusionary features of the culture's distribution of secular principles, perception of equality, and regulation of rights. More importantly, the concept of de-essentialism as a mode of assimilation echoes imperialism, if understood as paradigmatic. As mentioned in Chapter One, the report by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000 marked an urgent need of a renewed notion of coexistence in multicultural Britain. This is suggested in the novels, in which both Ali and Shamsie express concern about their contemporary understanding of British Asian immigrants as excluded from vital areas of British society. The United Kingdom as governed by secular assumptions and institutions is faced with an urgent need to radical change in approaching its diverse society – especially in relation to its Muslim citizens. Jane Hiddleston convincingly argues that Islam "has mistakenly been aligned with terrorism, and widespread ignorance has given rise to popular images of a fixed set of tenets, promoting oppression and violence, [which are] at odds with principles of freedom and equality" (66). The doctrine of secularism, as mentioned in the Introduction, can be understood in inclusionary terms as comprising tolerance, fairness, equality under the law, state neutrality, and religious freedom. It can thus be used to ensure a social framework where individuals can be and feel like equals through an accessible-to-all common identity. The constituents of the state can live as authentic selves and freely choose to believe or not believe in any transcendent reality. But, as Hiddleston argues, this inclusionary understanding of secularism does not correspond with the reality of the condition of British Muslims in the UK.

The previous chapters have looked at the various perspectives of the British Asian immigrant experience of existing in secular England, considering the socio-political climate of which the novels have been set. Chapter One considered secular ambivalence through the perspective of first- and second-generation Bangladeshi immigrants in post-imperial and post-9/11 British culture. The chapter presented different approaches to integration and assimilation, ranging from Mrs Azad's complete assimilation and to Mrs Islam's isolation. Chanu and Karim presented the perspective of those unable to find a sense of belonging in England and rejected secular Britain altogether by seeking a sense of belonging elsewhere. The ambivalence presented did not propose any sufficient modes of coexistence. Chapter Two, on the other hand, directed attention to more contemporary perspectives, indicating that the challenges presented by Ali's *Brick Lane* still pervades the British imaginary as presented in *Home Fire.* Shamsie's depiction of a post-7/7 British culture discussed the issue of belonging in a state that defines its Muslim citizens as suspects. The precious chapters have thus directed attention to how major developments in UK immigration policies, common attitudes, and national concerns has led to the precarious position of British Muslims. This in turn has complicated the already ambivalent situation in approaching secular culture. In expressing these concerns, both Ali and Shamsie are similarly directing attention to the possibility of a future Britain with a more inclusive definition of a people and a more sufficient mode of coexistence.

This chapter is dedicated to evaluating the novels perspectives of the future. The first section of the chapter argues that *Brick Lane*'s Shahana Ahmed and *Home Fire*'s Eamonn Lone both symbolize hope by means of changing and challenging the trajectory of their older generation. Both depict how inclusionary modes of secular culture can be utilized in terms of identity and understanding. Shahana, daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, does so by her performance of British-born confidence in demonstrating the possibility of claiming Britain as her home. Eamonn, on the other hand, symbolizes hope through his awareness of the precarious position of British Muslims through his cross-cultural encounters with the Pasha sisters and through his own experiences with prejudice. The secularized, upper-class son of the British Home Secretary is confronted with his own precariousness based on his appearance as half-Pakistani. This even position *him* vulnerable to suspicion in the socio-political climate of which the novel is set. The following section juxtaposes the novels' conclusions in how they illustrate a future of coexistence. *Brick Lane* ends in a state of utopian optimism. Nazneen and Razia points to the possibility of harmonious coexistence, where minority and majority culture thrives together. *Home Fire* ends in a state of desperate pessimism. The ending points to an insufficient multicultural policy where neither the secularized nor pious Muslim is included. I argue that Ali's optimism and Shamsie's pessimism are used to emphasize the same message; namely the necessity to redirect the current state policies of multiculturalism.

3.1. The Allusion of Hope: A More Sufficient Notion of Coexistence?

Brick Lane's Shahana Ahmed and *Home Fire*'s Eamonn Lone illustrates a positive approach to the future of coexistence and multiculturalism in the UK. Shahana's British-born confidence suggests an alternative notion of an accessible-to-all British identity, in which British Asians are able to claim a more coherent position in society. Eamonn, on the other hand, illustrates the positive effect of acknowledging the common process of cross pressures. By directing attention to the possibility of growth in mutual understanding for one another's cultural positions, he is indirectly signifying to everyone else the benefits of widening one's perspectives of the other. Together they signal different approaches to their common desire of an inclusive "home" in Britain.

