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Other Cities:

Novels of Immigration in London and Paris

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

Nasia Anam

2016

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2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Other Cities:

Novels of Immigration in London and Paris

by

Nasia Anam

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Aamir R. Mufti, Co-Chair

Professor Ali Behdad, Co-Chair

Other Cities: Novels of Immigration in London and Paris compares the formal differences of 20th and 21st century British South Asian novels and French North African novels that depict the lives and spaces of urban immigrant communities while attending to historical contingency, legal archives, and public debates. This dissertation argues that novels of immigration bridge a transition from the categorical binaries of (post)coloniality to the multitudes of globalization. Fluctuations in legal and public discourse surrounding immigration profoundly affect the lived spaces of immigrant populations, and the literary rendering of these communities and neighborhoods reveals the volatile and productive forms of identity, solidarity, and radicalness that arise in the immigrant enclave. I examine not only the encounter between Europeans and postcolonial immigrants in the enclave, but also different kinds of immigrant figures—the

intellectual and the laborer, the urban and the rural, the Caribbean and the South Asian, the Antillean and the North African, the Muslim and the Hindu. The confrontation between different categories of immigrants plays out not only in the content of novels of immigration, but also on the level of form. My research investigates the relationship between vacillations in the status of immigrants in 20th century Britain and France and shifts in novelistic style across eight novels. I analyze the depiction of South Asians in London in novels by Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, and Monica Ali, which are placed in comparison with French novels depicting North Africans in Paris by Rachid Boudjedra, Driss Chraïbi, Leïla Sebbar, and Leïla Marouane. By transposing, and thereby complicating, the postcolonial problematics of hybridity, hegemony, and subalternity onto the contemporary European metropole, my dissertation challenges the geographic divide between center and periphery in conceptions of global culture—from theories of economic world systems to recent discussions of world literature. *Other Cities* posits the novel of immigration as the most symptomatic literary category through which to read the contemporary anxieties endemic to postcoloniality and globalization.

The dissertation of Nasia Anam is approved.

Lia N. Brozgal

Elizabeth DeLoughrey

Aamir R. Mufti, Committee Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2016

For Amma, who guides me still.

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Acknowledgments

There is that old chestnut that circulates among academics, often uttered with an exasperated eyeroll or a dismissive handwave, that all research is “me-search.” I cannot say with any degree of confidence that I have avoided the cliché—I have many dogs in this fight, if one’s dissertation can suitably be called a dogfight. “How did we get here?” is a question I often found myself asking as a child whose life in an antiseptic Midwestern suburb was punctuated with annual trips to the sweltering, chaotic din of Dhaka.

As the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants and as someone who came into adulthood at the very moment this country began its everlasting War on Terror, my own experiences very much informed the direction of my scholarly work. But there was one moment in my research, sometime around 2012, which made truly clear to me the stakes of my project. Sitting the Humanities Reading Room of the British Library, I began perusing a recently published sociological study of the Bangladeshi diaspora (Nazli Kibria’s *Muslims in Motion*). As I flipped through the book, I noticed that one the case studies was on the Bangladeshi community of Chicago and its suburbs. Specifically, the study focused on an organization called the “Bangladeshi Association of Greater Chicagoland,” or the BAGC. This was, in fact, the very cultural organization for which my father served as president for many years in the 1990s. In that moment I struggled to work through all of the fortuitous turns and twists in my life that had brought me, for all intents and purposes, to conduct funded research on my very own father in the British Library. This somewhat bizarre episode illustrates to me the ways my studies as a graduate student have not only helped me understand the historical catastrophes and contingencies that propel groups people to migrate across the globe; they have helped me understand the history of my own family.

The work I have done for my dissertation is thus very close to my heart. I would like to thank the many sources of research support I received at UCLA in the service of completing my dissertation including: the Department of Comparative Literature, the Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship, the

Center for European and Eurasian Studies, the International Institute, and the Mellon Pre-Dissertation Fellowship. Thank you to Angela Deaver Campbell and the Scholarship Resource Center for supporting me through my final year at UCLA.

I am so grateful for the inimitable professors and mentors I have had to privilege to work with at UCLA in my home department, Comparative Literature, as well as English and French. I cannot think of another institution or department where I could have pursued and completed this particular project with such a degree of depth and rigor. I would firstly like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. The work I have done with Aamir Mufti—as his student, his T.A., and his mentee—has been invaluable to me through the years. I am immensely inspired and motivated by his cutting-edge research, his demand for excellence, and his belief that the scholar of literature has a hand in changing the world. Ali Behdad has been an incredibly generous and steadfast guide throughout my graduate career, helping me become a more refined and savvy academic as I have advanced. His canny approach to scholarship has been a great influence in my own work. Liz DeLoughrey has helped me untangle some of the most difficult intellectual knots I have ever encountered. She has always encouraged me to think expansively and creatively, and keep sight of the delight and wonder that can and should be a part of academic work. Lia Brozgal has been a constant source of fortitude, *bon courage*, and much-needed reality checks. I would not have pursued the French half of my dissertation with such gusto if not for her encouragement and truly giving approach to mentorship.

I am also incredibly grateful to the professors at UCLA who played important roles at earlier stages in my dissertation work or at earlier stages in my graduate career. The work I did with Jenny Sharpe, Françoise Lionnet, Michelle Clayton, Vinay Lal, Eleanor Kaufman, and Efrain Kristal continues to inform the ways I approach my current research. Before coming to UCLA I had the opportunity to work with some wonderful professors in the Department of English at University of Michigan, including Jennifer Wenzel and the late, irreplaceable Patricia Yaeger. I will always be indebted to my dear undergraduate professors at the University of Chicago who showed me how to live the life of the mind, especially David Levin, Malynne Sternstein, and the late, magnificent Miriam Hansen.

People often say that being an academic is one of the most isolating career choices one could possibly make. I have found this to be far from my own experience. My colleagues at UCLA are not only brilliant and inspiring interlocutors, they are some of the most interesting, hilarious, and kind people I have ever had the privilege to call my friends. Thank you Alexei Nowak, Nic Testerman, Dana Linda, Zen Dochterman, Michelle Lee, Carolina Beltran and Duncan Yoon for being there in ways I didn't even know I needed. Thank you to Ruth Jones for sympathy and feedback. Thank you to Sarah-Neel Smith for steadying me when life became pure chaos. Thank you to Shir Alon and Fatima Burney being as dependable and dear to me as family. Thank you to Jeremy Schmidt for reorientalizing friendship. Thank you to Yuting Huang for catalyzing nearly every important breakthrough I have had in the past eight years, and in advance, for someday forming a school of thought with me.

Outside of UCLA, I want to thank Anna Wainwright and Saul Zaritt—old and beloved friends who knew me in my quirkiest UChicago incarnation and now continue to offer me kindness, intelligence, and life coaching as cherished colleagues. My wonderful friends Brittani Sonnenberg, Neela Banerjee, and Tanzila Ahmed have all kept me awake and aware of literature's beauty and power, and given me the courage to believe in myself as a writer.

I am indebted and deeply humbled by my fiercely loyal, loving, and fascinating family. They have been infinitely patient with me and offered strength and support when I most needed it through my years of graduate work. In my most desperate moments, my sister, Seeba Anam, has always given me inspiration, protection, support, and laughter. My brother-in-law, Sameer Patel, is unimaginably generous and sends very entertaining emails. Together they have brought pure, unadulterated joy and love into my life in the form of my niece and nephew, Saniya and Saahir Patel, who have somehow managed to break all the world records in both cuteness and precociousness.

My gratitude to my stalwart parents knows no bounds. My father, Molla Anam, is my wisest and most curious teacher, whose intrepidity and imagination never ceases to amaze me. From him I have learned the value of taking risks. My mother, Murshida Anam, showed me what it is to be steadfast, loyal, and uncompromising in the pursuit of excellence. From her I learned the art of quiet defiance. I have

never known two braver people. My hope, in finishing this decade's long endeavor, is that I have been able to make my father proud and live up to my mother's wishes for me. I would not have chosen this path or stayed the course if not for the example they set.

And finally, I am grateful to the city of Los Angeles, for all the real and metaphorical sunshine it has beamed into my life, for melting what was icy, and bleaching out what was dark.

Curriculum Vita

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2015 Review of *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, by Srinavath Ragavan, for *Interventions*, Volume 17, Issue 2

2010 Review of *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times*, by Tanika Sarkar, for the *Journal of South Asian History and Culture*, Volume 1, Issue 3

Presentations

2016 “The Loose Canon: Zia Haider Rahman and Self-Conscious Postcoloniality.” Presented at the Modern Language Association, Austin

2015 “The Immigrant Enclave as a Borderland.” Presented at the South Asian Literary Association, Vancouver

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Introduction

We are here because you were there.

— A. Sivanandan, Institute of Race Relations, United Kingdom

Mass migration and immigration has unquestionably become one of the most urgent matters in our contemporary moment. Fewer issues seem to crystallize the present global anxieties surrounding such loosely connected phenomena as race and class inequity, the radicalization of urban youth in Europe, the global War on Terror, secularism in the West, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and freedom of speech and the press, among others. After a year that saw more migrants arriving onto European shores than ever before in history, the response among many Europeans has been alarmist to say the least, raising the collective hackles of conservatives, xenophobes, and Islamophobes alike.¹ Neo-Orientalist notions of the clash of civilizations and rousing defenses of western freedom of speech and the press are raised, in part, to justify more widespread apprehension about the massive influx of non-westerners—variously spoken of as immigrants, migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, aliens, or illegals—to Europe and the United States. The sense of *anxiety* that pervades Europe in receiving this enormous quantity of migrants, however, is not at all new. In the last few years, the specific political catalysts and national origins of migrants to Europe (more specifically, to Britain and France) differ somewhat

¹ The U.N. High Commission for Refugees reported in December 2015 that over one million migrants had crossed into European borders seeking asylum, the majority arriving from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. See “Why is EU struggling with migrants and asylum?”, BBC World News, March 3, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24583286>; and “Over one million sea arrivals reach Europe in 2015,” December 30, 2015 <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>.

from the previous wave of immigrants in the latter half of the twentieth century, which largely consisted of ex-colonial subjects. However, the current representation of those arriving as a marauding horde of invaders is many centuries old, dating back at least to the Crusades.² The specific incarnation of this age-old representation that persists now is one that has existed since decolonization, and it takes the form of a pervasive imagined fear of *colonization in reverse*. European nations, unlike the United States, have not historically prided themselves on being “melting pots”; mass immigration *into* Europe (and not *away from* Europe) is a phenomenon that is a product of modern history. It is clear how politicians and news media represent the formidable influx of migrants: as a cataclysmic crisis, one that threatens the European polity. Indeed this fear began to develop in response, particularly in Britain and France, not only to the *arrival* of postcolonial immigrants after WWII, but to their *settling* in cities such as London and Paris to form thriving communities. In France and Britain, where flare-ups of riots and bombings attributed to the existing postcolonial immigrant populations have unfortunately become familiar occurrences, panic stems from the idea that that the juggernaut has been set into motion of immigrants taking over entirely.

In my dissertation, *Other Cities: Novels of Immigration in London and Paris*, I turn to the novel of immigration to elucidate the impossibly complex historical and cultural constellation that is the postcolonial immigrant condition in twentieth and twenty-first century France and Britain. Though representations of the immigrant “problem” or “crisis” in dominant British and French discourse are veritably inescapable and organized in a simplistic, eminently legible “us” vs. “them” construction, the question of how the postcolonial immigrant populations represent *themselves* is much more complicated. My interest in this dissertation lies not in the European

² This current influx of migrants arriving on the shores of Europe is responding to the political catastrophes precipitated in the second decade of this century, amidst the amorphous “War on Terror” and the aftermath of the revolutions across the Arab world.

discursive construction of its immigrant “Others,” which seems almost compulsively to return to ancient Orientalist tropes (perhaps in an effort to beat an apocalyptic horse to death). Instead, the texts I examine in *Other Cities* are representations of postcolonial immigration from the perspective of postcolonial immigrants themselves. I examine the complex, self-reflexive, and experimental ways in which the literary text, specifically the novel, represents the process of immigrant arrival and settling in the French and British metropolis. Recognizing that this social configuration, though tied to a millennium of contact between Europe and the “Orient,” is relatively new and “in process,” I am guided by Raymond Williams’ approach to analyzing “structures of feeling”:

[D]efining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. They are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases, built into institutions and formations. (Williams, *Marxism* 133).

Williams asserts that the *affective* (rather than the programmatic) dimensions of art and literature offer insight into burgeoning social phenomena where official discourse simply cannot.

Literature is “where the true social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships” (133). After generations upon generations of being subjugated—meaning simultaneously to be oppressed and to be granted subjecthood within one of the world’s most powerful empires—the migrant who has arrived in Britain or France after WWII seeking citizenship occupies something akin to a W.E.B. Dubois’ notion of “double consciousness,” or even what Jean-Paul Sartre deemed the “nervous condition” of the native in his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. However, the distinction between the condition of the

postcolonial immigrant from the “doubly consciousness” black American or “nervous” colonized native perhaps can be best understood spatially. Rather than being displaced ideologically and/or geographically by the hegemonic impositions of colonization, the immigrant moves physically *into* the space of the former colonizer, seeking to settle and to become rooted. The novels I examine in *Other Cities* range in publication date from the 1950s to the first decade of the twenty-first century—a time period book-ended by decolonization and the international War on Terror. This particular swatch of time marks the global paradigm shift from the regime of Empires to that of nation-states. Both France and England implemented radically shifting policies over the last decades of the twentieth century to manage the resultant massive waves of migration from the (post)colony to the metropole. From the end of WWII to the years after 9/11, migrants from North Africa to France and South Asia to England transformed from being subjects of Empire, to welcome new citizens, to problematic interlopers, to the enemy within. The postcolonial immigrant thereby compounds the initial displacement of colonization, folding it back upon itself, pursuing assimilation into French and British culture while at the same time radically changing what it even means to be French or British.

There is a rich literary corpus that has grown out of the previous historical moment of postwar mass migration from the former British and French colonies and its legacy of transforming London and Paris, the former imperial hubs, into the profoundly (and often problematically) multicultural cities they are today. The literature of immigration—that which portrays immigrants, comes out of the process of immigration, and is written by immigrants—of course provides insight into the seismic historical shifts that led to the bewildering state of contemporary immigration. But more complexly, it raises profound issues representation that turn the central questions posed in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) inside out: namely how is

Europe represented by those who were formerly cast as “Orientals” by Europe? How are Britain and France represented by those who were recently colonized? And indeed, does the immigrant represent “Europe” or “its Others”? The aim of this dissertation is to examine the representation of immigration in the British and French postwar novel, not only as way to understand the contemporary moment, but to understand the impacts of immigration upon literary representation as such. My motivation is not simply to search through literature for some kind of empirical truth, not to understand it as “evidence” in the greater narrative of history, but to read the literary text as a symptom, and moreover, as an active participant in a complex constellation of historical, and social factors that constitute the volatile powder keg of the immigrant condition in twenty-first century Europe.

I. The Task of Representation

The germ of this project was sprouted in the late fall of 2005, when the international news cycle was dominated by reports of violence flaring up across the *banlieues* of France. The chain of riots was sparked off by an incident of Nicholas Sarkozy denigrating the North African youth populating the *cités*, or housing projects, as *racaille* (i.e., scum, or thugs). This was followed in quick succession by numerous French politicians citing the “polygamy” of North African immigrant women to be the root cause of civil unrest in the *banlieues*. At the same time in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I was fortuitously enrolled in a course for which I was reading Said’s paradigm-shifting *Orientalism* alongside the early-modern English travelogue, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. In *Orientalism*, Said maintains that in the centuries-long relationship between Europe and its eastern counterparts, “the Orient acquired representatives, so to speak, and representations, each one more concrete, more internally congruent with some Western

exigency” (Said, *Orientalism* 62). By invoking classically Orientalist tropes, the French administration was perhaps making the *banlieue* youth the representatives of a more deep-seated European crisis. What struck me at the time was not only the contiguity between Mandeville’s depiction of the morally lax and oversexed Oriental and the descriptions of North African Muslim immigrants by French officials (insinuating that they were uncivilized and sexually deviant). More than that, I was intrigued by the spatial irony in this twenty-first century iteration of Orientalism.³ In the text, Said postulates: “The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe” (Said 63). Orientalism is a practice of *representation*—a “theater,” distinct from Europe, but “affixed”—onto which all internal European anxieties can be staged. It has historically been a space where Europe can relegate and jettison all that is not properly European. Thus the conflict in the proverbial “clash of civilizations” might more accurately be a clash between European *representations* of two civilizations. Said’s underlying contention in *Orientalism* is that the representation of the Orient as everything that Europe is *not* was a discursive process that prepared, justified, and perpetuated the grand machines of British and French imperialism.

Yet, in the twenty-first century, when thousands upon thousands of “Orientals” populate the immigrant neighborhoods of European cities (a large proportion of whom are naturalized and natural-born citizens), official European discourse cannot take recourse to an inscrutable “elsewhere.” The imagined Orient no longer figures as a barbarous external realm to be dominated and civilized. It is no longer simply “affixed”; it is now physically *inside* Europe,

³ For instance, Mandeville states: “Mahomet commanded in his *Alkaron*, that every man should have two wives, or three or four; but now they take unto nine, and of lemans as many as he may sustain” (Mandeville 91).

cropping up in pockets in the form of immigrant neighborhoods in and around metropolitan cities. After the end of Empire, immigration from the former colonies of France and Britain has quite literally brought the Orient *inside* the bounds of Europe to settle there. Clichés dating back to the Crusades that insist on the savagery of the Oriental become much more complicated in representations of contemporary immigration, because now they index internal problems in contemporary France and Britain. The problems that arise in the *quartiers sensibles* and alleged “no-go zones” of France and Britain due to their fundamentally “uncivilizable” inhabitants are now a matter to be addressed through domestic law and policy, as well as the adoption of social projects such as immigrant “integration” and “assimilation,” which are on a continuum with the colonial “civilizing mission.” Any persistent representation of an incomprehensible and backward Orient must come to terms with the fact that the “Orient,” or the *representatives* of that “Orient,” are now members of the European polity. And this new social configuration is arguably what propels representations of postcolonial immigrants in the western media to become more and more alarmist.

The novel depicting the immigrant condition, meaning both the migratory journey and the troubled process of settling and assimilating into the host culture, is uniquely tasked with a specific form of cultural and political labor. In the case of post-WWII Britain and France, the novel of immigration bears an implicit twofold social responsibility: at once the novel is expected to portray mimetically the lives of immigrants in the metropolitan nation, while also performing as an advocate for the immigrant communities among the general British and French populace. That is to say, in the case of the novel of immigration, the very act of aesthetic representation has a political valence. Where official and public discourses offer their own representations of immigrants, borrowing liberally from the age-old Orientalist chestnuts that

have been circulated for centuries, the literary text is uniquely positioned to provide a counter-discourse. What gives literature as an artistic and representational form a particular prowess in serving a counter-discursive function is, of course, its very textuality. But less obviously, the literary representation of immigrant life is a means of confronting and undoing the ideological underpinnings of canonicity as a handmaiden of Empire. The very notion of a European literary canon—in its inheritance of Greco-Roman values, its Biblical underpinnings, its embodiment of Enlightenment ideals—was a way that the British and French Empires represented to *themselves* their civilizational superiority (as opposed to the decadent backwardness of the “Orient”). The novel that portrays colonial migrants and postcolonial immigrants in Britain and France poses a powerful challenge to the supposed universality of the literary canon for a number of reasons. The Anglophone and Francophone novel of immigration by its very nature disrupts the presumed distinction between Europe and “its Others” by narrating the immigrant experience *as* a European experience, thereby destabilizing the very category of “European” as such. Written in the language of the former colonizer and set in the metropole, the twentieth-century British and French novel of immigration cannot be but be placed in the larger category of British and French literature. And yet the content therein confronts head-on the difficulty, if not the near impossibility, of staking a legitimate position within “Britishness” or “Frenchness” for postcolonial immigrant communities.

The eight texts I examine in *Other Cities* maintain a troubled relationship to the aesthetic and political work the novel of immigration is burdened with performing. This ambivalence finds expression on the level of form in all of these novels, each of which departs from the verisimilitude of realism in its own distinct way. As Chapters Two and Three and detail in the British and French context, respectively, postwar novels that depict migration from the former

colonies to Britain by authors such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and V.S. Naipual, and to France by Mehdi Charef, Azouz Begag, and Nacer Kettane, stay in the mode of literary realism. The realist literary text, especially in the case of the first wave of British and French immigrant novels, can appear to function as some sort of testimonial or reportage of the conditions of life within a new cultural formation. Ian Watt's now classic assertion, with reference to the "rise" of the realist novel in eighteenth century England, is that the novel's "primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience" (Watt 13). In this sense, literary realism in the novel of immigration serves a strategic purpose, in effect including the immigrant experience under the large umbrella of the "human experience." Thus there is a dimension of the realist novel of immigration that is transactional: in the faithful attempt to reproduce (or rather, to re-present) the burgeoning immigrant communities in the idiom of the former colonizer, the literary text thus stands *in proxy* for the community itself. In turn the dominant discourses within British and French culture seek some sort of anthropological "evidence" from this body of literature. Thus a process is set into motion of the immigrant community entering into the common lexicon of British and French culture. However, as I shall go on to detail in the further chapters of the dissertation, what marks each of the novels studied in *Other Cities* is a resistance to this transactional, realist mode of cultural reportage.

In 1988, Stuart Hall published his essay, "New Ethnicities," identifying a cultural shift among the postcolonial immigrant populations of Britain. This transformation, according to Hall, is most perceptible in the flourishing cultural production from the immigrant communities of the era. Hall pinpoints two "moments" in what he calls "black" cultural production in Britain. The first "moment" is one in which non-white communities that grew out of postwar immigration (including South Asian, African, and Caribbean postcolonial immigrants) joined together under

the moniker of “black Britain,” “the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities” (Hall 441). This was an instrumental move to combat the structural racism that so marked postwar Britain, very much in line with Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism.”⁴ This “strategy” is representational in and of itself, a useful and temporary fiction with a political purpose. Falling within this first “moment” would be the realist novel of postcolonial immigration. But this essentialist mode of representation has the potential to become its own trap, as the cultural production of the immigrant community comes to serve the role of informant. With reference to the French context, Michel Laronde observes:

It could be argued that a primary cultural function of recent franco-Maghreban literature is to construct its own self-image and meaning in relation to the central Culture and to question the stereotypes that comprise their ‘official’ image. This reasoning could justify the argument that, since representations of minority discourses are present in the aesthetic works of authors who state immigrants as narratees, and who are often descendants of immigrants themselves, the works have a political dimension that should be de-aestheticized in order to be read. And the fact that the authors of *beur* [second-generation franco-Maghrebi] novels are ethnically ‘branded’ is used to justify the claim made by many critics of ‘minority literatures’ that texts, despite their fictional characteristics, must be read as fairly straightforward socio-political discourses. (Laronde 70)

The danger, then, of “strategic essentialism” is that the literary text becomes pure proxy, and robbed of its aesthetic dimension and its status as a work of art. It thus becomes rather easy for the dominant discourse to dismiss the novel of immigration as simply instrumental—especially in building an imagined “multicultural” national narrative—and to be lacking in artistic merit.

It is instructive here to consider the double valence of the word “representation,” a split both Hall and Spivak engage in their writing on counter-hegemonic discourses. In her perennially valuable essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak identifies and names an important cleavage in the term “representation” that has immense political consequences. Taking

⁴ In Gayatri Spivak’s 1986 essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

twentieth-century philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault to task for collapsing the bifurcated meaning of “representation,” she turns to Marx to untangle the fraught term. Marx distinguishes between “*Vertreten*,” that is, representation meaning to stand in *proxy* (in a political sense) from “*Darstellen*,” meaning to draw a *portrait* (in a rhetorical or aesthetic sense)—a distinction made clearer in Marx’s German than in English or French. The two senses of the term, according to Spivak, are “related but running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics” (Spivak 276). The danger lies in *Darstellung* overtaking *Vertretung*: “the staging of the world in representation—its scene of writing, its *Darstellung*—dissimulates the choice of and need for ‘heroes’, paternal proxies, agents of power—*Vertretung*” (Spivak 276). In collapsing the political relation into the rhetorical one, the risk is that the subaltern (she who is subjugated and silenced) will become a trope, evacuated of any real political efficacy.

Spivak’s examination of bifurcated representation is largely in regards to the western or Subcontinental elite *academic* rendering himself “transparent” in the effort to represent the subaltern. But what role does the work of art have in representation’s double valence? As opposed to the European representation of the postcolony (or the Third World, or the Developing World, or the Global South—all evocative, representational terms in their own right) that effectively erases the political presence of the subaltern by making her into a purely aesthetic trope, the opposite dynamic arises in the case of the postcolonial novel, a problematic configuration that resonates with the novel of postcolonial immigration. Namely, the aesthetic dimension of postcolonial representation “loses out” to its political function. Elleke Boehmer, in her inquiry into the “postcolonial aesthetic,” stresses:

[Q]uite *contra* the transcendence associated with certain visions of the aesthetic, *political* writing by contrast never loses sight of ideology. To generalize for the sake of the argument, openly political, postcolonial work undertakes, without apology, to be ends-directed, programmatic, instrumentalist, didactic, intent on direct impact. . . . It is tasked with reconstitution. It is therefore very far from being preoccupied with an aesthetic as such. Insofar as the postcolonial can be taken to signify a political commitment to some form of struggle and as allied to the traditions of anti-colonial resistance. . . . a simultaneous commitment to an aesthetic is understandably viewed in some postcolonial circles as a distraction, an unaffordable indulgence.

Referring specifically to the postcolonial text that is grounded in the postcolony, Boehmer alludes to the fact that a certain political weight is put upon the postcolonial text that not only precludes but *discourages* any aesthetic engagements. This is the danger of “strategic essentialism” losing its radical potential and becoming systematized by the dominant culture, co-opted as the *only* discursive mode through which the subjugated population can engage. Boehmer thus seems to argue that the postcolonial work is somewhat overburdened by its *Vertretung* function, ostensibly as a channel through which the subaltern does indeed speak. She argues for a serious inquiry into whether there is “something intrinsically postcolonial about certain kinds of writing *qua* form,” and advocates for a theoreticization of a “postcolonial aesthetic” (Boehmer 173). Part of this work, as I see it, is to make categorical distinctions *between* different kinds of postcolonial writing based on generic, geographical, and historical criteria. The aims of this dissertation follow suit.

These novels I examine in *Other Cities* arise from a moment of profound sociopolitical transition from the centuries-long era of imperialism to the twentieth-century era of the nation-state, to a burgeoning form of globalization. We can see the various changes in status of the postcolonial immigrant communities of Britain and France throughout this period as a cultural weathervane, shifting in response to this larger worldwide transition. In “New Ethnicities,” Hall identifies the moment of its 1988 publication date to be one of marked shift away from the

essentialist “black British” cultural formation. In his formulation, the second “moment” particularly of “black British” cultural production explicitly moves away from a reductive essentialism to one of self-awareness, marking a break and fissure in the united front of “blackness” in British culture. In so doing, the work of art complicates its role as a political *proxy* for the population it represents aesthetically. In the late 1980s, under Thatcherism and further away from the binaries of the colonial era, the “strategy” of constructing an “essential black subject” against British white hegemony began to lose efficacy. As Hall asserts, “You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals.” Instead, the “end of the essential black subject [necessitates] a recognition that the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity” (Hall 444). The movements of non-white culture move from essentialism to what resembles, in Hall's view, Derridean *différance*—a focus on difference, textuality, and the very problematics of representation—though more explicitly political than would be possible in a strictly deconstructionist rhetorical mode. It is firstly through artistic representation that Hall detects the politicization of “‘difference’ which is positional, conditional, and conjectural” (Hall 447). The progression from “black essentialism” to what, using Hall’s terminology could tentatively be call “black *différance*” involves calling into question the very aesthetic forms in which representations of non-white communities traffic.

Though “New Ethnicities” largely refers to the new filmic movement coming out of what what was then understood to be the burgeoning “black British” community, Hall’s turn to deconstruction to elucidate the self-reflexive mode of representation brings the Derridean primacy of the text to the fore. The issues that deconstruction raises of textual elusivity and play,

as well as “meaning” being ever deferred, are central to the novels I examine in *Other Cities*, marking a fundamental *crisis* of representation. James Procter, in his analysis of Hall’s essay, refers to a discernable formal shift in film produced by “black” British artists in Hall’s “second moment,” remarking on the tendency to use techniques of “‘cutting-and-pasting’ the footage to produce fragmentary narratives, or juxtaposing it with dissonant music. At stake here is a mode of representation that privileges quotation, pastiche and fragmentation in order to...display a recognition of the relationship between representation and power while seeking to contest those power by revealing the fictions on which they are based” (Procter 127). In their textual manifestations, many of these formal hallmarks of postmodernism—pastiche, juxtaposition, fragmentation, self-reflexivity, and the marked turn away from realism—characterize the novels I analyze in *Other Cities*. In troubling the process of representation, or rather, in calling attention to the process of representation, these novels demonstrate cognizance of literature’s dynamic and reciprocal relationship to socio-political reality. The texts examine in *Other Cities* explore the impacts of imperial and metropolitan stances and policies to control and regulate colonial subjects (and subsequently immigrant populations) on such aspects of day-to-day life as where one lives, what sort of education one receives, whether one is considered an assimilable member of society. And in different ways, each one of these texts demonstrates awareness of the palpable impacts that literature representing immigrants can and does have a upon British and French culture at large—a fact that seems to precipitate in formal instability, as the boundary between the literary and sociopolitical realms blur. Hall argues that we must be aware of the “*constitutive* and not merely reflexive” role representation plays in cultural formation:

[Representation] can be used, on the one hand, simply as another way of talking about how one images a reality that exists ‘outside’ the means by which thing are represented: a conception grounded in a mimetic theory of representing. On the other hand the term can also stand for a very radical displacement of that

unproblematic notion of the concept of representation. My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effect, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that it is only within the discursive, and the subject to its specific condition, limits, and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus...how things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. (Hall 443)

The novel of immigration hangs in trembling tension between *vertretung* and *darstellung*, constantly negotiation and renegotiating its role as both aesthetic portrait and political proxy. And sometimes this role is assigned post facto. Hall’s prescient argument above would perhaps most potently be corroborated by the inflammatory response to a literary text (coincidentally published the same year as Hall’s essay) that had radical societal impacts, exemplifying the consequences of aesthetic representation upon the political: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* .

The Satanic Verses is among the eight novels *Other Cities* analyzes over the course of four chapters, focusing on immigrant literature in and around Paris in Chapters One and Three, and in London in Chapters Two and Four. The chapters are organized not only by location, but also by time period, choosing two French and two British novels that depict the first wave of post-war immigrants to the metropole, and four subsequent novels that portray the lives of second-generation North African and South Asian youth in Paris and London, respectively. Each chapter pairs two novels that are temporally and geographically bound, and feature postcolonial immigrants at similar crossroads. The first chapter pairs Driss Chraïbi’s *Les Boucs* (1955) with Rachid Boudjedra’s *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée* (1975); Chapter Two discusses Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, both published in 1988; Chapter Three looks at *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, by

Leïla Sebbar (1982) and *La vie sexuelle d'un islamiste à Paris*, by Leïla Marouane (2006) together; and finally Chapter Four pairs Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). What draws these texts together is the manner in which they approach, in unique ways, the sets of historical and political occurrences (both metropolitan and postcolonial) that determine the very existence of the lives they depict. In the background of each of these novels is the question of new nationhood after the Second World War and what relationship it has to migration: whether the immigrant population continues to live under the shadow of colonization, or whether they can be assimilated into Britain and France as immigrants from one sovereign nation-state to another. The advent of the postcolonial nation—Algeria and India/Pakistan/Bangladesh in the novels I consider in *Other Cities*—is displaced in each of these narratives, viewed from the vantage point of the imperial center, but significantly *not* from that of the colonizer.

The focus of the dissertation is not simply upon the similarities between the British and French novel of immigration. Instead, I inquire into the different trajectories these bodies of literature have taken, partially in response to the different societal positions held by North Africans in France versus South Asians in Britain. In addition to the immediate impacts of immigration policy shifts and vascillations in public and political discourse surrounding immigration, *Other Cities* examines the continuation of colonial attitudes towards immigrants after decolonization. In each chapter, I consider the long-lasting legacies colonial policies of education and acculturation have had upon postcolonial immigrant populations. By attending to the different formal contours of the “crisis of representation” in each novel, I examine the far-ranging reverberations of the politics and ideology of British and French hegemony upon the

aesthetic (and specifically, the literary) forms in which immigrant communities represent *themselves*.

The eight novels examined in *Other Cities* were selected because of the specific ways they draw direct attention to form, and seem to struggle with the very possibility of representation. Indeed, *Other Cities* is fueled by the crisis of representation that takes a different shape in the French and British novel of immigration. The differing imperial stances toward French and British colonial subjects created a template for the kinds of migrants who circulated through the metropole, and subsequently the postcolonial immigrants who came to settle there. These differences find expression in the tensions between the immigrant elite, who emigrate for educational and professional purposes, and the immigrant proletariat who comprise the working-class majority of South Asians in Britain and North Africans in France. These differences have roots in the colonial era. For instance, in Raj-era South Asia the British implemented a comprehensive system of educating a sector of Indians in English mores and culture, and those who were educated were then meant to form an intermediary middle class. *Other Cities* examines the relationship between this nineteenth-century colonial education policy and the maximalist, intertext-saturated novels by Ghosh, Rushdie, Smith, and Ali. What separates (and alienates) the elite protagonists of Ghosh and Rushdie's novels from the working class majority of South Asian immigrants is a question of English cultural literacy. This creates a tension within the immigrant community that, as I argue in Chapter Four, finds resolution in a march toward eventual assimilation and middle-classness in Smith and Ali's novels.

On the other hand, the motif of illiteracy pervades each of the novels I examine in the French context, clearly due to the rampant French-illiteracy among the North African immigrant population. French colonial education policy, which withheld access to instruction in French

language and cultural mores from the vast majority of Maghrebi colonial subjects, had the effect of deeply segregating the small number of colonial elite who were given the privilege of French education—a rarified group deemed the *évolués*. The illiteracy and presumed unassimilability of North African immigrants can be traced to these policies. The rendering of the extremely alienating experience of immigration to France into novelistic form produces literature that is formally alienating, such as the works by Chraïbi and Boudjedra I examine in Chapter One. Chapter Three considers Sebbar and Marouane’s novels, portraying the attempt by second-generation immigrants to acquire French cultural literacy and thus cultural capital. These texts radically resist linearity and narrative continuity, reflecting the virtual impossibility of telling the story of successful integration into French culture. By focusing on novels that take place in the urban post-imperial metropolitan hubs of London and Paris, I also examine the ways the dynamics of colonization repeat themselves spatially. The novels map the ideological residues of the colonization on the level of the city itself, drawing a connection between literary form and the urban dwellings of the immigrant populations. Most importantly, each of these novels grapples with the immensely complex problem of representing a historical process from *within* it, in its urban epicenters, as London and Paris undergo the enormous transition from hubs of European empire to multicultural cities of the twenty-first century. And in so doing, these novels *participate* in the social, cultural, and political transformation of what it means to be British or French.

II. The Novel of Immigration

In the past twenty years, scholarship on the novel of immigration in the British and French contexts has often fallen under the rubric of postcolonial studies, analyzing novels of

immigration through lenses that are fundamentally rooted in the era of colonization (i.e., the Manichean colonizer/colonized binary of Fanon, the *négritude* of Aimé Césaire, the “hybridity,” and “mimicry” of Homi K. Bhabha, the different iterations of subalternity posited by the Subaltern Studies collective and Gayatri Spivak).⁵ Though the eight novels of immigration I examine in *Other Cities* are intrinsically bound to questions of postcoloniality, and *are* in the strictest senses of the term, *postcolonial*, I argue that they remain categorically distinct, and perform a different aesthetic and political function.⁶ Their predominant narrative concerns are not, for instance, those which inspired Fredric Jameson infamously to declare “all third-world texts” to be “national allegories”: decolonization and nation-formation (Jameson 69). Further and broader developments in postcolonial thought, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty’s “provincializing Europe,” Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau’s “*créolité*,” Françoise Lionnet’s “*métissage*,” Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s “minor transnationalism,” and Walter Dignolo’s “decoloniality,” are important moves in advancing the theoretical conception of the postcolonial moment. However, every one of these concepts is (deliberately and necessarily) geographically removed from continental Europe. To import these concepts in order to analyze the British and French novel of immigration is just that—an importation or a superimposition of a theoretical concept developed, in particular, to move *out of* metropolitan modes of thinking.

⁵ See *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*.

⁶ I realize the dubiousness in claiming the “postcolonial” has any sort of “strict terms.” I mean that temporally and historically, the novels were produced during and after decolonization. And if there is an argument to be made that “postcolonial” is a philosophical or ideological position, or a mode or methodology of critique that brushes against the grain of hegemony, these novels are certainly of that ilk.

The novels I examine in *Other Cities* are metropolitan texts and self-consciously so: they confront directly the existing rigidities and new elasticities of “Britishness” or “Frenchness.”⁷

The most important distinction between the novels I examine in *Other Cities* and the postcolonial novel as such is the way they self-consciously approach the quagmire of postcolonial representation *outside of* the postcolony. Ato Quayson, citing a formulation by Biodun Jeyifo, identifies “two orientations” of the postcolonial novel: “normativity and proleptic designation” and “interstitial or liminal postcoloniality” (Quayson 4). The first category of postcolonial novel is “saturated with what could be described as an ethical will-to-identity”—“writing back” to the Empire with a subversive cognizance of “classical models” of canonical literature” (4). This mode of literary postcoloniality “intersects with...the dimension of internal political and social critique that writers and critics feel themselves obliged to undertake on behalf of their people....And so politically committed writers join the press to become the fourth estate of the postcolony” (4). What Quayson describes here is the dual-edged problem of *representation* that is inherent to the postcolonial novel as such: namely, that the postcolonial novel is tasked not only with the aesthetic (and discursive) representation of the postcolonial condition, but that the *novel itself* must somehow behave as a political representation, an advocate for the society it portrays. This bears a resemblance to Hall’s discussion of essentialism in “black British” cultural production, as well as Boehmer’s probing of postcolonial criticism’s

⁷ A very fruitful line of inquiry I do not have the space to pursue here would be to shift the British and French immigrant novel’s immediate affiliation with postcolonial studies to consider its position in relation to the re-vivified category of “World Literature.” Works by David Damrosch (*What is World Literature?*), Franco Moretti (“Conjectures on World Literature”), and Pascal Casanova (*La République mondiale des lettres*) consider the agency of the “peripheral” text that circulates through the “center,” yet in these models, national literatures remain discrete. It seems that this model cannot address the specific circumstances of the immigrant text, where the “periphery” is very much *inside of* and *constitutive of* the “center.” It is more beneficial to think through immigrant literature as an example of “planetary,” a concept Gayatri Spivak introduces in *Death of a Discipline* (2004). More recent works such as Pheng Cheah’s *What is a World?*, and Aamir Mufti’s *Forget English!* pose challenges to the focus on circulation and disciplinarity that have dominated recent discussions on world literature, returning to questions of form and dynamics of power that are implicit in the presumed “worldliness” of a text. These are questions that are deeply pertinent to my inquiries on the novel of immigration, and warrant further investigation.

lack of engagement with formal questions. The act of “writing back” is committed specifically to counter the hegemonic representations (i.e., Orientalism) that have dominated western discourse on the postcolonial world.

In Quayson and Jeyifo’s two categories, the second type of postcolonial novel is the “liminal,” or “interstitial” text, which Quayson allies with “ambivalent cosmopolitanism” and Jeyifo qualifies as “neither smugly metropolitan...nor combatively Third-Worldist...The very terms which express the orientation of this school of post-colonial self-representation are revealing: diasporic, exilic, hybrid, in-between, cosmopolitan” (Quayson 5, Jeyifo 53-54). Quayson goes on to list a number of authors in this “school”: Salman Rushdie, Derek Walcott, J.M. Coetzee, Gabriel García Márquez, Junot Diaz, Zadie Smith. Herein lies much of the problem with categorizing novels of immigration as generally postcolonial: the terms used to speak about this vastly diffuse group of authors, who even in their own individual oeuvres touch upon a wide range of settings, topics and time periods, are incredibly vague and slippery themselves. Because the work of these authors is less often understood to be allied with a specific politics in a singular postcolonial location, their work becomes “liminal,” “in-between,” “hybrid,” and “cosmopolitan”—words that at first glance seem synonymous but have very different genealogies. And are these adjectives in reference to the authors or the narratives of the novels they write? “Hybridity” and “liminality” are terms that resonate with Homi K. Bhabha’s readings of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie in relation to the fraught subjectivity of the colonial subject.⁸ And “diasporic” and “cosmopolitan” have long been debated in academic circles, particularly in the way these two terms often render transparent the class complexities

⁸ In Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*.

that ostensibly facilitate diaspora and cosmopolitanism.⁹ But the effect of lumping these authors together (to somehow form a “school,” at that) under the amorphous terms of diaspora, hybridity, or cosmopolitan does them a disservice—much more significantly than assigning them any specific class designation—by glossing over the fact that their works are grounded in very specific historical and *political* moments.

My aim in distinguishing the novel of immigration from the larger umbrella of postcolonial literature as a distinct subcategory is to salvage it from some of the more diffuse and politically light-footed ways in which it has been approached in scholarship. The British and French novel of immigration is bound to the legal and juridical conditions that allow for immigration to even occur. And generically, the novel of immigration is not marked only by the national, ethnic, or class affiliations of its authors, nor even by the milieu represented in their narratives. The novel of immigration is unique in its capacity to *stage the encounter* between different kinds of immigrants from the vast postcolonial world within the spaces and enclaves in which immigrants settle and new and unprecedented identities.¹⁰ It also stages the encounter between those immigrants who inhabit the elite echelons the terms “hybrid” and “cosmopolitan”

⁹ For instance, Timothy Brennan (“Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism”), Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah (*Cosmopolitics*), Rebecca Walkowitz (*Cosmopolitan Style*), and Aijaz Ahmad (*In Theory*), et al. have all written at length on the subjects of cosmopolitanism and diaspora.

¹⁰ Cultural Studies has been another distinct approach to the British novel of immigration, dominated by discussions of “black British” affiliations among postcolonial ethnic minorities in Britain (see James Procter, *Dwelling Places*, Kobena Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, John McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, etc.). Though seeing the novel of immigration through the lens of “black Britain” is a useful rubric that addresses the moment of solidarity among postcolonial immigrants in the 1970s and 80s, it does not attend to the specific historical conditions that brought immigrants to Britain in the first place, and moreover it also paves over some of the inherent class differences even *within* specific ethnic group. And most importantly, it does not account for the splintering among ethnic and religious lines that has occurred in the post Rushdie Affair, post 9/11 era. On the other hand, scholarship focusing upon immigrant literature in France has tended towards a hyper-sensitivity to ethnic particularities. The category of *beur* cultural production, which refers to the second and third-generation progeny of first-wave Maghrebi immigrants to France, has been a formidable presence in discourse about literature and immigration (See Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in Contemporary France*, Susan Ireland, *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, etc.). However, the category of *beur* literature is overly specific (as opposed to “black Britain”) and similarly tied to a particular historical moment in the history of postcolonial immigration to France.

connote, and the majority of postcolonial immigrants in Britain and France who constitute an immigrant working-class proletariat. The novels I examine in *Other Cities* all negotiate the complexities of representation in the doubly displaced situation of postcolonial immigration the metropole through formal experimentation. They reflect, refract, and at times impact the shifting French and British national stances on race, religion, and citizenship. But I argue that while the content of each novel gives voice to the postcolonial immigrants of twentieth century London and Paris, in its formal composition, each text subverts a reading of its narrative as a straightforward rendition of the immigrant experience. Stylistically, the novels vary radically—from Proustian stream of consciousness, to epistolary exchange, to magical realism, to postmodern pastiche—but each uniquely depicts the transition of the South Asian and North African immigrant communities from newly deracinated colonial subjects to precariously settled metropolitan citizens.