3.1.1. British-born Confidence for Future Generations to Come

Brick Lane's Shahana, the rebellious older daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, represents a model example of British Asian identity. This is evident by the way she can be read as embodying British-born confidence (Upstone, "SAME OLD" 338). She illustrates a possibility of a new form of confidence emerging from her generation of British-born immigrants (337). She presents a new approach to secular society that differ from the older generation of immigrants and their connection to their migrant past (337). Shahana's British-born confidence can be traced through her association to a more global street culture which is presented as stronger than her connection to a diasporic consciousness (338). Shahana expresses a strong commitment to a future in the UK by means of opposing her father's desire of moving them back to Bangladesh (338). By emphasising her desire to stay in England, and rejecting the patriarchal society her father represents, Shahana can be argued to symbolize a better future through her depiction of an optimistic approach of coexistence in Britain (Majed 116).

Shahana's British-born confidence can be traced through her rejection of her parents' cultural heritage. When her parents are discussing the probability of moving back to Bangladesh, she tells them that she will run away at any attempt on forcing her to come with them (Ali 218, 365, 466). While her parents find it valuable for her to acquire knowledge of their culture, tradition, and language, Shahana opposes:

> Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than a poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back home. (Ali 182)

Moreover, Shahana perceives the traditional customs of her parents' cultural origin as frightening, alien, and somewhat backward. This is evident in a conversation with her little sister Bibi, when they are talking about their father's plan of moving the family back to Bangladesh. Their perception of Bangladesh as alien is presented through their idea of the country's lack of toilet paper and toothbrushes. Further, their approach to Bengali culture as frightening and backward is presented through Shahana's spiteful comment to Bibi when she says that "[j]ust wait until you're in Bangladesh … You'll be married off in no time … And your husband will keep you locked up in a little smelly room and make you weave carpets all day long'" (Ali 397). Arranged or forced marriage is perceived by the siblings as the ultimate threat, and a consequence they must face if they do not behave adequately (Liao 117). They have heard of former cases where young girls from their ethnic community in London's East End have been married off and sent to live in the village of Bangladesh, as when Jorina's son misbehaved and "they wanted to save the daughter" (Ali 51). Pei-Chen Liao has pointed to the cultural approach of preserving female sexuality and national heritage as more important than the wants and needs of their younger female members (117). To Shahana, this practice distinguishes from the Western culture she is affiliating with.

Furthermore, Shahana's British-born confidence is evident by the way she depicts her affiliation to Britain as steady. She embraces British culture and emphasises a desire to assimilate (Germanà 74; Newland 240). She is a British-born citizen who considers Bangladesh a foreign country; when asked where she is from, she answers firmly that "I'm from London" (Ali 298). Her cultural reference point is England, and the only identifications she has to Bengali culture, tradition, and customs, is through her parents (Pereira-Ares 207). Consequently, Shahana's British Asian identity is presented as unambiguous. Shahana lacks interest in her parents' cultural heritage. In her desire to assimilate and being considered an equal, British citizen, she refuses the traditions of her Bengali origins in order not to be recognized as different from her British fellows (Pereira-Ares 207). Nonetheless, growing up a teenager in multicultural London presents her with different challenges than those of her parents (Roupakia 650). She is not faced with the same pressure to de-essentialize in order to assimilate, as the religious, cultural, and linguistic essence of her parents has not become of important essence to her own identity. In claiming Britain as her home, embracing cross-cultural interactions, and celebrating a British Asian identity in the way she enjoys sandwiches with "cream cheese spread with mango pickle" (Ali 492), Shahana illustrates hope for future generations to come in confidently declaring her place in multicultural Britain.

3.1.2. The Possibility of Changed Perspectives and Extended Comprehension

Home Fire's Eamonn Lone represents hope for future coexistence. Through the character of Eamonn, Kamila Shamsie depicts the possibility of changed attitudes and awareness as a result from cross-cultural encounters. Chapter Two discussed Eamonn's ignorant position in the socio-political environment of contemporary Britain. Throughout the novel, Eamonn's perception of current events changes drastically. The way in which Eamonn symbolizes hope is explicitly stated through Aneeka, as she tells him that "You were hope" (Shamsie 97). Though the hope she is referring to is directed toward him helping her get her jihadi brother's corpse back to England, this same hope can be interpreted in terms of better conditions of the British Muslim position. As a result of his relationship with Aneeka, Eamonn changes his position of ignorance and presumption of "the enlightenment project of western civilization" as taught by his father, to developing a critical gaze on British secular culture (Banerjee 298).

Through his cross-cultural interactions, Eamonn is able to expand his perspective of British culture. This is alluded when he asks himself "[w]hat is the point of surrounding yourself with other versions of yourself all the time?" (Shamsie 83). It is possible to interpret Eamonn as acknowledging his earlier one-sided perspective through his self-reflective thought. Nevertheless, by only ever surrounding himself with other versions of himself, he has never needed to "account for his own character" (29). His earlier perspective changes throughout his encounters with the Pasha sisters. Aneeka and Isma challenges his perception of society and makes him aware of their demanding reality. Eamonn himself acquires insight to their everyday struggles when experiencing the prejudicial nature of his own environment, as exemplified through an interaction with his friends. After isolating himself in his love-bubble with Aneeka, Eamonn's friend Max jokingly comments that:

> ’I don’t know,’ Max said. ‘Twenty-something unemployed male form Muslim background exhibits rapidly altered patterns of behaviour, cuts himself off from old friends, moves under the radar. Also, are we sure that’s an evening shadow rather than an incipient beard? I think we may need to alert the authorities.’ (Shamsie 82)

Through Max’s humorous joke, Eamonn experience the effect of suspicion directed towards British Muslims in the racist climate following the war on terror as pervading the British imaginary. Though Max immediately comments that “[a]t least he’s drinking Pimm’s, so we know we haven’t lost him completely” (82), his former statement reflects the hostile attitudes circulating society.

Through his interactions with the Pasha’s and his own experiences of concealed prejudice, Eamonn becomes more critical of his father’s conservative politics. This is evident in the way he reflects on his politician father’s pro-assimilation speech at a predominantly Muslim school. Karamat stated with a strong voice that the reason Muslim’s are treated different, is because they “set [themselves] apart in the way [they] dress, the way [they] think, the outdated codes of behaviours [they] cling to, [and] the ideologies to which [they] attach [their] loyalties” (Shamsie 87-88). Eamonn reflects that “Eamonn of a month ago would have been proud” (88). Moreover, he directs his thoughts towards the ways the media is unable to “reveal the things that were most striking about [Aneeka] in those moments [of prayer]” (88). Through his reflective perspective we can interpret Eamonn as establishing an elaborated understanding of faith-based practices, and nonetheless an extended comprehension of those rejecting complete assimilation (Banerjee 298). Eamonn’s idealistic view of love over politics, of pluralism over homogeneity, of embracing difference as opposed to suppressing it, is perceived by his father as “weak” (Shamsie 236). This in turn reflects his father’s pessimistic view of the development of the secular culture and its relationship to its Muslim minority. Eamonn “acknowledged to himself he had no idea how the world might take him from this moment to that imagined one – he knew only they all would have to find a way to make it happen” (103). This indicates not only a nascent hope for the possibility of overcoming class, faith and political fracture, but also hints at the possibility for “a conversation between the state and the British Muslim community outside the sphere of radicalization and suspicion” (Banerjee 298; Moynagh 202). In this way, his naivety can be read as optimism for a desirable notion of coexistence in the multicultural British society.

3.1.3. A New Generation of Hope?

By confidently embracing a British Asian identity, Shahana is presenting the possibility to claim a home in Britain and to rightfully profess a present position in society. She is celebrating British culture and proposes an alternative of living in Britain where culture can be defined in heterogenous terms. Eamonn, on the other hand, presents hope for a future notion of coexistence that is defined by inclusivity and understanding. Through his expanded perspective of the marginalized position of British Muslims in society, Eamonn emphasizes the possibility and power of attaining a deeper comprehension for others in order to for societal change. Eamonn illustrates the possibility of changing from naïve and ignorant, to becoming educated and understanding. Together, Shahana and Eamonn represent the possibility of harmonious coexistence where different representatives of society can extend their perspectives. Shahana illustrates the possibility of a British Asian identity without approaching society through assimilation or isolation. Eamonn opens the conversation to deeper understanding for the marginalized, with aims of inclusivity. With the confident immigrant being welcomed to a more understanding majority society – they together propose a sense of hope for a future to come.

3.2. Exploded Potential – Exposing What Can Be

The hope presented by Shahana and Eamonn is approached differently in the ending of each novel. Both *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* depict interesting conclusions by means of alluding a future condition of British Muslims in a secular, multicultural Britain. *Brick Lane* offers an optimistic ending that can be read as utopian by the way its conclusion pivots from the more ambiguous and pessimistic nature of its context. *Home Fire,* on the other hand, presents a pessimistic ending which to some extent can be read as exaggerated. Even though their endings are contrasting, their motives are the same. Both conclusions can be understood as pointing towards the necessary means of radical change in terms of British multiculturalism – the need for a more sufficient mode of coexistence. Moreover, the comparative reading of the novels suggests that the same issue of exclusion is as prominent in 2001 and they are in 2015. Though the socio-political climate of the UK has changed, and each novel is presented in a time-period of extraordinary circumstances, the need for Britain to become more inclusive in terms of its British Muslim population, is crucial.

3.2.1. Utopian Optimism and Harmony in Secular Culture

Brick Lane offers an optimistic conclusion that speaks to the future in terms of hope of a better condition of coexistence in secular Britain. As discussed in Chapter One, the various perspectives on the immigrant position in London showed that the multicultural policy of the state can neither be said to be sufficient nor exclusively inclusive. The perspective presented in the novel's conclusion tackles this issue in a less pessimistic tone. Nazneen decides that neither she nor her daughters are leaving with Chanu for Bangladesh. The novel's final lines depict Razia and Nazneen's daughters surprising Nazneen by taking her ice-skating in central London:

> 'Here are your boots, Amma.'
> Nazneen turned around. To get on the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there.
> She said, 'But you can't skate in a sari.'
> Razia was already lacing her boots. 'This is England,' she said. 'You can do whatever you like.' (Ali 494)

The image constructed in the novel's ending illustrates a utopian reality of the British Muslim position in a post-9/11 British culture. Sarah Upstone argues that a more realistic ending is less important in terms of Monica Ali utilizing the novel's conclusion by means of declaring what could potentially become ("Representation and Realism" 171). The ending points to what British Muslim identity potentially could be before 9/11 and the race riots in northern England in 2001, and nevertheless the potential of what it can become in the future (173). Nonetheless, the novel's ending can be read as emphasizing a desire for change, a hope for the future framed in optimism as to visualize a potential of what could be.