III. The Figure of the Immigrant

The question of immigration, in keeping with the exigencies of our contemporary political moment, has become more pressing in our academic conversations in kind. If publication of Thomas Nail's 2015 book, *The Figure of the Migrant* indicates anything, it is that the condition of migration, and indeed, the condition of *being* a migrant—a state millions upon millions of humans find themselves in now more than ever—demands its own set of philosophical and theoretical considerations. Nail declares that “the twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant not only because of the record number of migrants today but also because this is the century in which all the previous forms of social expulsion and migratory resistance have reemerged and become more active” (Nail 7). This sentiment very much echoes

the one put forth by Edward Said in “Reflections on Exile,” that “our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of the totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” (Said, *Reflections* 174). There is a great degree of slippage between these interrelated terms, but it is important to highlight the shades of distinction between the migrant, immigrant, refugee, displaced person, and the exile as the political consequence in their difference can be dire. The terms “migrant” and “immigrant” have overlapping connotations but remain fundamentally discrete. The category of “migrant” is somewhat abstract, lending itself to figural conceptions: the migrant is kinetic, liminal, in a *process* of moving. Indeed, the question of *belonging* or *rootedness* is less a consideration in conceiving of the migrant. The figure of the migrant is necessarily in transit. Thomas Nail asserts (in a move that allows him to theorize the condition of the *migrant* in particular):

[T]he ‘emigrant’ is the name given to the migrant as the former member or citizen, and the ‘immigrant’ as the would-be member or citizen. In both cases, a static place and membership are theorized first, and the migrant is the one who lacks both. Thus, more than any other political figure (citizen, foreigner, sovereign, etc.) the migrant is the one least defined by its being and place and more by its becoming and displacement: by its *movement*. (Nail 3)

Moreover, for the purposes of this project, the term “migrant” is historically inflected; individuals circulating between the colony and the metropole during the colonial era were *migrants*, meaning they were moving through the empire as colonial subjects. Though at different moments in the French and British empires, the strictures on subjecthood wavered, *citizenship* as such was not at stake before decolonization.

I use the word “migrant” more flexibly than “immigrant,” as the latter is a subset of the former, and endeavor to employ both with a degree of rigor that seeks to extract these terms from more diffuse ones that are familiar to postcolonial scholarly discourse. By necessity, postcolonial inquiry has often organized itself around figures of movement and displacement—the “migrant”

and the “immigrant” of course, and even more juridically specific, the “refugee.” Edward Said posits the “refugee,” an explicitly political term, which is a “creation of the twentieth-century state,” against the figure of the “exile,” in which he identifies a “touch of solitude and spirituality” (Said, *Reflections* 181).¹¹ Aamir Mufti has argued, via Edward Said (and furthermore, via Eric Auerbach) that “exile” more than physical displacement, is an ethical and critical stance.¹² And elsewhere, Mufti, invoking Hannah Arendt has focused on the historical conditions that mark the refugee as one of the most symptomatic figures of modernity.¹³ “Refugee” is a symptomatic term, but also an internationally defined legal term, determined in the 1951 Refugee Convention; being granted refugee status as opposed to being simply a migrant can mean the difference between legitimacy and illegitimacy in the eyes of an asylum giving-state. I take pains to make these terms discrete here as a response to the fast and loose corralling of all these terms together in such turn of the twentieth-century theoretical formulations as Arjun Appadurai’s “scapes.” An “ethnoscape,” for example, is “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest

¹¹ Simon Gikandi has recently defined the “refugee” against the “cosmopolitan,” rather than the “exile”: “The refugee is the Other of the cosmopolitan; rootless by compulsion, this figure is forced to develop an alternative narrative of global cultural flows, functioning in a third zone between metropolis and ex-colony, producing and reproducing localities in the centres of metropolitan culture itself. Missing the very states they fled in the first place, refugees do not want to be cosmopolitan because they have no idiom for this experience; instead they set out to demarcate a zone of ethnicity and locality. Yet they are global because they cannot return to their old spaces of identity and must somehow learn to live outside both the nations that have rejected them and those that have adopted them” (Gikandi 26).

¹² In Aamir Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture.”

¹³ With a view to the Partition of India, he remarks that the “distinguishing mark” of modern nation-formation is “that it makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled...[W]henver a population is *minoritized*—a process inherent in the nationalization of peoples and cultural practices—it is also rendered potentially *movable*” (Mufti, *Enlightenment* 13). Mufti here invokes Hannah Arendt’s theory of minority in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* where she examines the question of citizenship upon the birth of the modern nation-state. This text draws into relief the figure of the minority and that of the refugee—the “*heimatlosen*,” or the homelandless. It is Arendt’s contention that the very process of nation-state formation creates the category of the refugee necessarily, and that citizenship by its very nature is an exclusionary category. She writes that after the two world wars, “there was hardly a country left on the Continent that did not pass...some new legislation which, even if it did not use this right extensively, was always phrased to allow for getting rid of a great number of its inhabitants at any opportune moment” (Arendt 278-9).

workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (Appadurai 33). To equate all these different “moving groups” without attention to the conditions under which they can (or must) move has the effect of rendering them all as abstractions without political specificity (or, for that matter, agency, other than to constitute a shifting world).

The “immigrant,” however, is not so much abstract or figural as juridical: to be an immigrant is to have moved from one sovereign nation-state to another, legally or illegally (*avec ou sans papiers*), by force or by choice. Immigration, more so than migration, connotes intentions to *settle* in the place of arrival, and to establish legitimacy in the eyes of the state through the bureaucratic process of naturalization. An East Pakistani moving to London or an Algerian to France in the late 1960s, for instance, would officially have been “immigrants,” where their equivalents in the 1930s would have been colonial subjects migrating from the periphery of empire to the center. I have endeavored, in the chapters of this dissertation, to employ these terms with cognizance of both their historical and philosophical valences, referring to “migrants” when discussing characters or events which are either positioned in the colonial era, or behave more as “migrants” than immigrants—that is remaining *in transit*, rather than aiming to *settle*. In *Immigrant Acts*, examining the relationship between the laws governing Asian Americans and the cultural production that came out of these communities, Lisa Lowe pithily writes: “If the law is the apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body of the nation, then the ‘immigrant,’ produced by the law as margin and threat to that symbolic whole, is precisely a generative site for the critique of that universality” (Lowe 8-9). Thus, the status of “immigrant” is one of transition from foreign alien to welcome citizen—from a member of “them” to a member of “us.” By its very nature, to “immigrate” is to enter into the

“universal,” as determined by the legal apparatus of the state. As a site of becoming, then, Lowe posits the immigrant as the paramount figure through which to critique universality. And if literature (and specifically the novel, with its historical ties to nationhood) is perhaps the most symptomatic art form of a given cultural configuration *as it is in process*, the novel of immigrant is the paramount form through which to critique the *representation* of universality.¹⁴

IV. Postcolonial Immigration in Historical Context

The historical time period covered in *Other Cities* is the approximate forty-year span between the mid-twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. Each text captures a different moment in the transition from the midcentury period of open postcolonial immigration to the British and French metropole to today’s extreme political anxiety surrounding European immigration. As such, these eight novels have a unique relationship to the period-specific political and public discourse of France and Britain negotiating their postwar multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, and multi-religious national identities. For both France and the U.K., the late 1940s mark a period of open migration from current and former colonial subjects, a policy that would be reconsidered, retracted, and controlled under various policy shifts that responded to particular migration flows from the postcolony. During a period deemed “*Les Trentes Glorieuses*,” a span of about thirty years from between the World Wars to the 1970s, when France saw unprecedented economic prosperity, demands for manpower opened up channels of migration to France from the colonies as well as Eastern Europe. After the initial postwar period, however, policies allowing and restricting immigration from the former colonies vacillated

¹⁴ The representation of universality *par excellence*, is of course the nineteenth century realist novel, according to numerous theorists of the novel over the decades (i.e., Ian Watt, René Girard, Georg Lukacs, Fredric Jameson, et al.)

radically, becoming more and more limited.¹⁵ Similarly, in the U.K., the post-war period began a period of open migration between former colonies and the Commonwealth at large under the British Nationality Act, a policy that was subjected to numerous subsequent restrictions over the course of the twentieth century.¹⁶ More broadly, an important point of comparison between the French and British cases lies in their programmatic stances towards immigration: *laïcité* in France and multiculturalism in the U.K. These stances towards race, ethnicity, and minority in France and England, respectively, are often posited against each other as oppositional strategies in wider discussions of the immigrant “problem” in contemporary Europe.¹⁷ Multiculturalism is less an official policy than a general political attitude, one that has played an important role in British governmental decrees surrounding race and immigration in the late twentieth century.¹⁸ *Laïcité*, on the other hand, is the official French position of secularism, which enforces a very strict separation of church and state, established in 1905.¹⁹ *Laïcité* grows out of Republican ideals of universalism, but manifests in such recent idiosyncratic forms as “*l’affaire du foulard*”

¹⁵ These policies were renegotiated with a view to Algerian independence in 1962, retracted to limit Maghrebi immigration in the late 1960s, and were eventually stymied completely from 1947-78 when all labor and family-related migration was suspended. The eighties ushered in a period under the *Loi Bonnet*, which tightened entry requirements and made grounds for expulsion more flexible (Schain 48). And 1993 began the set of policies known as the *Loi Pasqua*, which “modified the nationality code to make it more difficult for children born in France of non-French parents to obtain French citizenship” (54).

¹⁶ These included ones surrounding labor demands in the 1950s, and ones that would allow for family reunification in 1971 (the Immigration Act) and eventually limit it in 1981 (under a new Nationality Act). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, measures were passed that would limit work and citizenship prospects for migrant and asylum seekers (Schain 122).

¹⁷ See, for example, Robert S. Leiken’s *Europe’s Angry Muslims: The Revolt of the Second Generation* (2012), Didier Lassalle’s “French *Laïcité* and British Multiculturalism: A Convergence in Progress?” in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (2011), and *Multiculturalism, Muslims, and Citizenship: A European Approach*, Ed. Tariq Modood, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ricard Zapata-Barrero (2006).

¹⁸ Bhiku Parekh sums up multiculturalism as neither “a political doctrine...nor a philosophical...theory” but rather “a perspective” with central insights that are attentive to cultural difference as well as “internal cultural pluralism” (Parekh 238).

¹⁹ Olivier Roy distinguishes this form of *laïcité* from what he calls “ideological *laïcité*” which “defines national cohesion by asserting a purely political identity that confines to the private sphere any specific religious or cultural identities” (Roy xii).

(the headscarf affair) and a lack of official census that accounts for any racial demographics in France. These stances towards formation and maintenance of national identity in response to incoming migrant populations deeply affect the way immigrant communities are shaped in metropolitan cities. There is thus a palpable connection between the attitudes that the state takes towards immigrant groups, the way they function in the face of those attitudes, and most importantly to my project, the fictional representations produced by and of these communities and the spaces in which they dwell.

As we can surmise from these fluctuating and often contradictory policies surrounding immigration in both France and the United Kingdom, the day-to-day life of immigrant communities has vacillated in kind, as their status and legitimacy on European soil changes in courthouses and parliament buildings. In addition, immigrant groups from the Maghreb in France and South Asia in Britain hold a particular position in the national imaginary of these two metropolitan centers due to the inherent residual complexities of colonial history. Thus the novel of immigration brings into relief the unique political life of this literary category. The populations and city spaces depicted in these texts are directly impacted by the state policies that govern them, and thus the immigrant novel, particularly in the case of France and England, maintains a unique relationship to political reality. The novel of immigration as such (and the fictional worlds depicted therein) *could not exist* but for the administrative and legislative decisions of the state—immigration policy, labor law, and urban planning initiatives being just a few examples. And inarguably, the vast majority of authors who produce this literature are profoundly impacted by these very laws and social conditions as well. From the period between WWII and the present day, immigrants from these regions have gone from being colonial subjects, to welcome citizens, to disposable labor-force members, to problematic, interminably

procreating residents, to a scourge that must be put under surveillance, policed, and at any opportunity, excised.

My focus upon the literature of depicting South Asians in Britain and North Africans in France stems from the parallel imperial histories that mark the relationships between these cultures. No doubt, the prolific cultural production that has come out postcolonial immigration attests to both its generative and volatile qualities. But one aspect of the postcolonial French North African and British South Asian populations has come to dominate nearly any conversation about immigration, whether in political, journalistic, scholarly, or even parlor-room exchanges, and that is the question of diasporic Islam. It is no accident that the majority of Muslims are Maghrebis in France and South Asians in the United Kingdom. Because of the contiguity between ethnicity and religion, Islam can be effectively *racialized* in both metropolitan contexts. And because of the long imperial histories between these cultures, the shadow of colonial policy looms large over shifts in immigration policy. As argued by Etienne Balibar and other scholars of European immigration, it is easy to draw a clear line between French and British policies that legislate immigrant populations and those that were used to divide and rule colonial subjects.²⁰ Restrictive and repressive immigration policies increasingly target, in particular, the French North African and British South Asian populations. And due to the working-class status of most first and second-generation Muslim immigrants in both national contexts, disenfranchisement abounds, resistance to assimilation is tinged with *ressentiment*, and the fearsome specter of radicalization haunts every enclave—both from the perspective of the state and the ethnic communities. Every novel discussed in *Other Cities* approaches the question of Islam in diaspora uniquely. Each chapter of my dissertation examines in detail the historical relationships the French and British Empires had to Islam, as well as the ways the novels depict

²⁰ In Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe?*

the practice and policing of Islam in twentieth-century (multicultural or *laïque*) Europe. The novels I examine not only portray the breaks, fissures, and tensions within a singular ethnic or national diasporic community; they also individually address the pluralities and complexities in the practice of Islam among the British South Asians and French North Africans. These are differences that precede the migratory journey itself, rooted in the diverse cultures of origin that come together in the immigrant enclaves of London and Paris. But they are also differences in Islamic practice that arise on metropolitan soil as a product of the cultural mixture the enclaves afford, and seem to cleave along *generational* lines, rather than class, race, or ethnic lines. In this sense, the urban setting in the novel of immigration gains even more importance in its representation of heterogenous immigrant life.

V. The City as a Metonym of Empire

Paris and London both have rich legacies as literary cities and are perennial objects of study. As the former metropolitan centers of vast empires, they are also historical seats of world power and wealth and still wield enormous power on the global stage.²¹ But my interest in Paris and London lies specifically in the way postcolonial immigrants have come to inhabit the former imperial hubs. In a reversal of the colonial project to mold the colony in the image of the metropole, the massive postwar influx of (im)migrants transformed not only the demographics of France and Britain, but also the shape of their capitals. As Edward Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism*: “cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they can consciously exclude. Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British

²¹ In this sense, Paris and London are “Global Cities” in Saskia Sassen’s sense of the term *par excellence*.

or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?" (Said, *Culture* 15). Arguably, India and Algeria's "impact" upon London and Paris is in quite literally bringing the spatial dynamics of colonization *into* the imperial metropole. And indeed, in many ways both Britain and France have endeavored to "draw a clear circle" around "British London" and "French Paris," compounded by the spatial and ideological segregation of postcolonial immigrant communities.

Cities are widely understood to be the spaces in which new modes of being and new subjectivities are formed by virtue of their density and pace of life. Anthropologist Michael Keith asserts: "the city has long been a site in which newness comes into the world," noting that "the sites of the city that display the most intense forms of intolerance are commonly also those that demonstrate the potential for the most intimate forms of cultural dialogue" (Keith 252). Keith importantly identifies that the social *friction* afforded by the space of the city is perhaps the most productive phenomenon of urbanity. Intolerance and confrontation give way, in the best cases, to dialogue, and perhaps solidarity. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha turns to the idea of the city (and in particular, the "western" city) as a possible space of resolution to the residual liminalities and ambivalences of colonial contact. In "the west, and increasingly elsewhere, it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out...For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity" (Bhabha 320). Of course, this conception of the city as a space of confrontation and solidarity is almost undoubtedly the contemporary *multicultural* city that has become so diverse because of the great changes in population after

WWII. It is the multicultural city that stages many and varied kinds of encounter by virtue of its being the destination for global flows of migrants. London and Paris, in the decades after decolonization, have become multicultural as never before (arguments could be made, of course, that both cities have been multicultural for centuries, but the sheer ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of inhabitants is most certainly unprecedented). Indeed, populations from the former colonies grew to such proportions in the late twentieth century that public and political discourse in both London and Paris coalesced, at numerous moments, around the “crisis” of immigration.

Contemporary multiculturalism in London and Paris is a product of thriving neighborhoods populated by postcolonial immigrants, demographically attesting to the imperial past of these two cities. In this sense, postcolonial London and Paris function as versions of Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones”: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 7). The power of the contact zone lies in its capacity to stage potentially contentious confrontations that can also generate new and unprecedented social configurations. Pratt asserts that even though a contact zone can involve a stark power differential, it “treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees,’ not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt 8). Pratt’s study, however, focuses largely upon “social spaces” *in the colony*, as does most of Bhabha’s work on “liminality,” and “ambivalence.” Theorists of the contemporary postcolonial city located in the Global South focus upon its “uneven development” (Edward Soja borrowing

Immanuel Wallerstein's terminology)²², or its "superfluity" (Achille Mbembe), or the *métissage* it fosters (Françoise Lionnet). But only recently has a vocabulary developed to describe the phenomenon of the postcolony appearing *within* the metropolitan cities of London and Paris.

The political exigencies we face in our present historical moment propels the need to theorize beyond the persistence of colonial dynamics in the globalized, multicultural metropolis, remaining attentive to the specific historical conditions of immigrant arrival and settling. The establishment of substantial immigrant populations, particularly from the former colonies in Britain and France, raises and compounds the question of displacement that is so central to postcolonial studies writ large, in that the phenomenon of postcolonial immigration displaces the already inherent displacements of the colonial condition *back onto the metropole*. In the case of postcolonial immigration to London and Paris, the phenomenon of displacement becomes manifold. Moreover, displacement in postcolonial immigration is not simply an abstract theoretical concept, but also a concrete, spatial phenomenon. Though Said remarks on the impossibility of extricating the trace of their former colonies from the city limits of Paris and London, the patterns of migration over the decades—and indeed, over the centuries—have largely confined immigrant communities to spaces *away* from the city center, in the outskirts or in adjacent suburbs. The placement of immigrant communities on the outer peripheries of London and Paris mirrors, microcosmically, the spatial relationship between metropolitan center and colonial periphery.

²² Wallerstein employs the language of "core" (and/or "center") and periphery in his World-Systems Theory. The discussions therein of uneven development in the global capitalist world order has guided some of my thinking about migration patterns between (post)colony and metropole with respect to labor and class. Together with Samir Amin's concept of "unequal development," a general theory arises of a global economic order that is predicated upon large portions of the "peripheral" postcolonial world remaining financially indebted to the "central" post-imperial metropolitan nations, thus negating any linear notion of development. See, for instance, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, 1979; and Samir Amin, *Dynamics of Global Crisis*

London and Paris, as former imperial hubs, have always been a space of interpellation for the migrant arriving from the colony or postcolony. I use “interpellation” in the Althusserian sense, meaning that in these two cities, the migrant is always hailed and informed of his or her place within the dominant ideology.²³ Despite the conceit of the colonial “civilizing mission” or *mission civilisatrice*, the reception of the migrant in the imperial center during the colonial era immediately clarified the position of the colonial subject within the larger ideological framework of imperial France and Britain: as fundamentally uncivilizable. A well-known and oft-studied episode in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks (Peau Noire, Masques Blanc)* demonstrates the process of a European subject (a small French child) hailing a migrant (Fanon), bringing him into an ideology that makes explicit the power dynamics between the two parties in the interaction. This is the scene of Fanon’s traumatic interpellation on the streets of Paris after arriving from Martinique. Haunting the text is the refrain of a child (“*Maman*, look, a negro! I’m scared!”) who not only hails Fanon into a racialized order that disqualifies him from “Frenchness” as such (despite Martinique officially being an Overseas Department of France), but also establishes that he is to be feared as radically other, and thus dangerous. The episode confirms that becoming part of the dominant culture is a near impossibility for the migrant. In this moment, the metropolitan subject (child though he may be) mistakes Fanon, the “good” kind of colonial subject, for a “negro,” i.e., the “bad” kind of colonial subject. Significantly, this encounter takes place *in the metropole*, on a Parisian sidewalk. This act of interpellation occurs when the colonial subject migrates to the metropole and attempts to assert himself as a member of the French public, only to be shut down immediately by a child—a member of French society who ostensibly has no ulterior political agenda. Fanon returns to this moment of extreme trauma

²³ Althusser argues that “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” and emphasizes that “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ... ‘transforms’ the individual into subjects” (Althusser 11).

again and again throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*. The paradigm Fanon sets up here—that of the elite, “evolved” migrant being traumatically interpellated as one of the unrefined immigrant masses—is a motif that works its way into many novels depicting immigration. As this dissertation shall demonstrate, this traumatic moment of misrecognition is the sort that informs the crisis of representation underlying each of the texts I examine.

Later in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon illustrates a nearly opposite encounter with an adult Frenchman, which exemplifies the double bind in which Fanon finds himself. This time in a genteel parlor instead of a Parisian street, in which he is recognized elsewhere as the “good” kind of colonial subject (not one worthy of fearing) he is assessed thus:

You have nothing in common with a real Negro. You are not black; you are ‘very, very dark.

This practice is all too familiar to students of color in France. There is a general refusal to consider them as authentic ‘Negroes.’ The ‘Negro’ is the savage, whereas the student is civilized (Fanon, *Black Skin* 51-52).

Here Fanon sets up an important distinction between the categories of colonial subjects with whom the metropolitan subject would be familiar—the “student” and the “savage.” The trauma that Fanon suffers on the street and that he works through in the course of the text is not only in being mistaken for a “savage.” The trauma stems, just as importantly, from being denied his position as a “student”—that is, educated, civilized, evolved (*évolué*, in French colonial parlance), and by extension, cosmopolitan, itinerant, worldly. In this sense, race intersects with class and acculturation (being “civilized” exempts him from being “black”). The “good” kind of colonial subject eventually makes for a “good” kind of migrant to France, and continues on into the conception of the “good” kind of postcolonial immigrant. But as Fanon’s narrative shows, the possibility of achieving the status of a “good” migrant in the eyes of the European public (i.e., fully integrated) is at best ephemeral and at worst, utterly foreclosed.

Though Fanon's experience cannot be perfectly mapped onto the situation of twentieth-century North Africans in Paris (or for that matter, South Asians in London), it does elucidate many of intersections of class, race, and ethnicity that characterize the (ideological and spatial) position of postcolonial immigrants in either context. An important perceptual and ideological difference exists between kinds of migrants, and it is not reducible simply to different ethnicities, races, linguistic traditions, or nationalities. The vast majority of North Africans moving to France and South Asians to Britain after WWII were not highly educated, and thus ineligible to move in the circles of the metropolitan elite. They were instead laborers—often hailing from rural villages in the colony—who joined the ranks of the urban working class upon arrival. And they went on to establish thriving communities in the traditionally working-class spaces outside the metropolitan city center. The elite, educated cosmopolitan migrant, however, remains itinerant and *moving* between metropole and colony: rootless, but empowered by the ability—the *option*—to move. This is not to say that they do not establish permanent residence or citizenship in France or Britain. But the capacity to resist rootedness as an ideological *choice* is a mark of privilege. Ironically, being given more unfettered access to French and British acculturation allows for the possibility of avoiding allegiance to any particular culture. The majority of colonial migrants (and subsequently postcolonial immigrants) however, do not circulate to and from the metropole, and neither do they have the cultural or financial capital to do so. The overarching goal is to *settle* by forming communities, establishing families, becoming *rooted* in the metropole, and very significantly, taking up space. Herein lies the crisis of split allegiance within the immigrant intellectual that crops up in the novel of immigration: who does the immigrant intellectual represent—the would-be European or the disenfranchised alien? And who exactly does the novel of immigration represent—the rarified elite or the proletarian majority of

immigrants? Does the novel of immigration do the work of both political and aesthetic representation if there exists such a chasm between those who are representing and those who are represented? The novels I examine in my dissertation broach these quandaries on the level of form but also in their narratives. They do so by staging encounters between different types of immigrants in the space of the immigrant enclave.

VI. The Immigrant Enclave as a Space of Interpellation

Sociological studies of cities in the United States have theorized extensively on the “ethnic” or “immigrant enclave” and the social impact of “kinship networks,” not only in terms of the propensity of immigrants to settle in urban areas already inhabited by those of similar ethnic background, but also the economic and cultural advantages this practice affords to those who are new arrivals and without resources. Simultaneously, the ethnic enclave presents challenges to “assimilation” or “integration” into western culture and national ideals, which is ostensibly one of the major goals of immigrating—at least from the perspective of the state.²⁴ The “enclave” is a concept that has been evoked less frequently in the European context, and indeed, there is a distinct historical difference between the waves of immigration that have marked the clichéd “melting pot” metaphor in the U.S. In the former imperial cities of London and Paris, what compounds this logical trend of chain migration and the formation of urban immigrant enclaves are the residues of colonial spatial politics mapped onto the contemporary metropole. Michel Laronde (referring French cities specifically, but with a logic that can be extended to London as well) deems the formation of tightly knit immigrant communities outside the spatial and ideological center of the city “enclavement”:

²⁴ See, for instance, Portes, Alejandro, and Kenneth Wilson (1980) and Waldinger (1993)

[T]he tactic of ‘enclavement’ is indeed a policy of spatial isolation, and it may suggest creating a space of one’s own to oppose...the anonymity of the Nation-state. [It] refuses acculturation by erecting a protection against an outer, larger and more threatening space; although it means that the inner space is surrounded the notion of ‘enclave’ also helps minorities preserve an identity, and to combat estrangement from one’s own Culture even if it is through self-inflicted isolation. This then invites recognition by the central Culture, albeit through mechanisms of rejection and helps us to understand the disturbing function of a ghetto, the perfect example of an enclave. The concept of ‘enclavement’ is disturbing to the system of power...[W]hen read by the central discourse, it rings rebellious, isolationist, and self-destructive; when read by a minority discourse, the other’s reading of rebelliousness is reinterpreted as preservation of identity and Culture. (Laronde 71-72)

Laronde sees “enclavement” as a defensive and “tactical” move for immigrant communities, employing Michel de Certeau’s lexicon of “tactics”—subversive ways of moving through urban space that subvert the “strategic” and hegemonic organization of the city. But it is important to understand that this tactical subversion of space is in response to being radically relegated to the outside of Paris and London’s city centers. “Enclavement” is the reappropriation of a spatial practice that keeps the logic of colonization alive and well, even within the bounds of the metropole. In the novels I consider in my dissertation, the *immigrant enclave* is a formidable presence, in such forms as the squalid *bidonvilles* (or shantytowns) of Maghrebi laborers in Paris-adjacent Nanterre, the *banlieues* outside the central *arrondissements* of Paris, the Council Estates of East London, and the working class neighborhoods of North London. These urban enclaves are often set in opposition to the type of space from which the central characters have emigrated, whether it be (post)colonial cities or rural villages in South Asia and North Africa. But just as significantly, the immigrant enclave stands in tension with the city-centers of London and Paris, where wealth and power are concentrated.

Immigrant habitations and dwellings, domestic and public alike, feature prominently in the literary depiction the immigrant experience, often more so than the journey itself. Focusing

on the context of England, Patrick Parrinder identifies an important and counterintuitive common feature among novels of immigration: their tendency to portray stasis and cloistered spaces rather than migratory movement and itinerancy.

What most novels of immigration have in common...is their sense of spatial confinement. Sometimes the passage to England is described, but there is little or no sense of geographical exploration within England. The characters are held with a highly specific local space, or what the language of imperialism would call a settlement or outpost. (Parrinder 383)

The enclave is thus the site of the journey's end, where the immigrant stakes a claim on the land of the former colonizer, and marks the shift from movement to a mode of stasis, settling, and rooting—a space in which the *migrant* transitions into the *immigrant*. The immigrant enclave is thus a profoundly contradictory space. It is where the immigrant communities carve out space for themselves by establishing successful communities, and also where they gather political and social power. But at the same time, it is where immigrant working class (or the immigrant proletariat) is consigned to settle, lacking the access to social capital that allows the immigrant elite the possibility of circulating through the city center. The establishment of immigrant communities in the outer boroughs of London and the *banlieues* outside the *Boulevard Périphérique* in Paris follows the logic of the socio-economic organization of these cities.

In the case of London, the disparity between the central City of London and the eastern enclaves that principally housed the English working classes, and subsequently populations of French Huguenots and Jews before the mass arrival of South Asians, is a spatial manifestation of deeply rooted British economic and social and economic hierarchies.²⁵ The formation of London as a fundamentally segregated city was predicated upon the processes of empire, and so it

²⁵In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams emphasizes: “the total wealth which came back...[to England], was not evenly distributed. London was at one of its peaks as an imperialist city when it created its desperate centre of poverty and misery in the East End” (Williams 283).

follows a certain logic that the settlements of postcolonial immigrants should be superimposed over the internally colonized working class.²⁶ Paris had a similar, more spectacular, history to London of excising its proletariat from the central *arrondissements* under the direction of Napoleon III's notorious urban planner, Baron von Haussman in the 1860s.²⁷ The populations living in the outer boroughs of London and the *banlieues* of Paris have always been exiled, cast out on class-basis.²⁸ The patterns of settling for the majority of postcolonial immigrants in Paris and London have facilitated the mapping of racial and ethnic difference onto class difference. The concentration of specific ethnicities in the urban working-class spaces in and around Paris and London seemingly threaten the French and British state, as well as the general public ("communalism" has become a hot-button word in contemporary immigration debates in both France and Britain) but simultaneously has facilitated state repression and control of these populations.²⁹ The spatial logic of immigrant settlement also facilitates the surveillance and

²⁶ When Parrinder remarks that one of the "most striking features of the fiction of immigration into Britain in the overwhelming presence of working-class London as a setting, including the recurrence, over more than a century, of particular areas such as Whitechapel and Spitalfields in the East End," it becomes ever clearer that the spatial organization of London makes this setting a given (Parrinder 384).

²⁷ As David Harvey notes in his grand study of Parisian city-space, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, part and parcel of Haussmann's renovation plan for the city was to evacuate the center of an urban poor population, largely to curb the formation of a revolutionary mob. "His evident desire [was] to rid Paris of its industrial base and working class, and thus transform it, presumably, into a nonrevolutionary bastion of support for the bourgeois order.... And much of the working class was forced out with it, though by no means as far as he wished. The city center was given over to monumental representations of imperial power and administration, finance and commerce, and the growing services that spring up around a burgeoning tourist trade" (Harvey 146).

²⁸ As Paris became quite literally the center of a vast, global network of colonial satellites, it also cast out its working-class base into colonies of another sort, within the bounds of the Hexagon. And the quarters to which the working class were relegated were the squalid *bidonvilles* that eventually housed the Maghrebi migrant workers who were recruited to France after WWII. Jacob Paskins remarks: "Although some bidonvilles had grown around the edge of Paris since the late nineteenth century... [i]n the 1950s bidonvilles proliferated as they become populated with refugees escaping conflicts in north Africa.... The bidonvilles around Paris were mostly established along ethnic lines" (Paskins 97).

²⁹ During the Algerian war of independence, as Hannah Feldman notes: "As much as the administration feared the concentration of Algerians in any particular place, there were also benefits to be enjoyed, like the isolation and containment that such removed shantytowns provided for their investigations. Displacement and isolation were tools of war like any other" (Feldman 68-69).

policing of immigrant populations through policies that basically continue the logic of colonization. Etienne Balibar argues, in the case of contemporary France,

Just like the policies and laws that preceded it, it just the state at the service of a social and economic program of discrimination and hierarchization of populations; it ensures that the condition of immigrants will remain marked by insecurity, even when one has crossed the threshold of legality or even naturalization, so that in sum, *once an immigrant always an immigrant*, with the unlimited possibilities of exploitation that status allows. (Balibar 62)

The ideological status of the postcolonial immigrant, regardless of citizenship status, is facilitated in part by the spatial organization of London and Paris. It does not take much imagination to extend “once an immigrant always an immigrant” to “once a colonial subject, always a colonial subject.” The immigrant enclave takes on a metonymic quality repeating, in miniature, not simply the spatial dynamics of imperial center and periphery, but the inherent power dynamics of that historically uneven relationship. In this sense, the postcolonial immigrant enclave functions as an enacted representation of the totality of colonial and postcolonial history on the scale of the city.

As such, immigrant enclave is a prime example of what Michel Foucault has called a *heterotopia*: “counter-sites, a kind of enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” and is “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 24, 26). Examples of heterotopias Foucault provides are as various as a theater, a mirror, a garden, a ship, an Oriental carpet, a cemetery, and, quite significantly, the settler colony at the dawn of the colonial era.³⁰ What makes the immigrant

³⁰ Foucault writes about the heterotopia of “compensation...I am thinking, for example, of the first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century...marvelous, absolutely regulated colonies in which human perfection was effectively achieved.” To understand the settler colony as a heterotopia is to see the initial utopian project of colonization as creating copies of Europe across the face of the earth (27). Elizabeth Deloughrey has described this phenomenon, in the context of imperial Britain, as the impulse to create the “repeating islands” of colonial

enclave a *heterotopic* space is that it not only repeats the structure of Empire on a small scale, it entirely *reverses* the logic of empire. By forming thriving communities in and around the urban centers of the two most powerful imperial hubs of the previous two centuries, postcolonial immigrants have performed the most subversive tactical move imaginable by mimicking the colonizer's habit of forming (to re-quote Parrinder) "what the language of imperialism would call a settlement or outpost." In so doing, the establishment of the immigrant enclave perhaps proves (most diabolically) that the *mission civilisatrice* is at last a *fait accompli*. The postcolonial immigrant effectively adopts the stance of the European *par excellence* by *colonizing* metropolitan Britain and France.

VIII. The Other Paris, the Other London

Perhaps the most heterotopic valence of the immigrant enclave, the most powerful aspect of its metonymic function, is the way in which it condenses all the geographic spaces and temporal touch points in the complex matrix of colonization and its aftermath into a single neighborhood. This makes it a profoundly rich theater in which to stage encounters between different kinds of immigrants. Here the South Asian, the Caribbean, the West African meet each other; the North African, Antilliean, the Southeast Asian meet each other. Not only do these immigrants meet, they form new allegiances and social configurations that are heretofore unprecedented and would be impossible if not for the singular attraction of migrating to the former imperial hub. The eight novels analyzed in *Other Cities* portray the unprecedented—and often unstable—forms of identity, solidarity and resistance that arise in the mutable and

settlements throughout its empire. "The tension between the contained English isle and its propensity to expand outward by maritime rule draws attention to how conceptions of limited island space were vital to 'spawning' an Anglo-Saxon diaspora into colonial territories" (DeLoughrey, 7).

heterotopic urban space of the immigrant enclave. But what is unique about each one of the texts I have chosen to analyze in *Other Cities* is the manner in which they also stage the encounter between different *classes* of immigrants—namely the immigrant elite encountering the immigrant proletariat. In this sense, the immigrant enclave is a space of interpellation that is even more complex than the primal scene of postcolonial trauma Fanon experiences when the child hails him as *le nègre*. In the space of the immigrant enclave, the immigrant elite (the immigrant intellectual, the “civilized student,”) is brought into the fold of French and British culture simply as *an immigrant*: part of (and on equal footing as) the immigrant masses, and thus part of the immigrant “problem.” The novels themselves negotiate in their formal experimentations the ways in which they can represent the varied, fragmented, and volatile experience of postcolonial immigration to Britain and France.

Other Cities features two chapters focusing on novels of immigration in late-twentieth century Paris and two chapters that focus on mid-twentieth century and early twenty-first century London. In Chapter One, “Illegible Paris,” I look at *Les boucs*, by Driss Chraïbi, alongside *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, by Rachid Boudjedra. I argue that in depicting the endemic condition of illiteracy among Algerian migrants using high literary style, these novels highlight the disparity between immigrant laborers and immigrant intellectuals in mid-century France. I return to Paris in Chapter Three, “Parisian Re-Orientalism,” in which I examine *Shèrazade*, by Leïla Sebbar, and *La vie sexuelle d'un Islamiste à Paris*, by Leïla Marouane. Employing non-linear, aphoristic narration, both texts destabilize ideas of center and periphery in depicting French-Algerian protagonists who perform Orientalist stereotypes in order to accrue Parisian cultural capital. Canonically male French figures such as the Orientalist and the *flâneur* are processed through feminine immigrant perspectives and take on complex layers

of signification and subversion.

I place these French texts in comparison to four British novels of immigration. In Chapter Two, “You Know Nothing about London,” I discuss the heterotopic depiction of the immigrant enclave in *The Shadow Lines*, by Amitav Ghosh, and *The Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie. The formal experiments of these two novels reflect the fluctuations of colonial and postwar British immigration policies that map religious, class, and racial difference onto each other. The incendiary confrontations depicted in *The Satanic Verses* come, in turn, to affect public discourse on immigration. Finally, Chapter Four, “The Council Flat and the Globe,” looks at *White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith, and *Brick Lane*, by Monica Ali. I analyze the depiction of insurgency among second-generation Muslim South Asian males in millennial London as a reconfiguration of nineteenth century Indian nationalism. I contend that through their references to male Bengali nationalists both of these novels anticipate an inchoate and as-yet directionless political movement among second-generation immigrant youth that often takes the form of radical Islam, whereas the women in these novels become figures of stability, rootedness, and assimilation. The move to more stable realism in the latter texts reflects the possibilities of settling and *embourgeoisement* for South Asians in Britain.

II. The Novel of Immigration and Form

Though there is substantial scholarship on immigrant authors in the French and British contexts, comparative studies of these two bodies of literature remain few and far between.³¹ *Other Cities* puts these literatures in conversation, both because of similarities in the historical configurations in the British and French colonial empires, but also because of similar social

³¹ Scholarship often takes on literature of migration in Europe as a whole, such as *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-colonial Europe*, edited by Sandra Ponzalesi and Daniela Merolla (2005); and *Immigrant Fictions*, edited by Rebecca Walkowitz.

realities among immigrant populations that have settled in metropolitan England and France in the twentieth century. The discursive and juridical imbrications of the British and French novel of immigration raise the question: is the form of the novel affected by the political conditions under which it was produced? I argue that although the relationship of Britain to its South Asian immigrants bears much resemblance to the French relationship to its North African immigrants, the divergent *formal* trajectories of the British and French novels of immigration have as much to do with residues of differing policies of colonial education in North Africa and South Asia as with the different positions these communities have inhabited in the larger conception of the British and French nations.

The form, content, and indeed, the reception of the novels I examine in *Other Cities* vacillate in a rather extreme form of dialogism. They are not only in dialogue with each other in addition to the British and French literary canon as intertexts, but with the socio-political conditions of their production. Each one of these novels is self-conscious almost to the point of self-theorization. By turns they make reference to the specific changes in immigration policy that affect the populations depicted (in the case of *Les boucs*); to the political figures that they will potentially exacerbate (in the case of *The Satanic Verses*); to the changes in public and political discourse *precipitated* by one of the other novels (in the case of *White Teeth*); to recent world events whose political consequences are not yet clear (in the case of *Brick Lane* and *La vie sexuelle*). Each novel has a singular place within a massive constellation of imperial history, contemporary politics, and the reverberating social effects of the novels themselves. Formally, where novels depicting British South Asians have strong ties to the realist (or magical realist) family chronicle, the French novel of North African immigration is most often autobiographical and episodic. I see this contrast as symptomatic of a significantly different trajectory for

postcolonial immigrant communities in their respective metropolitan contexts—residues of differing divide-and-rule colonial policies on education, labor, and habitation.

The legacy of divisive colonial policies are perhaps most evident in the tension in the question of *how* these novels represent the immigrant experience and *who* represents the paradigmatic figure of the immigrant. The issue is crystallized in the fraught problem of representation—does the immigrant intellectual stand in proxy for the immigrant masses? Does he or she do so by producing an aesthetic representation? Does this complicate the question of audience, i.e., who is the novel of immigration *for*? Does it galvanize the downtrodden immigrant population or does it inform the general French and British populace? The texts I examine approach these complicated questions head-on, often staging the encounter between the immigrant intellectual and the immigrant proletariat as well as the alienation between them. The political task of the immigrant intellectual to represent the condition of the immigrant laborer in literary form produces a *narrative* anxiety as well, and at times the very form of the text itself appears encumbered by the political weight (i.e., in the maximalism of Rushdie and Smith) or unable to bear it (i.e., in the fragmentation of Sebbar and Marouane). Though interpellated by the postcolonial British and French majority as a monolithic immigrant “problem,” the figure of the immigrant becomes manifold in these novels. These novels explore, negotiate, and reconfigure the common experience of migration to the metropole, undoing the collapsing of nuance endemic to the process of immigration.

The novels of *Other Cities* challenge the neat categories of “Asian,” “Maghrebi,” or increasingly, “Muslim” that the French and British majority use to describe postcolonial immigrant populations by depicting moments of alienation in these texts that occur *within* these seemingly unified communities. The eight novels examined *s*, in various ways, meditate upon the

question of what it is to settle in the imperial metropolis as a member of a community that was formerly colonized—whether in doing so the immigrant communities compromise their cultural identity and whether France and Britain become effectively more Maghrebi or South Asian in the process. The latent question here, too, is what compels migrants to emigrate: are they driven by cosmopolitan aspirations, or to answer a call for manual labor (or, alternately, are they driven to migrate as refugees)? The immigrant enclave figures prominently in these novels in various incarnations—whether as a squalid shantytown, a hellish cesspool, a stagnant settlement, a multicultural melting pot, or a claustrophobic trap from which to escape. From the literary representation of the immigrant experience, questions arise about social hierarchy, local prejudices, inter- and intraethnic tension and reconfigurations of these structures in the contradictory urban space of the metropolitan immigrant enclave.

In portraying the complicated historical and cultural factors that conspire to create the heterotopic immigrant enclave and the ethnically, racially, and religiously plural populations therein, the novels expose the fraudulence of presuming any sense of homogeneity among postcolonial immigrants. As Ali Behdad warns, “To ignore the crucial economic and cultural differences among immigrant communities by labeling them all ‘postnational others’ marginalized by the white nation-state...proves not only intellectually problematic but also politically dangerous” (Behdad 76). It is thus paramount to attend to the nuances and fissures within immigrant communities. My aim in this dissertation is not only to examine the ways the French and British novel of immigration provides a counter-discourse to nuance and complicate the dominant monolithic representation of an immigrant “problem,” but to carefully consider the ways these differences arise manifest on a formal level. I read the formal experimentations in the French and British novel of immigration as deeply symptomatic of two rapidly changing social

milieus, reflecting at once intensely complex historical relationships of colonization and the churning machinations of contemporary globalization, and the ways these shifts keep the French and British postcolonial immigrant populations in a perpetual state of instability.

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Chapter 1

Illegible Paris: Illiteracy and Alienation in *Les boucs* and *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*

Nos ancêtres n'étaient pas tous des gaulois.

Our ancestors were not all the Gauls.

— *Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration*, Paris *métro* campaign, 2013

The mid-twentieth century was an era of extreme volatility for metropolitan France, due in no small part to the violent social upheaval of decolonization, and a resultant mass wave of immigrants from the Maghreb. Perhaps one of the most unstable and alienated figures to arise out of this period in French history is that of the French-illiterate Algerian, who migrated to France to answer the call for labor only to face a hostility, ostracization, and poverty in the former imperial center. The literature produced out of this period reflected the widespread social instability and resultant alienation of the time, with the experimental, self-reflexive literary genre of the *nouveau roman*, or the “new novel,” gaining popularity. The *nouveau roman* troubled the mimetic function of the nineteenth-century French realist novel and its presumed fidelity to social reality, as well as its ties to a universalist *Bildungsroman* narrative. Informed both by the deeply alienated experience of mid-twentieth century Algerian migrants and the generic turns of

the *nouveau roman*, two Francophone novels depict the twentieth-century plight of the alienated Algerian migrant laborer in France: *Les boucs*, by Driss Chraïbi (1955) and *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, by Rachid Boudjedra (1975). Between the publication dates of these two novels, France's relationship with Algeria changed radically. The texts bookend an era during which France implemented a new law granting Algerian subjects citizenship in 1947; Algeria gained independence from France in a violent revolution in 1962; and France halted all immigration from its former North African colonies in 1973 (Silverstein 4). What draws these two novels together is the way in which they reflect, both in terms of their narratives and in their experimental self-reflexive form, the extreme sense of estrangement suffered by Algerian migrant workers in France. In both Chraïbi's and Boudjedra's novels, assimilation is a veritable impossibility that is demonstrated to be less the fault of a resistant and communalistic immigrant population and more a product of France's structural inhospitability towards its former colonial subjects. The migrants in both texts are plagued by illiteracy in French language and mores, and it becomes clear in the course of both narratives that the condition of illiteracy is one that imperial France implemented as a strategy of control in North Africa. Its legacy among the postwar migrant population prevents them from sufficiently navigating the city spaces in and around Paris, and eventually proves to have dire consequences in both novels. *Les boucs* and *Topographie* meditate on the fraught question of literacy, writing, and access to the French language as a damaging residue of colonial educational policies in the process of migration to the metropole. This chapter examines the unique problems of depicting, in novel form, the Algerian migrant labor population who were extracted and segregated in spatial and ideological practices, first as colonized subjects who continued to be colonized in the metropole, and later as postcolonial immigrants with aspirations to assimilate as citizens. Both Chraïbi and Boudjedra

approach the segregation and alienation of Algerian migrant workers by depicting the experience of illiteracy, and specifically the legacy among migrants of illiteracy deployed as a colonial ruling practice in North Africa on the level of narrative and of form.