Moreover, this potential can be understood as a utopian alternative to coexistence that goes beyond the limits of the current situation of British Muslims position in secular Britain (Upstone, "Representations and Realism" 176). It can thus be read as a political statement that proposes an alternative that includes the possibility for the hidden to be revealed (Majed 112; Poon 435). The sight of Nazneen in her colourful sari on the "[g]linting, dazzling, enchanting ice" (Ali 494) provides an image of "harmonious coexistence between Western and Eastern elements" (Pereira-Ares 215). This image requests a multicultural Britain where British Muslims can be included without renouncing their cultural heritage (215). As discussed in Chapter One, Mrs Azad promoted an assimilationist approach to secular Britain in terms of hiding her cultural and religious background. Mrs Islam, on the other hand, promoted an isolationist approach based on her fear of de-essentialism. The alternative of multicultural Britain as depicted in the novel's ending points to a future that "is based on the existence, interchange, and creative engagement between Western and Eastern cultural forms on the part of both the minority and the majority community, without this implying the blurring of cultural differences" (215). In terms of this future desire of a new mode of coexistence, Upstone emphasizes the ending's creation of a "thirdplace," in which religious devotion is possible in the secularized space of British society ("Representation and Realism" 173). This "thirdplace," Upstone argues, postulates a new mode of coexistence as an alternative to existing government discourses, by means of reaching beyond current definitions of both multiculturalism and community cohesion (173). Moreover, intertwined in the suggested utopian alternative to coexistence in secular Britain, is the hope for a renewed multiculturalism. In these terms the goal is to promote Britain as a "community of communities," by means of emphasizing integration rather than toleration or simply accommodation, to radicalize the current notion of multiculturalism (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain 48; Upstone, "Representation and Realism" 175). In this alternative mode of coexistence, a potential of revised post-9/11 multiculturalism, Razia can embrace England for giving her the possibility of doing "whatever you like" (Ali 494), while wearing her headscarf and her Union Jack jumper, and Nazneen can ice-skate in her sari (Upstone, "Representation and Realism" 175-176).

Furthermore, the ending of *Brick Lane* also proposes an alternative approach for the migrant-subject in claiming a home within multicultural Britain. The finishing lines suggests an expansive notion of Englishness, in which it points to a new understanding of what defines culture (Poon 435). Sarah Upstone argues for a new sense of hybrid identity that is "less about being "in-between" cultures and more about the fact that culture is now, in essence, "in-between" ("SAME OLD" 336). This new hybrid form of British belonging can be traced to Nazneen and her daughters desire to stay in London, as opposed to joining Chanu in Bangladesh. Nazneen – representing the migrant position, and her daughters – representing the British-born, ultimately announces their belonging in Britain by claiming England as their home (343). Nonetheless, this indicates "a universalized belonging" by means of following an "alternative model of coterminous residence and belonging to be identified with the British-born subject" (343). By claiming their belonging as British Muslims, they are simultaneously claiming their right to British citizenship. Though Nazneen and her daughters only ever considered to leave with Chanu, Upstone argues for a sense of return in their decision to stay ("Representation and Realism" 173). This return can be understood as radical, in that it marks them as distinctly present in British society; a society where their citizenship is pervaded by post-9/11 discourses (173).

As argued above, the conclusion of *Brick Lane* offers an alternative to a more sufficient solution of the challenges facing British Muslim's sense of belonging. Even though the conclusion is optimistic, the novel has throughout drawn attention to British Muslims limitations and challenged the notion of coexistence in secular Britain. Following the events on 9/11 and the race riots in England in 2001, the progress of multiculturalism leading up to the events has been tampered by the extraordinary situations (Upstone, "Representation and Realism" 173; Upstone, "SAME OLD" 344). The optimism characterizing the novel's ending is damaged by the dreadful nature of much of the novel's plot by directing awareness towards the reality of British Muslims challenges with anti-immigrant prejudice and migrant alienation (Upstone, "SAME OLD" 344). Following the events of 2001, a "new and insidious form of religious discrimination" has altered the course of suppression (344). This has been evident throughout *Home Fire*, which culminates in the novel's conclusion.

The years following 9/11 did not introduce a more inclusive approach to British Muslims. The rise of ISIS from 2013 onwards and the increase of foreign fighters from the UK and elsewhere, established an even more precarious position for Muslims in the UK.