Chraïbi and Boudjedra's novels meditate on the difference between different kinds of migrants who arrived in France from Algeria during and after the war of independence. Standing apart from the majority of North African migrants, who were largely uneducated and worked industrial jobs, were the migrant elites who came from a small class of privileged colonized subjects that was granted access to French education: the *évolués*. The most potent encounter in either of these texts is not necessarily between the French metropolitan subject and the North African migrant, but instead the two kinds of migrants facing each other across an ideological gulf. This encounter occurs in the content of these novels, but more importantly, it occurs on the level of form in the experimental, *nouveau roman* style both novels employ. In this chapter, I trace the figure of the *évolué* within the bounds of the narrative of *Les boucs*, which tells the story of an Algerian writer-turned-criminal who is plagued and torn apart by his paradoxical status and his double displacement—first from his fellow countrymen through his education, and second from the ranks of the *évolué* back to the milieu of the *travailleurs* as a convict. In Boudjedra's *Topographie*, an Algerian migrant arrives in Paris only to get trapped in the labyrinth of the *métro*, harrowed by his inability to decipher any of the French signs that direct him out of the bowels of the subway. His sense of entrapment is brutally resolved in meeting a violent death in the station at the hands of French racists. The *évolué* figures more abstractly in *Topographie*, as an imagined counterpoint to its French-illiterate protagonist, and indeed appears to dissolve into the hallucinatory and savvy prose of the novel's narrator.

The rampant illiteracy of Algeria's migrant laborers in the transition between late imperialism and Algerian independence was not an arbitrary phenomenon, but a calculated policy of the French imperial machine. To keep the native populations uneducated and without access to skills for bureaucratic or technological labor was advantageous for control and domination. The result of this centuries-long policy was a vast arsenal of unskilled workers to recruit to the metropole during and after the World Wars, to both fight and work on behalf of French patrimony. Yet as the decades wore on and as the Algerian independence movement gained traction, attitudes towards the influx of laborers grew more hostile in metropolitan France. Thus the possibility of assimilation was precluded not only by lack of familiarity and education, but hostility from the French public which, in effect, perpetuated the condition of cultural and linguistic alienation and illiteracy among the migrant population.

Notably, the two novels I focus on in this chapter take place in spaces *near* the metropolitan center of Paris, but not properly *in* Paris. *Les boucs* depicts the wretched lives of Algerian migrant laborers on the outskirts of Paris in Nanterre, moving further out into wilderness as the *boucs* leave the city to escape from the consequences of their collective crime. During this time, Nanterre—future site of the prestigious French university, Paris X Nanterre (now called Université Paris Ouest Nanterre)—was a network of shantytowns, or *bidonvilles*, that housed a population of majority-male migrants and immigrants, largely hailing from the Maghreb and Eastern Europe. The setting of *Topographie* is technically Paris, but more precisely, except in the frustrated memories of the protagonist, the narrative never leaves the infernal space of the Paris *métro*. The duration of the novel follows the migrant's tortured journey through the inscrutable underground network of Paris's subway system as he unsuccessfully tries to navigate an unplanned detour with no access to the French language. In

both texts, access to central Paris remains out of reach, despite the nearness of the city itself. Just as Paris remains inaccessible, “Frenchness” as such remains inaccessible. Both novels are anxious texts, tonally uncomfortable and explosively political. In dense, and at times impenetrable prose, both texts demonstrate on both the level of content and form the extremely fraught question of the *évolué* representing the migrant worker while simultaneously negotiating the impossibility of assimilation to France.

I. Chraïbi as an Unwelcome Representative

Chraïbi’s first novel, *Le passé simple* (1954) is an angry coming-of-age tale that severely indicts traditional Moroccan patriarchy. Because of its biting criticism of Islamic conservatism and patriarchy, *Le passé simple* was met with great controversy, especially from Chraïbi’s fellow Francophone Moroccans. The novel was banned in Morocco until 1977 and was seen by many critics as a treacherous text, “playing the enemy’s card at a crucial time in Moroccan history” as Florian Kohstall asserts (101). But as Kohstall further argues, the novel trenchantly offers “a counter-narrative to official conceptions of nationalism, and aims at reconciling the quest for modernization with the country’s history and Islamic religious identity” (101). Chraïbi was angrily rejected by militant Moroccan Muslims, who understood *Le passé simple* to be a betrayal of their anticolonial efforts, and was issued a death threat from the *Parti Démocrate de l’Indépendance* for its critique of Islam and Moroccan culture. The outsized criticism Chraïbi received from his compatriots resembles the even more violent response to *The Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie would suffer thirty-five years later. As Nicholas Harrison asserts: “from the perspective of the PDI, [Chraïbi’s] offence was precisely that he had not aligned himself with the task of fuelling anticolonial feeling and building a sense of Moroccan identity.” Harrison goes on

to note—and this aspect of the controversy resonates in particular with the turmoil around Rushdie’s novel—“that the whole affair was marked by relative inattention on all sides to the specifically literary qualities of the text, which marked it out as an innovative work.” The implication here is that the furor of Chraïbi’s contemporaries has less to do with the content of the novel itself than the perceived gulf between Chraïbi’s political stance and the members of Moroccan Muslim public who were positioning themselves against the French. *Le passé simple*, rather than being a galvanizing work reflective of anticolonial causes, was instead critical of Moroccan society. Harrison notes that because Chraïbi was educated in Morocco before arriving in Paris in the mid-1940s to study chemistry and eventually journalism at French university, he “was singularly unrepresentative of most Moroccans. He had been educated at a French school in Casablanca” and had “lived in France since 1947; and he was literate in French (and indeed Arabic),” unlike the largely French-illiterate majority of Morocco (Harrison 512-513). Thus Chraïbi’s most controversial act was the apparent refusal to *represent* the majority sentiments of his fellow Moroccans.

Perhaps as a response to the indictment from his fellow Maghrebis, in *Les boucs* Chraïbi directly addresses the inequity and oppression suffered by Maghrebi workers in metropolitan France, this time turning his attentions to Algerian migrants. After the damages suffered during the Second World War, postwar France recruited a massive number of migrant laborers to from its colonies to help rebuild the war-ravaged nation.³² The tens of thousands of men migrated, particularly from the colonized areas of the Maghreb, to the industrial outskirts of France’s major urban areas for labor purposes were expected to return home after their purpose had been served. However, the new population of North African migrants instead made an indelible mark on

³² A 1965 study notes: “the Algerian element may be estimated at about 475,000.” It should be noted that the majority of migrant laborers arrived not from French colonies, but other parts of Europe. For instance: “In the two decades after 1945, up to 800,000 Portuguese workers migrated to France” (Paskins 69).

France not only by staying, but by raising families and establishing substantial communities in the French metropole. With this wave of arrivals, the shape and content of French culture began to change in kind. North African migrant laborers, the majority of whom were Algerian and who were, until 1962, still colonized subjects, were thus no longer relegated to in the faraway colony but now a visible and formidable force. An indirect consequence of recruiting from the colonies was that now metropolitan France was forced to confront the results of a century-long colonization process on metropolitan soil. Significantly, the substantial presence of migrants from the colonial world was evidence, in embodied form, of the paradoxes and aporias that undergird the French conception of “universalism” that is so foundational to French Republicanism. As Elisa Camiscioli remarks, the Enlightenment conception of universalism was complicated by the arrival and settling of substantial immigrant populations, which “intertwined fates of universalism and particularism in the French immigration debate, as it powerfully demonstrates the clash of a universalist social theory and racialized labor force” (Camiscioli, *Reproducing* 52). Rather than applying universalist principles to the growing number of Maghrebi inhabitants within the metropole, France continued effectively to continue colonial policies of management and control by using Orientalist logic to segregate workers of North African origin from other workers, even before the majority arrived after WWII. Camiscioli elsewhere cites a “survey conducted by the consortium of coal mine owners” from after WWI which “reported that the output of North Africans was inferior...due to a ‘less robust constitution’...and ‘clumsiness of their movements’ and ‘slowness of their reflexes.’...Upon their arrival, immigrants of color were forced to live and work apart from their French and European counterparts” (Camiscioli, “Race” 61-62). The segregation of Maghrebi migrant workers, who were largely pushed to *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns, outside such cities as Paris,

Marseilles, and Lyon was a spatial reification of the ideological separation of migrants from the North African colonies, who were understood to be unassimilable, and thus ironically, not eligible to participate in the advantages of so-called universalism.

Numerous scholars have noted the prescience of *Les boucs*; published a year before Moroccan independence and eleven before the end of Algeria's violent war of independence, Chraïbi's work depicts a condition of life among the *bidonville*-dwellers in France whose urgency and relevancy only increased throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. In terms of the ways Chraïbi positions himself within the contentious problem of representation, Germaine Brée, Chraïbi's English translator, identifies a universalizing impulse underlying Chraïbi's narrative of Algerian migrant workers in late-imperial France; in the depiction of this particular subjugated minority class, she claims that he seeks to address subjugation on a world scale. In her preface to the English translation of *Les boucs*, Brée asserts that Chraïbi aims to represent all oppressed populations: "those beings caught in the cogs of history, those persons 'in all times and all places...and not just North Africans in France—whose fate it was to be sacrificial victims, whether the Negro in America, the Jew in the Middle East, the Moslem in India, the slaves of ancient Rome or Greece, assimilated into a civilization, as though to prove that no creation of man has ever been for everyone or ever been perfect'" (Chraïbi, *Butts* 5). However, the tortuous narrative itself demonstrates that the very act of representation is a vexed one for both the writer and the novel in different ways. In the novel, the term "boucs"—a word in French that means "goat" and in particular "scapegoat," as well as the head butts of a goat provoked—comes to represent the Algerian migrant workers in postwar France at large. Brée's assertion that the novel appeals to all worldly scapegoats, the "sacrificial victims" of history, highlights the obvious religious undertones of the term. The Abrahamic story of the sacrificial

goat resonates, in particular, with the Muslim population of his novel. Indeed, Islam, though not an overt motif throughout the narrative, comes to the wretched *boucs* in a fleeting moment of transcendence and community in what amounts to a life of misery, hopelessness, and squalor in mid-century suburban Paris. Yet this assessment of the novel, which understands the writing of *Les boucs* to be an endeavor of solidarity and empowerment, is undone by the anguished ruminations of its protagonist on the vexed question of representation. *Les boucs* self-reflexively meditates on the ethics and even very the possibility of a novel to represent the plight of the illiterate and disempowered population of Maghrebi workers who were brought in to rebuild the nation that, in its capacities as an empire, had been oppressing them for over a century.

At the heart of *Les boucs* lies a central tension between the novel's protagonist, Yalaan Waldick, an Algerian writer, and the *boucs*—the larger milieu of Algerian workers amongst whom Waldick lives. The novel has the trademark self-reflexivity of a modernist text: Waldick, a mission-educated migrant who rose through the ranks of Catholic schools in Algeria before arriving in France, struggles to write a novel depicting his laboring brethren living in Nanterre, which he entitles, not coincidentally, "*Les boucs*." Yet what *we* read is not, in fact, Waldick's novel depicting the anguish of life in the *bidonville*, though certainly this is a motif that permeates Chraïbi's text. What we read instead is a narrative of the writer's very inability to write the story of the *boucs*.³³ The form the novel takes perhaps mirrors Chraïbi's own experience as a member of a select elite group of intellectual *émigrés* struggling to ethically

³³ The style of *Les boucs* is also characteristic of the French *nouveau roman* movement of its contemporary moment, which, according to Ann Jefferson, was "an antithesis to the mainstream realist fiction" and "posed a serious challenge to the...Balzacian novel" with a high degree of self-reflexivity about the writerly process itself, drawing attention to the "complex operations of "plot, character," and "representation." Examples of *nouveau roman* authors are Maurice Blanchot, Georges Perec, and Alain Robbe-Grillet (Jefferson 6-11).

represent a decidedly subaltern³⁴ population of migrant laborers—related culturally but far removed on a class spectrum—without compromising political import. *Les boucs* is then a story about the tortured scene of writing, rather than that of migrant labor. We witness the anguish of the colonially educated intellectual tasked with the distinct and veritably impossible work of representing an experience of subalternity in the European metropole.

II. The Encounter between the *Évolué* and the Migrant

After the publication of *Le passé simple* in 1953, Chraïbi used his journalistic training to look into the world of his fellow Maghrebis living and working in the *bidonvilles*. “In 1954,” writes Anna Hänsch, “Driss Chraïbi carried out a sociological study of Maghrebine emigrants in France. For six months he investigated the living conditions of emigrants who become the *boucs* in this novel” (Hänsch 150). Considering the *Les boucs* alongside *Le passé simple*, as Chraïbi’s focus moves between texts from the patriarchal strictures of traditional Islamic Moroccan society to the inhumane situation of colonial citizens living in the metropole itself, give us an overarching narrative of unsustainability and an implicit plea for a new social configuration: neither the oppressive patriarchy of traditional Islam nor the hostile paternalism of France’s failed ‘*mission civilisatrice*’ being a suitable answer. *Les boucs*, however, was one of the first Francophone novelistic representations of this relatively new social phenomenon—that of an *internal* colonization within the bounds of the metropole, with the colonial subjects being

³⁴ I am using the term “subaltern” here in the spirit of Ranajit Guha’s *Preface* to *Subaltern Studies* to mean a “general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Guha 35). This definition pertains to colonial India, but maps onto the situation of Maghrebis and especially Algerian laborers in the French colony. Guha and others in *Subaltern Studies* took the term from Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, and the military resonance of the term in that context is particularly relevant in the French context. Of course, Gayatri Spivak and others would go on to call this litany of subaltern figures into question, and it is not my intention to return to the initial *Subaltern Studies* definition of the term, but to suggest that colonial subalterity was instrumental in the formation of a migrant subaltern class in the metropole, both in the French and U.K. contexts.

installed in the outer rings of Paris or even further in the working-class *banlieues* and ostensibly exploited for manpower but often denied even that opportunity for work. As Islamic historian Abdelkader Benarab writes, *Les boucs* “inaugure une nouvelle ère dans la conscience occidentale, attire l’attention de l’intelligentsia arabe et préfigure un revendication métaphysique d’une existence digne pour ces hommes, grevés de manques et de frustrations” (Benarab 70-71). This motif would become a powerful aspect of Francophone literature throughout the rest of the twentieth century, and *Les boucs* anticipates not only one of the most problematic social configurations of twentieth and twenty-first century French culture, but also the very difficult challenge of representing this social reality.

Waldick’s writerly anxiety brings to light the fraught question of splitting the two valences of representation in its political sense (*Vertreten*) and aesthetic sense (*Darstellen*). As Gayatri Spivak posits in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the danger of collapsing the two senses of the term is in presuming that to represent *aesthetically* (a portrait or depiction) does the same work as representing *politically* (a proxy or advocate). In Spivak’s discussion, it is the phenomenon of the western intellectual seemingly “transparently” speaking *for* the subaltern that has the logical effect of positing the western intellectual as the universal subject. But just as problematic in collapsing the political *into* the aesthetic aspect of representation is the distinct risk this runs of subalternity becoming *only* aestheticized—a trope above all else, evacuated of political efficacy. In *Les boucs*, the question of aesthetic representation is further complicated by the figure whose task it is to speak for the subaltern. It is the migrant intellectual who is ostensibly in danger of troping his own compatriots, rehearsing the dynamics of hegemon and subaltern *within* the always already subaltern category of the colonized. How then, to approach a work of art that ethically represents a subaltern population in both senses of the word? This issue

is one that plagues Yalaan Waldik, and finds expression in Chraïbi's disjointed, fragmented narrative. Waldik's ambivalence stems in part from the fact that in the very act of portraying the *boucs* in a novel, he is performing as the oppressor. But moreover, he is stricken by the resistance and ultimate rejection from the *boucs* who see him neither as their brethren nor their representative. This ambivalence permeates the text on a formal level, which progresses in fits and starts, switching perspective from first to third person sometimes within the bounds of a paragraph.

Les boucs introduces a series of complications in the already complex issue of representation. Here we do not have an instance of a metropolitan intellectual transparently rendering visible the subaltern figure of the migrant laborer. Instead, we have an instance of a migrant intellectual (Driss Chraïbi) representing—decidedly *not* transparently—the anguish of a *fictional* migrant intellectual attempting to represent, in both portrait and proxy, the plight of the migrant laborer. The figure of the laborer here is *not* postcolonial in a strictly temporal sense, but still a colonial citizen in the last decade of the dying French Empire. A tacit fold in Spivak's configuration of intellectual, subaltern, *Darstellen*, and *Vertreten*, is that of artistic representation. If an aesthetic staging of an experience of subalternity—*Darstellung*—is the primary goal in, for instance, a novel, is this then an instance of *Vertretung*? Indeed, if the central problem of representation is the conflation of its two meanings, how can we interpret the politics of a novel whose explicit goal is the aesthetic representation of an underclass?³⁵ This is a configuration that perhaps reverses the central concern in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” That is, what is at stake in the instance of *Les boucs* is not the problem the subaltern becoming a trope,

³⁵ Perhaps a more extreme iteration of the vexed relationship between the aesthetic and the political appears at the end of another oft-cited essay, Walter Benjamin's “A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In 1936 he wrote, “[Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art” (Benjamin 242).

and the aestheticization of subalternity thus surmounting the work of political advocacy. In a novel *about* a subaltern class, the subaltern is always already troped—this is a baseline function of artistic representation. Rather, the question becomes: can the aesthetic do the work of the advocacy? Can an aesthetic representation operate as a political proxy? *Les boucs* approaches this problem head-on, and its fragmented narrative and irresolute protagonist give us a sense of the anxiety in that very task. Chraïbi’s novel is a very early instance of what will become a distinctly postcolonial problem: that is, how, in art, does the migrant intellectual represent the migrant laborer? Indeed, how does the work of art *stage the encounter* between the intellectual and the subaltern?

This motif of encounter in the metropole is characteristic of a very specific historical moment, one in which the colonial subaltern gained the possibility of circulating through the European metropole, (for the purposes of migrant labor) and thus had occasion to encounter the *evolué*—the colonial (or postcolonial) French-educated *élite*. Indeed, as educational historian Alf Heggoy notes, in the colonial era, “only at the very top and bottom of Algerian society was there any real contact between [Europeans] and Muslim [Algerians]. The *evolués*, because of French education, in effect became European” (Heggoy 181). The colonial *evolué*, inhabiting a different social stratum, would have very little reason to encounter—let alone live amongst—a working-class or peasant colonial subject. This kind of contact, while not common in colonial North Africa, became a matter of course during and after the World Wars, when thousands of Maghrebi men were recruited both as soldiers and laborers to fight and work on behalf of the French. As Heggoy remarks, under Napoleon III France was industrializing at breakneck speed and Algeria became a place from which to cull “building construction materials, iron, machines, and chemicals and exported sheep, agricultural products, wine, phosphates, and minerals. The only

jobs created for Algerians by this important exchange were unskilled positions, primarily as dockers... On the other hand, the French were building infrastructures: roads, railways, and ports” (Heggoy 184). At the same moment that Paris was being razed and rebuilt in the grand urban planning schema of Baron von Haussmann, pushing out its working class inhabitants to outlying *banlieues*, or suburbs, France was, in effect, creating a cache of thousands of unskilled laborers in the North African colony.³⁶ The reality of the alleged *mission civilisatrice* in the Maghreb in practice became a quagmire of dwindling and selective educational policies that left the vast majority of colonial subjects without access to the French language or means to progress (scholastically or otherwise) in the imperial infrastructure. France’s resistance to educating its colonial subjects in the Maghreb had far-reaching consequences, both in the colony and in its migrant and immigrant population in later decades, a topic I will return to later in this chapter. The pragmatic result of keeping Algeria’s population relatively unskilled and uneducated in the early to mid twentieth century meant there were thousands of able, ready (and disposable) male bodies to recruit and fill both military and labor needs during the ravages of both world wars.

Indeed the formation of modern Paris, the “capital of the nineteenth century,” was in many ways already predicated on manpower recruited from Algeria. As David A. Silverman writes, the development of Haussmannized Paris in the 1860s initiated the first arrival in France of migrants from Algeria for labor needs. “The arrival of the first waves of Kabyle migrant

³⁶ David A. Silverman writes extensively of the correspondence between the massive undertaking of Haussmannization and the creation of working-class *banlieues* just outside the periphery of the city. “The majority of suburban areas that would become bastions of factory labor by World War I began their growth in the 1830s as sites for bourgeois pavilions benefiting from high land values: e.g., Bondy, Romainville, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Maur, Argenteuil, and Suresnes.... With the construction of railroad lines throughout the nineteenth century, these upper-class residences were located increasingly farther away from the city, while the inner suburbs became largely proletarian. Moreover, nearly 42,000 men and women lived in a series of shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) in a 400-hectare area known as the “Zone” located just outside Paris’s ramparts, the name of which is preserved even today in *banlieue* youths’ reference to themselves as ‘zonards’.... The Zone lasted until the 1930s, when urban planners leveled it for the construction of the *Périphérique* ring highway and a network of parks and sports complexes. As in Lyautey’s Rabat, even this new Zone served as a de facto *cordon sanitaire* separating the bourgeois city from the proletarian suburbs.”

workers in France corresponded largely with these transformations of Paris” (Silverman 89). Thus the subjugation and exploitation of Algerians was not only a phenomenon in the distant horizon of the colony. It was quite literally *built into* the space of modern Paris. Algeria continued to be a source of labor power in France into the twentieth century, with manifold increases after WWI. This first influx of colonial subjects established the lines of migration and immigration between colony and metropole that continue on today as well as the precedent of Algerians inhabiting the lowest rungs of the metropolitan class ladder. Historian Martin Thomas remarks of the 36,3000 young male Algerians employed in France by 1921: they were “poorly paid, rarely unionized, and often assigned the dirtiest and most physically demanding factory jobs, which French workers were reluctant to perform, Algerian laborers were the proletariat’s very own underclass” (Thomas 216).³⁷ A devastated France after WWII needed an influx of manpower to rebuild its ravaged country and turned to its colonies for labor. France saw an unprecedented wave of emigration during the mid-twentieth century. “After World War II, as many as 350,000 Algerian men worked in French manufacturing and construction industries in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, contributing greatly to France’s thirty years of spectacular postwar growth known as the *Trente Glorieuses*” (Silverstein 5). These men came without their families on a temporary basis, largely from rural areas of Algeria and in general, were uneducated. “Il ne faut pas oublier que la très grande majorité de ces ruraux émigrés étaient analphabètes,” observes sociologist and writer Azouz Begag of the first wave of North African migrants, “Cela aide à saisir le rôle crucial joué par les réseaux dans le processus de mobilité. En témoigne le fait que dans les villes françaises, les immigrés algériens se sont regroupés selon leur origine

³⁷ “Most of the war workers from the colonies were quickly repatriated in the months immediately following the armistice in anticipation of a reflux of French workers to their former industries upon demobilization. Those who came to Paris in search of work typically took unskilled jobs in the metallurgical and car industries, warehousing, packing, sugar refineries, and the chemical industry. Algerians also cornered the market as so-called *laveurs de voitures*, their job being to clean Parisian taxis by night in preparation for the next day’s work” (Martin 216).

géographique d'origine" (Begag 202). The alienating process of migrating to a country without access to its language or culture—indeed to the country that systematically *denied* access to its culture—drew even tighter bonds of solidarity between Algerian workers in France.

That most of the Maghrebi migrants of the mid-twentieth century were illiterate in French and rural in origin made any possibility of integration into larger French society veritably impossible; and moreover, it reinforced the practice of living amongst each other and reconstituting village life in pockets throughout Paris's vast *bidonvilles*. Many of these workers settled in Paris-adjacent Nanterre, which became, in the postwar era, a massive industrial *banlieue* that attracted thousands of male laborers from France's colonies (as well as Eastern Europe) and thus the site of France's most notorious *bidonvilles*. A 1971 study commissioned by *l'Institut de l'environnement* argues that "les bidonvilles urbains d'Algerie constituent les avant-postes d'une armée d'invasion...Leurs habitants sont à mi-chemin entre la ville industrielle et le bled, sans démêler ce qu'il y a encore de rural et déjà urbain" (Herpin 1973). This study remarks that in Nanterre, a unique admixture of rural and urban life arises, that is not quite "la ville industrielle" or "le bled"—neither the industrial city nor the Maghrebi village—but a new formation of urban life that is composed of both. Thus even as Algerians were building the regularized forms of modern Parisian space and working the industrial jobs that kept the infrastructure of modern France running, they were simultaneously making their mark upon the spaces *outside* of the Haussmannized districts of Paris. Chraïbi's novel, then, is one of the first depictions of the effects of mass immigration to postwar Europe specifically upon *urban space*: namely that the growing *bidonvilles* brought the spatial form of the colony into the metropole. Setting *Les boucs* in the most infamous of these *bidonvilles* in the mid-1950s is a radical literary move, stridently departing from the established trajectory of the realist *Bildungsroman* which

typically sees its protagonist moving from the rural into the urban. By staying, for all intents and purposes, stuck in the squalor of 1950s Nanterre, Chraïbi's choice of setting mirrors the stagnated social position of the *boucs* themselves.

III. Waldick's Double Displacement

As a journalist, Chraïbi made a deliberate move in living amongst the workers in Nanterre, collecting testimonials and suffering their squalid living conditions to afford the novel a degree of veracity (Benarab 70-71). We might understand some of Waldick's anguish as a writer to reflect that of Chraïbi's when faced with the daunting task of representing this new situation of oppression. The novel that resulted is not, in the end, a realist narrative authentically relating the experience of any individual worker. Instead, Chraïbi's gives more diegetic space to the figure of the *writer* negotiating the quagmire of representation; the crisis of attempting to render this experience in literary form becomes an internal and emotional struggle for Waldick. To reiterate my earlier point, in *Les boucs* there is no central problem of what Spivak deems the "transparency of the intellectual" in the act of speaking for the subaltern (Spivak 262). *Les boucs* makes the crisis of the intellectual all too visible, and the fragmented, polyphonic, and disorienting form the novel takes reflects this very crisis. Waldick is a tortured figure, privy to the self-flagellating tendencies of a migrant intellectual who, to use a Duboisian term, is plagued by a "double consciousness" that allows him to see himself through the eyes of the French. This perspective is most often voiced in the harsh criticisms of Waldick's French lovers, who find only the Algerians to blame for their exploitation by Europeans.

Exploitation de l'Arab par l'Européen, oui, martela-t-elle avec un rire aigu. Je les condamne certes, ceux-là qui vous ont chassés de chez vous, ne savent plus quoi faire de vous, pas même vous prendre en pitié. Oui, je sais faire la part des choses, généraliser et reconnaître que notre civilisation n'a su que vous désespérer. Oui,

j'ai honte d'être une Européenne. Mais c'est vous, Nord-Africains, que je condamne les plus. Parce que vous vous êtes toujours laissé faire. Vous avez toujours été en état d'exploitation, vous aimez bien qu'on vous exploite. Mais même chez vous n'avez jamais été que cela: des bâtards d'hommes que tout le monde se passe de main en main, de génération en Phéniciens, Grecs, Romains, Wisigoths, Vandales, Arabes, Turcs, Francs. (Chraïbi 170).

And yet, despite Waldik's many ruminations on the failings of the Arab mind, the story of *Les boucs* is not one of his inability to properly integrate into French culture at large. The tropes of hybridity and liminality—clichés now in the established practices of postcolonial studies—are turned inside out in this early novel depicting a social configuration that would only become more and more common as the twentieth century progressed into the twenty-first. Waldik's anguish does not stem from the alienation he feels upon encountering the French; indeed there are very few scenes of interactions with metropolitan French subjects throughout the novel. It comes, instead, from the rejection he feels by the *boucs* themselves, who no longer see him as one of their own, Waldik having “evolved” into another species.

Ali Behdad has noted that an attentive reading of *Les boucs* should pay heed to the differing types of migratory flows between colony and metropole, a difference that is staged and ruminated upon at length by the narrator, Waldik. Behdad cautions us against the slippages of a postcolonial discourse that collapses the distinction between cosmopolitan intellectual migrant and subaltern laboring migrant. “The metaphoric use of spatial tropes in postcolonial theory has led to a problematic discourse of utopian mobility that often conflates the privileged experiences of writers and intellectuals with those of the least fortunate immigrants—we can see this lack of attention to economic and cultural differences even in the case of a politicized and worldly critic like Said or Bhabha” (Behdad 231). What we have in Yalaan Waldik is a figure that is at once an “evolved” intellectual *and* a subaltern migrant worker. Having arrived in France after making his way through French parochial schooling in Algeria, he is so alienated by his surroundings in the

metropole that he violently assaults a man in a bar and is imprisoned for six months. Upon release, he finds himself marked as a criminal and thus on equal footing with the other Maghrebi laborers who have come to metropolitan France as temporary workers. Waldik, in a sense, interpellates *himself* as a subaltern rather than being made aware of his position by the European gaze by committing this crime and dropping from the status of an *évolué* to a convict.³⁸

Waldik's plight is one of profound displacement. As Anna Hänsch notes, "The main character of the novel shows a deep *malaise* which he derives from the experience of a twofold liminality...resulting in a state of mind close to madness. The unity of the subject is broken, and Waldik finds himself in a schizophrenia-like situation between two personalities and two cultures" (Hänsch 151). However, Waldik's narrative is not simply the trajectory of a hybrid colonial *évolué* who finds himself confused and othered on metropolitan soil—neither properly Algerian nor French. His identity crisis moves beyond the bounds of his consciousness, and into the realm of legal and state discourse. Indeed, Waldik seems to *act* on his sensation of presumed inferiority in Europe by making himself a criminal in the French state, and thus willfully moving into a position of subalternity more aptly suited to his internal strife. His cohort in the *bidonville*, the self-named Raus, voices this very sentiment in a fit of rage, naming a preemptive European hostility towards the incoming Maghrebi population as a veritable self-fulfilling prophecy. He shouts:

[J]e chômerai, je vagabonderai, je volerai, je tuerai...puisque le monde, l'Europe, le Chrétien ne veulent nous considérer, nous Bicots, que par ce petit vasistas

³⁸ It is productive to think of Chraïbi's protagonist alongside the Frantz Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Abdelkebir Khatibi, in 1979, qualified *Les boucs* as "peut être considéré comme la version littéraire de la violence de Fanon" [perhaps to be considered the literary version of Fanon's violence]. Written in 1952, Fanon's text is contemporaneous with *Les boucs* and considers a similar configuration a migrant intellectual's anguish upon arrival in the metropole. The infamous moment of interpellation, coming from the mouth of a child shouting, "Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" (Fanon 91) and brings Fanon into cognizance of his position as "Other." Especially interesting is Fanon's own trajectory, from Martiniquan psychoanalyst to FLN-sympathizing quasi-revolutionary in Algeria. Fanon died less than ten years later in Washington, D.C. under the name "Ibrahim Fanon" which raises the question of Islam's relationship to a world-scale anticolonial struggle. (Khatibi 71).

(qu'ils on percé muni de barreaux, fait surmonter, d'un écriteau: voilà l'Arabe, le seul, le vrai) ouvrant sur nos mauvais instincts, sur nos déchéances à nos propres yeux...de sidi, de noraf...profession de foi, si l'on veut, et pourquoi ne voudrait-on pas? (Chraïbi 19).

Raus, among the *boucs*, represents the insidious and devolutionary power of a centuries-long structure of Orientalist discourse—imposed to both justify the French colonization of North Africa by France, and subsequently relegate Maghrebi migrant workers to the geographic peripheries of the French metropole. Raus performs his role as a criminal because the carceral bounds of the discursive structure around him, as he sees it, provide him no other option. As we see at the end of the passage, it becomes for him an almost religious injunction. The disembodied aspersions cast upon Maghrebi migrants in *Les boucs* are so ubiquitous that they have become a matter of course, a fact of the environment as naturalized as wind. Raus chants them over and over like an incantation. “Les injures du vent, Raus, cassant la porte, tout à l’heure les avait dites. Il les disait tous les jours, à chaque pas de ses longues pérégrinations à travers Paris, toutes les nuits il les ronflait. Je les avais si souvent entendues qu’elles étaient devenues litanies. *Bicot*, disait le vent, *malfrat*, *arabe*, *crouillat*, *sidi*, *noraf*” (Chraïbi 19). These epithets—*bicot*, *malfrat*, *arabe*, *crouillat*, *sidi*, *noraf*—are not new to the situation of Maghrebi workers filling the labor needs of French factories; they are age-old colonial insults slung regularly at the subjects of French North Africa throughout the period of occupation, imported along with foreign labor, as a means of subjugation.³⁹

³⁹ These are all historical epithets that do not have exact translations into English, but roughly, *bicot* means small goat, *malfrat* means thug, *sidi* has its origins in military terms for North Africans. *Arabe* and *noraf* (North African), of course, refer to ethnicity and geography. Benrabah indicates that these terms largely originated in the *pied noir* community, noting, “during the last quarter of the 19th century, there was a flowering of racist expressions to name the *indigènes* and *Ismaelites* who became the negative image of the Other. Racialist in its mentality, the settler community enriched its repertoire with pejorative slurs such as *bicot*, *melon*, *raton*, and *bougnoul*. The European settlers and the natives were in effect not warmly disposed toward each other” (30-31).

Raus is the only member of the *boucs* to whom Chraïbi gives any dialogic space or even a name. The rest of the workers act as a conglomerate, without individuation or singular voice. Raus functions as an intermediary between Waldik and the rest of the laborers, suffering none of the writer's ambivalence and proceeding in misanthropic and embittered resignation. That Waldik cannot conceive of his fellow Maghrebi workers as individuals betrays his alienation from them as a class, despite his efforts to depict their suffering in a novel. Indeed, the *boucs* themselves feel no particular sense of fraternity with Waldik. Raus explains to him:

Waldik était pour eux un Chrétien. Il tenta—et Raus le soutint—de leur expliquer pourquoi il voulait étaler leurs misères à tous sous la forme d'un livre, une sorte de journal plié en trois cents pages qui leur serait entièrement consacré. Il y en eut un qui haussa les épaules—un tic périodique. Ils ne dirent pas leur dignité de parias blessés, l'expression ou le simple entendement en eût été une faillite, citèrent tout au plus le cas des cobayes de la maison de Nanterre, continuèrent de le traiter en Chrétien (Chraïbi 148).

The gulf between Waldik and the *boucs* could not be made clearer than in this passage. He is not *of* them, as they collectively categorize him as a *Chrétien*, wholly separate from their lives which are devoid of dignity, family, or even any real opportunity to work and marked only by their difference from the French (Christian) population at large. That Waldik and Raus must explain to them, somewhat improbably, what a book might even look like indicates a complete lack of education among the *boucs*, and highlights the chasm Chraïbi creates between Waldik and the workers. Most importantly, the workers resist any attempt to express—to *represent*—their misery. To admit their indignity is a “faillite” or a weakness. The desire, then, to represent only exists within the *evolué*; the subaltern laborer in this case could not care less about Waldik's artistic or political aspirations.

What does it mean for Waldik to be a *Chrétien* in the eyes of the *boucs*?⁴⁰ His education and his writerly goals mark him not simply as French, but a *Christian* to the workers. In a scene during which the *boucs* vie for work at a construction site, the third person narrator (it is unclear at this point whether this is the perspective of Waldik himself or free indirect omniscience) describes the contractor of the site as a Christian, contrasting him to the “Arabs” asking for work:

Chrétien aimait le calme, l'ordre, la logique, et qu'un passif d'Arab fait de glandes atrophiées et d'âmes desséchées ne l'intéressait nullement, ne pouvait en aucune sorte l'intéresser, et que le propre d'un homme vivant en Europe même s'il était Chinois ou Polak était de se plier à l'Europe, à la logique, à l'ordre et au calme européens, même si l'on croyait nécessaire, références pour cet emploi de terrassiers, de récapituler et de commencer par le commencement, c'est-à-dire depuis l'embarquement à Alger ou à Bône (Chraïbi 32).

The narrator, in this moment, makes a number of remarkable moves. There are numerous categories of difference between the *boucs* and the contractor: those of race, religion, geography, and class. Of course, this passage exhibits the vast power of an Orientalist ideology—the (European) Christian, exemplifying logic, enlightenment, and decorum, set in stark contrast against the indolent and impotent Oriental. Yet from this spectrum of difference, Chraïbi's narrator sets up a peculiar binary, pitting the “*Chrétien*,” the Christian, against the “Arab,” and setting up an opposition between a *religious* category and an *ethnic* category. Of course, this binary excludes a substantial population of ethnic Arabs who are Christian. In the same passage, the narrator implicitly lumps together the “Polak” and the “Chinois” both as non-European. Racial, national, and religious differences blur and become indistinguishable from each other. Yet Chraïbi's categories reveal the working gears in the social machine processing incoming Maghrebi laborers in postwar France. The French, in this configuration, regardless of the French

⁴⁰ Though the *boucs* could simply be using the term “Chrétien” to mean he is effectively European, the religious undertones seem pointed here.

law of *laïcité* (separation of church and state) implemented in 1905, are necessarily Christian.⁴¹ The semiotics of these two categories—“Arab” and “Christian”—have deep historical underpinnings, revealing a great deal about the colonial administrative and educational policies under which the *boucs* would have been managed both in Algeria and upon arriving in France. “Christian” is the word the *boucs* use to describe the French, that is, in religious terms regardless of religious practice; whereas “Arab” is the term that the French would use to describe the Maghrebi workers, even though Chraïbi qualifies them multiple times throughout the text as “Kabylye,” meaning that they are Berber. Waldik, in his vexed position as “Arab” to the French and *Chrétien* to the *boucs*, sees from both perspectives. These categorical distinctions, with their particular religious and ethnic resonances, are far from arbitrary and index a complex history of colonial policies before the world wars.

IV. French Education as a Means of Control

To understand fully the configuration of *Arab* vs. *Chrétien* that Chraïbi sets up in *Les boucs*, we must understand the process of colonial education and the way religion figured into it as it changed throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. Education of the French language and French mores are essential components of Republicanism and universalism (i.e., *liberté*,

⁴¹ According to the French Ministry of the Interior, *Le Ministère de l'intérieur, de l'outre-mer, des collectivités territoriales et de l'immigration*, jurisprudence on the law of *laïcité* is as follows: “la République garantit la liberté religieuse, qui est d’abord la liberté de croire ou de ne pas croire, et aussi celle, pour les croyants, d’adhérer à la religion de leur choix ou d’en changer. En ce sens, la liberté religieuse est une expression de la liberté de conscience. La liberté religieuse ne peut être pleinement assurée que si l’Etat et les collectivités publiques respectent toutes les croyances et n’en favorisent aucune, ce qui implique leur neutralité religieuse. De la liberté religieuse découle un culte et de se conformer aux pratiques religieuses liées à sa foi. Cette liberté, reconnue par la Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen, peut s’exprimer tant dans les espaces privés que dans les espaces publics, à la condition de ne pas troubler l’ordre public et de ne pas entraver la liberté d’autrui. La loi définit donc un équilibre entre la libre expression des convictions religieuses dans l’espace public et le maintien de son affectation à l’usage de tous, afin qu’il ne soit approprié par aucune croyance particulière mais reste un espace de liberté ouvert à chacun. Cet équilibre est complexe et il continue d’évoluer avec la société française. Il est donc nécessaire de bien connaître les textes qui fondent le régime juridique de la liberté religieuse en France. Si la loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Eglises et de l’Etat est souvent citée, de nombreux textes régissent cette matière” (*Laïcité et liberté* 3).

égalité, fraternité), concepts fundamental to French culture after the 1789 revolution. To this day, Anne Corbett notes, in France “the major ideological principle of French Republicanism is universalism and it permeates the policies, priorities and practices of French primary education. It is systematically taught through a civic education which focuses specifically on the rights, duties, and obligations of the citizen, whoever he or she may be” (Corbett 229). Corbett continues on by noting that these ideals of civic duty and social mores are specifically taught through the correct practice of French language” (229). Louis Althusser found the roots of ideology in the State Apparatus of the school, making the connection between French ideals of civic and economic duty and the teaching of the French language. He asserts that aside from learning techniques and skills which aid a student in becoming a functional member of the workforce, “children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behavior, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination” (Althusser 89). French education is, thus, the most potent site of forming a *French* subjectivity—universalism, then, most clearly applying to those who have made their way through and been groomed in the machine of western education. This principle of universalism was ostensibly the guiding force of the *mission civilisatrice* in the colony, first under the aegis of the Catholic Church, and then later in the *mission laïque* and other imperial educational initiatives. Mohamed Benrabah links the dissemination of French education among the colonial subjects to the desire to weaken the power of local cultural forms—specifically Islamic institutions that held sway over the Algerian population. “In 1897, the Minister of Public Education outlined his Department’s activities in Algeria: ‘[The] conquest will be by the School:

this should ensure the predominance of our language over the various local idioms, inculcate in the Muslims our own idea of what France is and of its role in the world, and replace ignorance and fanatical prejudices by the simple but precise notions of European science” (Benrabah 31). Thus to be a recipient of French education in the Algerian colony was simultaneously to be deprogrammed out of an Islamic ideology. However, as referenced earlier, in practice, only a small minority of Maghrebi colonial subjects were ever granted the privilege of a French education and allowed to become *évolués*, suggesting that the *mission civilisatrice* was only ever a metonymic practice.

In deeming Waldik a *Chrétien*, the *boucs* mark him as recipient of the *mission civilisatrice*, and distinguish themselves as part of the majority of colonized subjects who did not receive such a privilege. The workers in the novel cannot read French and have no way of rendering their new French surroundings legible. Waldik, on the other hand, can navigate between the two languages and cultures, but in designating him a Christian, the *boucs* have, in effect, rejected his Arabness and lumped him in with the French. And yet, because of his status as a criminal, Waldik has also negated his own status as an *évolué* in France. Assuming a position of subalternity—undoing whatever “civilizing” literacy in the French language and French mores may have afforded him by becoming a convict—he is now rejected by the French in kind. He must stand before the same *chantier*,⁴² or construction site, as the *boucs* and vie for work just as they do, completely dependent on the foreman of the site to relate news of possible work. “Le Caporal savait lire et il épelait l’annonce du placard à haute voix, gravement et en hochant la tête. Les autres répétaient à sa suite, faisant des traductions et des commentaires entre deux syllabes épelées, deux mots laborieusement constitués” (Chraïbi 29). Indeed, even to fully

⁴² “*Chantier*,” in addition to meaning a construction site, also colloquially means a mess or a dump—no doubt Chraïbi’s use of the word reflects this polysemy as a metonym for the entire situation of migrant laborers in France

comprehend his reading of the French notice, they must translate its meaning into their native language and agree collectively upon what he has said before they can completely understand whether they will be given work.

The wave of migrants who arrived in France after WWII were drawn from the vast population of unskilled and illiterate men of working age, a category of person created under the specific administrative policies in the Maghreb over the decades of imperial occupation. Though ostensibly, the *mission civilisatrice* was guided by a universalizing impulse to convert the subjects first to Christianity and then to Republicanism, in practice, the efforts were much more convoluted. Despite administrative proclamations, educational policies throughout the nineteenth century in colonial North Africa were inconsistent and largely haphazard. Principles of Republicanism initially guided the French colonists to disseminate universalist ideology in an imperial policy known as “assimilationism,” based on “a pronounced faith in the ability of reason to prescribe a universal civilized way of life, and a commitment to universal equality, even if this latter ideal was never quite realized in the colonies,” explains Spencer D. Segalla (9). The desire to “replace ignorance and fanatical prejudices” of the Muslim natives were largely displaced by the racial prejudices of the French *colons*. Largely in response to an 1871 insurrection in Kabylia, Algeria, assimilationism gave way to “associationalism,” which was grounded in a notion of fundamental difference between colonizer and colonized, the latter being, at root, unassimilable, and thus not eligible for universalism.⁴³ By the late nineteenth century, metropolitan France had handed over control of colonial administration to the resident

⁴³ In some ways this development in moving from “assimilationism” to “associationalism” in the French colonial Maghreb was the complete opposite of the evolution of educational practices in British India. The 1835 Orientalist-Anglicist controversy eventually resulted in the British deciding to instruct Indian subjects in *English* rather than Persian, Sanskrit, and other subcontinental languages following Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous “Minute on Education.” See Haruko Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*.

piéd noirs of France, who systematically refused to educate the Algerian population, reasoning that more education (learning, that is, the very principles of French universalism) would lead to nationalist sentiments and ultimately rebellion.

North African Muslims, in kind, grew suspicious of French education because of hostile treatment at the hands of the *colons*, and thus a systemic illiteracy in French was perpetuated in a two-fold fashion, both by the colonists and colonized.⁴⁴ Thus North Africans who received French education and achieved literacy in the French language, were few and far between.⁴⁵ Arabic speaking North Africans remained the least French-literate ethnic group throughout the colonial period. Eligibility to become an *evolué*, on equal footing with the *piéd noirs*, was thus determined by racial boundaries—in descending order: Jews, Berber-Kabyles, and Arabs, the “races,” of course, being determined first and foremost by the French colonists.⁴⁶

It is very important to note, however, that being illiterate in *French* is not the same as

⁴⁴ Benrabah states, “After 1870, the colonial authorities established a programme of educational democratization in France and Algeria. To generalize education and make it obligatory, the French Government issued two decrees, one in February 1883 and the other in October 1892. But the *piéd noir* administrators refused these decrees and denied literacy to Algerian Muslims as they were firmly convinced of its politically empowering potential. At the time, a Governor General said: ‘the hostility of the *indigène* can be measured by the level of his education’ [Ageron, 1968: 339]. In the end, colonial administrators blocked the systematicization of education in Algeria, especially after 1898 when the *colons* obtained effective budgetary control in the colony... However, long before European settlers opposed these reforms, Algerian Muslims had deserted French schools. Colonial brutality and cultural aggression pushed Algerian Muslims into passive cultural ‘resistance-refusal’ which lasted almost five decades. Parents viewed with suspicion the secular education offered by colonizers. They were distrustful of its religious agenda and considered the offer as an evangelistic effort to drive their offspring away from Islam. Algerians preferred their children to remain illiterate rather than sending them to the ‘school of the devil.’” (30-31).

⁴⁵ In Algeria, the most likely candidates to be educated were Algerian Jews, who were granted full French citizenship in 1870, and a small portion of Algerian Berber-speaking Kabyles, since Berbers, especially Kabyles, were thought to be more secular in their Islamic practices and thus more assimilable.

⁴⁶ This divide-and-rule technique was codified in the formation of the “Berber/Kabyle myth,” in which the French imperial infrastructure categorized the Berber speaking population as closer to European since they were more agrarian and not, ostensibly, nomadic as the Arabic-speaking population was. As Benrabah notes, “To promote positive and negative identities among Muslims, colonialists developed a set of stereotypes and metaphors based on a number of elements that supposedly expressed ‘civilization’. Berbers/Kabyles were opposed to Arabs and the ‘Kabyle myth’ implied that the former were susceptible to assimilation into French culture and the latter were not. Two types of stereotyping embodied in the ‘Kabyle myth’ would prove long-lasting and divisive for Algerians before and after independence.” This practice would change somewhat after an 1871 insurgency in Kabylia, and more radically during the world wars, when the vast arsenal of French-illiterate unskilled Maghrebis were deployed as workers and soldiers who circulated through the French metropole (32).

being illiterate in general. Even in the mid nineteenth century, as Benrabah notes, a French colonial administrator remarked on the “Algerians’ level of education” saying “‘nearly all the Arabs can read and write; in each village there are two schools’” (Benrabah 32). In the case of the protectorate of Morocco, Chraïbi’s homeland, associationalism was a more widespread ruling practice, solidifying segregations between colonizer and colonized. This led, ironically, to colonial support of Islamic educational institutions. Segalla remarks, “commitment to preserving Moroccan culture and preserving Islam, was an explicit rejection of republican assimilationism, but it was also a departure from the Catholic evangelism that had been republicanism’s chief rival (and occasional collaborator) in the colonies during the nineteenth century. The commitment to preserve Islam made a virtue out of necessity” (Segall 15). And in this sentiment we have a sense of the complex matrices of race, religion, and relationship to the French metropole that determined the status and eligibility for French literacy in the North African colony. Arab Muslims, being cast off as nomadic heathens, were understood to be the least assimilable to any version of French culture, be it Christian or *laïque*, and eventually Islamic schools were even given infrastructural support across the Maghreb⁴⁷ to prevent the danger of *métissage* (Segall 15) Berber-speaking Kabyles were subject to civilizing efforts of the Church, which is perhaps why for the Kabyle *boucs* of Chraïbi’s novel, Waldik’s education marks him as a *Chrétien*.⁴⁸ These nineteenth-century colonial social strata were then jumbled and reconfigured amongst the migrants who arrived in the metropole during the last decades of the colonial era. That Waldik is such a rarified figure among the *boucs* and the French alike is no historical

⁴⁷ Though this was not without a great deal of control by the French. “When France established three official Muslim schools, called *médersas*, in 1850, they were subject to significant material and ideological controls that reinforced the colonial regime, while their student bodies remained small. Subsequent legislation further compromised their pedagogical independence” (Schreier 117).

⁴⁸ However, this slight racial privilege of Berber-speakers dissolved after the 1871 insurgency, after which all Muslims were lumped under the category of uncontrollable alike for the colonial administration.

accident.

Waldik's anguish about his ultimate impotence and incapacity to represent the *boucs* is inextricably tethered to these shifts in colonial policy and the jealous guarding of literacy by the colonial administration. Resisting the binarisms that collapse distinctions between differing types of (post)colonial subjectivity, Ali Behdad cautions against conflating "the issue of assimilation in the novel" that is, in the metropole, with "France's assimilationist colonial policy in Algeria" and being "inattentive to the organization of labor and capital in France that had necessitated the policy of temporary immigration at the time" (Behdad 233). It is important to note, however, that at the historical juncture of *Les boucs*, these policies are part and parcel of each other, especially since in 1955 Algeria's nationalist movement was only just gaining legs. Algerian *émigrés* were colonial subjects who had been recently granted full French citizenship and not yet "immigrants" as such. Indeed, this new status of French citizenship is a source of tension between the French contractor who holds the power to employ the *boucs* and the Kabyle workers themselves.

De temps à autre, le Caporal entrouvrait la porte, les prenait tous à témoin—il dit que l'annonce date de deux jours, il dit qu'il a déjà engagé des terrassiers et que, même s'il ne l'avait pas fait, il ne voudrait pas de Bicot; et que ce n'est certes pas lui qui a voté cette loi de 1946 sur le Statut de l'Algérie et dont une des dispositions accordait la citoyenneté française aux Algériens qui n'étaient auparavant que Sujets, ce qui leur a permis de se rendre en France sans passeport... Je lui ai dit: je ne fais pas de politique, j'ai faim; je lui ai dit: l'annonce est toujours là, donc tu as besoin d'ouvriers et un coup de pioche ou une pelletée de terre ignorent le racisme oui monsieur et que si c'est une question de rendement nous étions prêts à faire un essai gratuit... Je lui ai dit: où sont les terrassiers que tu dis avoir engagés? montre-les-moi, je ne te crois pas parce que je ne vois personne sur ton chantier—ils hochaient vigoureusement la tête avec ensemble et il refermait la porte pour reprendre le dialogue. (Chraïbi 33).

Waldik attempts here to speak as a *bouc*, claiming that he is not interested in politics and is simply hungry and in need of work. However, his capacity to dialogue at all with the contractor, as opposed to the rest of the *boucs* is contingent on his knowledge of French. It is, contrary to

what he professes, an explicitly political move he makes in this moment to act as the representative of the laborers as the one educated member among them, speaking with authority about the arbitrariness of race to the needs of a construction site. However, in Nanterre—outside of, yet immediately adjacent to the capital of the French empire—we see the principles of Republicanism break down. This episode is immediately followed by the workers acting as a mob and beating the contractor to death. The contractor’s hostility is most certainly a response to tenfold increase of Algerians in France between the establishing of the postwar law to which the foreman refers (which allowed free movement between Algeria and France and granted full citizenship rights to Algerian subjects) and the publishing of *Les boucs*. By denying them work even though it is needed (as the notice purports) the contractor negates the reason for the Kabyle laborers to have migrated at all, and moreover, he denies them the practical advantages of their newly established citizenship (rather than subjecthood) in France.⁴⁹ Important to note too is that the foreman acridly rejects the *boucs* as simply “bicot,” all colonial distinctions between Kabyle Berbers and Arabs now arbitrary and irrelevant, as well as any difference between *Waldik*, the *evolué*, and the illiterate *boucs*. Upon arrival in France, these divide-and-conquer tactics of categorizing colonial subjects become immaterial, migrants becoming one monolithic, undesirable entity.

It is remarkable that the foreman explicitly names this law in particular as one he vehemently opposes. The conditions of the entire social formation in the Nanterre *bidonvilles* of Paris are entirely determined by the fluctuations within the policy decisions of the French colonial apparatus. There is, thus, a co-constitutive relationship between the novel of

⁴⁹ “Immigration from Algeria had built up slowly from the 1920s and 1930s; after the war it increased substantially. France had an Algerian population of 20,000 in 1946 that increased ten times to 210,000 in 1954; foreigners in France as a whole declined from 1.7 to 1.5 million in those same years. Free movement between Algeria and France became law in 1947, and the distinction between citizens and subjects in Algeria was dropped so that all Algerians were considered citizens” (Silverman 80).

immigration in metropolitan France and the policies of migration and immigration that shape the communities depicted therein. That this law appears in the diegesis of Chraïbi's narrative marks this as a new moment in literature; we might consider it a generic move. This kind of subjectivity—that of the (subjugated) migrant figure—enters into official French discourse with the establishment of the ONI (l'Office National de l'Immigration) in 1945 and Francophone literary discourse a decade later with *Les boucs*. The question Chraïbi raises in the very act of writing this novel is, again, of representation. To what degree can a novel act as political representative for a fractured and oppressed community, especially if it does not function as a community as such? Giving the workers the collective title of *les boucs* does not necessarily constitute them as a community; indeed the lack of women or children among the *bidonville*-dwellers at this point in France's history of migration seems to challenge the notion that Waldik's cohorts form a community in any real sociological sense. And yet at the end of this interchange between Waldik and the foreman, the *boucs* act as one unit, collectively murdering the foreman, no doubt an allegory for the inchoate violence and anger brewing amongst the destitute and dejected migrant populations of Nanterre.

V. The Bond of Islam Among Migrant Workers

Raus makes the point to Waldik that the *boucs* were not even cognizant of their misery before the writer appeared and informed them of their status as subaltern. This sort of community, one formed around a mutual feeling of misery, despair, and injustice Raus argues, only leads to violence. This is the outcome of the Enlightenment principles of universal human rights that Waldik attempts to bestow upon the laborers.

Parmi les 300 000 Arabes de France, ils étaient résiduels, les parias. Et ils n'avaient même pas à choisir entre les deux attitudes possibles face au monde:

l'amélioration ou le défi. Non, même ce choix ne leur était pas possible: ils ont laissé leur âme de l'autre côté de la Méditerranée. Et ils ne le savaient même pas: ils se contentaient parfaitement de leurs viscères. Mais tu es venu un jour leur dire: vous serez des hommes, vous serez heureux, vous serez libres. Prophète à taille de pygmée, j'ai à t'apprendre que cette nuit ils ont tué. Tué en groupe, posément comme un seul homme, avec un seul couteau, à la même fraction de seconde. Tué parce qu'ils ont commencé à s'apercevoir que trop lourde était cette âme que tu leur as donnée—ou redonnée insatisfaite, inemployée, et qu'elle les faisait trop souffrir. (Chraïbi 50-51).

Seemingly, violence is the only outcome when Waldik attempts to represent the *boucs* as a political representative, as the bond in the community formed at the moment of the foreman's murder is only the collective despair of the *boucs*. Raus roundly rejects Waldik's efforts in shouting, "Et j'en ai plus que marre de ce type, cria-t il. Et les Boucs en ont marre—il se croit encore leur prophète!—et Simone en a marre et les Bureaux de Placement et les prisons et la Maison de Nanterre et Mac O'Mac et les curés et tous les Chrétiens de ce pays" (Chraïbi 165). Raus names at once the Kabyle boucs and all French entities in the entire novel as people who are sick of Waldik, including his miserable French wife, Simone, and a writer named Mac O'Mac, a pretentious French novelist who has taken on the same task as Waldik. Mac O'Mac's presence in the novel is a further defeat in Waldik's efforts to act as a representative for the *boucs*, as they seem to prefer him for the job rather than the treacherous, *Chrétien* Waldik. In a moment of self-doubt and resignation, Waldik reflects:

Mac O'Mac est le représentant de ces opprimés et son nom est célèbre jusque dans le plus humble gourbie de Kabylie. Régime de dattes ou pot-de-vi en espèces, exploitet du même coup, affirmation de la précieuse personnalité politico-littéraire de Mac O'Mac, que vaut une morale? Ils lui ont donné si impulsivement leur amour d'hommes traqués—et il ne le sait même pas. C'est lui que je plains. (Chraïbi 91)

It seems, at this moment, that the novel has given up on itself, Mac O'Mac standing in for a centuries-old history of Europeans faithfully representing the colonial subaltern. The misery of this subaltern can be expressed, according to Waldik's logic, by the very European subject that

creates and perpetuates the misery itself. This task cannot be undertaken by an *evolué* who seems to try the patience of all parties in the novel, rendering Waldik's position obsolete. Yet one moment in the text stands in stark contrast to the overarchingly desolate tone and sense of hopelessness that permeates the narrative. There is a bond that precedes the oppression of the *boucs*, and that comes in the form of Islam.

Le poste de T.S.F.⁵⁰ Il l'installa un jour dans une maison en ruine où dix Arabes l'avaient accueilli presque avec gratitude...Il tourna les boutons capta une voix au hasards... Cette voix! C'était tout ce qu'il avait désiré: la voix d'un cheikh chantant le Koran et qui lui affirmait qu'en regard du Créateur Sublime il n'avait pas souffert, que le mal comme la souffrance n'avaient jamais existé que dans le conception humaine de l'homme, que de tous les règnes de la création seul l'homme avait voulu dépasser son état de créature et s'était ainsi dénaturé, et que ce qu'il appelle le mal ou la cruauté dans la nature (lutte pour la vie, maladies, mort grands fauves mangeant des animaux plus faibles qu'eux) n'étaient somme toute que des éléments de l'Ordre du Monde... Mais il y avait autre chose que les mots et il n'avait pas besoin de comprendre. Cet incantatoire Koranique qui dépassait les mots, les idées et les valeurs humains. Maintenant il savait qu'il pleurerait. Comme il savait sans qu'il eût besoin de se retourner que tous ces Arabs pleuraient. (Chraïbi 140)

Chraïbi's choice to include this passage of communal bonding and transcendence around Quranic verses is surprising, given the ire towards Islam in his first novel. However, this moment gives the *boucs* a more complex affective texture than simply that of an illiterate group of downtrodden scapegoats. Here we have a sense of their collective *education* in a tradition other than that of French Republicanism. Waldik hears in the verses an appeal to other universalizing principles that consider all humans equally (before the "Créateur Sublime") and it moves each member of this inscrutable group to tears. There appears to be, among the workers, a deep sense of recognition of the disembodied *cheik's* voice reciting verses. We see that the *boucs* are not devoid of all literacy whatsoever, but that they are learned in Islamic traditions. Indeed, this makes historical sense, as the selectivity of French education in the North African colony was

⁵⁰Short for *télégraphie sans fil*, a wireless radio

met with a flourishing of Islamic educational institutions across the Maghreb. Only at the end of WWI was “compulsory primary education for Muslim boys...ordered,...and then it could not be enforced,” remarks Heggoy (186). “Despite reforms intended to expand attendance and the efforts of a number of individual educators,” Joshua Schreier writes, through the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “the Third Republic consistently denied the vast majority of Algerians the resources to obtain any formal education. This would only begin to change in the interwar period as both reformist Muslim *Ulema* (religious scholars) and colonial reformers began to construct an educational infrastructure for Muslim youth” (Schreier 116-117). The “Ulema” (or “‘ulama,” as it sometimes appears) was a movement of puritanical, Salafi Islam that gained legs at the turn of the century in the Maghreb as Sufi practices lost popularity.⁵¹ Though Heggoy remarks that the educated leaders of the “‘ulema were not, ostensibly, in opposition to the French colonial apparatus”⁵² Martin argues that from “its inception in 1931, the Association of Reformist ‘Ulama pursued a vigorous educational campaign that identified French colonialism as the original cause of the debasement of both Algeria’s ‘true religion’ and

⁵¹“By the 1930s, Algeria’s reformist ‘ulama, the foremost proponents of *Salafi* teaching in North Africa, called for Muslims to rediscover the purity of early Islam. From its inception in 1931, the Association of Reformist ‘Ulama pursued a vigorous educational campaign that identified French colonialism as the original cause of the debasement of both Algeria’s ‘true religion’ and of its authentic Muslim identity” (Thomas 82).

⁵² Heggoy provides this fascinating history of the ‘ulama movement: “[I]n terms of the history of education in Algeria and in the context of Muslim resistance to French cultural penetration in Algeria, was the Association of Reformist Ulama which was founded in 1931 by Cheikh Abd- el-Hamid Ben Badis. He was a learned Islamic theologian who wished to avoid political conflict with the French but insisted on teaching his people the true meaning of Islam. Pure Islam, as Ben Badis saw it, required the ability to read the Qu’ran, hence the necessity of learning Arabic. To teach this holy language, the Ulama founded schools—130 by 1936. Some 10,000 students a year attended Ulama schools in the 1940’s, and perhaps as many as 50,000 in the period of the normalcy that followed World War II. Since the Ulama’s program can be synthesized in a capsule form as a slogan, namely ‘Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language; Algeria is my fatherland,’ their policy’s cultural impact was quite clear. The Ulama also developed a Muslim scouts’ movement. They obviously wished to create a new élite made up of young Algerians steeped in Islamic and Arab culture. Many of the Ulama teachers took pride in the fact that they knew no French, and they refused to offer courses in French in spite of laws governing free schools in colonial Algeria that required fifteen hours a week of instruction in French” (188).

of its authentic Muslim identity” (Thomas 82).⁵³ Whether or not the original intentions of the movement were anticolonial, what it did provide for the Maghrebi colonial subjects was a sense of community and learnedness that stood in sharp contrast to the French imperial efforts to push various ethnic and cultural groups in North Africa asunder and leave the population largely illiterate. It created a sense of solidarity in the face of oppression, and eventually taking the form of pan-Islamism, one of the breeding grounds of anticolonial nationalist movements across the Maghreb. It is very clear why the “ulema” movement provided a unifying cause among groups who were strategically divided by the French imperial machine, and clearer still why this newfound solidarity would feed into an anticolonial positioning among its followers.⁵⁴ However, it is important not to make an overly facile elision of pan-Islamism and anticolonialism. The *boucs* of Chraïbi’s novel, in the unifying moment of listening to the radio broadcast of Quranic verses, are moved to tears rather than violence. That is to say, it is not in this rare act of *inclusion* that they are inspired to violently revolt. It is rather in their collective rejection by the French, in their *exclusion*—from public life, citizenship rights, the possibility of entering the economy through work, the inability to read work notices because of structural denial of literacy—that they are driven to “mobilize,” as it were.

Ultimately this disparity between the ideals of French Republicanism and the reality of systemic and total subjugation of its Muslim Maghrebi colonial subjects, and more egregiously after 1947, its Maghrebi *citizens*, is what renders Waldik incapable of representing the *boucs*. He

⁵³ “In simple terms, across French North Africa, Sufism gave way to the puritanical Islam of the ‘ulama as the focal point for religious resistance to French rule. Immediately after World War I, the Islamic reformism—or *salafiyya* movement—that linked the doctrinal renewal of Islam to socioeconomic modernization of Muslim states made a dramatic impact across the Maghreb. By the 1930s, Algeria’s reformist ‘ulama, the foremost proponents of *Salafi* teaching in North Africa, called for Muslims to rediscover the purity of early Islam. From its inception in 1931, the Association of Reformist ‘Ulama pursued a vigorous educational campaign that identified French colonialism as the original cause of the debasement of both Algeria’s ‘true religion’ and of its authentic Muslim identity” (Thomas 82).

⁵⁴ Thomas proposes that “as a distinctive, anti-Western philosophy that transcended ethnic, linguistic, and class boundaries, pan-Islamism had a unique capacity to mobilize Muslim opinion against European imperialism” (83).

simply cannot render their experience by virtue of his unique position as both an *evolué* and a *bouc* himself. The distinct historical position of Chraïbi's novel makes it especially illuminating to the burgeoning anticolonial movement in Algeria. It is their mistreatment in Nanterre that may cause the *boucs* to react even more strongly to the *cheik's* voice, to feel even more moved and nostalgic and *communal* than they may have had they been granted work, education, and any degree of legitimacy upon arriving in France (as citizens, at that). It is this first wave of migrant laborers, and soldiers as well, embittered and disillusioned, who would return to Algeria with a new sense of resentment and purpose. Heggoy remarks that it was the returning workers who pushed for educational rights for Muslims in the colony during the interwar period. "When migrant workers returned home...they carried back to Algeria...the whole complex of popular education which exposure to a European milieu had given them. The birth of twentieth-century Algerian nationalism can be traced directly to the population movement between Algeria and continental France that began during World War I" (Heggoy 187). Finally Heggoy names the first formidable group to begin an anticolonial effort in Algeria to be the "*Etoile Nord-Africaine* (ENA) founded in 1926. Designed primarily as a syndicalist organization determined to fight for the rights of Maghribi workers in France, it quickly became an Algerian political party which educated members and other Algerians along ideological lines that combined aspects of Marxism with a pan-Arab point of view" (187). Thus the effort to defend workers rights in the French metropole led, fluidly, to anticolonial nationalist organizing in the colony. Though the ENA was Marxist and pan-Arab rather than pan-Islamic in its orientation, it stood for the same principle of forming solidarity between disparate groups whose fissures were exacerbated by French ruling practices.⁵⁵ As Heggoy notes, the ENA, too, was begun by two *evolués* who had been educated

⁵⁵ The ENA is largely understood to be the predecessor of the Algerian socialist party called FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) that led the independence movement. See Daniél, le Joly. *The French Communist Party and*

in France. Thus, what we see in a historical alternative to the Waldik's representational paralysis is the very possibility of representation and movement out of subalternity, but on the condition of *circulation*, and moreover, of *return*. Movement *back to* the colony from metropole is what seemingly facilitates representation, at least in mid-century Algeria itself.

VI. The Illiteracy of *Topographie's* Migrant

However, the increased circulation between North African (post)colony and French metropole did not necessarily make the transition into French society any easier for Algerian migrants. Twenty years after the publication of *Les boucs*, in *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, Rachid Boudjedra took on the topic of an Algerian migrant worker trying (and failing) to arrive in Paris, equipped with a broken cardboard suitcase, the address of a cousin, and little else. Most importantly, the migrant lacks literacy in French and knowledge of how to navigate the complex and confusing network of the Parisian subway system. The text does not allow him to escape the *métro*, a scene of hyper-signification in which inability to interpret becomes criminal. Before he can reach the correct exit to reach his cousin's address, he is brutally murdered by a group of Parisians in the station. Boudjedra's experimental narrative includes remembered scenes of interaction between the unnamed migrant and older Algerians in his village who have returned from sojourns working in France. Though these figures, the "laskars," as the migrant remembers them, participated in the Parisian insurgency movements during Algerian war, they return with none of the solidarity nor willingness to pass on cultural literacy that historical organizations such as the ENA purported to bring to colonized Algerians. Boudjedra's novel depicts a harrowing condition of illiteracy and isolation in the bustling

the Algerian War.

underground space of the *métro*. Many scholars have written about the migrant's illiteracy and thus his complete and total alienation from the linguistic and cultural milieu surrounding him in the metro stations. His illiteracy not only renders his journey through the subterranean space of the *métro* utterly harrowing and ultimately fatal within narrative bounds of *Topographie*, it is also crystallizes the cultural disharmonies between metropolitan French culture at large and its incoming Maghrebi migrant population—differences that, as we see by the end of the novel, are criminal in the Paris of Boudjedra's novel. The novel's hapless protagonist, stuck in the labyrinth of the inscrutable *métro* for a period of a day, only ever attempts to enter but never fully arrives, as Seth Graebner has argued in naming the migrant a perpetual *emigrant*, and not a proper immigrant (Graebner 294). John Culbert pushes this notion further, claiming that the migrant is an "*arrivant*: neither inside nor outside, and tampering with the boundaries that define their topographies" (Culbert 103). The protagonist's inability to ever properly "arrive" in above-ground Paris is a powerful allegory for the condition of Algerian immigrants in late twentieth-century France.

Similar to Chraïbi, whose first novel turned a critical eye towards Moroccan culture, Boudjedra's first novel, *La Répudiation* (1969) was a scathing critique of Algerian social practices, including "the hypocrisy and double standards of male behavior, the widespread sexual repression, the misappropriation of religious doctrine to serve male interests, the general superstition and charlatanism" (Corcoran 62). Though *Topographie*'s damning portrayal of Paris life as it passes through the *métro* indicts the French treatment of its postcolonial immigrants, it also engages in criticism Algerian society itself, though less directly than in his first work. The migrant is a figure whose powerlessness is attributable to the failures of both postcolonial France and Algeria, both conspiring to create a particularly disadvantaged sector of postcolonial

subalternity. The refusal—by both French colonial infrastructure *and* the Algerian *laskars*—to transmit French literacy, both linguistic and cultural, to the migrant is what makes his entrance into Paris impossible. Boujdedra’s depiction of a French-illiterate migrant arriving in Paris has complex historical precedents, as I have demonstrated in the first half of this chapter. Yet *Topographie*, in its highly experimental, stream of consciousness style (and below I will return to the complex question of *whose* consciousness is streaming) is hardly a faithful rendering of historical reality in mid-century France. The migrant at the center of *Topographie* is perhaps even more figural than the *boucs* in Chraïbi’s novel. Here we have no diegetic intellectual to act as a rhetorical conduit of the disoriented subaltern experience in metropolitan France. Rather Boudjedra’s novel attempts to enter the psychic space of the alienated migrant where the anguished Waldik of *Les boucs* stopped short. *Topographie*, in a modernist move, takes place over the course of a singular terrifying day and proceeds in dense and disorienting prose that resists legibility in a manner approaching hostility toward its reader.⁵⁶ The effect of reading, very simply, is a reproduction of the very disorientation the migrant must feel at his incapacity to make sense of his surroundings in the *métro*. As Susan Ireland observes, “The non-linear, labyrinthine structure and the new-novel style fragmented presentation of events are used to convey the increasing anguish of the disoriented immigrant and his underground encounter with an unfamiliar world he is unable to decipher. As he wanders through the metro, his increasingly battered suitcase serves as a central image of his immigrant status, becoming an extension of his body and psyche” (Ireland 34). The migrant, whom the narrator calls simply “le voyageur” experiences a sort of sensory overload as he moves through line after line of the *métro*, overwhelmed by crush of variegated people, the indecipherable and multicolored *métro* map, and

⁵⁶ Scholars such as John Culbert also categorize *Topographie* as an example of the *nouveau roman*.

the aggressive advertising campaigns pasted on every visible wall. The narrator neatly sums up his status in the first few pages of the novel:

Toujours est-il qu'on l'avait vu allant et venant dans les couloirs butant visuellement sur ces images de fromage de paquets de détergent de sauces tomate de paysages exotiques de plats cuisinés de poêles à frire de produits de maquillages de slips d'écritures à l'envers de machines à laver de tampons menstruels de maisons de campagne de canapés en cuir de papier hygiénique de femmes nues de téléviseurs de soutiens-gorge de matelas moelleux de frigidaires d'automobiles de lave-vaisselle de voyages lotophages de spaghetti de bicyclettes de déodorants de yoghourts. (Boudjedra 16)

His only status to those who see him in the *métro* is that of a figure with no discernable destination, constantly coming and going amongst an endless (and unpunctuated) litany of advertised commodities plastered across the underground's surfaces. Thus the only voyage Boudjedra's *voyageur* can hope to complete is to and fro among the visual noise of product posters. Unable to decipher the hieroglyphs of the *plan du métro*, he struggles to understand the pictures before him for some sort of guidance, only to feel more alienated by the incomprehensible products themselves—seemingly convenience items, but evacuated of their universality once perceived through the eyes of a rural, illiterate, male Muslim migrant laborer. Luxury items such as washing machines, automobiles, refrigerators, and country houses are far out of the migrant's economic reach. Hygienic products such as toilet paper, detergent packets, and menstrual tampons are quite possibly foreign concepts, and (in the case of the last item) offensive to his sense of propriety. He is struck equally by the *slips* and *soutiens-gorge*, no doubt advertised by what he sees as *femmes nues*, and as Seth Graebner notes, many scholars have commented that the effrontery of these images offend the Muslim sensibilities of the migrant (Graebner 272).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In particular, Seth Graebner gestures toward the analyses of Karin Holter, "Topographie ideale pour un texte maghrebin," and Armelle Crouziers-Ingenthron, "Le labyrinthe de symboles."

His sensory overload is marked formally through Boudjedra's breathless, comma-less flow of information that streams in sentences spanning twenty to thirty lines. The page's unrelenting injunction to read ceaselessly is entirely at odds with the migrant's complete inability to read his surroundings. Yet a small phrase in the above quotation calls into question his alleged illiteracy: he perceives that amongst the pictures of make-up and frying pans, there are "écritures à l'envers,"—inverted writings. That he understands the French script is backwards suggests that he knows the direction in which Arabic is read, perhaps indicating that he may indeed be literate in the language of his homeland. It is thus, and perhaps more importantly, the migrant's *cultural* illiteracy that prevents him from ever exiting the *métro* before he meets his violent demise. Unable to make sense of the forms of urban modernity before him, the *métro* becomes a surreal and nightmarish space and the migrant traverses in dread.

A buter donc à travers ces corridors dans les carrefours desquels il y avait des courants d'air terrible qui ne le rendaient pas plus frileux mais qui enroulaient autour de lui les pans de son bleu de chauffe dans lequel il flottait, montant les escaliers mécaniques en marche ne cessant pas d'engloutir leur sol métallique et brillant tournant autour d'eux-mêmes et revenant, surgissant dans un chuintement quasi inaudible comme un gros poisson aux mille écailles blanches scintillant au soleil des centaines de tubes au néon éclairant les fameuses affiches et se reverberant sur l'inox recouvrant les escaliers roulants, multipliant ainsi les structures, faussant les topographies et créant artificiellement des semblants d'espaces qui n'ont pour eux que leur qualité d'inexistence et qui ne sont quand même pas de vrais miroirs aux alouettes mais la tentation reste grande de les éprouver ou tout au moins de savoir quel est leur rapport avec l'espace réel, hachuré, strié, sectionné, et désarticulé comme un mille-pattes qui ne saurait plus démêler sa tête de sa queue, broyant (Boudjedra 16).

The mundane workings of the seemingly banal, quotidian *Métropolitain* forms take on the tone of fantasy and horror: terrible drafts blow through the confusing corridors (similar, perhaps, to the injurious wind that so plagues Raus in *Les boucs*) and monstrous machines rise and resemble great metallic millipedes and giant scaly fish.

VII. Polyphony and a Surplus of Text

The migrant's incomprehension of his surroundings sharply contrasts the canny and often caustic observations of the novel's narrator. Indeed, the voice of the narrator is one that at once perceives and analyzes the disorientation of the bewildered migrant but is also entirely cognizant of the pigeonholing the French passers-by employ to describe the migrant in the *métro*. Indeed, as Doris Ruhe remarks, he is never granted the "same protective mask available to him as the autochthonous" French,⁵⁸ and thus does not profit from the anonymity—simultaneously celebrated and reviled by poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Ezra Pound—in being a member of the Parisian crowd (Ruhe 56). The migrant, whose face is hardly apparitional, does not have the privilege of being a "petal on a wet, black bough."⁵⁹ Interspersed throughout the text are testimonials from French witnesses who speak to the police about the attack on the migrant: "Mais non mais non, je vous assure c'est pas pour dire mais je l'ai bien vu qui allait et venait dans les couloirs et qui regardait les bicyclettes, les spaghetti, enfin! vous voyez et puis il était bizarre" (Boudjedra 16). It is not that the migrant is, with his uneven shoulders and overstuffed suitcase, as visible to the French *métro* riders as the advertisements surrounding him. The advertisements are arbitrary to the French, who understand, digest, and presumably ignore the visual barrage of commercialism in the subway. The migrant is instead rendered visible precisely because he is observed to be *observing* the advertisements himself. He is caught noticing the images of bicycles and spaghetti on the wall, which, in conjunction with his unkempt demeanor, betrays his foreignness—an implicit crime in and of itself. Boudjedra's narrator offers us thorough explications of each of the sights the migrant sees (*we* can read the captions of each of these advertisements even when the migrant cannot) while simultaneously producing, in stream-

⁵⁸ Ruhe 56

⁵⁹ With reference, of course, to Pound's 1912 poem, "In a Station of the Metro."

of-consciousness form, the *affect* of his disorientation. The polyphony of *Topographie* moves the reader through multiple perspectives in quick succession—from official police reports to prejudiced passers-by, gaudy advertisements, Algerian newspapers, and finally the befuddled *voyageur* himself. The narrator may have access to all these perspectives, but the security of omniscience is not passed on to the reader who, like the migrant, must struggle at every point in an effort to reorient herself. In a review of *Topographie*, Kenneth Harrow argues that the reader cannot “draw the line between the impressions of the voyager—the naive peasant—and ‘le voyeur,’ the sophisticated narrator who calmly explains the workings of each minute detail...found in the Metro. Every route is clearly delineated, every direction minutely examined, every sign, every machine...is dissected and laid bare in all its ugly, aggressive, and painful qualities” (Harrow 65). Boudjedra repeats the images and slogans of these ads over and over throughout the migrant’s increasingly tortuous and tortured journey, and with each repetition the words lose their denotative signification, beginning to mimic the menace the migrant feels upon encountering these looming and meaningless posters again and again. “Just as in a labyrinth,” Ruhe emphasizes, in the *métro*, “the protagonist keeps being confronted with the same hoardings, the meaning of which he cannot make out. Boudjedra’s *écriture*, with its intratextual repetitions and calculated ruptures in the narrative flow, corresponds perfectly with the image of this labyrinth” (Ruhe 56).

Boudjedra’s novel, published in 1975, takes a different tack from Chraïbi’s *Les boucs*, published two decades prior. Here we do not witness an explicit struggle in the act of *writing* the migrant experience. The question of collapsing *darstellen* and *vertreten* is less belabored by the narrator in *Topographie* than *Les boucs*. Boudjedra’s experimental rhetorical style precludes the possibility of the French-illiterate migrant laborers (of which the *voyageur* is representative) by

being a projected audience for this work, let alone many French-literate readers. The traumatic scene of this novel is not in its *writing* but rather in the practice of *reading* and legibility. The migrant's complete lack of access to the endless and slippery chains of signifiers surrounding him stands in direct contrast to the hyper-signification of Boudjedra's saturated prose. The political thrust of *Topographie* is placed squarely in the realm of *darstellen*—in the portraiture of the migrant's journey. Boudjedra, in the disorienting form of his novel, turns an archetype of Orientalist discourse on its head. As Seth Graebner argues, *Topographie* offers "its own reply to the endlessly punned 'dis-Orientalism' recorded by European visitors lost in the labyrinths of Arab cities. The emigrant lost in Paris finds the alleged Cartesian simplicity of French networks (to say nothing of French syntax) and their diagrams just as disorienting, and literally cannot distinguish the map's orient from its occident" (Graebner 178-179). But in large part, the novel's intertextual constellation is in the astral literary plane of Greco-Roman antiquity and high European modernism. In nesting "voyages lotophages" among the list of luxury items advertised in the *métro*, Boudjedra simultaneously references Homer's *Odyssey* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which include chapters on the "Lotus Eaters." In both literary odysseys, lotus-eaters signify decadent and indulgent distractions from the telos of the journey, and importantly, in Greek mythology, the lotophages hailed from an island off the coast of (Oriental) North Africa. Here Boudjedra inverts the terms: the distractions that repeatedly thwart and stymie the migrant on his journey—not simply to Port de Clichy in the immigrant enclave of the seventeenth *arrondissement*, but to successful assimilation into metropolitan French culture—are those of European modernity in the *métro*. As Culbert remarks, "Boudjedra's critique of French anti-immigration attitudes and policies thus targets both the myths of travel, including *The Odyssey*, and mythology in the Barthesian sense, as collective delusion of consumer culture" (Culbert

102). The novel's affect of disorientation, with its references to Orientalist travelogues, Greco-Roman epics, modernist masterpieces, and consumer culture, is very clearly to be felt by the European reader, and herein are novel's politics. It is, in no uncertain terms, an indictment of contemporary French culture at large, simultaneously its rampant consumerism and its structural racism toward its immigrants. In *Topographie*, these aspects of contemporary French culture are on a continuum.

VIII. Anti-*flânerie*

Topographie's migrant enjoys none of the privileges of a modern European urban subject. Though set in the heart (or bowels) of exemplary Parisian modernity, the *métropolitain*, Boudjedra's migrant could not bear less resemblance to the most archetypal urban figure of European modernity: the *flâneur*. Indeed, it seems that the migrant's horrific and fatal passage through the *métro* is in every way the polar opposite of *flânerie*. As Charles Baudelaire writes in "Peintre de la vie moderne":

Pour le parfait flâneur...c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Être hors chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés. (Baudelaire 514)

The nineteenth century urban strolling figure feels at once part of the throngs and distant from them, at the "center of the world" and yet hidden, able to observe, interpret and most importantly, willfully select which urban experiences he will relate to his audience. Though the *flâneur* delights in the movements of the crowd, he remains fundamentally alienated, unable to identify with the comings and goings of the urban proletariat. It is, very significantly, an assumed posture of distance, a willed alienation. The migrant, in Boudjedra's novel, could not be more

alienated by his surroundings in the *métro*, but this is structural rather than elective. French society, as it manifests in the synecdochal space of the underground, is a vast construction of forms and signifiers profoundly alien to him. Rather than feeling “immense jouissance” in partaking of the crowd, *Topographie*’s migrant feels panic and anxiety. In some senses the migrant has more in common with Walter Benjamin’s assessments of Baudelairian *flânerie*. In writing on Baudelaire, Benjamin sees the former’s musings on *flânerie* to be deeply critical and ultimately elegiac assessments of Parisian life. “[Baudelaire’s] poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather, the gaze...[is] of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller. The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home” (Benjamin, “Paris 41). Benjamin’s description of the *flâneur* at this point resonates, rather ironically, with the migrant’s plight in *Topographie*. Though the *flâneur* is a figure of modernity *par excellence*, it is precisely the machinations of modernity that alienate him from his city—the same modern forms, indeed, that alienate the migrant. Moreover, the migrant is quite literally away from his homeland and stands apart from the French metropolis and middle class. However, these are neither metaphorical nor tactical moves for the migrant. To alienate oneself as an *agent* from urban life at large is an act of *flânerie*. What the migrant is subject to in *Topographie*’s hellish *métro* is alienation without agency; it is an experience of anti-*flânerie*.

Agency in the *metro*—that super-saturated space of signification that Boudjedra depicts in his novel—is predicated upon both linguistic and cultural literacy. We cannot think of the legibility of an urban space and the possibilities of writing it differently without turning to Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life (L’invention de la vie quotidienne)*, de

Certeau describes two possibilities of engaging with city space, the “strategic” and the “tactical.” A strategy, for de Certeau, “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, ‘clientèles,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘objects’ of research)” (De Certeau xix). De Certeau contrasts strategy—top-down power relationship to lived environments, i.e., following the *plan du métro* to navigate the city and consuming the myriad advertisements adhered to its walls unquestioningly—to tactical moves through the city. A tactic “cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance” (xix). De Certeau sees the subversive engagement with strategic cityscapes as a means of acquiring agency in the superstructural, hegemonic forms of urbanity. He goes on to claim that “tactics wander out of orbit, making consumers into immigrants in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it” (xx). De Certeau employs a very particular vocabulary to describe a tactical relationship to the city—that of “the other” and “the immigrant.” We can assume that de Certeau’s use of these terms is metaphorical; that is, he likely is not addressing a tactical relationship to the city that a racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious “other” or “immigrant” might have to Parisian spaces. His concepts of strategy and tactic are contingent upon a preliminary legibility of metropolitan urbanity to the city-dweller and the *decision*, as it were, to be subversive and to act tactically. To move tactically through the *métro* is a foreclosed option for Boudjedra’s migrant, since he lacks, first and foremost, preliminary access to the *strategic* organization of the metropolitan space.

IX. Legacies of Violence

We must wonder whether de Certeau's concept of "tactical" city-dwelling takes into account the possible relationships that the immigrant population of Paris could have to the city at large, particularly to those like the migrant, who have no prior literacy in metropolitan French culture. The France that the migrant attempts to enter in *Topographie* is one that has taken a remarkably different shape than that of *Les boucs*. In the twenty years between the publication of these two novels about similar migrant populations, the relationship between France and its North African colonies (particularly Algeria) changed radically. Between 1955 and 1961, joining the thousands of laborers arriving in France searching for abundant work were the families of the men once left behind. "During the 1954-62 anti-colonial war in Algeria, the families of many laborers came to France to escape the escalating violence. Immigration continued apace after the war until the global economic downturn of 1973, at which point the French government enacted legal barriers to future labor migration" (Silverstein 4). The introduction of Maghrebi family members to the *bidonvilles*, which had been comprised largely of men, ushered in a new social configuration in France—that of growing North African immigrant communities. French attitudes towards this incoming population were less than kind, especially during the Algerian war. Jim House asserts: "The dominant version of the war propagated by the state and right-wing media and other colonial discourses presented Algerians as a collective danger and the Paris police as the victims, never the perpetrators, of terror" (House 214). The public understanding of Algerian immigrants as a dangerous quantity in and around Paris illuminates the social motivations for what appears otherwise to be the migrant's arbitrarily violent and mortal beating twelve hours after he enters the *métro* at the start of *Topographie*.