3.2.2. Inflated Pessimisms Echoing Greek Tragedy

Home Fire offers a dramatic ending with a pessimistic outlook on the future of coexistence between British Muslims and the majority society in multicultural Britain. Eamonn has travelled to Pakistan to be with Aneeka, who is mourning her brother. There is a crowd of people and journalists at the park in Karachi where Aneeka and Parvaiz's corpse is located. When Eamonn arrives, two men secure a bomb around his waist. Aneeka recognizes Eamonn:

> The man with the explosives around his waist holds up both his hands to stop her from coming to him. *Run!* he shouts. *Get away from me, run!* And run she does, crashing right into him. … At first the man in the navy shirt struggles, but her arms are around him, she whispers something, and he stops. She rests her cheek against his, he drops his head to kiss her shoulder. For a moment they are two lovers in a park, under an ancient tree, sun-dappled, beautiful and at peace. (Shamsie 260)

Nalini Iyer's reading of the novel's conclusion include an understanding of the death of Eamonn and Aneeka, the Home Secretary's son and the sister of the ISIS traitor, as imposed by terrorists to revenge Parvaiz's betrayal and strategically pivoting the media narrative back to their trajectory of fear and violence (146). More importantly, the final scene, wrapped in the couple's last moment of peace, implicitly states that neither the religious nor secular Muslim's are welcome in a post-9/11 British imaginary (146). Though this is exaggerated to some extent, Keeble and Annesley argue that the novel's ending does depict a pessimistic perspective of multiculturalism in the liberal-democratic state of the UK (81).

The novel's ending can thus be understood as a critique of the multicultural policy of the UK. Throughout the novel, attitudes and legislation towards British citizenship has been explored from the perspective of both the marginalized and the majority (Burns 188). Lorna Burns points to the post-imperial British imaginary as pervaded by the decline of the British empire and its expansionist agenda which ultimately has led to uncertainty in British superiority (Burns 188). In this imaginary, Paul Gilroy argues for the appearance of a new form of racism that is "primarily concerned with mechanism of inclusion and exclusion" (45). He argues that this new form of racism,

> specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose 'origin, sentiment or citizenship' assigns them elsewhere. … West Indians, for example, are seen as a bastard people occupying an indeterminate space between the Britishness which is their colonial legacy and an amorphous, ahistorical relationship with the dark continent and those parts of the new world where they have been able to reconstitute it. Asians on the other hand … are understood to be bound by cultural and biological ties which merit the status of a fully formed, alternative national identity. They pose a threat to the British way of life by virtue of their strength and cohesion. For different reasons, both groups are judged to be incompatible with authentic forms of Englishness. (Gilroy 45)

This new racism Gilroy describes, continues to pervade the British imaginary as renewed or enhanced in the climate of the war on terror. The pessimistic nature of the novel's general plot portrays a multicultural society eroded by inequality and cracks, and thus emphasize the failures of racial politics in Britain (Keeble and Annesley 90, 93). Gabriella Pishotti discusses the distinction between grievable and ungrievable bodies, arguing that the secularized Eamonn can be considered grievable and worth protecting, whereas Aneeka represents the ungrievable

(358). The distinction between humans as grievable or ungrievable is connected to a dehumanizing effect which ultimately devalues certain individuals to a state of abjection (349). Considering Gilroy's new racism, Eamonn represents those who can be included, whereas Aneeka represents the excluded. By implying that both Eamonn and Aneeka ends up dead in the novel's conclusion, then, symbolizes a fusion of what they each represent, which ultimately function to separate their distinctions (Pishotti 358). This dramatic ending emphasizes the challenge of exclusion and discrimination in the secular state which has been aggravated by the contemporary war on terror (Burns 189).

Through its pessimistic nature, the novel's critique of the current situation extends to inspire change (Keeble and Annesley 90, 93). Aneeka's decision to embrace Eamonn instead of running away, has been understood as a sacrifice that can be read as an act of resistance (Pishotti 359). Her action forced "witnesses to recognize her human dignity and thus subverting the power of those voices that sought to deny it" (359). Scholars point to the political significance of *Home Fire* as an adoption of Sophocles Greek tragedy *Antigone* (See for example Burns; Lau and Mendes; Pishotti). In her chapter on "Antigone's Political Legacies," Tina Chanter points to the anticipating effect of Antigone, by which it allows the prediction of a different "future of a politics yet to come" (21, 39). This renewed politics announced through Antigone, she argues, lies between her resistance and political protest, and "the defiance of all those political protesters to have followed in her steps, some of whom are still to come" (21). Through Aneeka, then, as Antigone's descendant, Shamsie promotes the possibility of future change to follow, "a postcolonial, post-racist, anti-repressive, anti-imperialist future," in the aftermath of Aneeka's sacrifice (39). What Chanter suggest is a new identity,

> of a world in which political protestors against the war on Iraq are not conflated with terrorists, but rather recognized as calling for a future for democracy that is yet to come, a future in which the rhetoric in the service of freedom is not merely an empty ideal, but one with determinate content. (Chanter 41)

Aneeka's sacrifice can nonetheless be understood as a heroic action by standing up for what she believes through distinguishing herself from an imaginary that has determined her actions (43). She has refused the current notion of British identity to determine her own. By doing so, she challenges the underlying debate that defines such identity, and forces a discussion to redefine its definition (43). In this way then, the novel, especially through its ending, proposes the necessity of change to establish a sufficient mode of coexistence in multicultural Britain.

3.2.3. Optimism and Pessimism: Two Sides of the Same Story

The essence of each ending establishes an interesting ground for comparison. Both Ali and Shamsie criticize their current notion of coexistence and contemporary multiculturalism. Ali's optimism and Shamsie's pessimism functions as a similar approach to tackle the current issue of exclusion in state polity. The British culture and socio-political situation of each novel differ by means of *Brick Lane* being pervaded by post-imperial and post-9/11 discourses, while *Home Fire* is affected by the discourses of the war on terror and the debates leading up to the Brexit vote. What juxtaposing the novels suggest, is that British culture in 2001 versus c. 2015 remains defined in exclusionary terms in reference to its Muslim minority citizens. It is important to note that, while the novels illustrate different perspectives on the challenges of its first-, second- and third-generation immigrants. The essence of their critique directs attention to the same sense of inequality, discrimination, and prevalence of Islamophobia as a consequence of both cultural underpinnings and state governance. Both novels suggest a disappointing view of the state of British multiculturalism, and points to the necessity of future change. The ending of *Brick Lane* takes a more optimistic approach than its more pessimistically presented context. By doing so, Ali emphasizes the unrealistic sense of her utopian conclusion. *Home Fire*, on the other hand, exaggerates its overall pessimism in its conclusion. Shamsie uses the peaceful moment of the two lovers of Aneeka and Eamonn to intensify the insidiousness of the state's governance, dramatized through the ending's tragedy.

Both conclusions can be understood as directing attention to the possibility of what can be. *Brick Lane* does so by illustrating what British Muslim identity had the potential to be before 9/11 as well as what it still has the potential to become. By strategically framing this in optimism, Ali illustrates how this can be envisioned. Her joyful image of the girls going ice-skating in London can be understood as a political statement. The harmonious fusion of Eastern and Western culture points to an understanding of British culture as renewed in terms of its pluralism, illustrating that British culture no longer is distinguished by cultures in plural, but that a singular, pluralistic British culture has emerged. Ali thus suggests an alternative approach to existing alternatives to multiculturalism, by means of including Muslims more explicitly in society rather than positioning them in their earlier space of absent-present. Furthermore, this echoes the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain's suggestion of establishing a "community of communities" based on integration in favour of earlier notions of mere toleration and accommodation. Ali is suggesting a community of universalized belonging which follows an expanded notion of Englishness, where British Muslims can exist without being deprived of their cultural heritage and religious affiliation. This potential of an inclusionary definition of British Muslim identity after 9/11 as portrayed by Ali's utopian optimism, can be understood as demolished in our reading of *Home Fire*.

Shamsie suggests a possibility of what can be in a different manner than Ali. Her depiction of a future notion of coexistence is portrayed in pessimistic terms. Nevertheless, her pessimistic approach need not be perceived as a total rapture of Ali's hope for the future. What Shamsie illustrated is first and foremost that Ali's ambitions for a more inclusive definition of British Muslims has not yet become a reality. To some extent, Shamsie can be considered to continue Ali's aspiration. *Home Fire* points to an extended notion of Muslim exclusion if we interpret the death of Eamonn and Aneeka as symbolizing that there is no room for neither the secularized nor the pious Muslim in Britain. Shamsie emphasizes the effect of the war on terror as enhancing earlier condition of exclusion and discrimination. The events of 9/11 and its aftermath has been considered an exceptional situation and the reason for the more precarious position of Muslims in the West. Nonetheless, Shamsie directs attention to the possibility of regarding the war on terror in similar terms, or if the contemporary climate pervaded by threats of terror is the new normal. Either way, Shamsie is critical to the prejudgement of British Muslims as potential suspects. Furthermore, by displaying Aneeka's political resistance in the spirit of Antigone, Shamsie dramatizes the fundamental need of renewed politics and a more inclusive definition of British identity.

3.3. Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the possibility of a secular culture defined by a more sufficient mode of coexistence. The first section investigated this by considering the underlying presence of secular inclusionary modes. Shahana portrayed the ability of claiming her right to an authentic life in the UK through her British-born confidence. Moreover, through emphasising the possibility of claiming her presence in secular society, she is proposing a changed approach to the new generation of immigrants to follow. Eamonn, on the other hand, depicted the benefits of acknowledging the presence of the common process of cross pressures. He illustrated its potential to be a tool in developing awareness and understanding of other people's cultural position. By emphasizing the inclusionary modes of secular culture both Shahana and Eamonn propose hope for a better future of the immigrant position in Britain. The possibility of sufficiency is ingrained in secular principles. Thus, they need to be revealed in secular culture and state governance in order to enable change. This is discussed in the next section.