This is a France that has nominally granted its Algerian subjects citizenship and, until 1965, free passage into France. In practice, as *Topographie* demonstrates, Algerian immigrants were often treated as internal enemies.⁶⁰ Hostility towards Algerian migrant workers devolved to mass violence on October 17th, 1961, when numerous Algerian protesters marching in solidarity with the Algerian independence movement were killed mercilessly in Paris by police. Victims of the massacre are estimated between thirty-one and two hundred (Cole 117). The next year, Algeria's violent independence movement came to a close. During the war, over a hundred thousand Algerian migrants lived in its squalid *bidonvilles*, which became spaces that the repressive ideological apparatus of the French police force used similar tactics as in Algeria to suppress a burgeoning insurgency of FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) members who circulated through Paris and returned back to the colony during the period. As Silverstein states:

With a logic similar to that of its wartime policies in Kabylia, the French government initiated a series of urban reform measures to undermine the FLN's network in France—spatialized by the FLN as the *wilaya* VII of organizing and operations—by destroying the spatial cohesiveness of the immigrant neighborhoods. Likewise, the 1959 creation of the spatial category of Urban Priority Zones (ZUP) targeted urban renewal in areas of heavy Algerian populations...in large part to rupture the proto-ethnic solidarities considered potentially outside of the law. The first step in this process of relocation was to build prefabricated camps and foyers (*cités de transit*) in the vicinity of the bulldozed shantytowns in order to lodge the families while more permanent structures were being constructed in the municipalities. (92)

Moving tactically through the city for the Algerian migrant workers who maintained ties and circulated intelligence for the FLN had vast political consequences and was literally a matter of life and death. To move tactically in this sense was to move against the strategic and destructive movements of French imperial anti-resistance efforts. Moving through Paris for Algerian

⁶⁰ “The final Evian agreement in 1962 guaranteed dual nationality and immigration rights to European Algerians for 3 years, but after that they would have to choose between Algerian and French citizenship. Algerians in France were asked to make a similar declaration, but they could continue to hold dual citizenship, unlike the Algerian Europeans” (Janoski 80).

immigrants with FLN ties was not a matter of gestural resistance, but was instead a figuration of war.

The subversion of de Certeau's urban tactician can seem paltry when compared with the insurgency of the migrant's compatriots from his native village, Piton. "Les trois laskars," three older men who have journeyed to France and returned to Algeria, regale those in Piton with tales of France, which the migrant remembers while he is lost in the *métro*. Theirs is an extremely tactical relationship to the city space of Paris:

Ils avaient alors appris, par coeur, tous les itinéraires du métro et en connaissaient tous les recoins, toutes les issues, toutes les lignes, toutes les stations, tous les escaliers mécaniques, tous les portillons, tous les méandres et toutes les courbes, puisqu'ils y donnaient leurs rendez-vous clandestins, déposaient, dans ses corbeilles à papier, des armes et des tracts que d'autres venaient, discrètement, récupérer. (Boudjedra 202)

From their committed familiarity with all the *métro*'s itineraries and routes to the plans of clandestine meetings about where to deposit and retrieve arms, we understand that the *laskars* were participants in the Algerian independence movement in Paris. This knowledge of Paris and its infrastructure (a knowledge, at bottom, of resistance) is not passed on to the migrant, however. As Graebner argues, "The novel demonstrates a failure in the process of transmission of a collective memory that would have helped keep the protagonist out of trouble. The mistrust the emigrant feels in the Métro stems originally not from incomprehensible signs, but from recalling his dealings with the only people who could have helped him in his own language, despite his illiteracy" (Graebner 179). We see in the depiction of the *laskars* a fundamental divide between their generation and that of *Topographie*'s migrant, who chooses to journey to France after Algerian independence, and after the massacre of 1961. The term "laskar" here seems to be aligned with the "lascars" of the colonial South Asian context, but the term also means something akin to "rascal" or "rogue" in French. The roguish *laskars* contribute to the

migrant's confusion and anxiety upon entering the *métro* by keeping essential information from him, as well as feeding him misinformation. Their unwillingness to share information with the migrant is of a piece with their dismissal of him as "l'idiot" whose cowardice should have compelled him to return to Piton after encountering the intimidating urbanity of Algiers, let alone Paris (Graebner 179). His illiteracy is two-fold then, reinforced by his compatriots who could possibly have offered him navigational skills and means to enter into the Parisian milieu with some degree of preparation.

The pervasive French hostility towards incoming Maghrebi laborers by 1973—the year Boudjedra sets *Topographie*—had irrupted into instances of violent aggression toward new immigrants. Very significantly, 1973 and 1974 marked the two-year span in which France officially halted immigration from North Africa after two-decade long period of open circulation. Writes historian Jane Freedman, "The decision to halt labour migration in 1974 can be seen as both an economic and an electoral choice. The decision was taken as a result of the economic recession which followed the 1973 oil crisis, and growing unemployment within France which lessened the need for migrant labour. At the same time there was evidence of growing tension and xenophobia within France and thus electoral pressure for some kind of control of immigration" (Freedman 12-13). The end of the *Trente Glorieuses* with its attendant economic prosperity also signaled an era of growing aggression towards (im)migrant populations that found its way into legislation. Racism, notoriously difficult to quantify in a nation with no census or official political discourse on race under the rubric of Republicanism, was no doubt a motivator in public attitudes towards new immigrants. This collective anger manifests in the brutal scene of the migrant's murder in *Topographie*, a senseless act of violence that Boudjedra describes in graphic detail:

Eux, cinglant sa mémoire à coups de chaînes, l'achevant à coups de couteaux levés et abattus à une vitesse vertigineuse, avec une rage ponçant leurs nerfs à vif, le couvrant de plaies béantes, d'hématomes, de contusions, de traumatismes, s'amusaient à taillader la chair jusqu'à l'os resurgi blanc de sel et faisaient gicler le sang dans un silence où seuls leurs ahans créaient quelques perturbations sonores, comme s'ils étaient non pas les assassins (RÉVEILLEZ vos INSTINCTS DE GAULOIS! SAUPIQUET C'EST.)...mais les victimes hirsutes et excitées par le sang, alors que lui, muré dans un silence terrifiant, se voyait mourir, sans douleur, totalement obsédé par l'idée qu'il fallait rester rigide face à l'ultime saccage, face à la lame du couteau brillant dans la pénombre et dont il ne percevait que la trajectoire telle une luciole gonflée de lumière, translucide et affolée taraudant l'espace bleuté et surchargé par les volutes serpentant des cigarettes des autres et par leur haleine de bouchers vivant l'histoire à reculons et jouant aux chevaliers preux, aux défenseurs des valeurs désuètes et des races supérieures. (Boudjedra 153-154)

As the attackers beat and stab the migrant to a bloody pulp, the narrator inserts the bitterly ironic text of an advertisement that looms over the scene, urging the viewer to “AWAKEN YOUR GALLIC INSTINCTS.” The advertisement is a specific brand of canned foods, encouraging the consumer to participate in the rich tradition of French culture by eating canned comestibles. The grandiosity of this advertisement juxtaposed simultaneously with the banality of convenience food and the brutal violence transpiring below it tells a damning story of mid-century French society. The Gallic instincts awakened by the hoodlums in the *métro* inspire them to commit hateful and mortal crimes. At the end of this description, the narrator describes the thugs as “butchers living history backwards and playing valiant knights, defenders of outdated values and of superior races.” The migrant’s cruel fate seems to be punishment not only for being a despised Maghrebi in a hostile France, but also for a failure to interpret the signs and signifiers of the *métropolitain*, a metonymy of Parisian culture, and by extension French culture writ large.

The migrant’s death in the *métro* mimics a spate of real-life violent incidents in France that took place in the month before the novel is set. *Topographie’s* aesthetic is highly literary and experimental and simultaneously conversant with contemporary historical events in the tense and

evolving relationship of France to its postcolonial immigrants makes its political orientation clear. Jane Freedman explains, “North Africans were attacked in Paris suburbs and anti-immigrant riots broke out in Marseilles in 1973 leading to the death of eleven Algerians....It was thus a conjuncture of economic and social pressures, together with the desire for electoral appeal which led the Secretary of State for Immigration, André Postel-Vinay, to announce a temporary stop on labour immigration in July 1974. The suspension was make [sic] permanent in October of the same year” (Freedman 12-13). Thus not only were the oil embargo and rising xenophobia structural causes for the official blockade of immigration from the Maghreb, but it was a response by the French government to very specific attacks upon immigrants—deaths resembling that of *Topographie*’s migrant. Boudjedra incorporates samples from actual Algerian periodicals listing the names, ages, and natures of attack of the eleven victims in Marseille: “Onze morts depuis le 29 août. L’Amicale des Algériens en Europe a publié une liste de onze travailleurs immigrés assassinés selon elle, après les ‘événements de Marseille’” (Boudjedra 154-155). In so doing, we see that the example of the migrant in the novel—terrified, deceived, and scapegoated—is a story that has become harrowingly universal.

In contrast to Boudjedra’s disorienting and stream-of-consciousness representation of the *métro*’s environs, the samples from the periodicals are neither repetitive nor surreal. They are instead terse, clear, and grounded in a very troubling political reality. Correspondence from the Algerian government is quoted in the narrative denouncing the actions of the French attackers upon Algerian workers in Marseille, but also actively suspending all immigration to France from Algeria. In printing this correspondence, Boudjedra places the agency on the side of the Algerians to stop emigration, and to protect its own people from the (freshly decolonized) French hegemon:

Le Conseil de la révolution et le Conseil des ministres dénoncent avec vigueur toutes les forces occultes qui travaillent contre la promotion des relations entre l'Algérie et la France, voire entre le Tiers Monde et la France. Des mesures conservatoires ont été envisagées et il a été décidé en l'occurrence la suspension immédiate de l'émigration algérienne en France en attendant que les conditions de sécurité et de dignité soient garanties par les autorités françaises aux ressortissants algériens. (Boudjedra 224-226)

Attempting to navigate French modernity takes on the texture of surreality for the migrant, but the consequent brutality of this failed migration is addressed in clear prose with an official mandate on the part of Algeria. The streaming prose resolves into something very concrete in this moment, and the disoriented text finds its bearings. The stylistic contrast between the migrant—the “arrivant” who never quite arrives in Paris—and the official discourse of the French press reporting his murder suggests that for the illiterate, working class Algerian migrant, the process of “arrival” as it were (i.e., integration, assimilation), is plagued by horrific and surreal obstacles and is, in reality, foreclosed. The clear and lucid prose of the periodicals indexes the brutal fate of those who might attempt to transcend the purgatorial (and metaphorically, the transitory underground) status of being a migrant to join Parisian society.

The murder of *Topographie's* migrant marks the inevitable conclusion of a centuries-long relationship between France and its colonial subjects. The year in which the novel's events transpire, 1973, is also the year that France changes its policies of immigration. In this shift France understood the influx of migrant workers from its former colonies to be no longer subjects of a residual empire, but immigrants from a newly formed nation with which it had an acrid and unexamined past. It is also the cataclysmic result of a centuries long hoarding of knowledge and education, a colonial policy set into motion as a means of domination. The widespread illiteracy among migrants to France from the Maghreb was a historically manufactured phenomenon of colonization. But linguistic and cultural illiteracy, in a nation

where social mores and ideologies are passed down through the classroom, becomes a crime against Republicanism, and in this configuration, the illiterate become de-facto criminals. In this way Boudjedra's migrant is a scapegoat of history, similar to the *boucs* of Chraïbi's work. In both works, we confront the very fundamental problem of the *literary* representation of *illiteracy*, depicted as a problem of writing in *Les boucs* and of reading in *Topographie*. The tortured and angry Waldik, unable to write and unable to authentically represent the population of laborers he lives amongst, wallows in a tortured cycle of self-flagellation. Though Waldik blames thousands of years of history for the subjugation of Algerians, this manifests in his inability to write this narrative. The novel's anger is directed outward, toward the French foreman, a microcosmic mouthpiece for a vast history of Orientalist oppression. His murder is symbolic and cathartic, but little else. In *Topographie*, however, the task of representing the illiterate migrant is complete, but the omniscient narrator who understands both the panic-stricken anxiety of the illiterate migrant as well as the vast networks of signification across the *métro* employs such labyrinthine prose that the affect of illiteracy is passed on to the reader. Though the migrant is brutally murdered, the violence of the text is waged upon the reader who is implicated in the crime. Unlike *Les boucs*, Boudjedra's novel does not ruminate upon the tortured subjectivity of the *évolué* who is simultaneously subaltern in twentieth-century France. *Topographie*, in its surreal literary spirals, instead calls out the values of the very culture that creates these tortured subjectivities, one saturated in consumerism and hieroglyphic signs of modernity that deems a sector of humanity unworthy of literacy, and then brutalizes them for their inability to read.

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Chapter 2

“You Know Nothing about London”: Encounters on the East End in *The Shadow Lines* and *The Satanic Verses*

I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained.

—Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*

In 1988 the United Kingdom published two English-language novels depicting the experiences of upper class, western-educated, South Asian migrants discovering, for the first time, East London’s thriving community of working class South Asian immigrants. Though employing markedly different styles, and with very distinct afterlives, both Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* depict the reconfigurations of rooted life-ways that occur upon uprooting, and the uncanny, heterotopic versions of home that are constructed in diaspora. Notoriety and worldwide fervor has somewhat superseded aesthetic considerations of the latter novel; nonetheless, that these two works came into the world in the same year and orbit in the same historical constellations warrants a careful comparison. Both novels feature narrative developments in which the protagonists—first-generation, subcontinental migrant intellectuals—find themselves in the inscrutable space of the immigrant enclave. Therein, they encounter unfamiliar members of the South Asian diaspora who further

trouble both protagonists' increasingly unstable conceptions of class, culture, and nation. Both novels construct scenes in which their cosmopolitan protagonists venture into East and South London and encounter urban spaces that are at once strikingly familiar and strangely foreign. Ghosh's narrator finds on Brick Lane an uncanny version of a Bengali city that bears resemblance to both Dhaka and Calcutta superimposed onto London, as though Partition never happened. Yet his response is bewilderment and retreat rather than celebration. Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha, while transforming from man into goat, spends a substantial amount of time in the fictional neighborhood of Brickhall, encountering a youth culture whose populist brand of hybridity seems to him more monstrous than his own bestial form. In examining these two novels together, this chapter will consider the fruitful fictional motif of the immigrant enclave, seeing it as a space of confrontation and production, reimagining the postcolonial nation-state within the metropole, and creating unprecedented forms of postcolonial subjectivity. Where *The Shadow Lines* spends only a brief few passages disturbing the narrator's worldview by dropping him into the East End neighborhood of Brick Lane and South London quarter of Clapham, *The Satanic Verses* plunges headlong into a fictionalized version of the same spaces, positing the immigrant enclave as ground zero for a coming apocalypse. Indeed it is the real-life version of the immigrant community both texts depict that responded violently to the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, troubling already unstable categories of race and religion within a precarious, newly multicultural formation of British citizenship. This chapter examines the relationship between the historical determinants of migration and policies surrounding immigration to the U.K. from South Asia, and the narrative shape these novels take in response. These two novels in particular were produced in a moment of transition between the first generation of colonial and postcolonial migrants who were to arrive and establish communities in the former imperial

metropole, and second-generation immigrants who were born and raised in an increasingly multicultural Britain. In this sense, they are exemplary of the complex and imbricated formal relationship between the novel of immigration and the socio-political reality it reflects and refracts, raising fundamental questions about *who* can represent the immigrant condition, *how* it can be represented, and, most importantly, the political impacts of representation.

The Shadow Lines evades the teleological trappings of a linear version of history by mimicking the associative and mnemonic inner workings of one individual's mind. The formal technique Ghosh calls "Proustian" is also one that gives the seemingly rambling multi-generational story very definitive boundaries (i.e., the narrator's consciousness). Where Ghosh's text seems to close in on itself, revealing its limitations in the ways the narrator can and cannot imagine the lived-experience of the immigrant communities who have settled in London, Rushdie's text broadens and multiplies out from its central protagonists and their milieu, including no less than five different (and sometimes overlapping) narrative strains and vastly different temporalities that appear to exist simultaneously. Settings and styles in the novel range from a fable-like imagining of medieval Arabia, to a postmodern, media-saturated 1980s Bombay, to a cinematic and doomed contemporary pilgrimage, to the modern-yet-mystical exile of a religious leader, to an ever-hotter and hellish rendition of an immigrant-riddled London. Where *The Shadow Lines* turns to the imaginings, flights of fancy, and memories of its sensitive, intellectual narrator to fill in the gaps of history, *The Satanic Verses* turns to the fantastical, the supernatural, and the demonic, offering no recourse, as *The Shadow Lines* does, to a central event the text calls a "redemptive mystery," but instead conjures what amounts to an eschatological vision of Thatcherite, postcolonial Britain.

Earlier examples of novels depicting postcolonial immigration to the United Kingdom are marked by a distinct separation of classes. That is, a number of novels from the twentieth century depict either *elite* migrants or *working class* migrants, but rarely any crossover. For instance, mid-twentieth century novels by British Caribbean authors such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and even V.S. Naipaul largely stay within the working class milieu of the majority of Caribbean migrants to England. By contrast, novels by South Asian authors migrating to England come, for the most part, from the perspective of the colonized and postcolonial elite. *The Shadow Lines*, though staging the encounter between West Bengali elite and East Bengali working class immigrants in the enclave, ends by keeping these two groups separated and ultimately irreconcilable. What is more, it does not touch on the way the British public, by and large, does not *recognize* shades of distinction between different postcolonial immigrant groups. The political issues of the text remain rooted in subcontinental traumas of the past. From the mid-twentieth century on, Ghosh, alongside such authors as Nirad Chaudhuri and Hanif Kureishi depict stories of British-educated cosmopolitans whose major struggle stems from the effort to stay within the elite echelons of society when transposed to Britain. Significantly, these texts generally stay in the formal realm of *literary realism*. The realism in these texts facilitates readings that draw a one-to-one correspondence between the events and characters in their narratives and immigrant social reality. To be sure, this way of reading lacks rigor, but is not an uncommon practice in postcolonial readership (and more unfortunately, scholarship). A marked departure from realism, however, leaves no option but to question the relationship between the reality of postcolonial immigration to England and its literary *representation*.

What distinguishes the texts examined in this chapter—*The Shadow Lines* in its circular, associative style and *The Satanic Verses* in its chronological volatility and use of the

mythological and the grotesque—is their *departure* from straightforward realism to introduce temporally nonlinear, surreal, or supernatural elements into their narratives. These formal experimentations trouble the possibility of reading the text as faithful aesthetic renditions of immigrant life in Britain. *The Satanic Verses* bears some hallmarks of postmodernist literary style, such as a montage-like or pastiche composition and myriad references to popular culture. Yet ultimately its main concern is interrogating the origins of the narratives that come to comprise the hegemonic narratives circulated to construct what we understand to be “History.” Due to its supernatural elements like people transforming into beasts and delusional bouts of time travel, Rushdie’s text has widely been categorized by critics as an example of “magical realism.” This novelistic form originated in mid-twentieth century Latin America, marked by fantastical or mythological tropes that intersect with literary realism against a backdrop of political turmoil. Magical realism, as literary scholar Brett Levinson notes, “represents a demand for a . . . mythos as a means to explain the beginnings which escape history’s narrative” (Levinson 26). Thus *The Satanic Verses* fills in the historical aporias and implausibilities that account for the contemporary configurations of Indian, British, and indeed, global society by creating its own mythos.

I. Migrating Borders

The circular structure of *The Shadow Lines*, written in 1988 by Amitav Ghosh, whirls through a complex set of twentieth-century circumstances, facilitated by its unnamed narrator’s own memories, stories passed down from his academic uncle, Tridib, and dizzying encounters with historical archives. The trajectory of Tridib’s family—traveling between London, Calcutta, and Dhaka between the Second World War and the 1980s—is a small-scale metonym for the

vagaries of twentieth-century nation-formation in Europe and South Asia. The structure of *The Shadow Lines* evokes the mnemonic and sense-driven digressions of *À la recherche du temps perdu*; indeed, in a 2005 interview Ghosh states, “I remember at the time my ambition was to do with space what Proust had done with time: that is, to make completely different instances of a continuum immanent in each other” (Hawley 9). The non-linear form of the novel challenges any sort of teleological understanding of the domino-like political events of WWII, the end of empire, the Partition of India, and the war of Bangladeshi independence. Rather than a temporally straightforward account of India’s—and particularly Bengal’s—changing relationship to the United Kingdom in the transition from a metropole/colony binary to three (and subsequently four) distinct and sovereign nation-states, this history arrives through the layering of Tridib’s memories with the narrator’s own. The structure of the narrative follows a mnemonic logic that is associative rather than linear. The novel’s form reflects the narrator’s near obsessive recounting of his own memories blurred and conflated with his uncle’s. Moreover, it centers around a central traumatic encounter: one that is not, counterintuitively, between colonizer and colonized, but instead different kinds of postcolonial subjects whose fates are inextricably tied. Ghosh’s Proustian, memory-driven style lends the narrative an almost claustrophobic sense of intimacy that contrasts the sprawling historical scope of its narrative. The narrator’s memories of the urban spaces in Dhaka, Calcutta, and London, as well as his memories of traveling between these cities are layered with the memories of Tridib, his uncle, in the decades after WWII. The diffuse and associative narrative structure underscores the narrator’s perception of these cities as superimpositions of each other—that in some capacity, Calcutta, Dhaka, and the immigrant enclaves of London are repeating iterations of each other. By this logic, the traumas of postcolonial nation-formation are also imported diasporically in the process of migration. The

novel poses an implicit analog between the severing of different subcontinental groups during Partition to the separation between groups of South Asian immigrants who established separate but parallel patterns of migration to the postcolonial British metropole.

The Shadow Lines meditates obsessively on the violence of border drawing and, by extension, the post-war advent of the modern nation-state. Imagery of borders and mirrors permeate the text, finding expression in such transparent metaphors as Tridib's mother's Dhaka house, which is partitioned when two feuding brothers each claim one side of the structure. "They [divided] the house with a wooden partition wall [which] ploughed right through a couple of doorways so that no one could get through them anymore; it had also gone through a lavatory, bisecting an old commode. The brothers even partitioned their father's old nameplate" (Ghosh 121). This allegorical "house divided" clearly illustrates the apparent absurdity of bisecting the contiguous region of Bengal between India and East Pakistan in 1947's Partition. Yet the novel moves between WWII, the 1960s, and the 1980s without portraying the actual historical moments of state border drawing in the region of Bengal—1947 being the formation of India-Pakistan and 1971 being the independence of Bangladesh from West Pakistan. Instead Tridib, and the narrator in kind, turn to Europe for possible solutions, searching for a nationless alternative to the political configurations of modernity. Therein, Ghosh can tie together the twentieth-century historical touch points in the novel, which range from a war-torn WWII London to its cosmopolitan 1980s incarnation, and from a mid-twentieth century East Pakistani Dhaka to a Calcutta fraught with religious riots in the 1960s. R. Radhakrishnan has called Tridib a "utopian dreaming subject, touched by the West in a certain way before [he] can envision a cosmopolitan universality" (Radhakrishnan 785). Tridib performs the role of the nomadic migrant intellectual, educated in the metropole and returning home changed, with a perspective

on his native Calcutta that now incorporates the perspective of the colonizer as well as that of the colonized. He seems to have successfully loosed himself from the tethers of origin. He is idolized by the narrator, and though many of the text's mnemonic episodes appear to be from Tridib's memory bank, they are nonetheless filtered through the reverent perspective of his young nephew. Thus the novel itself seems to posit Tridib as infallible, an ostensibly perfect compromise of Orient and Occident—"utopian," yes, but also constructed with the distinct biases of our narrator, who models his adult self after Tridib's intellectual loftiness and itinerancy.

The fragmented, circling structure of *The Shadow Lines* centers around a traumatic event, a 1964 riot in Dhaka in which Tridib and his relatives, accompanied by Tridib's British lover, go to retrieve their Hindu patriarch from amongst a community of opportunistic Muslim mendicants. In post-Partition East Pakistan, Tridib and his family cross the border from Calcutta to their ancestral home in Dhaka to retrieve his grandfather—who had stayed behind in 1947 claiming, "I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere?" (Ghosh 211). Accompanying them is British May Price, Tridib's lover visiting after a long epistolary romance set in motion when Tridib's family took bomb-refuge in their London flat during an unfortunately-timed 1940s English sojourn. Tridib's attempt to remove his grandfather from the house exacerbates the Muslim squatters who have come to occupy it in the interim, and whose ire is already stoked by widespread Subcontinental Hindu-Muslim rioting originating in Srinagar, Kashmir. The Bangladeshi Muslims in this episode appear only as an inscrutable and violent mob, illegible to both the British *memsahib* and the Hindu Bengalis present. The portrayal of the East Pakistani, East Bengalis in this scene—which appears at the *end* of the narrative but temporally sometime during the narrator's adolescence—is foreshadowed by the narrator's

alienating encounter with the East Bengali immigrant enclave of Brick Lane in London. It is telling that the most traumatic and resonant act of violence in the novel occurs not between members of any group who were officially at war or in positions of enmity during the entire temporal span of the novel, but instead among people who ostensibly share a historical linguistic and cultural bond. Tridib's family—elite, upper caste, upper class Hindu Bengalis—nonetheless experience enough of a separation from the traditionally rural and agricultural Muslim Bengalis who came to inhabit the neighborhoods of East Pakistani Dhaka after Partition to come to mortal blows very shortly after encountering them face-to-face.

II. Uncanny Encounters on the East End

Tridib's death is a small-scale synecdochal act of violence that coalesces historical vectors, crossing through Raj-era India, World War-torn Europe, and the contemporary hostile border-space between India and Pakistan. Tridib, his grandfather, and his grandfather's helper are brutally murdered by the angry mob when they attempt to lay hands upon May. May describes it to the narrator thus: "They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear" (Ghosh 245). She goes on to qualify Tridib's death as a "sacrifice" and the narrator, in kind, describes the event as a "final redemptive mystery" (Ghosh 246). Perhaps the narrator's final puzzlement at the nature of Tridib's sacrifice indicates that the text itself is not sure of what exactly has been redeemed. Tridib's death in the novel's final episode may then be a sacrifice for this impossible desire: that of the migrant intellectual who wants to free himself of the difficult historical factors that determine his very subjectivity. At an earlier point in his life, the narrator recalls his stories of coaxing May into a love affair by telling her "an old story, the best story in Europe" from "when

Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries...it was the story of a hero called Tristan...a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas” (Ghosh 183). Tridib idealizes a time not just before modern postcolonial nation-states or even before colonization, but preceding border-drawing as such—a truly utopian and universalist desire. This idealism is what propels him to intervene in the sectarian violence that erupts in Dhaka, and rather than mortal naïveté, the characters of *The Shadow Lines* see his endeavor as “redemptive.” Nyla Ali Khan equates Tridib’s utopianism to an underlying subscription to universalist ideals that have colonialist underpinnings. “In rejecting the meta-identity of nationalism, Ghosh seems to privilege a universalism that has been rejected for its hegemonic and manipulative power by many postcolonial scholars...Universalism is too utopian to provide a genuine solution to the actual problems bred by nationalism” (Khan 87). Tridib’s death thus symbolizes the tragic death of a universalist ideal—one, significantly, that undergirded the civilizing mission of colonialism.

In contrast to Tridib is his much younger, glamorous, and worldly niece Ila—the object of the narrator’s obsession and wayward lust. Ila, the daughter of a Bengali diplomat, feels no such discomfort at crossing national boundaries in her many travels and sees the globe as “a worldwide string of departure lounges” (Ghosh 20). It is Ila, in fact, who ushers the narrator into an extant realm, which could arguably be the very borderless, post-national space of which Tridib dreams. On a doctoral fellowship in London as a young man in the 1980s, the narrator is cajoled by Ila into visiting Brick Lane, a road in the East End Borough of Tower Hamlets along which a thriving Bengali (and post-1971, Bangladeshi) community has settled after decolonization. Ila invites the narrator to this district for inexpensive shopping. “‘You wouldn’t know it,’ she said. ‘It’s a place where there are lots of cheap retail shops run by Indians and Bangladeshis’” (Ghosh 97). We must wonder why the narrator, whose fixation with London

while still in Calcutta had him committing entire swathes of the city to memory down to the smallest alleyway, would have no familiarity with the area of town in which a dense concentration of his fellow Bengalis have settled.

Though *The Shadow Lines* does not dwell on this moment in the narrative for any substantial length, the vast history of South Asian immigration to the U.K. it indexes is exceptionally complex, bound up in class difference, religious difference, and regional variation in both the Subcontinent and Britain. The narrator finds himself overwhelmed upon the first encounter with Brick Lane:

I had no means of recognising the place I saw; it did not belong anywhere I had ever been. I walked ahead...in a trance, looking at the Bengali neon signs above the shops that lined the lane, staring into display windows lined with the latest Bengali film magazines, reading the posters that had been slapped on those walls of aged London brick—stern grey anti-racism posters issued by an iridescent spectrum of the left-wing, buried now under a riot of posters advertising the very newest Hindi films—listening to quick exchanges in a dozen dialects of Bengali as people hurried past me...like shoppers at Gariahat on a cold winter's morning. I stopped to sniff the fragrance of rosogollas wafting out of a sweet-shop....Exactly like that sweet-shop on the corner of Gole Park, [Ila] said, isn't it. And so it was, with exactly the same laminated counters and plastic tables; exactly the same except that it was built into a terrace of derelict eighteenth century London houses, and there was no paan-shop at the corner...but instead...hanging over it was the great steeple of Hawksmoor's Christchurch Spitalfields. (97)

The narrator strikes a dissonant chord in proclaiming that he has “no means” of recognizing the space in which he finds himself, only to go on to describe each sight around him with keen familiarity. His befuddlement at the Bengali-inflected space of Brick lane betrays a carefully-constructed separation of classes that has far-reaching roots in Subcontinental social hierarchies—ones that were compounded and exacerbated under colonization and take on uncanny forms when displaced onto the postcolonial metropole.⁶¹ Having been reared in

⁶¹ The uncanny, Homi Bhabha argues, drawing on Freud's sense of “unheimlich”, is a natural side effect of colonization. “In-between [the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*] plays the time of a colonial paradox in those

Calcutta, of course, he swiftly identifies Bengali script, comestibles, and popular cultural items. And yet he still claims that this space “belongs nowhere he had ever been.” The narrator, though surrounded by familiar sights that remind him of home, is completely incognizant of the circumstances which would lead to the formation of a thriving Bengali community in the imperial heart of London, and thus finds himself supremely disoriented in this unfamiliar admixture of English form and Bengali content. We might surmise that this enclave would resemble, to some degree, Calcutta, having once been the colonial capital of Raj-era India. Indeed, Brick Lane conjures the Calcutta sites of Gariahat and Gole Park for the narrator, and yet he remains puzzled. This is not simply that the colonial “self” (a paan shop) is being mapped onto the imperial “other” (an eighteenth century London house) creating an “in-between” that unsettles the narrator. In this East End neighborhood, the narrator’s sense of colonial “self” becomes radically unstable.

But when examined from a different angle, the narrator’s innocence of the thriving East Bengali enclave in East London suggests a willed ignorance of a vast sector of what is ostensibly his own culture and its diaspora. The narrator quickly finds Calcutta-cognates for each of the signs and shops he sees on Brick Lane. However, in all likelihood, the “dozen dialects of Bengali” he hears on the street are not culled from regions in Indian West Bengal (which houses Calcutta), but rather, East Bengal—what would have become Bangladesh by this point in the narrative. And though the narrator, Ila, and Tridib are all Bengali, just as the community that populates Brick Lane is in this scene, the *milieu* from which Tridib’s extended family hails is very different from that of the Bengalis settling in Tower Hamlets. This episode, though

contradictory statements of subordinate power. For the repetition of the ‘same’ can in fact be its own displacement, can turn the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in the moment of enunciation” (Bhabha 195). Though undoubtedly a related phenomenon, the colonial uncanny does not fully explain the narrator’s sense of misrecognition on Brick Lane—an even further displacement and perhaps a deeper dive into the uncanny.

seemingly incidental, is deeply symptomatic of a division between kinds of postcolonial migrants to the U.K. Even before 1947, the urbane, western-educated, prestigious-university bound migrant from Calcutta would historically have had very little chance of mixing with the Bengalis who began to populate London's East End.

A subject like Tridib—a cosmopolitan and itinerant intellectual—results from the legacy of British colonial education (and thus ideologically training) of a subsection of upper-caste Indians. Following Thomas Babington Macaulay's now infamous "Minute on Education," education policies were implemented to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" who would "serve as interlocutors between the British ruling class and native subject." Certainly, the early salutary goals of colonial education in India were utopian.⁶² As Gauri Viswanathan emphasizes in her seminal study of the practice, the Indian colony provided a space of experimentation for the British Raj to make right, in some capacity, the ills plaguing metropolitan English society. "The revival of a classical pedagogy of English literary instruction in India coincided with the declining status of polite language and literature in England. The growth of a mass British reading public had created what many alarmed critics saw as a distaste for fine reading and, more seriously, threatened the survival of all intellectual greatness and refinement" (Viswanathan 144). In its capacity as a corrective to contemporary English society, educational policy in the British colony

⁶² It should be noted that Macaulay's Minute ushered in the era of "Anglicist" rather than "Orientalist" educational policies in colonial India, meaning Indians would be instructed in English, learn English values, and read English literature. On the kind of colonial subject these policies created, Homi K. Bhabha has deemed the class of people "mimic men raised 'through our English School,' as a missionary educationist wrote in 1819, 'to form a corps of translators and be employed in different departments of Labour.' The line of descent of the mimic man can be traced through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, Naipaul....He is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha 125).

served a function that could be described as heterotopian—that is, utopia enacted.⁶³ The dissemination of English literature colonial Indian schools was not simply a way to familiarize Indian subjects with metropolitan culture, but to address the moral deficiencies of both contemporary Indian and English society alike. Viswanathan writes,

As a time capsule for English culture, India provided an ideal setting [where] editors of Calcutta journals and newspapers deliberately wrote...on subjects not having the remotest bearing on Indian life, such as the fashions of the day in England, and on imagination, etiquette, and morality. Such discussions, they admitted, would be considered tedious and archaic in a modern newspaper in England, but in the Calcutta papers they served to give the Indians a taste for ‘polite’ literature that Englishmen were fast losing. (Viswanathan 144-145)

Thus rising nineteenth century bourgeois Indians were served an idealized vision of a genteel, refined English culture that did not include the reality of a rapidly industrializing English middle class.⁶⁴ What is more, this aspiration to achieve an English gentility through colonial education was reserved, in most part, for bourgeois Bengali Hindus. Tribid and the narrator are exemplary of an elite English-educated lineage of (largely upper-caste Hindu) Bengalis who came to be known as the *bhadralok* under the Raj.⁶⁵ Though this term in does not technically exclude Muslims, their status in colonial Bengal as agricultural laborers, for the most part, would have precluded them from participating in the class pretensions, including English canonical reading, of the *bhadralok*. Indeed, as Parna Sengupta argues in her study of colonial educational practices among Bengali Hindus and Muslims, the figure of the “backward” rural Bengali Muslim “who

⁶³ I refer here again to Michel Foucault’s concept of the “heterotopia,” or an “enacted utopia.” Foucault describes the colony as an example of a heterotopia *par excellence*—the creation of a space of “compensation” that is “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as our is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.” He goes on to qualify this vision of the heterotopic colony as those of the “first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century, of the Puritan societies that the English had founded in American and that were absolutely perfect in other places” (Foucault 22).

⁶⁴The idealism that fueled the British colonial endeavor on the whole is not dissimilar from the ideals of contemporary British multiculturalism. As social projects, they both seek to enact a perfected vision of British society while ignoring the structural violence necessary to create that very societal configuration.

⁶⁵ Roughly, *bhadralok* translates to the “gentry” in Bangla.

was unable or unwell to modernize” began to circulate in administrative discourse in the late nineteenth century. She contends, “the state and urban Muslim elite in Bengal came to see rural Bengali Muslims as backward not only because they were poor and prejudiced against Western schooling but also because they were not properly Muslim. That is, the rural population was thought to not fully understand what it meant to be authentically Muslim, as evidenced by their religious practices, which shared many similarities with their rural Hindu counterparts” (Sengupta 124). Not only were Bengali Muslims, residing mostly in East Bengal, excluded from the possibilities of bourgeois class ascendancy because of caste and religion, they were also effectively denied their identity as Muslims, as they were somehow simultaneously *too Hindu*. Thus East Bengali Muslims became an inscrutable, indefinable category of people under the Raj, a characteristic that seems to persist both in the Subcontinent and in diaspora in *The Shadow Lines* whenever Ghosh’s characters encounter Bengalis from the other side of the border.

Among the colonial *bhadralok*, there grew to be an aspirant subcategory of men within the rising-middle class of office workers and urban-dwellers: the Bengali Babus. The term “Babu” during this period transformed from being an honorific bestowed upon accomplished or well-respected men in the community to a disparaging marker of pretension. The 1905 edition of the *Hobson-Jobson*, a dictionary of colonial vocabulary produced for Britons living in India, defines “Baboo” in this fashion:

Properly a term of respect attached to a name [whose] application is now almost or altogether confined to Lower Bengal...In Bengal and elsewhere, among Anglo-Indians, it is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate, Bengali (Yule 44).

In many ways, the Babu was a reification of the “civilizing” project of British colonization, creating an Indian intelligentsia class that began to value the habits and occupations of English life and necessitated a certain *performance* of Englishness, which, in its simulation, became a

target of ridicule. Bengali Babu was at bottom a product of a cultural transformation—one that the British set in motion, but simultaneously scorned. As historian Hugh Tinker explains:

[P]rofessional emigration acquired a momentum of its own [in the colonial era]. The small Indian community in Britain before 1939 included many who were Bengalis. Even in India, these professional people had already become different, had, in a sense, emigrated out of the traditional culture. . . . they ate European food, kept dogs, smoked pipes, read the *Illustrated London News* and the *New Statesman*. (Tinker 8).

As the term “Babu” itself evolved to have mostly pejorative connotations, the figure was widely lampooned by Britons and Indians alike. Nonetheless, as a characteristic figure of modernizing India, the Babu grew to have a rich literary history of its own.⁶⁶ Perhaps the most famous example of Babuism is Rudyard Kipling’s Huree Chunder Mookherjee in *Kim*, a character described as representing “*in petto* India in transition—the monstrous hybridism of East and West” (Kipling 382). Without going so far as to argue that Tridib and the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* inhabit the “monstrous hybridism of East and West,” I bring up this figure here to index a discursive precedent to the socio-economic space these two characters inhabit. Their class affiliations are clearly delineated and accounted for in historical colonial literature.

III. Importing Class Divisions

On Brick Lane, what *The Shadow Lines*’ narrator encounters, ushered by the cosmopolitan and detached Ila, is a thriving community of émigrés and immigrants who are entirely outside of his regional, class, and—very significantly—religious affiliations while still identifying as Bengalis in the United Kingdom. The historical account for Bengalis in Tower Hamlets is a decidedly working-class one, and one that the narrator seems to really only have opportunity to access on British soil. The Bengalis who would first establish routes of migration

⁶⁶ For an extended study of the literary legacy of the Bengali Babu, see Tabish Khair, *Babu Fictions*.

from the Subcontinent to Britain in the nineteenth century were sailors (or “lascars” in colonial parlance) from the Northeastern region of Bengal called Sylhet. Lascars traveled to Britain seeking work as laborers (naval or otherwise) and when settling, they remained close to the ports—London’s Docklands being within the borough of Tower Hamlets on the East End, a trend that was cemented through the decades well into the twentieth century. Significantly, these Bengali lascars were largely Muslim. This is a pattern of migration completely divorced from that of the nineteenth-century migrant intellectual, but with a significant impact upon South Asian migration to the U.K. in the twentieth century.⁶⁷

Though Ghosh would go on to explicitly take on the subject of lascars in the imperial machine in his *Ibis Trilogy*, in *The Shadow Lines*, this history remains latent and indecipherable. Following the Muslim lascars of the nineteenth century, after Partition the migration of the Muslims extended to Pakistanis (which, until 1971 would have included East Pakistan) established themselves in East London, the traditional reception area for new arrivals like the French Huguenots and onward to Jews from East Europe. Thus we see, when considering the Brick Lane passage of *The Shadow Lines* from a historical perspective, that the narrator’s misrecognition is not a simple example of colony-to-metropole disorientation. The severing of the urbane, Hindu, rising middle class Bengali from the rural, peasant-class Muslim Bengali was

⁶⁷ John Eade writes of the Bengalis who would first establish routes of migration from the Subcontinent to Britain in the nineteenth century, citing specifically sailors (or “lascars” in colonial parlance) from the Northeastern region of Bengal called Sylhet: “The presence of Syhleti lascars in the dock areas of the Victorian East End is significant because their successors have come to dominate Bangladeshi settlement not only in London but across the whole country. However, during the 19th century and down to the 1950s Bengalis working in British ocean-going ships were recruited from other districts within the delta as well, i.e. Chittagong, Nokhali and Comilla. Wherever they came from a prime motivation appears to have been an economic one: to earn money to send, or bring back, to the villages from which they travelled. If they remained in London for any period of time most lascars stayed near the port so that they could find work in a returning ship” (Eade 92).

a product of colonial ruling practice.⁶⁸ It is the latter group, however, that in the twentieth-century came to constitute a substantial immigrant presence in the former imperial center of London, and moreover the majority of East Bengalis who settled there were Sylhetis: a minority *within* that subcategory of Bengali.⁶⁹ Following WWII, immigration policy in Britain changed multiple times, shifting from open migration in 1948 from the postcolonies. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 once again restricted immigration to citizens of the Commonwealth only, which drove, as Anne Kershen notes, “a rush of Sylheti migrants who wanted to get into Britain before it was too late. For a short period of time labour vouchers were readily forthcoming from relatives and prospective employers and from Bangladeshi brokers, in both home and host countries, who promoted and organised migration” (Kershen 80). Sylhet itself, a northeast region of what is now Bangladesh, houses a minority community who often consider themselves culturally distinct from even East Bengal as such. And yet it is the Sylheti laborers who came and settled in East London, eventually bringing their families establishing a visible and contiguous community. It is this group—a minority within a minority—that have come, metonymically, to represent (variously) Bengalis, Bangladeshis, South Asians, and Muslims for the broader British public.

⁶⁸ The narrator’s confusion is just as attributable to the severing of the burgeoning Hindu Bengali middle class under the Raj (centered in Calcutta) from the more rural, laboring, and Muslim population in East Bengal. This is a schism that predates Partition; the province was principally split under the British Raj in 1905, purportedly to make administrating the large area more efficient. The 1905 Partition of Bengal was a line drawn on ostensibly religious grounds. East Bengal, as it would be known from then on, was understood to contain a majority of Muslims in the province and thus was separated from West Bengal, including Calcutta (the seat of the Raj at the time). Though officially abolished in 1911, it was essentially upon this same border that the division between India and East Pakistan was drawn in 1947, again on religious grounds. For an in-depth study of the partition of Bengal, see Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India*.

⁶⁹ Indeed, it was predominantly working class South Asians from the West Pakistani district of Mirpur and East Pakistani (Bengali) district of Sylhet that responded to postwar Britain’s coinciding call for manual labor and official welcoming of all Commonwealth members after 1948. Many of these labor-seeking Sylheti migrants settled in the East End boroughs of London, including the area surrounding Brick Lane.

This is a history of migration to which the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* has almost no access, due to a long legacy of religious and class division and regional estrangement. Ila's laughing assessment of the narrator's awe upon seeing the sights of Brick Lane sums up his position tidily: "You see....It's all new to you. I've always told you. You know nothing about London" (Ghosh 98). The narrator's proclamation that he has "no means" of recognizing the space he encounters on Brick Lane—his lack of familiarity with the community before him—was historically determined in the colonial era and compounded by postcolonial patterns of migration. The postcolonial immigrant intellectual remains rarified and distinct from the larger majority of postcolonial immigrants. But it is the working-class British South Asian community who not only represent majority of immigrants from the region, but in the British cultural imaginary, a more visible and thus more politically impactful presence. The narrator's insistence that what he encounters on Brick Lane—and thus the history it indexes—is "new" to him, further emphasizes the estrangement of the immigrant intelligentsia class from the mainstream reality of postcolonial immigration to Britain. But it is only in the metropolis, within the bounds of London's Bengali immigrant enclave, and indeed, on the very street of Brick Lane, that these estranged, partitioned, historically severed peoples and regions of the Subcontinent come together. The enclave provides a space for encounter, for imagining alternative histories, or even for undoing those histories. If Tridib's wish for living outside of the tethers of history (his "utopian dream") could be fulfilled anywhere it would be in the immigrant enclave, as it represents the possibility of Hindu, the Muslim, the urbane, the rural, the elite, and the peasant existing simultaneously in the same quarter, amongst minority residues of the Huguenots and the Jews.