The following section discussed the necessity of changing the definition of secular culture and its insufficient approach to coexistence, by juxtaposing the endings of *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire.* Both novels offer a pessimistic understanding of their contemporary situations. Ali uses utopian optimism in directing attention to a future yet to come. She illustrates the potential within secular culture by means of extending the inclusionary modes and definition of authenticity and common national identity. Shamsie, on the other hand, expresses the issues with the conflict of exclusionary modes that pervades contemporary British secular culture. By implying the death of both the secularized and pious Muslim, she is directing attention to the dangerous trajectory of enhanced exclusion of Muslim citizens. Ali and Shamsie's conclusions strongly suggests a need for a conversation to re-define the current definition of British identity. Moreover, they is amplifying the necessity of implementing a focus on inclusion, equality, and freedom.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore the exclusionary dynamics that fuel cultural tension within a United Kingdom governed by secular assumptions and institutions. This thesis has argued that the way Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* exposes the dominance of exclusionary implications and pressures in the secular ambivalence of British majority culture, through its encounters with Muslim minorities. Moreover, this thesis has attempted to suggest that the socio-political situation in the United Kingdom as situated in the novels' respective periods of 1985 to 2001 *and* 2014 to 2016 has complicated the Muslim immigrant experience of adapting to a British secular culture by means of challenging their right of living authentic lives.

The purpose of Chapter One has been to analyse *Brick Lane* by emphasizing first- and second-generation Bangladeshi immigrants experience with integration and assimilation through their encounters with the tensions within British secular culture. The period of 1985 illustrates post-imperial tensions in British culture that complicated the first-generation Bengali immigrants in adapting to society. Many of the Bangladeshi immigrants living in Britain in this period has experience de-colonialization, something that affect their perception of the United Kingdom as their colonial motherland. The issue of non-white immigration with implications of colonial and imperial racism pervades the socio-political climate leading up to 2001. The multicultural "peak" of the report by the Commission of the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000, is altered by racial and religious antagonism following the 11 September attacks in the UK and the riots in the UK. Both first- and second-generation immigrants are introduced to a new form of insidious religious discrimination.

Chapter One found that the secular opportunities as inclusive are matched by different inclusionary pressures stemming from racisms and historically inherited hierarchies. The characters presented different coping strategies ranging from assimilation to isolation to exile, based on their approach on and understanding of the British secular culture. The female characters, Mrs Azad, Razia, and Nazneen, as discussed in the first section of the chapter, illustrated the prominence of secular inclusion, by means of their perception of British culture as emancipating and liberating in terms of its opportunities of individualism and freedom. Yet, the underlying condition of their position in secular society is defined in terms of being hierarchically lower and thus unequal to their white British neighbours, through their acceptance of the prevalence of racism and discrimination.

Nevertheless, the inclusionary ideal of secular culture is complicated by the prominence of exclusionary pressures as discussed in the following section. Mrs Islam, Chanu, Karim, and the Bengal Tigers, illustrated different angles of the ambivalent situation. Both Mrs Islam and Chanu emphasizes their need to preserve their cultural heritage. To maintain a sense of pride and power, Mrs Islam chooses to segregate. On the contrary, Chanu explores several approaches to British culture. His initial understanding of Britain as a place of opportunities, attractions, and mutual respect is complicated by his encounter with a society he finds oppressive and discriminatory. His strategies of conforming *then* rejecting assimilation fails to offer him an authentic life in England, which ultimately results in Chanu leaving Britain altogether. Moreover, Karim and the Bengal Tigers expresses their concern for all internal and external Muslims. Their concerns are marked by the reinforced Islamophobia and anti-immigrant forces pervading British secular culture. Their perception of the Muslim position in the socio-political situation as unequal and deprived of rights is challenged by the Lion Hearts as representing far-right anti-immigration attitudes. Moreover, xenophobic attitudes and misrepresentation of Muslims in the media following 9/11 complicated the already ambivalent situation of Muslims in secular culture. What these findings suggest, is that the process of adapting to a post-imperial and post-9/11 British culture is complicated by the exclusionary implications of the secular.

The purpose of Chapter Two has been to analyse *Home Fire* in terms of how British Muslims of different class and belief experience with the ambivalent situation of secular culture by emphasizing how the socio-political climate complicated the inclusionary opportunities of authenticity and common identity. The novel is set in the period of c. 2014-2016. The socio-political climate of which the characters find themselves in are pervaded by exclusionary implications constructed by the rise of ISIS and the war on terror, *and* the political tensions leading up to the Brexit vote. The insidious religious discrimination of British Muslim citizens is prevalent in this socio-political situation. Multicultural policies are challenged by the threat of terror, in which politicians such as David Cameron expressed that British multiculturalism had failed and rather promoted a weaker collective identity as a cause of domestic terrorism. Multiculturalism thus took a shift from integration to emphasizing assimilation. Through hardened rhetoric on shared British values and terrorism as the number one priority of national security priority, British Muslims became prone to both public and governmental suspicion which nonetheless placed them in a precarious position in British secular culture. The precariousness of British Muslims increased alongside the political discussion of stripping British extremists of their citizenship.

Chapter Two found that the ambivalent situation of British secular culture is complicated by insidious religious discrimination that challenges British Muslims sense of authenticity, freedom, and equality. The situation defining the Muslim immigrant experience of British society is depicted in the novel as characterized by fear, suspicion, and anxiety. The chapter found that racist exclusion and historically inherited hierarchies is nonetheless enhanced in contemporary society, resulting by the prevalent distinction of *us* versus *them.* This distinction can be understood as a consequence of the war on terror as a national security concern. Moreover, this consequently constructed the categorization of Muslim citizens as either "good" or "bad." As in Chapter One, Chapter Two present different perspective of and approaches on secular culture. The first section found that even Karamat, representing the British Home Secretary, is in a position that complicated his experience of the culture. Karamat perceives assimilation as the ultimate means of inclusion. Acknowledging the precarious position of his Muslim past, Karamat finds it inevitable to promote exclusionary pressures of cultural cohesion. Moreover, Isma's experience of secular culture is different, as she approaches authenticity by rejecting complete assimilation. With her father and brother tying her to Islamic extremism, Isma is prone to suspicion and thus must prove her alliance to the state. Her process of proving her loyalty to Britain constructs ambivalence in Isma's position in society. When conforming to the expectations of society, she simultaneously has to accept her unequal position which evidently complicates her opportunity of living her authentic way of life. Moreover, the chapter has also directed attention to the secularized character of Eamonn. His portrayal of an uncomplicated and ignorant approach to secular culture emphasizes the argument of the Muslim experience as complicating the ambivalent situation provoked by secularism.

The following section found that the exclusionary modes of British secular society provoke rejection. Parvaiz demonstrated the process of rejection and radicalization as a consequence of factors *within* British culture. His fragile state of stigmatization and alienation made him even more vulnerable to cross pressures based on his lack of a sense of belonging. Aneeka, on the other hand, presented her rejection of secular culture and British governance as triggered by the exclusionary pressures in state actions. Her initial embrace of British inclusivity is complicated by the state's ruthless handling of her brother's death, as she questioned its ability in maintain equality, tolerance, and human rights. Moreover, the media's mediation of the Pasha siblings emphasizes Aneeka's question, as the media is depicted to misrepresent Muslims through its Islamophobic rhetoric that nonetheless reinforces hateful attitudes. The chapters presentation of the ISIS recruiter Farooq found that the exclusionary implications of the secular could be used as propaganda.

The purpose of Chapter Three was to evaluate the different pressures examined in Chapter One and Chapter Two through juxtaposing *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* in terms of what they perceive for the future experience of British Muslims, considering the complex situation provoked by secularism as a cultural phenomenon *and* a consequence of state action. The reading of *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* suggests that the United Kingdom as governed by secular assumptions and institutions is faced with an urgent need to radical change in approaching its Muslim communities. Both the socio-political climate of *Brick Lane,* pervaded by post-imperial and post-9/11 discourses, *and* the socio-political situation in *Home Fire,* pervaded by tensions constructed by the war and terror and debates leading up to Brexit, has been illustrated as constructing an ambivalent situation in the experience of Muslim immigrants encounter with secular culture.

This chapter has found both *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* suggested that the inclusionary principles comprising secularism can be used to ensure a social framework where all citizens can be perceived as equals through a common notion of British identity. The first section of the chapter illustrated this by juxtaposing *Brick* Lane's Shahana and *Home Fire*'s Eamonn as representing a developed notion of confident British Asian identity that can be secured through acknowledging and respecting one another's cultural position. Both Shahana and Eamonn emphasized the underlying presence of secular inclusion and opportunities. The chapter found that Shahana's British-born confidence pointes to the possibility of Muslim immigrants in claiming their right to an authentic life and present position in Britain. Moreover, Eamonn directed attention to how the society can benefit of being aware of the common process of cross pressures in order to develop a mutual understanding and widened perspective of one another's cultural position. Together, the new generation proposes optimism for the future condition of immigrant in British secular society.

The following section found that the conclusion of *Brick Lane* and *Home Fire* directs the same message to the future of the United Kingdom's policy of multiculturalism. Ali utilizes a utopian portrait of the future condition of Muslim immigrants in Britain by emphasizing the potential that lies *within* secular culture. Her optimistic ending points to the possibility of *what can be*, while simultaneously criticizing *what is*. Moreover, Shamsie utilizes the Greek tragedy of Antigone as a means to emphasize the hostile condition of the British Muslim position in multicultural Britain. Shamsie illustrates the issue of exclusionary pressures as prevailing in contemporary secular culture. Shamsie dramatizes the dangerous trajectory of enhanced exclusion of Muslim citizens in the novel's final lines that implies the death of both the secularized and pious Muslim. Finally, the novels conclusions suggest the necessity of re-defining the current definition of British identity *and* a re-focus on inclusionary tenets of equality and freedom.

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