The narrator himself subscribes to Tridib's belief in a borderless world and in his own research as a young scholar, meditates upon the consequences of border-drawing in postcolonial South Asia. Especially ironic for the narrator is the presumption that in creating independent nation-states with political sovereignty, national boundaries also create discrete cultures. In a widely-studied scene in the novel, as a student in 1979 the protagonist reads archival newspaper clippings about the 1962 riots that spread across the subcontinent that began in Srinagar, Kashmir and eventually sparked the Dhaka riot that leading to Tridib's death. He subsequently discovers one of Tridib's old maps. In a gesture that gracefully demonstrates the difference between physical ("Euclidian," as the narrator puts it) space and imagined distance between geographic places, he places the point of a compass in Khulna, East Pakistan and spans the pencil nib out to Srinagar, drawing circles with this circumference across parts of Asia. "[W]hen I took my compass through the pages of that atlas...I discovered that Khulna is about as far from Srinagar as Tokyo is from Beijing, or Moscow from Venice, or Washington from Havana, or Cairo from Naples" (Ghosh 226). Looking at the national border that separates Calcutta, the former capital of contiguous Bengal, from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, he reflects:

[T]here had never been a moment in the 4000-year-old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after [the borders had been drawn]—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border (Ghosh 228).

Despite the Euclidean circles the narrator draws here, he insists upon the "closeness" of Dhaka and Calcutta as mirror images of each other. Brinda Bose remarks that the "looking-glass metaphor is a particularly evocative one for the tenability of the diasporic imagination, locating the 'other' across the shadow line, uncannily familiar and yet potentially antagonistic in its inversion" (Bose 241). The mirrored relationship between Dhaka and Calcutta that the

protagonist describes here bears resemblance to Foucault's definition of the "heterotopia," in that "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24). For Foucault, a mirror is a heterotopia *par excellence*, and thus the "inversion" the narrator perceives of Calcutta in Dhaka warrants a closer analysis. There are distinct political consequences of understanding these two cities, separated by multiple moments of political Partition, as mirror images of each other. East Bengal—under the feudal systems of the Mughal era, under the British Raj, and under the rule of West Pakistan—was traditionally understood to be the agrarian hinterland that housed the Bengali Muslim peasants who worked the lands and paddies of high-caste Bengali Hindu *zamindars* (landed aristocracy). To understand the Dhaka as a city across a "looking glass border" that has arisen as a mirror image of Calcutta reveals a certain sense of loss and sentimentality that colors the narrator's understanding of East Bengal across the border, one that suffuses the way any character within Tridib's family characterizes Dhaka: as an estranged twin rather than an independent city unto itself with its own unique history and culture.

That the violence that erupts in Dhaka is "mysterious" to the narrator and his family, and the East Bengali Muslims who perpetrate the violence remain inscrutable to the narrator even as he repeats the events of the murder over and over in his memory betrays a continuation of age-old Subcontinental class, caste, and religious divisions, even in diaspora. Of course, post-Partition, Bengal as a region itself became intra-diasporic, with many thousands of Hindus and Muslims crossing the India-Pakistan border and leaving centuries-old ancestral land in the process (much the same, if not quite as violent, as the western Indo-Pak border). The surprise of the seemingly sudden enmity that irrupted between Hindu and Muslim neighbors during this time has deep roots in the way East Bengal inhabited the West Bengali (aristocratic) cultural

imaginary. Dipesh Chakrabarty has written at length about the inherent sense of pastoral nostalgia for East Bengal that was incorporated to galvanize the *Swadeshi* rhetoric of nineteenth century Indian nationalists such as Rabindranath Tagore and Bankminchandra Chatterjee, who portrayed it as a rural “idyll” untouched by time (Chakrabarty 127). Moreover, the sentimentality for the Bengali countryside was coupled with derision and judgment of its people: the “languages and the ways of life of the people of the eastern side of Bengal were long an object of amused contempt for those on the western side, who called easterners *bangals*” (Chakrabarty 127).⁷⁰ Indeed, for the narrator to understand Dhaka this way (as a mirror image) is to understand East Bengal to continue to be the de facto “colony” of its original “metropolis,” Calcutta, without an character of its own. In his study of Hindu Bengali Partition testimonials, Chakrabarty argues that there seemed to be a willful ignorance of any latent class or caste *ressentiment* among the East Bengali peasantry. “If the village was always an abode of perfect ethnic harmony, the eruption of Muslim hostility toward the Hindus could only ever be a shocking and entirely unreasonable break with the past” (Chakrabarty 134). The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* seems equally perplexed by the seeming suddenness of the Muslim squatters in Dhaka who take up residence in his grandfather’s home. Fifteen years after Partition and nine years before India would become a powerful ally in the war against West Pakistan for Bangladeshi independence, the causes 1962 skirmish in Dhaka remain ultimately enigmatic for the narrator. He puzzles over the map, ruminating on the domino-effect of lateral violence across the subcontinent rather than considering deeply rooted, centuries-long histories of structural violence and subjugation—British colonization compounding the feudalism of the caste system—that may have created an already-volatile powder keg which the Srinagar riots simply sparked off.

⁷⁰*Bangal* connotes a rustic, less refined mode of speech and etiquette. The opposite of *bangal* is *ghoti*, a term used by East Bengalis to describe West Bengalis, which connotes a degree of pretention and superciliousness.

IV. The Possibility of Heterotopia in the Immigrant Enclave

It is only in diaspora, in London, that the narrator can begin to understand some of the problems of rehearsing the age-old practice of idealizing East Bengal, thinking of it as a quaint facsimile of West Bengal. Though confused and somewhat alienated on Brick Lane, the narrator is nonetheless seduced by the familiarity of the sites before him, displacing the uncanny mirror-image of Calcutta he imagines Dhaka to be upon the streets of Tower Hamlets. Brick Lane becomes heterotopic because all historical moments and places in the long span of London's relationship with South Asia are simultaneously present, with familiar hierarchies of power and order scrambled and re-arranged. It resembles "nowhere the narrator had ever been" by virtue of it resembling *everywhere* the narrator had ever been (or heard about), rendering it unrecognizable, somewhat like the ideal, borderless Europe of yore of which Tridib fantasizes. In a novel that is ostensibly about the local, family-scale expressions of vast world issues such as the traumas of Partition, the severing of the Bengali people, and the reverberations of WWII in Britain into the Subcontinent, the narrator's disorientation in the immigrant enclave of Brick Lane is perhaps the most apt metonym for the state of the metropolitan city as the twentieth-century comes to its close.

But the narrator's experience of the immigrant enclave is not simply a displacement of the East Bengali idyll onto an East London road. The trauma and subsequent violence of Partition comes to mark his understanding of the Bangladeshi community in London, alienating him once again and voiding the potential for him to relate and recognize that community as his own. Visiting an Indian-Chinese restaurant in South London with his cousins Ila and Robi, Tridib's brother, the narrator struggles to make a connection. The proprietor, Rehman-shaheb,

“spoke Bengali with a nasal Sylhet accent, and we had to listen to him carefully to follow, even though he was obviously making an effort to match his speech to ours” (Ghosh 235). The narrator’s characterization of Rehman-shaheb’s dialect-inflected Bengali reveals slight, if politely-managed, disdain. He goes on to ask Rehman-shaheb to *perform* his East Bengaliness some more after the meal is finished. “‘Yes, do sit with us for a bit,’ I [asked]...For me the experience of hearing Bengali dialects which I had never heard in Calcutta being spoken in the streets of London was still replete with unexplored ironies” (Ghosh 236). It is only in this diasporic setting that such a conversation between segregated class and caste subjects could occur; it is only in the enclave that the characters present in the scene could presume any degree of equality. Rehman-shaheb goes on to explain that he arrived in London before the sixties, explaining that he “joined a ship, you know” (Ghosh 237). Ghosh pithily draws out the class distinctions between these two characters with a sharp, historically-informed clarity. Rehman-shaheb is the archetype of a working-class East Bengali migrant who follows the centuries-long tradition of Sylheti sailors arriving in England, only to put down roots and enact such community-building behaviors as establishing businesses and growing families. As a figure, he is very different from the nomadic, itinerant, cosmopolitan intellectuals eating dinner at the table, bemused simultaneously by the proprietor’s twang and his entrepreneurial spirit. But amusement and a sense of irony quickly give way to underlying hostilities, as Rehman-shaheb inquires further into the family’s experience of Dhaka and triggers the emotional declaration from Robi that his brother was killed there. The illusion of a reunited Bengal in diaspora quickly dissolves as Robi leaves the restaurant in a huff, and Ila and the narrator follow. Any possibility of an innocent reconciliation of the estranged halves of Bengal in the “heterotopia” of the diasporic immigrant enclave is foreclosed in *The Shadow Lines*.

The novel struggles to represent the Bangladeshi immigrant community—both the spaces within the immigrant enclave and the community members therein, and stays largely in the realm of the jet-setting travelers in the narrator’s family. The “mirror image” of Calcutta on the other side of the border the narrator imagines can only be accessed, ironically, in the metropole, facilitated by the historical circumstances of mass immigration that resulted from Britain’s postwar policies and need for laborers from the Commonwealth. In this instance London has the potential to be a medium of reconfiguration, if not reconciliation, between different kinds of immigrants—immigrants who would really be understood to comprise a monolithic immigrant group of “Asians” or more pejoratively, “Pakis,” by the British public. But *The Shadow Lines* does not ultimately invite such a vision of mixture or cross-contamination. History binds the characters in this novel, despite the underlying desire to be “outside” history, as it were, by the narrator, and principally, by Tridib. The logic of the text clearly delineates the consequences of behaving as though historical context can be ignored in positioning Tridib’s murder near the end of the circular narrative. The narrator’s persistent confusion—firstly at the presence of a thriving Bangladeshi working-class community in East London, and secondly at the continuation of hostilities between Muslim and Hindu Bengalis—demonstrates the text’s inability to represent the condition of *immigration* in late twentieth-century Britain. Tridib and his family remain *migrants*, and circulate through South Asia and the United Kingdom in a pattern that resembles the circulation of privileged colonial subjects. Despite the encounters the text stages, it cannot fully conceive of the new formations of immigrant culture—admixtures of Muslim, Hindu, Bengali, Pakistani, Indian, Caribbean, African, and English—and remains bound up in the politics of Partition-era India.

These seemingly small-scale encounters in the immigrant enclave that Ghosh stages in *The Shadow Lines* in 1980s London are addressed much more explicitly and potently by Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses*, published in the same year as Ghosh's novel. The cacophony and inscrutability of Brick Lane depicted in *The Shadow Lines* is a far cry from the social upheaval *The Satanic Verses*, both in the bounds of the text and in its reception. Ghosh's novel shares a significant motif with Rushdie's—that of encounter and subsequent misrecognition between different categories of immigrants, despite their surface-similarities. The narrator's nostalgia in *The Shadow Lines* for a borderless Europe and an undivided India shifts his focus from the incarnations of these very possibilities in the immigrant enclaves of East London. Though never explicitly explored in the bounds of the text, it is the narrator's class, regional, and religious background, determined in the legacy of Raj-era India, that keep him from immersion in this alternative immigrant history. Brick Lane and its working class Sylheti population is a world apart from the narrator's Calcutta-Dhaka-Regent's Park circuit, and his encounter results only in confusion and eventual retreat. The novel lays down a specific historical encounter: not the classic colonial encounter of colonizer and colonized, but instead that of the migrant intellectual class encountering the immigrant working class—two subjectivities that seemingly arise out of colonial residue and become something new entirely in the space of the metropole. *The Shadow Lines* also introduces the space of the immigrant enclave—from which it retreats rather quickly—which repeats, within the metropole, many of the geographical disparities of colonization (or, in more contemporary parlance, the global South appears *inside of* the global Northern metropolis). This kind of encounter, fleeting and incidental in *The Shadow Lines*, fuels much the tortuous plot of *The Satanic Verses*. Bestial Saladin Chamcha's sojourn within the

immigrant enclave of Brickhall precipitates not only an identity crisis in himself but one for Britain on the whole, both within the novel and in its riotous reception.

V. Remapping London

In the catalyzing scene of *The Satanic Verses*, as Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, the mirrored Indian protagonists of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, hurtle from an exploded airplane on the way to London from Bombay, the narrator poses the central question of the novel: "How does newness come into the world?" What is essentially an immeasurably diffuse question nonetheless fuels the surreal and often bewildering plot twists in Salman Rushdie's maximalist, magical realist narrative. The "newness" the narrator cites here may refer to the superhuman corporeal forms these two characters begin to inhabit, or the burgeoning political configurations Chamcha encounters in East London, or the inception of a new religion in Farishta's medieval fever dreams. Moreover, the question of "newness" could just as well be raised about the status of Islam as a global political presence at the turn of this century—a continuing evolution in which the 1988 publication and reception of *The Satanic Verses* was a flashpoint. The uniqueness of Rushdie's controversial novel lies not simply its fabulist and historically expansive narrative, nor its political and cultural afterlife, but the contiguity between the community it attempts to represent and the refusal by that very community to be represented by the novel. Treading on similar narrative ground as *The Shadow Lines*, *The Satanic Verses* does not retreat, the way the latter text does, from the inscrutability of the modern and perplexing forms of culture that have resulted from the centuries-long contact between Britain and South Asia. Instead, it excavates the underbelly, if not the bowels of that relationship, pushing into its otherworldly and netherworldly incarnations. Far from the utopia outside history that Ghosh's

Tridib wishes for, and far even from the seemingly enigmatic Bengali enclave *The Shadow Lines*' narrator encounters, the East End neighborhood of Brickhall in *The Satanic Verses* is heavily encumbered by the layers and layers of history the immigrants bring with them as well as the newer forms of oppression in hostile legislation and public attitudes toward immigration. Moreover, Brickhall transforms into the epicenter of an impending apocalypse.

In its depiction of migrants and immigrants in London, Rushdie's text examines class and race complications among working class immigrants from the outside perspective of migrant elites who suddenly (and unexpectedly) find themselves on the *inside* of these communities. As opposed to earlier and even contemporary examples of South Asian novels of immigration such as *The Shadow Lines*, *The Satanic Verses* stands apart in its departure from the realms of the colonial elite and postcolonial bourgeoisie, and instead descends onto lower rungs of the immigrant class ladder, landing in the immigrant enclave of the East End of London. Rushdie's novel portrays the encounter between the immigrant elite and the immigrant working class, as its jet-setting Indian cosmopolitan protagonists find themselves received by the British state as *part* of the immigrant proletariat—a rude awakening that catalyzes surreal journeys through hellish and supernatural versions of London and Mecca. This encounter, in conjunction with the move away from both literary realism and socio-political reality, indicates a crisis of representation. That is, it raises the question of *who* represents the proverbial immigrant in twentieth century London, and *how* they should be represented, both aesthetically and politically. What results from the fundamental *misrepresentation* and misrecognition of the immigrant elite as the immigrant proletariat is an anxiety that translates into instability on the level of literary form. Magical realism is, in this capacity, an unstable and anxious formal response to the anxieties of a troubled question of representation.

VI. The Refusal of Representation

But of course, *The Satanic Verses* is not *only* a story about migration and immigration between postcolony and metropole. It is indeed the juxtaposition of its seemingly unrelated narrative threads that indirectly provoked the most inflammatory reaction from the (principally South Asian) Muslim communities of Britain, eventually catching fire in the rest of the world. The *Satanic Verses* arrived on the literary scene in what was already an era of great civil unrest within British immigrant communities, and became the cause of even more turmoil in the subsequent violent response to the novel. As referenced above in the chapter, after WWII, from the 1940s through the 1960s Britain recruited massive numbers of laborers from its former colonies in the Caribbean and South Asia to rebuild itself. By the late twentieth century, these immigrants began to form rooted communities in outskirts and outer boroughs of British cities. Predictably, tensions rose between the white British public and non-white immigrant groups, resulting in violent race-fueled riots throughout Britain and especially in London. At the intersection of race and class subjugation, suffering prejudice and increasing immigration policy restrictions, members of the immigrant working class formed solidarities across ethnic, linguistic, and geographic differences of origin, facilitated by the tight quarters and communal living conditions of the immigrant enclaves in which they settled. At the same time small numbers of the postcolonial elite continued to circulate as students and professionals through British institutions of higher education and commerce. The implicit project of *The Satanic Verses* is to recognize and, in some capacity, to *bridge* the divide between the mobile circuits of elite migrants who remain cordoned off in the higher echelons of global society and the majority of immigrants in London who settled and formed bustling working-class communities. Rushdie

stages the confrontation between otherwise severed classes of immigrants in Chamcha's sojourn in Brickhall. But in positioning this story alongside the cautionary fable of a manipulative politicking prophet named Mahound,⁷¹ Rushdie not only satirizes the dangers of political Islam in dictatorial twentieth-century nation-states, he also indirectly addresses and allies these issues in the unstable immigrant neighborhoods of 1980s London.

The Rushdie Affair, among other things, was a moment in which a novel depicting immigration in England breached the boundary between fiction and social reality, further troubling the already anxious question of representation woven into its very narrative. In its moment, *The Satanic Verses* attempted to represent, *aesthetically*, the real-life community of immigrants, and the result was a wholesale refusal by that very community to allow the novel to represent it *politically*. In a September 1988 interview, upon the Indian publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie was asked about the rising hostility among politicians and journalists toward his controversial novel. Rushdie's now infamous response was a casually tossed-off suggestion that his text could not possibly incite or inflame any particular violence. "It would be absurd to think that a book can cause riots," he responded. "That's a strange sort of view of the world" (Appignanesi 32). Of course, by February of the following year, as the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* catalyzed the ensuing worldwide "Affair" that saw mass protests in the subcontinent and Middle East, book burnings in England, and the murder of one of its translators, the absurd proposition that the book could cause riots was outsized by the real violence of its worldwide reception. The view of the world that Rushdie deemed "strange" in 1988 is one that we have now fully incorporated into our sense of reality—that in which incensed

⁷¹ This name was also, of course, a common invective in medieval and early modern European depictions of Mohammad.

groups of people *can* and *do* respond with anger and violence to being misrepresented in cultural production, and that these responses have the potential to become globally consequential events.

Much of the scholarly debate surrounding the novel, particularly in the wake of its explosive reception, consistently broaches the problem of situating *The Satanic Verses*. As a work of art, it is about many things including (but not limited to) the Bombay film industry, the many guises of fanaticism, the dangers of dogma, political machinations within personality cults, Oedipal family drama, the trials of class aspiration, the vagaries of global capitalism, and most topically for its time, the volatile cultural formations in the immigrant enclaves of London. The legacy of this particular novel expands far beyond the scope of its vast and sprawling plotlines, and indeed much of its potency lies in its symbolic power. As a great deal of scholarship has shown, the publication of the novel itself contributed to new questions of readership and citizenship after the tumultuous Rushdie Affair. And in its narrative organization, the novel portrays burgeoning social and ideological forms—"newness," as it were—arising in distinct but equally conflicted urban settings in very different historical moments. The many volumes, articles, and special-issues of journals produced about *The Satanic Verses* in the decades since its original impact makes analysis of the text well-trodden territory at this point, and for good reason. Most scholarship on the novel, from just after its publication through the decades that followed, has largely been split between close-reads of the narrative and socio-political assessments of the novel's aftermath in the Rushdie Affair.⁷² Notable exceptions include Gayatri

⁷² Special Issues of journals that attend particularly to *The Satanic Verses* include, for instance, *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, Special Issue: *Black Culture*, 2:2, 1989; and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Online Special Issue: *The Satanic Verses*, 2012. For close narrative analyses, see, for example, Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*; Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Between Exile and Diaspora*; Gillian Gane, "Migrancy, the Cosmopolitan Intellectual, and the Global City in the Satanic Verses"; Sarah Upstone, "Negotiations of London as Imperial Urban Space in the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel"; Vassilena Parashkevova, *Salman Rushdie's Cities: Reconfigurational Politics and the Contemporary Urban Imagination* etc. For considerations of the novel's socio-political impact, see, for example Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair*; Daniel Pipes *The Rushdie Affair*:

Spivak, who proposes that the novel ushers in new categories of author and reader with the Ayatollah “filling the author-function, and Salman Rushdie, himself, caught in a different cultural logic, is no more than the writer-as-performer” (Spivak, *Outside* 218-219). And Aamir Mufti deems the many-pronged and complex reception of the text immediately after its publication in both the Western and “Islamic public sphere” to have been on continuum with the novel’s “pastiche-like structure—the situating of different discourses in juxtaposed textually-marked sections, the enactment of the Islamic transgressions within brief self-contained passages, the playful rewriting of well-known and easily recognizable episodes from the narratives of Islam” (Mufti, “Reading” 113). The impact of the Rushdie Affair as a socio-political event has proven to be legion in public discourse surrounding the relationship between metropolitan nations of the West (especially the United Kingdom) and their postcolonial immigrant populations. Yet the content of the novel foregrounds, and in many ways *portends*, the conflicts it would spark in the very socio-political realities its narrative aims to satirize.

Among its many narrative strains, its two main settings and plotlines touched the most sensitive nerves among British Muslims and subsequently Muslim communities across the world. These are the chapters set in “Brickhall,” a fictional immigrant enclave that bears resemblance to the thriving immigrant neighborhoods in 1980s East and South London, and “Jahilia,” a mythological rendering of medieval Mecca. Upon crashing down on English shores, Chamcha transforms into goatish beast and embarks on a Dante-esque journey into a hellish Brickhall, while Farishta possibly suffers a psychotic break and communes with the Angel Gibreel, lucidly dreaming of the inception of an Islam-like faith the desert city of Jahilia. The novel not only highlights surprising similarities between the disparate social configurations of

The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West; Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*; etc., as well as Rushdie’s own autobiography, *Joseph Anton* 2012.

the two fictional urban settings but also provides insight into the tumultuous aftermath of the novel—both in the immediate fall-out of the violent Rushdie Affair and the longer-term consequences for South Asian Muslim immigrant communities in contemporary London. Making Jahilia London’s dreamscape—its unconscious, as it were—ascribes a similar and radical “newness” arising from multicultural Thatcherite London and early Islamic Arabia.⁷³

VII. Policy Shifts and “Immigrant Riff-raff” in Brickhall

The London of *The Satanic Verses* is that of an alternate universe, in which the issues plaguing contemporary immigrants are amplified to supernatural heights. After plummeting out of a bombed airplane heading from Bombay to London, Gibreel and Chamcha take diverging, if equally surreal, paths. Instead of being received as glamorous world travelers on the tarmac of Heathrow airport by adoring friends and fans, they are mistaken by the local police officers for “fishboat illegals,” clandestinely crossing the state border of the U.K. Chamcha not only survives the fall, but at this point the novel’s magical realist style has him transmogrifying into a devilish, goat-like beast. Chamcha is taken into police custody in London while Gibreel is left behind to subsequently begin his own odyssey through alternate and surreal versions of London and medieval Arabia. While the latter lies catatonic, slipping into the dream world of Jahilia, the former begins his purgatorial journey into the enclave of Brickhall. From this moment on, Chamcha begins to suffer the consequences of being mistaken for a member of the immigrant masses. Before the fall, Chamcha had cut a figure of urbane cosmopolitanism—a Bombay native whose lifelong aspiration is to be a proper Englishman. Suffering immense humiliation at the

⁷³ For reasons of space I will not be able to address other very rich settings in the novel, such as Gibreel’s and Chamcha’s versions of Bombay, saturated both by Bollywood culture and Oedipal dramas; the exilic European dwellings of the mythical Ayatollah; and the fantastical *hajj* pilgrimage of the prophetess named Ayesha, of whom Gibreel dreams as well.

hands of the immigration officers, such as being beaten, ridiculed, and forced to eat his own excrement, he becomes incredulous. “‘This isn’t England,’ he thought. . . . How could it be, after all; where in all that moderate and common-sensical land was there room for such a police van in whose interior such events as these might plausibly transpire?’” (Rushdie 158). Rather than a reception fitting of his elitist and aspirant British-educated upbringing (“Chamcha,” after all, is Hindi slang for “toadie”) he is treated as though he is a member of the vast majority of South Asian immigrants who arrived in the U.K. after WWII as laborers. In this experience, Chamcha is subject to the condition that Etienne Balibar has likened to a Deleuzian “microfascism” in contemporary European policies on immigrants. Restricted policies of granting citizenship to immigrants “ensures that the condition of immigrants will remain marked by insecurity, even when one has crossed the threshold of legality or even naturalization, so that in sum, *once an immigrant always an immigrant*, with the unlimited possibilities of exploitation that status allows” (Balibar 63). In a diabolically logical extension of colonial policies of subjugation, immigrants are treated as *de facto* criminals, regardless of citizenship status.

At this juncture in the narrative, *The Satanic Verses* introduces a two-fold problem of representation on the level of both content and form. In the plot of the novel itself, this is a moment of *misrepresentation*—that is, the officials of the British state mistake these two elite migrant cosmopolitans for the other, less welcome, kind of migrant. As soon as the immigration officers hail and apprehend Chamcha as a migrant below his class, it is though they have cast a magical realist spell on him and he *becomes* the sort migrant whose reception in England is neither humane nor human. Regardless of his complete and willful assimilation into the values of English life as an adolescent, as an adult (and as a goat-man) he is understood to be a *representative* of the larger immigrant mass by the immigration officers and treated in

accordance. His transformation into a devilish monster and descent into London-as-Hell clearly reflects the way a member of his rarified societal echelon might interpret the common experience of the immigrant proletariat. Chamcha and Farishta's plummet from the plane marks their entrance into the literary realm of magical realism, a universe with which the character of Chamcha himself seems unacquainted. And indeed, his lack of familiarity with the rules of this particular magical realist world indicates his simultaneous lack of familiarity with the politically unstable conditions that, by very of logic of the form, attends to the "need for a mythos" to explain that which has "escaped history's narrative."

Chamcha simply cannot fathom the conditions of life in which the majority of his postcolonial immigrant compatriots live, as it does not match the vision of England he learned about his posh schooling, and neither does it at all resemble the sheltered circles through which he had previously moved in London. Rushdie's supernatural London is entirely populated with new migrants and immigrants whose cultural heterogeneity so threatens the British polity that, in a fantastical reification of Orientalist discursive practices, the control mechanisms exercised upon postcolonial immigrants transform the unwelcome newcomers into subhuman beasts. Early in his own bestial odyssey to East London, Chamcha encounters a Nigerian-turned-"manticore" (part man, part lion, part scorpion) who credits the discursive prowess of the British public for his shifting shape. "They describe us... That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (Rushdie 174). As he himself is transforming into a bestial form Chamcha is propelled by another immigrant to the East End borough of "Brickhall"—a portmanteau of the "Southall" and "Brick Lane" neighborhoods in which waves of twentieth-century South Asian immigrants settled. "*East* she told him... east east east they ran, taking the low roads to London town" (Rushdie 176). There he finds that in postcolonial London

the immigrant enclave itself—the Orient to the Occidental center in the City of London—is a re-mapping of empire in miniature on English soil.

If this London is Chamcha's own personal hell, his previous life's "sin" is the failure to recognize himself as an immigrant equivalent to any other. He reflects upon what transpires in the police vehicle, humiliated that he be considered on par with "riff-raff from villages in Sylhet or...Gujranwala, but he was cut from different cloth!" (Rushdie 164). Chamcha is incensed at being mistaken for someone outside of his class and region in the Subcontinent—that is, the sort of immigrants who have formed bustling working-class neighborhoods in the outer boroughs of London. His indignation is rooted not only in the transmogrification and dehumanization of his body, but that a person like him, of his breeding and training, should be subjected to such a fate. In a faulty reading of Nirad Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Chamcha reflects that he has striven to be "worthy" of the phrase *Civis Britannicus Sum* (Rushdie 412).⁷⁴ Coming from an elite Bombay family, having survived the hazing of English boarding school life as an adolescent, and having cultivated a proper Received Pronunciation accent, he considers himself to be above receiving the treatment of any other migrant. Chamcha makes a clear distinction between the rights, and specifically the *human* rights, of different kinds of migrants as a function of *class* as well as regional affiliation. He is incensed at being treated like a menial laborer from the hinterlands of Bangladesh or Pakistan, rather than a high roller from Bombay. In this light, the immigration officers could be considered *more* democratic than Chamcha in

⁷⁴Chaudhuri's sardonic epigraph to *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. The dedication reads thus: "To the memory of the British Empire in India,/ Which conferred subjecthood upon us,/ But withheld citizenship./ To which yet every one of us threw out the challenge:/ "Civis Britannicus sum"/ Because all that was good and living within us/ Was made, shaped and quickened/ By the same British rule" (Chaudhuri iix). "Civis Britannicus sum," as Chaudhuri evokes and Rushdie quotes, refers to a common refrain of the Imperial British Parliament, likening Britain to ancient Rome. Historian Randall Hansen notes, "As the Empire expanded, Roman citizenship was conferred on peoples in the occupied territories. Roman citizenship, like the British, recognized no borders within the Empire. The comparison was not lost on British statesmen, who often invoked *Civis Britannicus sum* as a sentimental expression and defence of subjecthood's indivisibility" (Hansen 70).

their equally atrocious treatment of all immigrants alike. With this first violent introduction to the world of the immigrant working classes, the text suggests what it might mean for a privileged member of the immigrant intelligentsia to represent the larger disenfranchised population of postcolonial immigrants in 1980s London—not simply by speaking or advocating *for* them, but by *becoming* part of them. The form of the text suggests that breaching this class boundary could only really be performed in universe where the rules of reality, socio-political or otherwise, do not apply. By staging the interpellation of the migrant elite *as* the immigrant proletariat, *The Satanic Verses* suggests that the encounter between different classes of immigrants *as equals* might be as significant as the confrontation between the immigrants and the native European population. The first step in this process occurs as the representatives of the state, the immigration officers, conflate all immigrants into one contiguous immigrant “problem.” The second step is the encounter *between* the different kinds of migrants—which is at once traumatic and productive—in the space that allows for such meetings to occur: the immigrant enclave that the text dubs Brickhall.

Chamcha’s escape from police custody and journey into the fictional East London enclave of Brickhall introduces not only the political unrest that flares up within the heterogeneous mixture of postcolonial immigrants residing there, but a deep-seated suspicion of the solidarities that arise amongst them. After being humiliated as a “fishboat illegal” immigrant, he eventually takes refuge in the house of a Bangladeshi working class family in the neighborhood. His arrival there is his introduction to the growing power of immigrant communities that is far out of the bounds of his own experience. In the peculiar space of the immigrant enclave, vastly different kinds of migrants and immigrants—rural, urban, Muslim, Hindu, Subcontinental, Caribbean, African, elite, and working-class—not only confront each

other but live amongst each other in a way that would be nearly impossible outside of this space. And it is particularly an immigrant enclave such as Brickhall that affords the possibility of radical reconsiderations of identity formation, historical cognizance, and resistance to hegemony.

In Brickhall, Chamcha plunges into a less lofty, more typical version of U.K. immigration when he takes shelter in the ironically named Shaandaar Café (“Shaandaar meaning splendid or grandiose), an exploitative “bed and breakfast” for refugees run by the Bangladeshi Sufyan family, members of the “Sylheti riff raff” that so disgust Chamcha. The proprietor is the overeducated, prolix Muhammad Sufyan, whose overwrought philosophizing rivals Chamcha’s posturing as an elite Englishman. Muhammad’s wife is Hind, corpulent and tyrannical, with a deep-seated nostalgia for the Bengal of her childhood. “Where were the village of her youth and the green waterways of home? The customs around which she had built her life were lost” (Rushdie 257). Chamcha, Muhammad, and Hind represent three different incarnations of first-generation postwar South Asian migrants, caricaturing the class and geographical distinctions between them. For example, Bombayite Chamcha’s intolerance for more rural immigrants, Dhaka-born Muhammad’s indulgent pedantry, and rural Hind’s plain-spoken rejection of metropolitan life. Despite his saturnine appearance and odor, Chamcha is demonstrably offended by having to take refuge with lowly South Asians who share none of his class aspirations. “[H]ow cruel these fates were, to instigate his rejection by the very world he had so determinedly courted... What mean small-mindedness was this, to cast him back into the bosom of *his people*, from whom he’d felt so distant for so long!” (256). Yet despite their differing experiences of life, both at home and in London, what Chamcha, Muhammad, and Hind share is their inextricable tie to the land and traditions of the Subcontinent (and specifically the memory of a colonized Subcontinent)—a tethering that is symptomatic of their first-generation immigrant status.

Muhammad and Hind Sufyan represent the kind of immigrants that constituted an increasingly visible group around the time of *The Satanic Verses*' publication: South Asian Muslims. By the 1980s, the categories of "Muslim" and "South Asian" in the United Kingdom, for all intents and purposes, had become coterminous. Social geographer Ceri Peach notes that though Muslims had been a small but consistent presence in Britain since the nineteenth century (mostly lascars from the Middle East and Sylhet region of Bengal), "the major growth of the Muslim population dates from the post-war immigration of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians to fill the labour shortage in the industrial cities of" Britain. By the 1980s, South Asians constituted nearly two-thirds of Britain's Muslims (Peach 19). But as a distinct immigrant group South Asian Muslims had yet to coalesce into a formidable social and political presence in the U.K.—this would ironically become a more forceful movement during the tumult of the Rushdie Affair itself. By delving into the nuances and volatile allegiances among the inhabitants of Brickhall, *The Satanic Verses* portrays the transformation of one political configuration into another, anticipating the ways in which the postcolonial immigrant communities of Britain would begin to splinter and re-form around social issues that were not directly tied to those of colonization and decolonization.

VIII. "Black Britain" as a Historical Category

The London of the 1980s experienced multiple violent race riots between Caribbean immigrants and the English working class, as well as increasing turbulence in its South Asian immigrant population. Drawing inspiration from resistance movements across the globe, a burgeoning political configuration among non-white postcolonial immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia, known as "black Britain," began to form. As James Procter asserts in

his study of black Britain, this 1960s influx of South Asian and Caribbean workers arriving in British cities produced “a distinctively ‘black British’ culture and politics” in the U.K. (Procter 4). Perhaps most importantly, these groups of immigrants hailing from the former colonies inhabited similar positions in Britain’s rigid class hierarchy with little recourse to ascend upward. Racial oppression compounded by class oppression, to say nothing of the centuries-long legacy of colonial oppression that was imported into the metropole, all proved to be powerful galvanizing forces that formed bonds that would propel the movements of the temporarily unified front of black Britain. The tight quarters and communal lifestyle of immigrants living in the enclaves of London provided ample breeding ground for such solidarities to arise. An analogous movement begins to form in Rushdie’s Brickhall around the racial inequities and injustices the community members face there on a day-to-day basis. Instead of rallying around a common racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic identities, the immigrant community of Brickhall is one in which members of variegated racial groups and class affiliations bind together against the threat of an increasingly hostile British majority, reflecting radical movements in 1980s East London.

The simultaneity of immigrant influx from the Caribbean and South Asia (and subsequently African Commonwealth states), close spatial proximity within Britain’s urban centers, and similarity in labor-class stature all fostered the conditions for a strong solidarity to form between these disparate ethnic and cultural communities. As Kobena Mercer puts it, when “various peoples—of Asian, African and Caribbean descent interpellated themselves and each other as /black/ they invoked a collective identity predicated on political and not biological similarities” (Mercer 291). Most importantly, these differing communities were treated as one homogenous “immigrant” entity by official British discourse. Historical difference preceding

arrival in the U.K. aside, for these communities the term “black” was “disarticulated out of the dominant codes of racial discourse, and rearticulated as signs of alliance and solidarity among dispersed groups of people sharing common historical experiences of British racism” (291). During the decades of the 1950s, the arrival and settling of many different groups of non-white Commonwealth immigrants sparked off waves of reactionary violence across British cities.⁷⁵ The race-fueled violence eventually leading to the Conservative government passing the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which decidedly restricted unfettered migration rights to non-Dominion citizens. Though official measures to control British racism were passed in the Race Relations Act of 1965, the very nature of the movement was predicated on lumping together all non-white citizens in terms of race—now seen as a homogenous entity in the eyes of the British government. Writes Pathik Pathak, “Racism was further institutionalised in the state with the Immigration Act of 1971 when all primary non-white immigration was stopped dead” (Pathak 12). The new groups of non-white Britons, being treated as one monolithic immigrant “problem,” found solidarity in each other through resistance movements. Rushdie’s novel follows in the legacy of Caribbean writers such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming whose novels depicted the trials of the black British migrant experience in the mid-twentieth century. But, in its vast historical scope and magical realist style *The Satanic Verses* offers insight into the ways first and second generation immigrants differ in their responses to what Pathak calls “institutionalized racism.” Moreover, in the portrayal of the burgeoning resistance movements in Brickhall adopting a bestial Chamcha as their unofficial mascot, the novel demonstrates the

⁷⁵ In 1950, the Colonial Office surveyed the habitations of the new immigrants, observing that the “integration of those who had arrived since World War II” had faced three major issues: “the concentration of migrants in inadequate inner-city housing, employer prejudice against black workers, and the occurrence of sporadic instances of civil unrest” The “sporadic instances of civil unrest” observed by the Colonial office became more serious with the Notting Hill riots of 1958. Instigated by gangs of working-class “teddy boy” white citizens, the multiple-day riots in the summer of 1958 involved attacks on hundreds of Caribbean migrants, and ushered in an era of race-related legislation in the U.K. (Hansen 92).

manner in which the sociopolitical position of postcolonial immigrants in Britain superseded (and sometimes nullified) residual and nuanced class distinctions within the immigrant populace.

The Satanic Verses most clearly addresses the cultural formation of black Britain through the depiction of Hind and Muhammad's daughters and their cohorts—second generation immigrants whose allegiances are not to an idealized pastoral Bengal, nor an urbanized, elitist vision of Englishness, as were their parents', but rather a radicalized population that is born into British citizenship and yet always treated as alien. Rushdie is careful to distinguish the first generation immigrants in the text from the Sufyan daughters, who seem to come from different stock entirely—children who were born and raised in conditions Hind describes thus: “anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt like your ears would drop off but when you turned in the directions of the words you saw only empty air and smiling faces” (Rushdie 258). These spectral and evaporating acts of racism recall Balibar's reference to “microfascisms,” and indicate the structural conditions under which residents of Rushdie's Brickhall live: as de facto pariahs and even criminals, regardless of citizenship status. Sarah Upstone highlights the generational difference in the Sufyan family, arguing that for “the Sufyan family...the tension is not between themselves and white capitalism; indeed, they themselves profit from its aggressive economics, filling the bed-and-breakfast's rooms with refugees...for valuable financial remuneration from the local authority. Instead the battle is between parents and daughters, ...standing as a metaphor for the wider shift in how space is occupied, and how...new voices interrogate and satirize the old” (Upstone 91). Though Upstone is correct to emphasize the tension between parents and teenagers in the Shaandaar Café, extracting racial tension from intra-familial friction oversimplifies the complex cultural

matrix Rushdie creates in Brickhall. The Sufyan parents' refugee rental scams do not simply amount to happy profiteering from "white capitalism." They instead exemplify the coercive tactics of a hegemonic system that rewards complicity in passing down structural subjugation—a striking remnant of colonial "divide and rule" policies.

In Brickhall, compounding the standard clichés of rebellious youth is a burgeoning and fiery resistance to the systemic violence that produces racist legislation, cultural hostility, and complicity by the very people who are being oppressed. They resist, to put it simply, the re-mapping of colonialism on British soil by creating an alternate cultural form in the immigrant enclave that reimagines and reconfigures the postcolony into a new, empowered, and formidable force. In some ways, the Sufyan sisters and their cohorts in Brickhall seek a community that resembles the borderless utopia of Tridib's fantasies in *The Shadow Lines*, but their motivations are less nostalgic and less oriented towards an imagined halcyon past. In Mishal and Anahita Sufyan, Hind and Muhammad's teenage daughters, we see the anger of a generation born into a post Nottingham Riots, Race Relations Act world, one whose solidarity with those suffering similar prejudices makes more sense than allegiance to a Subcontinental "home." They are staunchly committed to their present, and indeed, raise their contemporary political and identitarian struggles to metaphysical heights.

The South Asian youth of Brickhall create a mythos and an almost cultish ideology around Chamcha to complete the epic form of warfare they perceive to be brewing in the enclaves of London, drawing inspiration from Caribbean and African activists rallying around the solidarity of a non-white black Britain. The Sufyan daughters identify with Chamcha immediately, not as a proper Englishman, but as a bestial pariah—the resultant transmogrification of the "evil spell," as it were, cast by British immigration policy. That they

identify with his status as subhuman (rather than his projected Englishman image) reveals a great deal about the position the immigrant youth of Brickhall inhabit in British society. They *celebrate* their de facto criminal status, seeking an outlaw leader to idolize. This is far from the aspirations of the elite migrant intellectual, whose desire for cosmopolitan itinerancy and global access is quite the opposite of reappropriating a perceived condition of illegality and illegitimacy. The Sufyan sisters trouble Chamcha's discrete categories of Subcontinental and British, flippantly glossing over the serious identitarian politics of South Asian nation-formation. Mishal proclaims, "'Bangladesh in't nothing to me. Just some place Dad and Mum keep banging on about.'"—And Anahita, conclusively: 'Bungleditch'" (Rushdie 267). Their attitude is a far cry from the characters in *The Shadow Lines*, for whom the trauma of postwar, postcolonial border drawing proves to be an insurmountable historical injury.

Instead, the Sufyan sisters confront Chamcha with the new (if vexed) cultural and political formations of a multicultural Britain. Chamcha rejects their assertions that they are British more than anything else. "But they weren't British, he wanted to tell them: not *really*, not in any way he could recognize. And yet his old certainties were slipping away by the moment, along with his old life" (Rushdie 267). Far from the colonial ideal of Englishness Chamcha pursues, the Sufyan daughters are properly British in this nightmarish version London—a universe, fantastical as it may be, formed out of the numerous and ambivalent policy shifts and irruptions of racial disharmony in postwar, multicultural Britain. These vicious social realities are constitutive of the city's fictional hellishness. Chamcha's fierce effort to reject his Indian roots and pursue an English "moral code" of "assiduity, fastidiousness, moderation, restraint, self-reliance, probity, family life" proves a miserable failure in Brickhall, where his mythical bestiality is his only source of relevance to both the authorities and the counter-cultural youth

alike (Rushdie 265). “Mishal and Anahita Sufyan, who still unaccountably treated him like a kind of soul-mate, in spite of all his attempts to dissuade them, were beings who plainly admired such creatures as moonlighters, shop-lifters, filchers: scam artists in general” (Rushdie 271). Rather than “out-Englishing” the English, in his monstrous incarnation Chamcha effectively “out-immigrants” the immigrant.

IX. The Possibility of Political Resistance in Brickhall

The immigrant enclave of Brickhall itself is a space that disturbs stable categories of geography and subjectivity. It is a petri dish for new cultural and political formations that play out in the microcosm of the street. Vassilena Parashkevova posits that “the text delineates a broad spectrum of migrant urban narratives that crystallize around the ‘satanic’ diasporic spaces of Brickhall High Street, the Shaandaar Café and the Club Hot Wax—spaces that supplement and effectively haunt the image of ‘Proper London’ in the novel” (Parashkevova 83). But beyond “haunting proper London,” the events in Brickhall radically transform London at large. The enclave of Brickhall appears to be the birthing ground for an entirely distinct cultural formation. The street has its own logic, subverting, or rather, re-appropriating its own hellishness, and its custodians are members of the youth culture that grows out of it. In Brickhall, generational difference is amplified and exacerbated by the distinct socio-political environment that shapes the second generation’s point of view. “Mishal had developed the habit of talking about the Street as if it were a mythological battleground...From her Chamcha learned the fables of...the white racists and black ‘self-help’ or vigilante posses starring in this modern *Mahabharata*, or, more accurately, *Mahavilayet*” (Rushdie 292). Mishal demonstrates the development of a black British subjectivity that cherry picks elements from multiple non-white cultures to form a new

origin story to rival British chauvinism and structural violence. “Mahavilayet” (*vilayet* being a common subcontinental term for England) replaces the “Mahabharata” for Mishal’s generation, and here again the motif of “newness” arises—a new myth of foundation for an unprecedented cultural formation. Black solidarity informs all aspects of life for the youth of Brickhall.

The aggression Brickhall youth face comes not only from invisible hands shoving immigrants around, but from a structurally hostile environment enabled by laws and regulations that inherently call into question the legitimacy of immigrant communities. The solidarity of all non-white racial groups in the U.K. has a history tied to multiple shifts in Britain’s postwar immigration policies.⁷⁶ By 1968, the U.K. Parliament had heard Enoch Powell’s notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech,⁷⁷ (Powell 6) and subsequently the 1970s saw a fierce reactionary turn in British public discourse around the question of immigration, coinciding with the rising popularity of the National Front—a party that espoused racist policies calling for the repatriation of all non-white citizens, regardless of birthplace. Thatcherite policies that further restricted immigration effectively ended the period of open circulation between the United Kingdom and its former colonies.⁷⁷

Race riots that erupted in the Southern borough of Brixton in 1981 and 1985 between Caribbean immigrants and whites confirmed that the London of the 1980s was veritably inflammable, and this environment informs the purgatorial London Rushdie portrays in *The*

⁷⁶ After WWII, as empire began to crumble, Parliament enacted the British Nationality Act of 1948. The legislation granted citizenship to both native Britons and colonial subjects under the rubric of “Citizenship of the UK and Colonies,” giving full rights to migrants from the colonies to enter Britain. The change of status from colonial subject to imperial citizen granted mobility to individuals in vast swathes of the colonial world, and thus ushered in a flood of new immigrants from South Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, along with their families. The communities that formed as a result now constitute a majority of the United Kingdom’s approximately 2.6 million members of ethnic minorities (Hansen 68)

⁷⁷ The new Nationality Act of 1981 that rescinded the broad-ranging definition of citizenship of the 1948 Act

Satanic Verses.⁷⁸ Fictional Brickhall is a space of crackling volatility, resulting from legal measures instated by Britain's conservative leaders. *The Satanic Verses* punishes such politicians fittingly; offending conservative leaders such as "Mosley, Powell, Edward Long" and Margaret Thatcher herself are ritualistically microwaved in effigy at Brickhall's "Club Hot Wax," an inverted Madame Tussaud's (Rushdie 302). As Robert Spencer astutely remarks, "the novel's preoccupation is with the possibility that the experience of migration might...give rise to the 'devil talk' of dissent: to the kind of sceptical disposition that subjects religion, as well as other sources of entrenched and illegitimate power, to criticism" (Spencer 258). Though *The Satanic Verses* has received much of its notoriety and subsequent backlash from its biting critique of scriptural Islam, some of its most subversive work is in mythologizing the beginnings of a new era in Britain's relationship to its postcolonial immigrant population. In Brickhall, what we see is a subjugated group surmounting their internal differences to become self-aware—not only to radicalize but to form a formidable counter-lexicon of *critique*.

But Rushdie does not portray this diverse community with a celebratory reverence for their new-found solidarity. The proxy immolation of oppressive authority figures is symptomatic of a community performing rituals around which to bond. The community of Brickhall rallies around a common cause; but rather than effect change, their movement takes on the characteristics of ritual and dogma, with Chamcha unwittingly (and unwillingly) becoming their symbolic leader. Rather than fetishizing Englishness, as Chamcha was wont to in his past life as a human, the second-generation immigrants of Brickhall make a totem of the transmogrified Chamcha himself. Despite being purloined to a back room of the Shaandaar Cafe, Brickhall's inhabitants begin to conjure images of the beast in an oneiric collective consciousness. "He

⁷⁸ Certainly, the racial tensions amongst the Caribbean and African immigrant populations in London have not eased in the recent past, as the riots raging across North London in the summer of 2011 attest.

began to appear to locals in their dreams. The mullahs at the Jamme Masjid which used to be the Machzikel Hadath synagogue which had in its turn replaced the Huguenot's Calvinist church;— and Dr Uhuru Simba the man-mountain in African pill-box hat...and Mishal herself..., and [activist] Hanif...all dreamed him, rising up in the Street like the Apocalypse” (Rushdie 294). This communal dream is no less than prophetic, and in Brickhall's quasi-religious turn, Rushdie portrays the power of grass-roots radical movements as well as danger of their slipping into fetishistic forms. The narrative thus ties Chamcha's experience in Brickhall to the one of Gibreel in Jahilia, thereby implicitly relating the powder-keg situation of 1980s London to the beginnings of the Islamic faith.

Rushdie casts Chamcha's totemization as a matter of convenience for a loosely-connected group in need of a figurehead. “[N]octurnal browns-and-blacks found themselves cheering, in their sleep, this what-else-after-all-but-black-man, maybe a little twisted up by fate class race history, all that but getting off his behind, bad and mad, to kick a little ass” (Rushdie 295). Brickhalls are willing to overlook the “class race history” dissonance between them and Chamcha, allowing that he is “black” after all. They imagine him, in his sheer monstrosity, to fight on their behalf—to *advocate* for them—presuming that racial solidarity would trump other differences. Despite his internal objection to being associated at all with immigrants of their ilk, this community of oppressed black Britons elects the bestial Chamcha to be their representative *par excellence*—a representative of mythical and spiritual proportions, that is, a prophet. But importantly, he does not become their figurehead in the incarnation of Englishness he aspires to inhabit; instead he represents them as the most grotesque and caricatured version of the “immigrant problem” imaginable. “What was happening, although nobody admitted it or even, at first, understood, was that everyone, black brown white, had started thinking of the dream-figure

as *real*....and was now roaming loose about the city. Illegal migrant, outlaw king, foul criminal or race-hero, Saladin Chamcha was getting to be true” (Rushdie 297). Yet Chamcha rejects the ethos of the movement as it erases the very lines he wishes to draw between different kinds of immigrants.

[H]e didn’t like the use of such American terms as ‘the Man’ in the very different British situation, where there was no history of slavery; it sounded like an attempt to borrow the glamour of other, more dangerous struggles, a thing he also felt about the organizers’ decision to punctuate the speeches with such meaning-loaded songs as *We Shall Overcome*, and even, for Pete’s sake, *Nkosi Sikel’ iAfrika*. As if all causes were the same, all histories interchangeable” (Rushdie 429).

Chamcha’s objection to the conflation of all histories of oppression in the service of civil rights for non-white immigrants in Britain mirrors his objection to being mistaken or misrepresented as a member of the larger immigrant masses. Though the discrimination and danger the immigrants face in Brickhall very much resembles acts of violence and prejudice regularly committed against immigrants in late twentieth-century Britain, the members of this community are painted with broad, satirical strokes, and their fervor for the cause of social justice proves to be more self-destructive than progressive in the narrative of *The Satanic Verses*.

In Chamcha’s disfiguration and his subsequent celebration as *the* symbol of immigrant oppression—as an “illegal migrant, outlaw kind, foul criminal, or race-hero”—Rushdie encapsulates the central struggle in the task of representing the immigrant experience in literary form. For the migrant intellectual to represent politically (as a proxy or advocate) and aesthetically (artistically or discursively) the “immigrant experience” as such, a degree of performance (or shape-shifting) becomes necessary. It is of course no accident that both Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta are actors by trade; Chamcha’s “mimic man” qualities as a would-be Englishman no doubt gain polish from his chosen profession. But what does it mean to

“mimic” the subaltern rather than the elite? In his grotesque transformation, *The Satanic Verses* probes into the *costs* of representation by implicitly questioning the very practice of the migrant intellectual standing in for and portraying the postcolonial immigrant masses. Chamcha resists his ascribed prophetic role as the Brickhall community pushes its way towards apocalyptic race riots. The text itself abandons the narrative arc of racial strife at the moment of its greatest intensity and switches to the resolution of Chamcha’s very personal Oedipal drama in Bombay. Peter J. Kalliney sees this move as Rushdie absconding from the political work of class struggle. “One on hand,” he writes, “the story requires a discussion of social class and would not make sense without it. On the other hand, the novel fails to explore fully the ramifications of this problem, containing the situation by leaving it all together” (Kalliney 76). But Kalliney’s assessment illustrates the tendency of scholarship surrounding the novel to separate the novel’s depiction of class/race conflict in London from the controversies surrounding its satirical take on Islam.

X. Juxtaposing Brickhall and Jahilia

In the vast body of scholarship on *The Satanic Verses* and Rushdie’s oeuvre in general, there have been few inquiries into *why* contemporary London and medieval Jahilia appear side-by-side in the narrative. Neither does the novel make explicit why the chapters that take place from Chamcha’s perspective—ones that directly take on the question of racial strife in 1980s London—are interspersed with those from Gibreel’s perspective. Ian Baucom proposes that in the novel, “for the migrant the point is to arrive....[T]he desire of the migrant is to succeed where the citizens of Jahilia have succeeded, to transform the quintessence of unsettlement into an invented performance....It is a desire to rest, to belong” (Baucom 202). Yet by mapping

Jahilia and Brickhall onto each other, the novel troubles the notion of stability and “the politics of emplacement,” as Baucom puts it, by imagining the far reaching global consequences (in both spatial and temporal terms) of the local political decisions that establish “Submission,” the novel’s para-Islamic faith.

Both London and Jahilia are urban theaters that stage profound change and transformation. Jahilia, a city made “entirely of sand...the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form” houses a people who are a “mere three or four generations removed from their nomadic past” (Rushdie 94) but now replace the instability of migration with the invention of a new ideology and faith. Rushdie styles Gibreel’s dream-sequences in Jahilia with a markedly different rhetorical texture than the London chapters’ ludic postmodern eclecticism. These sections are always in the present tense and employ motifs of epic and myth, with a tonal unity reflecting what is to become orthodoxy in the faith’s origin story. As Gibreel dreams of the inception of “Submission,” Rushdie’s stand-in for the Islamic faith, he feels himself to be the carrier of an indeterminate message to Mahound, the prophet of the new religion. He remains perplexed at the messages he receives and delivers, unable to dispute or corroborate Mahound’s claims, calling into question the purity of the revelations themselves. Indeed, the very moniker of the prophet indicates Rushdie’s play with purity and orthodoxy in Islam.⁷⁹ The name itself has a history as a pejorative title assigned by medieval European Christians to the perceived false

⁷⁹ “Mahound” is the version of Muhammad who appears in the eighth circle of Dante’s *Inferno* as a “sower of discord.” Edward Said also expounds at length in *Orientalism* on the genealogy of “Mahound” and “Muhammad.” “Mohammad is an imposter, the very phrase canonized in [16th century Orientalist Barthélemy] d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque* and dramatized in a sense by Dante” (Said 72). Mahound is the incarnation of the anxious European gaze, rather than a strident and provocative Muhammad-gone-awry.

prophet of an idolatrous Oriental religion.⁸⁰ As Gibreel dreams him, the narrative frames the prophet's chosen title like that of an epic hero.

Pronounced correctly, it means he-for-whom-thanks-should-be-given, but here he...has adopted, instead, the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound (Rushdie 95).⁸¹

By reclaiming this invective, the narrative explicitly evokes present and former British political movements and indexes the solidarity of black Britain to justify the appropriation of a derogatory epithet, turning an “insult into a strength” and recalling Brickhall's exaltation of bestial Chamcha. Thus the religion formed in the fictional city of Jahilia has particular relevance to British (post)colonial and racial politics, and moreover echoes the ways Brickhall comes to fetishize Chamcha-as-beast. In choosing to name this religion “Submission” and its leader “Mahound,” the novel presents a version of the faith that is especially conversant with British histories of subjugation and resistance. Drawing connections between Brickhall's version of black Britain and the inception of the Islam-like faith in Jahilia, the novel suggests a version of Islam that becomes empowered by appropriating the slurs the Occident has slung at it—thereby choosing heterodoxy rather than orthodoxy. But the novel itself seems to tell a cautionary tale about black Britain; it is by equal measures celebrated and criticized in the narrative. And indeed, when *The Satanic Verses* entered the public sphere, a vocal contingent of global Islam vehemently chose to defend orthodoxy.

⁸⁰ India's Prime Minister, who banned the book in India, claimed that Rushdie intentionally provoked the Muslim world in naming the prophet of “Submission” Mahound, a sentiment echoed by countless imams and ardent Muslims following the novel's publication (Appignanesi 62).

⁸¹ “Farangi” is a generally derogatory term for European in many South Asian languages.

XI. The Politicization of the Aesthetic

The fictional community of South Asian immigrants in Brickhall is not, of course, the same one that responded in real life with such hostility to *The Satanic Verses*. The question of artistic representation as it relates to political representation becomes very complicated in examining *The Satanic Verses* in the wake of its publication. The skepticism toward the percolating movements for immigrant civil rights in the narrative of *The Satanic Verses* was met by a skepticism and outright objection to the novel itself by a substantial number of British South Asian Muslims upon its publication. The whole of the Rushdie Affair was ostensibly fueled by the allegedly blasphemous portrayal of a quasi-Islam in the Gibreel chapters of the text. But less directly, the Rushdie Affair came out of the very anxiety of representation at the heart of its narrative. Indeed, by refusing the (aesthetic and political) representation *The Satanic Verses* offered, the postcolonial immigrants of 1980s Britain propelled that anxiety into a full-blown crisis. Despite the fact that the principle objection was not to the chapters set amongst the immigrant proletariat of Brickhall, and even despite the fact that many protesters proudly declared that they had not and *would* not read the novel, the fate of the text was in some ways written into its own form. Bridging the chasm between the two extremes at either end of the immigrant class spectrum would not be achieved by imagining the very prospect as a magical realist Hell on earth. Nor indeed would it be bridged by calling into question the orthodoxy which British South Asian Muslims had begun to whole-heartedly embrace (rather than the solidarities of black Britain) as a potent form of defense against the hostile political environs of late-twentieth century Britain.

After a series of violent riots in 1989 in the British city of Bradford featuring Muslims burning the “blasphemous” novel (and less than a month after Khomeini’s *fatwa*), Rushdie expressed distress at being rejected by the very community he had depicted in his novel.⁸² “This is, for me, the saddest irony of all; that after working for five years to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture of which I am myself a member, I should see my book burned, largely unread, by the people it’s about, people who might find some pleasure and much recognition in its pages” (Appignanesi 62). In refusing Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* to represent working-class South Asian and/or Muslim immigrants, those who objected to the novel highlighted a dissonance between the novelistic portrayal and sociopolitical reality of British immigrant life. Far from identifying with the (often unflattering) depiction of Brickhall, the incensed groups of British South Asians were more concerned with rejecting Rushdie’s portrayal of Jahilia. Rather than responding to the political criticisms waged at Thatcherite Britain, Rushdie’s fellow British South Asian Muslims demonstrated a much stronger allegiance to *Islam* than any other national, ethnic, racial, or political category.⁸³

⁸² Rushdie employs the term “blasphemy” numerous times in the text, certainly cognizant of the political buttons his novel would likely push. Indeed, in the novel’s violent global reception, the inflammatory term would eventually play an important role in the relationship of British Muslims to *The Satanic Verses*. On the riots in Brickhall, the narrator observes, “priests became involved, adding another unstable element—the linkage between the term *black* and the sin *blasphemy*—to the mix” (Rushdie, *SV* 297). Priests, of course, are voices of *state* authority in the Church of England. However, the narrative of the novel does not, and indeed cannot, fully account for the impact the term “blasphemy” would come to have in relation to its publication

⁸³ The most controversial passages in the novel for observant Muslims are the words channeled through Gibreel in his second encounter with Mahound, while the prophet receives revelation. In direct opposition to the message of monotheism of Al-lah, one of the gods worshipped among Mahound’s tribe, he purports to have heard of the divinity of three other goddesses in Jahilia’s pantheon. Mahound repeats these verses—“Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?...They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed”—in an act of political maneuvering (Rushdie 114). Unable to decide whether the message of monotheism or polytheism is correct, Mahound decides for political reasons to appeal to more powerful and pagan citizens of Jahilia (and temporarily alienating some of his followers), and later refuting the claims of these verses, attributing them to Satan. These lines are culled almost verbatim from a historical Islamic debate regarding the Surah *al-Najm*, which refers to pagan gods worshipped in the Arab world in the era of the Quran. Hamid Dabashi writes of the “controversies about the occasion and variations of these four verses,” noting, “on the authority of some early Muslim commentators, including al-Tabari, some Orientalist scholars have argued that [the verses initially acknowledged] the power of

Most significantly in the British context, many Muslims rallied together to appeal to Parliament, claiming that Rushdie's text was criminal, since it is "blasphemous." This situation raised a profound question of *citizenship* among the postcolonial immigrant population, and specifically for those who do not practice Christianity. Since the United Kingdom is not explicitly secular, jurisdiction on religion is particularly knotty. Britain's state sanctioning of the Church of England means the United Kingdom had standing blasphemy laws up until 2008, a fact that British Muslims attempted to use advantage to their advantage in 1989.⁸⁴ To the Muslims demanding due process on grounds of blasphemy, the British government offered cold comfort, and for the British population at large, it offered no conclusive decision on the fate of its blasphemy laws (this would be delayed, again, for another nine years). Historian Leonard Levy details: The Home Office "denied that Rushdie had violated any law...[T]he difficulties in redefining blasphemy were immense: [should all] religious groups should be protected...including the minor and obscure, or just the faiths believing in one God, or only the major or mainstream faiths?" (Levy 563). Extant blasphemy laws would, if adjusted to reflect the multicultural form Britain had taken since their implementation, ostensibly protect the offended Muslim groups of the U.K., and a trial of Salman Rushdie on these grounds would not be out of legal jurisdiction. As Ashley Dawson astutely observes, "assertions of British secularism conveniently ignore the fact that Britain retain[ed] a Blasphemy Law whose solely Christian provenance makes explicit both the racial formation and the nonsecularity of the state....British Muslims calling for the equitable application of the Blasphemy Law were in fact appealing to

these pagan deities to intercede on behalf of their believers. Muslim scholars, on the other hand (and with few exceptions) categorically deny such a possibility" (Dabashi 42).

⁸⁴ In a speech urging the British government to try Rushdie on the grounds of blasphemy, Kalim Siddiqui, director of The Muslim Institute, highlighted the responsibility he feels the United Kingdom should have to protect the rights of its Muslim citizens. "We will participate in promoting the global goals of...Islam just as we expect the British government...in promoting the global goals of their religions, civilization and culture." (Siddiqui 1989)

Enlightenment conceptions of an egalitarian legal system” (Dawson 124) By exercising the right to appeal to standing jurisprudence, British Muslims were enacting the most basic form of citizenship, arguably demonstrating assimilation in the most profound way possible. In a nation that does not separate church and state, the contingent of South Asian immigrants who began to see themselves less as “black British” or even “Asian,” and more as “Muslim,” showed themselves to be a formidable legislative force. Coming to no specific conclusion, the British government skirted what should have been one of the most foundational issues of citizenship in its contemporary, postcolonial moment.

Moreover, testaments from Islamic leaders during the Rushdie Affair make clear that the offense many British Muslims felt was not only from the seemingly “blasphemous” passages of the novel. They also felt that as a discrete group, the British government was forcing a cleavage between their obligations to the religion and to the state. In a 1989 speech, Kalim Siddiqui, director of The Muslim Institute, highlights what he felt to be a dissonance between the position of British state and the rights of its multicultural, multi-religious citizens. “Our status as British citizens does not and cannot in any way compromise our...promoting the global goals of the religion, culture and civilization of Islam just as we expect the British government, and the British Christian and Jewish communities to participate in promoting the global goals of their religions, civilization and culture.”⁸⁵ More inflammatory screeds such as a pamphlet published by the Islamic Da’wah College International in 1989, find justification in Britain’s ambiguous legal position for growing Islamic hostility. “Since the British law allows the ridiculing of Islam...and since Britain protects...perpetrators of mischief, such as Rushdie, and makes them immune to legal prosecution...then Britain does encourage denigration of...other people’s beliefs

⁸⁵ “Speech delivered by Dr Kalim Siddiqui, Director, The Muslim Institute, at a Conference on the Rushdie Affair held in London on April, 1989.

which can only breed resentment, hatred, and strife.”⁸⁶ The pressures of the situation privileged religion-based (rather than race-based) solidarity, and the efficacy of a black British configuration for British Muslims became increasingly obsolete. The future of black Britain, which remains irresolute at novel’s end, found an uneasy resolution outside the narrative in the dissolution of a precarious racial solidarity. A united front of minority races in the U.K. became a secondary concern to Muslims holding U.K. passports and even birth certificates in the wake of the Rushdie Affair, who now found their citizenship to be, in reality, perforated.

Thus, the publication of *The Satanic Verses* brought into relief the hazards of proceeding as though “all causes were the same, all histories interchangeable,” as Saladin Chamcha puts it while in Brickhall. The racial solidarity offered by the black British movement in 1980s Britain does not address the issues of a growing population that considers itself to have equal and often paradoxical allegiances to Britain and Islam. In his 2012 memoir, *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie pinpoints the publication of *The Satanic Verses* as a lynchpin in this new adherence to an Islamic identity rather than an ethnic, racial, or political affiliation. “For a generation the politics of ethnic minorities in Britain had been secular and socialist. This was the mosques’ way of destroying that project and getting religion into the driving seat. British ‘Asians’ had never splintered into Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh factions before” (Rushdie, *JA* 142). Of course, Rushdie’s assessment of “British Asian” unity is more than idealistic. *The Shadow Lines* illustrates the existential feelings of alienation between the diasporic elite West Bengali Hindus and working-class East Bengali Muslims in Britain. But the Rushdie Affair had the undeniable and trenchant effect of extracting British Muslims, and specifically South Asian Muslims, from the larger collective of postcolonial immigrants. No longer allied by class or race, the boundaries

⁸⁶ From a pamphlet entitled, *A Factual Response to Salman Rushdie’s Concoction: ‘The Satanic Verses’ through the Researched Works of Western Scholars*, 1989

between immigrant groups begin to re-form around questions of religion. And the British legal apparatus, caught between professed secular ideals and historical religious ties has proven ill-equipped for these contemporary political exigencies.

Both *The Shadow Lines* and *The Satanic Verses* grapple with the vexed question of how to represent, aesthetically and politically, the condition of postcolonial immigration at the close of the twentieth century. The crisis of representation is precipitated by the encounter staged in the enclave between the protagonists of these novels and the thriving communities of immigrants with whom they nominally share nationality and ethnicity, but little else. The overarching sense of anxiety that marks these two novels is exemplary of at a distinct historical juncture—that of a culture in transition. Ghosh’s novel shows the persistence of age-old categories of difference which were established over centuries of colonization in the Subcontinent, and explores the deep identitarian fissures that belie the seeming conviviality of immigrants in diaspora. Its Proustian, mnemonic, and repetitive form circles around an act of sectarian violence, layering memories and cities on top of each other, and indexing the eternal return of historical trauma. *The Satanic Verses*, on the other hand, in its all its many magical realist, postmodern turns, explores the ever-shifting borders of difference and solidarity, materializing around the manifold intersections of race, class, nationality, and religion. But it is in the reception and response of the Rushdie Affair that make clear the high stakes of the question of representation. In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Gayatri Spivak critiques the moment that the subaltern is troped—when *Vertreten* collapses into *Darstellen* and the political is aestheticized. The Rushdie Affair, however, is a clear illustration of what happens when the opposite occurs, and artistic representation becomes completely subsumed by the art object acting as a political proxy.

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Chapter 3

Parisian Re-orientalism: Encountering the Oriental Self in *Shérazade* and *La vie sexuelle d'un islamist à Paris*

*Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel)*

Old Paris is no more (the form of a city
Changes more quickly, alas! than the heart of a mortal)

—Charles Baudelaire, “Le Cygne”

Separated by over two decades, and coming out of two very different moments in France’s relationship with its postcolonial immigrant population, *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1983), by Leïla Sebbar and *La vie sexuelle d'un Islamiste à Paris* (2007), by Leïla Maraoune, offer fractured narratives of second-generation French Algerians who run away from home to the center of Paris. “Home” for both protagonists—Shérazade in Sebbar’s novel and Mohamed in Marouane’s—is just outside of Paris, but both texts similarly depict their multi-generational family homes to be akin to a different country entirely—the seat of Muslim piety, traditional family structures, and traditional modes of dress and cuisine. Both protagonists also sketch out an alienation endemic to the generation of their fathers who arrived in a hostile France during the *Trente Glorieuses* period, and both texts portray second-generation Algerians whose goal is to undo the alienation of their fathers’ generation by venturing into the center of Paris and attempting to establish footing there. In running away to Paris, both Sebbar’s

Shérázade and Marouane’s Mohamed are interpellated as North African others despite their concerted efforts to inhabit subject-positions that are less predetermined. Yet both, in differing ways, create tactics to infiltrate the space of the Parisian center, not simply by *assimilating* to French culture (as “Frenchness” remains asymptotical) but by performing, subverting, and repurposing the Orientalist tropes that French society has historically mapped onto Algerian culture. They both decide to deploy Orientalist stereotypes of themselves to their benefit with mixed results. Shérázade’s ambivalent fascination with the nineteenth-century Orientalist archive compels her into an “autoethnographic” obsession and fragments her sense of self (reflected in the text’s episodic form) before it finally repels her out of Paris entirely. Mohamed’s fixation with performing the most lascivious Orientalist stereotypes to lure French women into his bed induces a psychotic break and reveals him to be possibly schizophrenic, a fact which calls the entire narrative and even the act of narration into question.

There is a deep discomfort and anxiety that emerges in both of these texts in their depiction of French acculturation. This anxiety plays out on the level of form and content in both novels and it relates to a performance of *embourgeoisement* for both protagonists. It has roots in a historical fissure between the North African intellectual elite and the majority of Maghrebi immigrants in and around Paris, who remain in the working class and largely live outside the *Boulevard Périphérique* in the *banlieues*. As the work of Louis Althusser demonstrates, French education in particular is a powerful vehicle of ideology, as it is not simply the dissemination of knowledge, but also of mores and etiquette.⁸⁷ In the Algerian colony, the denial of a French

⁸⁷ Indeed, in “Ideology and the State,” Althusser correlates education with the skills to obtain power and manage labor. Thus by mere virtue of acquiring a French education, the *évolué* learns the methods and strategies of the ruling class. “[C]hildren at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to ‘speak proper French’, to ‘handle’ the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to ‘order them about’

education was a potent strategy of control—only a select few colonial subjects were ever to become *évolués*. To deny the majority of Algerian subjects French literacy was simultaneously a means of denying them a claim on the post-revolutionary entitlement to French universalism. As opposed to the Indian middle class of native intermediaries that formed after Macaulay’s famous 1835 “Minute on Education,” Algeria saw no such corresponding middle class of French-educated natives in the colony. Indeed, as chapter one of the dissertation has demonstrated, the majority of Algerians remained French-illiterate into the twentieth century. Though this chapter does not make any sociological causative claims connecting contemporary Algerian communities in France facing challenges in assimilating and the colonial ruling strategy of denying its Algerian subjects French literacy, the persistent motif of illiteracy in novels that depict Algerian immigrants attests to its legacy. Moreover, for the Algerian immigrant, *acquiring* French literacy, both in terms of language and mores—the principle requirement for any narrative of the immigrant experience in France—creates an immediate distance between the latter-day *évolué* and the immigrant community at large.

This distance is expressed psychologically and *spatially* in both texts as the protagonists move into the Parisian center—thus there appears to be a direct correspondence between French education and Parisian real estate. The distance also produces a familiar anxiety in the protagonists that echoes W.E.B. Dubois’s “double consciousness” and Frantz Fanon’s anguished scene of interpellation on a Parisian street in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (“*Tiens, un nègre!*”). The anxiety is palpable in the experimental form of both novels—aphoristic and episodic in Sebbar’s text and hallucinatory and unstable in Marouane’s. But *Shérazade* and *La vie sexuelle*,

properly, i.e. (ideally) to ‘speak to them’ in the right way, etc. To put this more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’” (Althusser 89).

rather than focusing on the phenomenon of the postcolonial immigrant intellectual suddenly and traumatically being interpellated as one of the immigrant masses, instead depict a process of acculturation in the opposite direction. Both novels portray the trials of “second-generation” Algerian immigrants; by this I mean immigrants who arrived not as adults seeking economic stability, but instead those who arrived as youth or were born in France, coming of age on French soil. Both protagonists hail from the working-class immigrant enclaves of the Parisian *banlieues* and attempt to move centripetally into the heart of Paris by acquiring metropolitan knowledge and modes of behavior. But rather than ascending into the ranks of the bourgeois French intelligentsia, both protagonists, despite their efforts to re-appropriate and subversively perform their stereotypes, are ultimately stymied by burdensome legacies of colonial subjugation. The tropes of Orientalism that have circulated by and through metropolitan French culture for centuries prove to be a destabilizing aesthetic block with profound political consequences that prevents them from fully participating in Parisian culture.

I. The Anxiety of The Postcolonial Intellectual

Chapter One of the dissertation discussed at length the processes by which French colonial policies restricted colonial subjects in the Maghreb access to French education and literacy. By this token the opportunity to “modernize”—that is, to emulate Europeanness—was historically rarer in the Francophone colonial context than the Anglophone. In Algeria and Morocco, as with other swathes of the imperial world, the systematization of identitarian fissures was, of course, a fundamental part of imperial “divide and rule” policies. Because access to French education and literacy was so severely limited to a handful of *évolués*, linguistic, religious, and ethnic differences between colonial subjects were compounded by growing *class*

differences between the majority of subjugated North Africans and the minority who were to become the colonized elite. Aamir Mufti has qualified the transition into “modern forms of culture” under colonization—that is, creating the “fully colonial subject”—to be particularly disorienting. To fully succumb to the cultural paradigms of the colonizer and “modernize,” as it were, is simultaneously an act of treason: “This stain of treachery against one’s own people and of loyalty to the foreign rulers spreads throughout the cultural terrain, coloring even the most radical critiques of indigenous society.” Representing this process, according to Mufti, is symptomatically fraught with the “inability to produce narratives of cultural continuity that can absorb the dislocations of modernity” (Mufti 13). Interestingly, the alienation between different classes or ranks of colonized subjects appears to be distinctly correlated to a sense of *dislocation*. Thus, the anxiety of alienation from “one’s own people” is somehow *spatialized*. At the same time, this spatial sense of displacement or dislocation is internalized in the alienated colonized subject. Writing that is produced out of this superimposed *class* division between colonized subjects betrays a kind of psychic discomfort that aggressively disturbs the delicate ecosystem of colonial subjectivity, yet expresses itself *inwardly*, or *affectively*, rather than the more external violent expressions of colonial divisions (for example, in events like the Partition of India or the insurgencies of the FLN).

Jean Paul Sartre’s preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*⁸⁸ famously deemed the condition of the native a “nervous” one, giving a psychoanalytic valence to Dubois’s “double

⁸⁸ “Notre ennemi trahit ses frères et se fait notre complice ; ses frères en font autant. L’indigénat est une névrose introduite et maintenue par le colon chez les colonisés *avec leur consentement*” (Sartre). It should be noted that Sartre uses the term “*névrose*” as a noun to describe “*l’indigénat*.” “Nervous condition,” a term that has much currency in postcolonial scholarly discourse, comes from Constance Farrington’s 1963 translation into English (“The status of the ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*” [20, *Preface to Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, 1963]). Richard Philcox’s 2004 translation forgoes this term for one with more contemporary medical and diagnostic valences that perhaps “nervous condition” does not: “neurosis.” It is as follows: The status of the ‘native’ is a neurosis introduced and maintained by the colonist in the colonized *with their consent*” (Preface iv, Richard Philcox, 2004).

consciousness.” According to Fanon’s logic, in his or her aspirations to mimic and thus become akin to the colonizer, the educated colonized subject suffered a kind of psychosis that originated not from primal familial scenes of trauma but externally from the superstructures of colonial society. Thus for the colonized, *functioning* under the hierarchical regimes of colonial subjugation was predicated upon a psychological *dysfunction*—a deeply destabilizing split in subjectivity that arose from the identification with both oppressor and oppressed. The process of colonial education produced a mode of being that to some degree systematized this traumatic moment of split subjectivity. Acquisition of a colonial education is the currency that allows the *évolué* to live outside of what Fanon deems the *bidonville* (shantytown) or “le village nègre, la medina, la réserve...un lieu mal famé, peuplé d’hommes mal famés” (Fanon, *Damnés* 42). It is the bridging of the divide—or rather the *movement* between—both the psychology and spaces of the colonizer and colonized that produces “l’indigénat névrose.” Though in his writing Fanon specifically addresses the *bidonvilles* of colonial Algeria, the importation of this spatial divide is plainly evident in postcolonial metropolitan France. The genealogy of the immigrant enclaves in Parisian *banlieues* is one that is easily traced back to the *bidonvilles* that were established under colonial rule in Algeria. Indeed, as Susan Ireland remarks incisively, “The layout of French cities today reproduces the old colonial geography” (Ireland 174). Moreover, the spatial relations between the outer rings of the *banlieues* around the central twenty *arrondissements* of Paris create the conditions for surveillance and control of immigrant populations, thereby continuing the hierarchies of power between metropolitan France and its colonies on the scale of the city. Michel Laronde asserts that the organization of Paris and its *banlieues* in concentric circles perfectly reproduces the logic of the Panopticon. “Appliquée à l’immigration, l’architecture du modèle panoptique n’est jamais aussi évidente que dans la spatialité de *la région parisienne*....

l'arrangement spatial de l'immigration est statistiquement égal pour le centre et pour l'anneau ce qu'il faut considérer, c'est non pas le seul découpage administratif en départements mais investir la géographie *interne* à ce découpage pour y retrouver le cloisonnement horizontal qui donne au système panoptique sa particularité: celle de l'isolation horizontale entre Surveillés" (Laronde 96). The circular arrangement of Paris's *banlieues* ostensibly, according to Laronde, eases the capacity for surveillance and control of immigrant communities by the French state.

Thus ascending out of the ranks of the subjugated proletariat through *class* mobility does not simply separate the colonial intellectual from the colonial proletariat spatially. It indicates the transition from the ranks of those who are surveilled and controlled to those who sit in positions of privilege and power. In the abstract, it creates a specific kind of anxiety that not only wracks the (post)colonial intellectual's subject formation, but also the forms of art produced out of this process. This is the anxiety of representation. Anxiety as an affective register permeates the Francophone text that stages the confrontation of the (post)colonial intellectual with the (post)colonial proletariat, because of its implicit and explicit political valences. As Sian Ngai remarks in her important study of literary affect, "the very effort of thinking the aesthetic and political together—a task whose urgency seems to increase in proportion to its difficulty in a[n] increasingly anti-utopian and functionally differentiated society—is a prime occasion for ugly feelings" (Ngai 3). What Ngai calls "ugly feelings"—affects such as irritation, paranoia, and anxiety that are smaller in scale than emotions like anger, terror, or melancholy—spring forth from the very task of coupling the political and aesthetic registers of representation. This task is a burden the novel of immigration cannot but take on. Moreover, the affect of *anxiety* according to Ngai's logic can have a specifically *spatial* dimension.

The question of timing that one normally associates with anxiety's affective grammar (When?)⁸⁹ can also become a question of location (Where?)...[In] spatialized representations of anxiety...the externalizing aspect of 'projection'...can be perceived not just as a strategy for displacing anxiety, but as the means by which the affect assumes its particular form...[These representations] reinforce the boundary between center and periphery, and thus the distinction between 'here' and 'yonder' on which the experience of threat depends, depict anxiety less as an inner reality which can be subsequently externalized than as a structural effect of spatialization in general. (Ngai 213)

Thus there is a profound connection between the drawing of borders—spatial separations that are reified geographic means to separate people—and the internal affect of anxiety, which is once again *externalized* in the form of the text. The ability to move between spaces designated for different colonial subjectivities results not simply in a condition of “hybridity” or even “ambivalence”—celebratory terms, at bottom, in Homi Bhabha's lexicon—but an anxiety that threatens the very possibility of representation.

II. Between the *banlieue* and the *arrondissements*

Sebbar and Marouane's texts are both preoccupied with the separation between the central *arrondissements* of Paris and the outer *banlieues* and the way this physical distance indexes a difference of class, legitimacy, and “Frenchness,” as it were. Traveling between the two spaces, and indeed, the way both protagonists attempt to infiltrate the center of Paris, creates a dire sense of tension in either text. As this chapter shall go on to explicate, the attempt to enter into the Parisian center is predicated, in both texts, upon incorporating and subverting tropes of Orientalism that are *produced* in the metropole. Moving out of the *banlieues*—the urban spaces within the French metropole that are somehow designated as other, foreign, and even fundamentally Maghrebi—into the central districts of Paris affords the protagonists of either novel access to French metropolitan knowledge and forms of cultural capital. But more

⁸⁹ “Timing” can also refer to what Ngai elsewhere deems “deferral” in psychoanalytic discussions of anxiety.

insidiously, the move stages the troubling encounter with the Orientalized version of themselves. Sebbar's and Marouane's protagonists have come of age on metropolitan soil, but in immigrant enclaves that cordon them off from what might be deemed proper "French society." The enclave, particularly in the hegemonic French cultural imaginary, remains discreet from Republican ideals of French culture, and indeed, functions as an irruption of the postcolony within the metropole.⁹⁰ Though they are steeped in Algerian (thus, ostensibly "Oriental") culture, it is only in the Parisian center that Shérazade and Mohamed come to see themselves through the mirror of Orientalism. And moreover, it is there that both come to the conclusion that acquiring cultural capital in Paris necessitates their *performing* Orientalism, a realization that leads to very different results in either case.

The manifold layering of identities that is catalyzed by the movement between Paris and its *banlieues*, center and *Périphérique*, leads to modes of being that are unsustainable, and this is reflected in the fractures and narrative breaks in both texts. In their explicit confrontations with Orientalist imagery and stereotypes, both *Shérazade* and *La vie sexuelle* demonstrate themselves to be texts self-conscious of their political dimension. But the arduous weight of this work saturates the very form of these novels, resulting in narrative instability. Sebbar's novel flits between points of view and moments in time in an aphoristic, episodic style that gives the narrative on the whole an evanescent, ephemeral quality. Marouane's novel, though locked in first-person perspective by the internal monologue of its obsessive protagonist, Mohamed, undermines his narrative fidelity by calling his sanity into question. Both narratives are constantly in danger of falling apart or slipping away, and in this manner, they challenge the universal narratives of Frenchness and subject-formation that are foundational to Republicanism.

⁹⁰ For a further discussion of the postcolonial "haunting" contemporary France, see Achille Mbembe, "La République et l'impensé de la 'race,'" (2005).

Both protagonists remain psychologically inaccessible and elusive, for reasons of perpetual motion in the case of Shérázade and possible schizophrenia in the case of Mohamed.

As opposed to the vexed-yet-familiar literary confrontations in the other novels I have discussed thus far in the dissertation—i.e., between the immigrant and the metropolitan, or the immigrant elite and the immigrant proletariat—the anxiety in these two texts is not catalyzed by the encounter between different kinds of immigrant subjectivities. Instead, these two novels powerfully depict the encounter between different aesthetic *representations* of Algerian cultural life—those that bear more resemblance to the quotidian, day-to-day experiences of immigrants, and those that have been continuously perpetuated since the earliest historical moments of Orientalist inquiry. The unique prowess of both *Shérázade* and *La vie sexuelle d'un Islamiste à Paris* is their complete resistance to be read as straightforward testimonies of the Algerian immigrant experience in contemporary France.

III. Outside of the *Beur* Enclave

The two novels examined in this chapter stand apart from the corpus of texts that have been collectively called “*beur*” literature—*beur* being a slang term coined in the early 1980s to describe the population of first and second-generation Maghrebi youth who were coming of age in France. “*Beur*” as a moniker for a distinct category of French literature has been met with resistance among its authors and progenitors, but is nonetheless useful in thinking about the cultural zeitgeist that produced a body of novels, films, as well as a radio station and political movements that brought questions of racial injustice and civil rights to an increasingly diverse France to the fore.⁹¹ The novels considered to be examples of *beur* literature are largely in the

⁹¹ In addition to the radio and television stations BeurFM and BeurTV, an important example of the *beur* movement becoming more a more visible and formidable force in French society was 1983’s *Marche pour l’égalité et contre le*

bildungsroman style, featuring adolescent Maghrebis negotiating their place in dominant French culture and carving out their own unique forms of culture in the *cités* around major metropolitan centers. Autobiographical novels and films by such artists as Azouz Begag, Nacer Kettane, Mehdi Charef, and Farida Belghoul in the 1980s and 90s are exemplary of the form, which depart in many ways from the colonially-inflected writing of an earlier generation that included Chraïbi, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Assia Djebar.⁹² Leïla Sebbar's novels most often are understood to fall under this rubric because of their subject matter, centering around the political and cultural turmoil that youth of North African origins have faced in late twentieth-century France. Yet Françoise Lionnet has called her works "'unclassifiable' according to the traditional criteria that oppose 'French' and 'Francophone' literatures since the standard opposition between the center and the margin is rendered inoperable" (Lionnet 177). What distinguishes *Shérazade* from the typical trajectory of a *beur* novel is that it takes place neither in the spatial margins of French culture, nor at the margins of the Parisian metropole, but in the central *arrondissements* of Paris, further troubling any perceived separation between center and periphery. And Marouane's *La vie sexuelle* departs even further from this paradigm by focusing on a second-generation Algerian man's futile attempts to enter bourgeois adulthood in the very bourgeois quarter of the *septième arrondissement*.

As opposed to most other works that fall under the category of *beur* literature, neither *Shérazade* nor *La vie sexuelle* take place in the *bidonville* or the *banlieue* but instead depict the counterintuitive practice of what Michel Laronde calls "enclavement" *within* the bounds of the

racism (which was dubbed the *Marche des beurs* by the newsmedia). "Forty North African youths marched the 750 miles from Marseilles to Paris to protest a rise in racist killings...[W]hen the marchers reached Paris 45 days later, they led a column numbering 100,000 (Hein 73).

⁹² See the extensive scholarship of Alec Hargreaves and Susan Ireland among others for extensive studies of *beur* culture in twentieth-century France.

Parisian center. “Enclavement” is itself a means of establishing autonomy and belonging when the hegemonic structures of society are designed to prevent that very outcome for a specific ethnic or cultural group.

The minority subject will frequently reclaim as a ‘third space’ the position in the urban landscape from which he was originally displaced. This space is the initial ‘insertion’ point in the central Culture, a space considered an ‘enclave’ to be destroyed. Enclaves occupy a dual space: they are typically places considered both *outside* and *inside* systems, depending on who produces the discourse. For the central Culture, the *bidonville* on the cultural (and often, spatial) margins of the modern European city, is an enclave to be erased physically as not being part of the architecture of the urban city, but as representing its empty spots, its architectural non-places; consequently, the architecture of belonging to the city (hence to the society, to the system) starts *beyond* the *bidonville*. To the contrary, for minority discourses, the initial position occupied by immigrants on the urban grid is identified as a buffer (Laronde, “Urbanism 71).

Neither *Shérazade* nor *La vie sexuelle* take place in the enclave—in fact both protagonists make purposeful moves *away* from the immigrant enclave into the center. And yet both Shérazade and Mohamed end up practicing elements of “enclavement” within the Parisian center. Mohamed especially finds himself engaging in this despite his more explicit desires to become as French as possible. In this sense, both novels, though written at distinct moments in France’s postcolonial relationship to Algeria, depart from the hallmarks of the *beur* novel, which for the most part remain spatially within the enclave and thus reproduce “enclavement” on the level of literary subcategories in the larger realm of Francophonie. By venturing into the central *arrondissements*, both novels bring the immigrant enclave metaphorically *into* the Parisian center—an experimental move, to be sure, and one that sees no conceivable future in either text.

IV. Shérazade as a Shape Shifter

The character of Shérazade is at the center of Leïla Sebbar’s eponymous trilogy, including *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux vert* (1983), *Les carnets de Shérazade* (1985)

and *Le fou de Shérazade* (1991). Structured in a fragmented narrative that shifts perspective from chapter to chapter, the first novel in the trilogy features a few months in the life of a seventeen-year-old young *beur* woman named for the famed storyteller in *Les mille et une nuit*. Shérazade, whose family hails from Algeria, has run away from her *banlieue* to the then-bohemian right bank neighborhood of Beaubourg. She is something of a social pariah, surviving purely by means of her wit and resisting demands that she conform to any sort of social standard, be it that of Algerian immigrant culture, metropolitan French culture, or even the quasi-anarchist counter-culture of the squat where she has taken up residence. Françoise Lionnet identifies her as an “itinerant, fugitive, picaresque character and something of a social parasite” (Lionnet 168). Indeed, Shérazade bears a resemblance to the figure of the *pícaro*, defying the implicit social protocols and living outside of a standard economic structure. Yet the text does not quite perform the satirical function of the picaresque. Rather than a holistic social critique as such, its narrative fragmentation calls into question the aesthetic representation of a subject like Shérazade, as the historical, social and political circumstances that produce her are so varied and complex. *Shérazade’s* unstable form echoes the instability the eponymous protagonist herself feels as she encounters, again and again, representations of herself (or versions of herself)—ones she feels drawn to and repelled by simultaneously.

Shérazade’s daily life in a squat filled with other disenfranchised youth is punctuated by trips to the Beaubourg library in the Centre Pompidou, where she devours works on Algerian history, art, and literature. Her days consist of prowling the nearby streets, including the seedy rue Saint Denis, jumping on and off the metro to avoid police, and working a retail position inside Les Halles, which has changed over time from a bustling nineteenth-century food market to a labyrinthine mall. She is vigilantly aware of the way she is perceived by the various gazes

imposed upon her and her attempts to subvert any attempts to fix her into a legible identity express themselves in both her perpetual motion and itinerancy as well as her shape-shifting approach to fashion.

Shérazade, dans ses mains en coquille saisit les écouteurs du walkman de chaque côté du cou, et les replaça exactement sur ses oreilles, après avoir cassé le fil de rayonne rouge et jaune du foulard à frange brillantes, comme les aiment les Arabes de Barbès et les femmes du bled, lorsqu'elles n'ont pas encore été éblouies par les foulards Monoprix qui imitent, dans la couleur fondue et le motif abstrait, les foulards de marque, Shérazade n'aimait pas particulièrement ce foulard que la mauvaise qualité du tissu rendait trop mou et où le fil du walkman s'embrouillait, chaque fois que l'étoffe glissait, parce qu'un noeud simple ne suffisait jamais à la maintenir à sa place (Sebbar 8).

Shérazade must carefully consider her attire based on the neighborhood of Paris in which she dwells; in the immigrant-filled neighborhood of Crimée, she dons a *keffia*, a Palestinian-style scarf that indicates her Arab roots, but as she moves closer to the center, toward her new neighborhood, she opts for the more brightly colored scarf that is more demonstrative of her youthful life in Paris. Often, she disappears completely into the crowd in a neutral *impermeable*. Her sartorial choices reflect both her fluid identity as well as the sector of Paris in which she chooses to dwell from day to day. She is able to move between the most bourgeois and most crime-ridden sections of the city and its populace, defying all demands to fit into comfortable categories of French or Maghrebi. Thus she is keenly aware of the way she functions as an aesthetic object; while seeming resistant to being bound to a fixed set of tropes, she is also incredibly savvy in the ways she is able to circulate within and manipulate these pre-existing representational categories. Shérazade's resistance to being pinned down aesthetically is echoed in the aphoristic form of the text as well as the transitional spaces that its characters inhabit.

Notably, the settings of the novel are profoundly impermanent, whether temporary or public. The chapters in Sebbar's novel move from the Beaubourg library, to the streets of the

Marais, to a squat with a metaphorical revolving door, to the galleries of a modern art museum. Only fleetingly does the narrative ever enter a stable domestic space with a few short scenes in Shérazade's familial home in the *banlieue*. The majority of the novel takes place in what Marc Augé calls "non-places," that is, "hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity [in]...world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Augé 78-79). Augé contrasts these spaces to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*—places saturated with historical significance—but deems them to be just as dialectically important in the formation of cultural identity. "Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (Augé 79). The events of *Shérazade* take place among the not milieu the venerated *lieux de mémoire*, but instead transpire in liminal spaces of impermanence. This has the effect of superimposing the transitional quality of immigrant life, which is largely relegated to the outer circles of metropolitan Paris, to the very heart of the city.

Shérazade moves constantly, disappearing again and again from each habitation in which she temporarily stops, possessed of a keen, observing eye. Her experience of city space bears resemblance to a nineteenth-century detached *flânerie*, and even Michel de Certeau's subversive spatial practice of tactical walking. What is remarkable about Shérazade's journey into and rambles through the central *arrondissements* of Paris is her insistence on moving through it as an autonomous subject, despite the multiple forces around her attempting to repress her movements. Indeed, in many ways, Shérazade's perpetual motion through Paris stakes an implicit claim on inhabiting the city as a *flâneur*, despite the race, gender, and economic factors that would

otherwise foreclose this identity to her. Laura Reeck likens her engagement with the city to aspirant male bourgeois figures of nineteenth-century literature “who ventured to Paris from the provinces.” Certainly, Shérazade’s move from French periphery into center mirrors a classic trope of the nineteenth-century coming of age story. Reeck contrasts, however, “Rastignac, Frédéric Moreau, and Julien Sorel[’s]...premeditated intention and expectation of climbing the Parisian social ladder” to Shérazade’s motivation “simply to escape her familial environment” and use Paris as a “space of performance and enactment” (Reeck 82). But to see Shérazade’s engagement with the Parisian center as a mere “performance” of earlier models of bourgeois *flânerie* does not account for the subversive process of attempting to accrue metropolitan cultural capital through autodidacticism, and subsequently *refusing* that social currency by departing for Algeria.

V. Maps of resistance

Shérazade’s rambles and observations of the city are suffused with observations about the ways the Algerian culture from which she hails is mapped and inscribed upon the walls and sidewalks of Paris, often in gestures of implicit resistance. An episode on the *métro* demonstrates the way Sebbar subtly depicts the way that *any* form of moving through the city for Shérazade can potentially become one of resistance. The *métro*, is an example of what Henri Lefebvre would deem an “abstract space”—an infrastructural technology that allows the state and its citizens to run smoothly through daily life—but also a site of surveillance and repression. Shérazade begins by observing and recording, in particular, the ways that Arabic script is inscribed in graffiti all over the cars.

Shérazade prit le métro, sans bien savoir où elle irait. Chaque fois qu’elle voyait une inscription sur un affiche, écrite en caractères arabes, elle sortait un carnet

chinois réservé à cet usage, et notait avec application les mots, les phrases, elle ne savait pas très bien, vérifiait, après la copie si elle n'avait pas commis d'erreur, oublié un signe ou une boucle (Sebbar 206).

This scene recalls the terrified state of Rachid Boudjedra's protagonist in *Topographie*, who is stuck on the *métro* and unable to escape before meeting his brutal end because of his inability to read French. But here the direction and thus the consequences of the conditions of illiteracy are reversed—Shérazade cannot read the messages that are conveyed, like a secret code, between readers of Arabic in the quintessentially French metropolitan space of the *métro*. By inscribing Arabic script onto the walls of the subway, the *métro* ceases to be a “non-place” for those members of French society whose language and culture is subjugated and oppressed, and instead becomes a place of resistance and legibility. And though Shérazade cannot understand the meaning of the words, her impulse to copy the shapes of the words down, to repeat the motions of palimpsestic inscription, is evidence of her idiosyncratic approach to acquiring knowledge and subverting hegemonic cultural practices that would otherwise prompt her to assimilate.

Shérazade perhaps challenges the physical space of the city most potently in scenes of layering maps of resistance, quite literally, over the city space itself. As Elizabeth Holt asserts, “The legacy of Algerian independence hovers ambiguously over French national cartography as well as the spatial tactics of the residents of the *squatt* [sic]” (Holt 394). Shérazade's cohorts in the squat model resistant (or in de Certeau's lexicon, “tactical”) modes of moving through the city, a behavior that she herself appropriates without ever fully committing to a life of rebellion. Sebbar depicts multiple scenes of the squat's inhabitants examining maps of Paris, of France, of Europe, and of Algeria, spreading them out onto the floor of the flat or on the sidewalks of the city. In doing so, Pierrot, their unofficial leader, dismisses conventional experiences of Paris.

Pierrot examinait maintenant le plan de Paris. Il avait quitté le Nord vers dix-neuf ans et, à Paris depuis bientôt huit ans, il connaissait mal cette ville qu'il n'aimait

pas. Il ne comprenait pas l'enthousiasme des étrangers pour la capitale. Lui suivait toujours le même itinéraire, sans prêter attention à Paris. Il savait à quel endroit il retrouverait les copains pour une manie, une réunion, un casse, et depuis qu'il vivait au squat il n'allait plus à l'aveuglette d'une chambre minable à une autre, hébergé par tel ou tel. Il vivait en résistant clandestin, ne donnant jamais son nom ni son adresse (Sebbar 53).

In this practice, the characters perform the work of re-inscribing the center of the city as their *own* place, re-mapping and superimposing their “non-places” onto Paris. They thus implicitly insist on the legitimacy of the quarters relegated to them as immigrants—the *bidonville*, the *cité*, the *banlieue*—and superimpose these spaces onto the *lieux de mémoire* of Paris.

In an episode that appears near the end of the text, when Shérazade begins to consider leaving Paris and traveling further afield, she spreads out a map of Algeria onto the sidewalk, leading to an encounter that radically reimagines what a *lieu de mémoire* may mean to France's postcolonial immigrant population. An elderly Algerian man who bears a resemblance to her father approaches her. Upon viewing the map, he asks to look at it with her and reveals to her the routes and passages supporters of the Algerian resistance employed during the years of the revolution.

Ils étaient accroupis devant la carte tous les deux, l'homme montrait à Shérazade d'où il venait, c'est lui qui trouva le village du grand-père qu'elle avait cherché tout à l'heure. Ensuite il lui montra à quel endroit la Révolution avait éclaté, lui indiqua les wilayas, lui parla de la guerre. Il avait participé au déclenchement de la révolte, puis était venu en France pour fonder avec d'autres des réseaux... Il se surprenait aussi à parcourir de nouveau les trajets clandestins que les réseaux avaient mis au point dans Paris (Sebbar 165-166).

For Pierrot, Paris is a series of pathways to protest and transgression, and for this aged former Algerian revolutionary, Paris bears the traces of violent anti-colonial uprising. In both instances, there is an effort to reconceive and remap Paris as a space that not only accommodates its immigrant population, but as one that is profoundly transformed by the histories and knowledge

of resistance they carry with them. This scene is followed immediately by the arrival of the police attempting to control a nearby skirmish and demanding to be shown Shérazade's and the man's papers. By choreographing a scene of police repression following the identification of anti-hegemonic networks on the map, Sebbar transparently depicts the dangers of re-inscribing the palimpsestic traces of resistance upon Parisian public space. The very gesture of spreading maps on the ground in Paris that trace paths of resistance recalls Jorge Luis Borges's parable of the futile map scaled as large as the empire itself.⁹³ The immense effort to contain all complex details and histories in the representation of a given place, including both the narratives of the powerful and the subjugated, can undo its very functionality.

V. Autodidacticism and Autoethnography

Shérazade tests the limits of the text to contain the various and often contradictory forms of knowledge, testimony, and representation that constitute the points of confrontation (or, to use Mary Louise Pratt's terminology, the "contact zones") between French and Maghrebi people in the Parisian metropole. This is most evident through Shérazade's autodidacticism and dedication to excavating the personal, archival, and aesthetic histories that precede her own ephemeral habitation in Paris. Laura Reeck, turning again to Mary Louise Pratt asserts that Shérazade is not only an autodidact, but an "autoethnographer." "Sebbar endows Shérazade with the ability to represent herself on her own terms and to engage with the center in all of its complexities of people, places, histories, institutions...[She] decodes her observations, [yet] remains writing within a code...all the while adjusting it for her own purposes and context" (Reeck 82).

Shérazade herself is an avid consumer of all forms of knowledge surrounding the historical

⁹³ With reference to "On Exactitude in Science," by Jorge Luis Borges.

encounters of the French and Maghrebi peoples. Though she runs away from her home, and ostensibly her ties to Algerian culture, her first instinct is to retreat to the library and plumb the literary archive produced by Franco-Maghrebis such as herself.

It seems quite important to Shérazade not only to *live* the experience of a North African immigrant in France, but also to confront representations of that experience. And in doing so, through her reading practices, she indirectly yet undeniably changes the circulation of texts in the Beaubourg library and eventually the reading public of the French library patrons. The librarian is one of Shérazade's most loyal allies, and also the person who sees her most as a force of cultural change, rather than a representative of any sort of fixed identitarian category. "La bibliothécaire, en parcourant la fiche remplie par Shérazade à l'inscription, avait vite vu en elle une lectrice de ces livres que les Français ne lisaient jamais, soit parce qu'ils ne les connaissaient pas, soit parce qu'ils n'avaient d'intérêt que pour ce qui touchait au Patrimoine (Sebbar 90). The librarian, as a custodian of France's knowledge-bank, in this way bestows upon Shérazade a place in the intelligentsia who can shape France's patrimonial archive. An interaction between the librarian and a pair of inspectors Shérazade's family has employed to search for her reveals a great deal about her radical departure from the stereotype of Algerian immigrant youth. After checking the bars and nightclubs in which they expect to find her, they make their way to the library at the Centre Pompidou as a last resort. There, it is the librarian who not only defends her, but names Shérazade as part of a cadre of young female students who are responsible for the changing face of French literature as such, simply by demanding that minority authors be stocked on the shelves. The shift in the literary archive of the Beaubourg library is an endeavor to represent the multiplicity of postcolonial French culture itself.

Elle parla de Shérazade avec chaleur, leur dit qu'elle lisait beaucoup, en particulier des écrivains d'Afrique du Nord, elle cita Faraoun, Dib, Boudjedra,

Djebar, Farès, Haddad, Yacine, Roblès, Memmi, Choukri, Mammeri, Chraïbi, Ben Jelloun, des poètes marocains...mais [les inspecteurs] n’avaient pas l’air de connaître, elle indiqua plusieurs rayons qu’ils regardèrent de loin. C’est grâce à Shérazade et à d’autres lycéennes comme elle que j’ai ces étagères sur l’Afrique du Nord...Elles ne leur sont pas réservées: de plus en plus de lecteurs d’Aulnay, des Français, prennent ces livres qu’ils n’auraient pas eu l’idée de demander avant (Sebbar 125).

In naming this litany of Maghrebi authors, the text self-consciously places itself in a canon of literature that sits not only alongside, but within, *la littérature française*.⁹⁴ It is important to note that while Leïla Sebbar, the author of *Shérazade*, is part of these of new additions to the French literary archive, *Shérazade the character* is not. Instead, she is a reader, a consumer, a viewer, and an observer. “From Victor Segalen,”⁹⁵ notes Jean-Louis Hippolyte,

Shérazade understands that the traveler, the exiled, must be an ‘exote,’ that is, one who is resolutely foreign to the culture he or she explores, not through cultural hierarchy but rather cultural diversity. The modern novel linked the figure of wandering to the development of urban space, as Walter Benjamin notes in *Paris, capital du XIXe siècle*. But Shérazade’s wandering—her name signifies ‘open city’ in Persian—is also an exploration and reveals a lack—topically lipogrammatic—and a search, not only for the missing letters (Shérazade/Shéhérazade) but by extension for all letters, all books....The act of reading for its own sake takes on an importance that belies the need for an end, for it is the process itself that looms large in Shérazade’s vision rather than a hypothetical sense of resolution, as if the lack of titles (n’importe quoi’) bespoke

⁹⁴ On the ways ethnic and sociological categories come to complicate the relationship between *littérature beure* or *littérature de l’immigration* and *littérature française*, Christiane Albert offers this illuminating insight: “L’appartenance ou la non-appartenance des auteurs à la nation française et de la littérature française deviennent donc des critères déterminants dans la désignation de cette littérature. Ceux-ci apparaissent cependant problématiques dans la mesure où la plupart des écrivains qui constituent la littérature beure ne peuvent être considérés comme des étrangers puisque beaucoup d’entre eux possèdent la nationalité française. Ils ne sont cependant pas pur autant intégrés à la littérature française puisque l’institution littéraire dans son ensemble (édition, critique, université) éprouve la nécessité de les regrouper dans une catégorie littéraire spécifique et distincte d’elle. Ainsi ce qui sous-tend la catégorie “littérature beure” ou “littérature de l’immigration”, c’est la transposition dans le domaine littéraire de catégories non littéraires (sociales, ethniques, juridiques) et non a représentation littéraire de l’expérience de la rupture avec son pays ou sa culture d’origine. Théoriquement, celle-ci devrait être une étape intermédiaire menant à l’assimilation par la culture d’accueil puisque la plupart des écrivains qui composent cette catégorie sont nés en France ou y sont venus très jeunes, y ont été scolarisés et sont destinés à s’intégrer en France et à s’assimiler à la littérature française et à pendre de ce fait l’étiquette “écrivain beur”. Cet aspect transitoire de l’immigration n’est cependant pas pris en compte par la critique qui enferme les écrivains beurs dans une catégorie littéraire spécifique” (Albert 59-60).

⁹⁵ For an extensive study on Victor Segalen, see Charles Forsdick, *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

the necessary absence of names, compounding paratextual and onomastic lack. (Hippolyte 292).

Shérazade is decidedly *not* an equivalent of the legendary figure of Sheherazade, in that she is not a teller of tales. Her goal is not survival and homeostasis by means of storytelling. She is, rather, always *consuming* literature and always moving, escaping the gaze and bedrooms of the men who would keep her romantically hostage by inscribing her into already-written stories. In other words, Shérazade does not perform the role of the artist, but rather, the critic.

VII. The Flânerie of the Underprivileged

Hippolyte, like Reeck, compares Shérazade again to the figure of the 19th-century *flâneur*, an analogue that is as apt as it is fraught. The critical perspective of the *flâneur* is tied to his untethered mobility. Shérazade perhaps *moves* as a *flâneur* might, but with the immense (and undesired) weight of colonial and postcolonial history bearing down upon her. As a keen observer of nineteenth-century urban life, the *flâneur* could move about the city in a particular way because new Haussmannized form of Parisian space allowed for it. As David Harvey remarks of Paris after the massive undertaking of Haussmannization, “The new boulevards... permitted... free circulation of the bourgeoisie within the commercial and entertainment quarters. The transition toward an ‘extroverted’ form of urbanism, with all of its social and cultural effects, was assured” (Harvey 146). That the *flâneur* is a bourgeois subject is almost a given; it is a privileged individual who can spend his days and nights wandering about the regularized boulevards, awash in nostalgia (instead of working in a factory or in servants’ quarters). Walter Benjamin, in considering Charles Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, remarks on this figure’s ease among the throngs, as opposed to a mere city “pedestrian who would let himself be jostled by the crowd... [T]here was also the *flâneur* who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forego the life of a

gentleman of leisure. Let the many attend to their daily affairs; the man of leisure can indulge in the perambulations of the *flâneur* only if as such he is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city” (Benjamin 173). Shérazade, however, moves not with ease nor freedom, but with the desire to *escape*. She wishes to extract herself at once from the complex legacy of Haussmannized bourgeois Paris, as well as the *bidonvilles* and *banlieues* its formation was predicated upon—relegated spaces that would come to house families like hers.

Shérazade’s move into the city center and her ability to navigate through the bourgeois spaces of Parisian society as well as its seedy underbelly (we never quite see her taking up with the laborers of the proletariat) is reminiscent of traditional practices of *flânerie*. Yet her liberty to ramble does not come from the freedom of great financial comfort, but instead a conscious effort to live outside the regularized economies of either the immigrant working class or the French bourgeoisie. Rather than the canonical *flâneur*, who maintains no familiarity with the majority of French working-class citizens, Shérazade comes from an immigrant proletariat milieu and actively chooses to move through the city as a latter-day *flâneur* without the attendant privilege that would typically characterizes such a figure. The *flâneur* could let his mind wander freely for the very simple reason that his faculties no longer had to be engaged in vigilant self-protection. This is far from the constant state of apprehension and surveillance under which Shérazade must exist. As David Harvey notes, “the growing residential segregation not only protected the bourgeoisie from the real or imagined dangers of the dangerous and criminal classes but also increasingly shaped the city into relatively secure spaces of reproduction of the different social classes” (Harvey 146). This forced segregation of classes at once liberated the bourgeois subject to move about freely in the city, but also alienated him from his once familiar capital. Walter

Benjamin remarks that Haussmann, as “*artiste démolisseur*...estranges the Parisians from their city. They no longer feel at home there, and start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis” (Benjamin, “Paris 175). The nineteenth-century *flâneur* felt alienated from his city not only because the restructuring of city space makes the metropolis “inhuman,” as Benjamin puts it, but also because a portion of humanity itself, that is, the proletariat, had been evacuated from the city center. Thus, we can infer that the urban laborers that were relegated to the *banlieues* during Haussmannization were quite literally exiled and alienated (doubly alienated then—from work and from *workplace*) in the same moment that the bourgeoisie were conceptually alienated from their city. For twentieth-century postcolonial immigrants to Paris, the compounding of spatial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic alienation draws a seemingly impenetrable ideological wall between the *banlieues* and the city center. Shérazade’s unique power lies in her capacity to inhabit all these spaces and thus multiple subjectivities fluidly if not as “freely” as the classical *flâneur*. However, her inability to stay put in any of these positions makes clear the conditions of being a mutable subject—there is no option to settle and make a claim on any particular space or identity. Her resistance to remain still and become fixed in space is symptomatic of an underlying anxiety to settle into in any particular identity.

VIII. The Immigrant and the *Pied-noir*: Inverse Migrations

Shérazade’s most fraught relationship is perhaps with her *pied-noir* paramour, Julien, whom she encounters in the library. He is a scholar and researcher of the nineteenth-century archive of colonial French expeditions in Algeria. Their relationship has the air of a repetition compulsion—the desire to return to the scene of trauma and replay it. Her excavation into the literary archive in the Beaubourg library is matched by his pursuit as a scholar to inquire into the

complex history of colonial Algeria. Julien's fascination with North Africa harkens back to a belief that these two cultures are imbricated in inextricable way, and have been so since the time of the Crusades, if not before. His desire for Shérázade as a love-object is inseparable from his baseline Orientalist desire to possess the Maghreb. "Il travaillait à la fois sur des archives coloniales et des arabes. Il était curieux de tout ce qui, du plus loin de l'histoire, constituait sa propre histoire et celle de ces peuples, de ces civilisations qui se fréquentaient depuis les croisades" (Sebbar 106). As Elazar Barakn asserts, "Because of its colonial and neocolonial context, the exchange between Shérázade and Julien... must be constantly renegotiated... Their relationship is not to be read as an apology of colonization, as fruitful encounter or as the site of an unproblematic multiculturalism but, rather, as the realization that the colonial encounter, in its violence, created a hybridization that can never be erased. Such as *métisse* history must be dealt with, and the search for one's roots and identity must of necessity pass by this crossroads" (Barakn 262). And yet neither Shérázade nor Julien seem to quite engage in a straightforward "search for roots" in their forays into the various archives they plumb. Their activities as lovers are riddled with subversive performances of colonial stereotypes, volleying back and forth between re-doing and undoing the gender and power dynamics of colonizer and colonized.

In many ways, Julien is Shérázade's inverse. He is a migrant from Algeria himself, but the cultural loss he mourns is one of excavation and conquest. For him, the "contact zone" of Algeria and France was not quite one of "hybridity" or even "*metissage*" but domination. As a former colonist, he has received a very different historical narrative of the relationship between France and the Maghreb and maintains a romantic attachment to the idea of conquering and *settling* Algeria. To Shérázade, he waxes nostalgic about the pioneer-mentality of his

grandmothers' generation, ruggedly settling the inhospitable terrain of Algeria as though it was a *tabula rasa*.

Elles tiraient au pistolet et à la carabine aussi bien que leurs mères et leurs grand-mères qui, au début du siècle, ne sortaient pas sans un petit pistolet dans la poche profonde de leurs jupes paysannes lorsqu'elles allaient surveiller les semailles avec deux ou trois ouvriers arabes à cinq kilomètres du village. Ces femmes se levaient à trois heures du matin, attelaient et conduisaient la voiture à la cheval jusqu'aux champs. La mère de Julien avait été élevée par des pionnières hardies et vigoureuses qui savaient broder, gérer une propriété agricole, tirer à la carabine, galoper à cheval sur les Hautes Plateaux, soigner et accoucher les femmes dans les mechtas, faire des tournées d'infirmière avec boîte à pharmacie et piqûres, aider les institutrices des écoles ouvriers (16).

The romance with which he paints this portrait of pioneer woman stands in stark contrast to the texts from his research he reads aloud to Shérazade, emphasizing the fear of reverse colonization that marked the imperial project from its earliest moments.

Il lut à Shérazade un passage des chroniques algériennes de Théophile Gautier, tirées de son *Voyage pittoresque en Algérie* paru en 1845: 'Nous croyons avoir conquis Alger, et c'est Alger qui nous a conquis. Nos femmes portent déjà des écharpes tramées d'or, bariolées de mille couleurs qui ont servi aux esclaves du harem, nos jeunes gens adoptent les bourrons en poil de chameau. Pour peu que cela continue, dans quelque temps d'ici, la France sera mahométane et nous verrons s'arrondir, sur nos villes, le dôme blanc des mosquées, et les minarets se mêler aux clochers, comme en Espagne au temps des Mores' (Sebbar 182-183).

The two portraits of French women here could not contrast each other more explicitly—on the one hand we have venerated women who can conquer the Algerian *landscape* (with no mention of Algerian people) through hard and fruitful labor, and on the other, we have French women who are struck by Oriental lassitude, seemingly by donning the habits of Algerian women. It is adopting the *aesthetic* of the Oriental that, in Julien's construction, proves to be most threatening to the purity of French culture. His initial scholarly pursuit is to inquire into colonial education practices in nineteenth-century Algeria, but quite significantly, he succumbs to the desire to become a "collector" of Orientalist paintings rather than engage in any critical analysis of the

colonial period. “Julien...se promet d’entreprendre aux Archives d’outre mer d’Aix-en-Provence des recherches sur les institutrices et les instituteurs en Algérie, mais la passion de la peinture orientaliste le prit et il se découvrit peu à peu les défauts sublimes du collectionneur” (Sebbar 17). Though Sebbar portrays him to be a sympathetic character with a genuine reverence for North African culture, he cannot overcome his innate desire to capture, to aestheticize, to exoticize, and to succumb to the painterly gaze of the Orientalist. In his pursuit of Shérazade, he attempts to reclaim what has been lost with the end of empire. But she remains ever elusive, despite his attempts to fix her in photographic and filmic imagery.

IX. Orientalism, Neo-orientalism, and Re-orientalism

Julien’s fascination with Shérazade manifests in his attempts to match her in body to the images and descriptions of women in the historical and artistic archives of the colonial era. His desire is thus circular—his pre-disposition to be seduced by the Orientalist representations of femininity predetermines his approach to Shérazade. When she does not quite conform to his ideals, his solution is first to *teach her* about the gaze of the colonist, and eventually request that she *perform* the role. Julien intervenes in Shérazade’s autodidactic process of learning the complex histories that led to her family arriving in France by superimposing the master narrative of colonial domination and coercing her with its most lascivious expressions. He is particularly invested in instructing her on the aesthetic form of the odalisque, the recumbent form in the paintings of Delacroix, Gérôme, and Matisse. “Elles sont allongées, alanguis, le regard vague, presque endormies, elles évoquent pour les peintres de l’Occident la nonchalance, la lascivité, la séduction des femmes orientales. On les a appelées ‘odalisques’ dans l’art du siècle dernier en oubliant que l’odalisque, dans l’Empire ottoman, était simplement une servante, un esclave au

service des femmes du harem impérial” (Sebbar 182). Shérazade’s journey into central Paris allows her the possibility of educating herself liberating herself from the oppression she feels from her own family, but this process, through the figure of Julien, exposes her to residual and insidious forms of colonial oppression.

Fiona Barclay notes that the novel provides a view into the unique position of second-generation postcolonial immigrants in France. They are not only caught between two cultures as it were, but stand directly at the intersection between a subjugated colonial past and their media-saturated counter-cultural present. “*Sherazade*...explores how...Orientalist structures of thought intersect with global youth culture, producing an environment in which the haunting traces of the past are both an imposition to be resisted and fought against, and an empowering source which spurs the protagonist towards deeper levels of self-knowledge” (Barclay 22). But it is never quite articulated in the novel what conclusions Shérazade comes to in her search for “self-knowledge.” Sebbar does not offer a straightforward account of Shérazade’s response to the representation of Oriental femininity. The fragmentation of the text—the short, aphoristic form of each chapter and fundamental lack of access to Shérazade’s internal thought processes—makes ambiguous the way these paternalistic art history lessons provided by her *pied noir* lover affect her psyche. Shérazade’s capacity to learn about and thus inhabit multiple narratives and viewpoints in the multifaceted, fraught history of France’s relationship to its former colonies makes her subject to what might be called a “nervous condition,” though not that of Fanon’s “native.” Her escape from her home and family in the *banlieue* and subsequent propensity to volley between the Orientalist love-lessons in Julien’s apartment and the youthful rebellion of her squat betrays an underlying malaise and anxiety succumbing to any predetermined version of her identity.

Shérazade seems to command an impressive awareness of herself as an aesthetic object upon whom seemingly everyone around her wants to project their desires surrounding the encounter between France and Algeria—whether it be one of Pierrot’s agitated resistance or Julien’s Orientalist submission. Her response is at once to explore the various ways in which this encounter has been aestheticized through visual and literary representation and to manipulate those representations as she sees fit. Many critics have remarked on Shérazade’s remarkable sense of agency and empowerment, but it is predicated entirely on remaining in perpetual motion. Any moment of inertia finds Shérazade quickly escaping the settling impulse of succumbing to a fixed identity, while appearing to manipulate and subvert the many attempts to pigeonhole her. Sebbar depicts scenes of Shérazade and her female friends—women hailing from various parts of the Francophone postcolonial world—out together at clubs and parties, and finding themselves immediately aestheticized and fêted for their exotic appearance, especially as a trio. “Souvent elles entendaient dire d’elles: ‘Elles ont un look pas possible’” (Sebbar 145). That their “look” is “pas possible” to the *crème de la crème* of the most fashionable Parisians reveals the desire of the French elite to deem them mysterious enigmas. By doing so, they can simultaneously erase the long and complex history of colonization and subjugation that created the pathways for members of the postcolonial world to end up in 1980s Paris. Shérazade and her friends, however, demonstrate themselves to be very self-aware, utilizing the cultural capital the fashion world bestows upon them for being “exotic” to float between the squalor of the squat to the glamor of Parisian nightclubs. They even monetize their perceived exoticism by posing as fashion models in an absurd photo shoot mimicking a safari. The photographer shouts out a series of incongruous images that smack of modern incarnations of Orientalism. “On aime beaucoup les scènes de jungle et de forêt vierge en ce moment... Il manque une panthère mais

j'ai de quoi dans le coffre, ce sera pour tout à l'heure. Attendez, j'ai une idée, vous allez prendre chacune une mitraillette comme des *guérillères*, j'en ai là des vraies pas chargées, les jouets font toc, ça vous fait pas peur j'espère (Sebbar 147). Not only are they asked to imagine themselves in jungle scenes among big game, but as guerillas in arms, demonstrating the capacity for even anti-colonial struggle to become aestheticized, Orientalized, and evacuated of political power.

Shérazade and her cohorts engage in a counter-intuitive move by appropriating the stereotypes of Orientalism that is neither full-fledged *assimilation* into French culture nor a retreat into their “traditional” culture. Rather, they route their identity in Paris *through* the mediation of Orientalism. Moving into the Parisian center paradoxically propels them away from “Frenchness” as such, and into the stereotypes that French culture assigns to them. This maneuver is similar to what Ali Behdad and Juliette Williams, as well as Michel Laronde, in separate contexts, have deemed “neo-orientalism.” Behdad and Williams explain “neo-orientalism” to be

a mode of representation that, while indebted to classical Orientalism, engenders new tropes of othering... Not only do Middle Eastern writers, scholars, and so-called experts participate in its production, but they play an active and significant role in propagating it. Second, unlike its classical counterpart, neo-Orientalism entails a popular mode of representing, a kind of *doxa* about the Middle East and Muslims that is disseminated, thanks to new technologies of communication, throughout the world (Behdad 284).

Michel Laronde's definition of “neo-Orientalism” emphasizes that despite its new incarnations and forms, it continues to place the West at the center of any ideation of the non-West.

Tout comme le néo-orientalisme est une invention moderne de l'Orientalisme 'classique' en ce que le discours néo-orientaliste sur l'Orient (donc, par translation, sur l'Etranger) est tenu par l'Oriental (l'Etranger) en position interne à l'Occident; le néo-exotisme est un faisceau de pratiques qui appartiennent au Monde oriental (donc, étrangères au Monde occidental) mais sont le fait de l'Oriental en position interne au Monde occidental. Dans le deux cas, on voit que quelque chose ne change pas: c'est la place de l'Occident comme base référentielle du discours, ce qui confirme le maintien de l'Oriental dans la

position d'Etranger par rapport au discours occidental. Or, ce maintien est voulu par l'Etranger lui-même. (Laronde 293)⁹⁶

In Shérazade's process of encountering and engaging with the stereotypes of her culture that are, at bottom, an intrinsic aspect of French culture, we see the costs of assimilation. True "Frenchness" being a foreclosed option, the only choice Shérazade and her friends have to participate in central Parisian life is to perform their stereotypes, an unsettling example of "neo-Orientalism." Indeed by retreating back into older forms of Orientalist stereotypes, more than a practice of "neo-orientalism," they are perhaps more accurately engaging in what could be called "*re-orientalism*": that is, revivifying the means of classical Orientalist tropes to reach very different ends.

X. Refusing Representation

Shérazade's actions in the novel's last episodic chapters are symptomatic of distress and anxiety that she feels at this perverse reinstatement of troubling eighteenth and nineteenth century stereotypes. Julien's attempts to Orientalize Shérazade culminate in a series of photographs he takes of her striking Odalisque-like poses, a game she herself engages in willingly before tearing all the photographs down in a rage. "Elle arracha toutes les photos d'elle que Julien avait collées, punaisées, épinglées à la cuisine, à la salle de bains, sur les panneaux de la chambre et de la grande pièce. 'J'en ai marre de voir ma gueule partout, tu comprends? T'as pas besoin de moi vivante, finalement'" (Sebbar 152). In her anger, Shérazade comes to realize that Julien's objective, despite finding real person from his idealized land of Algeria, is to "capture" her (on film). He can thus transform her into a two-dimensional (and depoliticized) aesthetic representation of herself on which he can project age-old Orientalist tropes, making her more

⁹⁶ I was first alerted to Laronde's usage of the term in Monique Manopoulos's discussion of beur literature in "Decentering Language Structures."

valuable in photographic form than as living, breathing individual with an immensely complex history.

Ultimately, Shérazade is inspired by aesthetic representations that are bound up in the colonial era, yet depart from the classical motifs of Orientalism. In the apartment of Julien's filmmaker friend, who attempts, once again, to capture Shérazade on film by making her the star of an exploitative film about youth in the *banlieues*, she encounters a book of photography, *Femmes Algériennes 1960*, by Marc Garanger. Shot in the midst of the revolutionary period in Algeria, Shérazade perceives a fierce strength that stands in stark contrast to the indolence of the odalisque.

Les visages des Algériennes dévoilées devant l'appareil photographique que manipulait le soldat-photographie français pour le recensement de la population de l'intérieur, ces visages avaient la dureté et la violence de ceux qui subissent l'arbitraire mais qui savent qu'ils trouveront en eux la force de la résistance. Devant l'objectif-mitrailleur, ces femmes qui parlaient la langue de sa mère avaient toutes le même regard, intense, farouche, d'une sauvagerie que l'image ne saurait qu'archiver, sans jamais la maîtriser ni la dominer (Sebbar 211).

She is moved by the faces of Algerian women who stare resolutely back at the camera, bearing evident traces of the violence they have had to suffer generation after generation, rather than lying supine and powerless. It is of her own volition that she opens the book of photography, positing herself as an autodidact and an analyzer or a *critic* of the image, rather than becoming figural herself. Her eventual refusal to partake in the exploitation film is another example of Shérazade's desire to control representations of herself and others like her, this time through refusal rather than manipulation.

Shérazade's final encounter with a representation of what she feels to be an iteration of herself inspires her to leave Paris entirely, a move of *re-orientalism* that reorients her path in life. In the Centre Pompidou, a public Parisian space she nonetheless enters on her own terms by

stealing into the galleries after hours, she views Henri Matisse's odalisques in complete solitude and finds herself responding to them as she did before Marc Garanger's photographs.

Shérazade regarde *L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge*. Elle ne comprend pas pourquoi ça l'émeut. La femme allongée, les seins nus, les bras derrière la tête recouverts d'une légère gaze, les cheveux à moitié cachés par un foulard de mousseline brodée de perles, a des yeux noirs petits et ronds, une bouche petite, presque un double menton à cause de la position, Shérazade ne la trouve pas belle... [Elle] la regarde fixement jusqu'à midi. Elle a écrit la description de l'odalisque sur son carnet sans rien préciser, sans noter qu'elle la trouve plutôt laide et que pourtant cette femme la touche, elle ne cherche pas à savoir pourquoi. Sa décision est prise. Shérazade ira en Algérie (Sebbar 232).

Though the motifs of Matisse's painting that she lists bear resemblance to the odalisques of Delacroix and Gérôme Julien shows her—a languid, partially nude, richly adorned woman with the physical features of someone from the Near East—she is nonetheless transfixed in a way that is distinct from her reaction to the other works. Though Shérazade does not find the figure beautiful, she is compelled. She writes a description of the painting in her notebook in the same manner as she retraces the Arabic graffiti in metro, without understanding logically, but feeling connected. Matisse's oeuvre is, of course, distinct from the verisimilar style of classical Orientalism, with bolder colors and a distinct attention to the textures and patterns of Oriental textiles.⁹⁷ And it is Matisse's own work as a *re-interpreter* of classical Orientalism that perhaps attracts Shérazade to his version of the odalisque.

A very short chapter in the middle of the novel provides a clue to her emotional response before the Matisse. In it, the women of Shérazade's community gather together as they do every Thursday to sew traditional Algerian garments, but this time without Shérazade herself. The narrative proceeds in this scene suffused with what appears to be Shérazade's appreciation of the

⁹⁷ For an in-depth exploration of Matisse's relationship to textiles, see the accompanying book to the 2005's exhibition at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art: *Matisse, His Art and His Textiles: The Fabric of Dreams*, 2004.

ritual, though since she is ostensibly “missing” from the neighborhood and thus could not possibly be our entry into the scene. Nonetheless, its position as an anomalous break from the milieu of Shérazade and her Parisian companions gives us a sense that the gathering is an ongoing phenomenon, always playing in the background of Shérazade’s exploratory activities in the city-center.

Ce jour-là on cousait en arabe pour une mode arabe et dans des tissus arabes que seules les femmes de l’immigration maghrébine portaient. Suivant les années, Shérazade et Mériem, qui réussissaient toujours à récupérer les chutes les plus chatoyantes, avaient entendu, répétés des centaines de fois le jeudi puis les jours de fête, les noms des tissus qui se répandaient partout dans l’appartement, jusqu’à l’heure où le mari allait arriver, alors tout disparaissait à une vitesse qui étonnait toujours les deux soeurs, la place était nette comme si personne n’y avait vécu de la journée. Crêpe patène, mouslin, tissu croché, Champs-Élysées, tissu Chadli... Shérazade et Mériem savaient exactement ce qu’évoquait chacun de ces noms, les couleurs, les motifs, la souplesse ou la transparence, et jusqu’à la forme de la robe (Sebbar 193-194).

The attentive and careful descriptions of the way the women in this scene handle the various textiles and textures, and the detail with which Shérazade and her sister, Mériem, have memorized the highly specific names of each these fabrics work to undo the hegemonic Orientalist aesthetics of the classical odalisque. Though similarly surrounded by fabrics, the Algerian women in the immigrant enclave are far from indolent and recumbent. They are instead immensely productive and convivial, laboring and communing together to reproduce the motifs and patterns of their original culture. In so doing, they recreate a space of Algerian femininity in the French immigrant enclave that is far from the excessive indulgence of the imagined harem. It is perhaps the richness of Matisse’s attention to textiles—to the product of Algerian womens’ *labor* rather than their perceived wanton lassitude—that moves Shérazade enough to inspire her departure to Algeria.

In Shérázade's self-fashioned encounter with yet another representation of Algerian women, Matisse's odalisque does not function as an aesthetic object to be appreciated by the colonizing gaze. It is rather repurposed and reimagined as a way out of the anxiety Shérázade feels when the classical figure of the Odalisque is imposed upon her. Fiona Barclay turns to Edward Said and Charles Forsdick to interpret Sebbar's employment of the odalisque as a motif, arguing that it "operates as an example of Said's 'traveling theory,' an ideological application of the ghostly return in which an idea or theory becomes displaced from one location only to return, phantom-like, in the politico-historical context of another period, reshaped by the reception and use to which it is put. Forsdick argues that the implications of traveling theory extend to the 'displacement, recycling, and reinterpretation of colonial concepts (and more controversially, of the language used to describe them)'" (Barclay 24-25). The consequences in the act of "displacement"—of peoples, of theories, of aesthetic representations—as I have thus far discussed in this chapter have myriad political and psychological resonances: for example, "treason" (Mufti), "anxiety" (Ngai), or "haunting" (Barclay). When coupled to Said's "traveling theory," displacement takes on a valence of eternal return while opening up a space for "reinterpretation." In Shérázade's encounter with Matisse's odalisque, it becomes difficult to *locate* exactly where and how displacement occurs and what or whom is being displaced—the movements are so numerous that the scene virtually vibrates: Shérázade is displaced from Algeria to France, from the *banlieue* to Beaubourg, from the squat to the Centre Pompidou; the museum itself is displaced from its public opening hours to an infiltrated space of trespass; the figure of the odalisque is displaced from the reality of nineteenth-century colonial Algeria to the imaginings of a twentieth-century French painter, and from the form of classical Orientalism to Fauvist Expressionism. And moreover, the observant gaze of the painting's viewer is displaced

from that of a bourgeois French museum-goer to a seventeen-year-old runaway who has more in common with the figure in the painting than the vast majority of its audience. This last displacement—the displacement of viewing, observing, critiquing, and interpreting—is perhaps the most potent move of *re-orientalism* in Sebbar’s novel.

XI. The Assimilable and Unassimilable

The trajectory of Leïla Marouane’s protagonist, Mohamed, in *La vie sexuelle d’un Islamiste à Paris*, bears much resemblance to Shérazade’s—he grows up in a *banlieue* of Paris, Saint-Ouen, and “escapes” to central Paris as a means to untether himself from the obligations and oppressions of his family. But as opposed to the seventeen-year-old in the 1980s, Mohamed is a grown man who retreats to a bourgeois Haussmannized *immeuble* rather than a squat in the Marais. He appears to take a much more pre-meditated tack than Shérazade in his will to dominate Parisian culture by means of his bedroom.⁹⁸ Mohamed cuts a rather caricatured figure—he is a forty-year-old virgin and former Islamist with a raging Oedipus complex. Having found success as a *financier*, his goal is to acquire an apartment in a posh district of Paris as a means, eventually, to bed hundreds of French women. However, Mohamed’s fantasy life is rife with outlandish Orientalist stereotypes and he imagines his apartment to become a de facto harem in the center of twenty-first century Paris. Thus his process is threefold: he initially distances himself from his ardent religious beliefs and thus his familial obligations. He then changes his appearance by straightening his hair and getting blue contacts, and goes on to change his name to Basile in order to sign a lease on an apartment in the *sixième* or *septième arrondissement*. Finally his plan is to perform Orientalism—not his own cultural traditions, but

⁹⁸ It should be noted that Mohamed’s desire to take over bourgeois Paris through sexual conquest bears a great deal of resemblance to the narrative of Mustafa Sa’eed, the protagonist of the Sudanese novel, *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), by Tayeb Salih.

the *French stereotype* of the Oriental—as a seduction method. Thus Mohamed willingly participates in the inscription Julien, the *pied noir*, tries to force upon Shérazade. Mohamed sees his acquisition of cultural capital through French fluency, landing a Parisian apartment, and succeeding financially as a banker. By extension, his would-be performance of Orientalist tropes is ironically the ultimate expression of *Frenchness*.

Mohamed's relationship to his family is one fraught with class shame. He is embarrassed by the fate of his *ouvrier* father who, according to Mohamed, died an ignoble death as a secret alcoholic. Moreover, he seems to perceive a fundamental injustice of gender in the marriage of his parents that places his mother's education and liberal, progressive upbringing in Algeria on a lesser plane than his illiterate father's squalid habitation in the French hexagon.

Car mon père, à peine majeur, et bien avant de l'Indépendance de son pays, la chemise sur le dos, une carte de manoeuvre dans la poche, était venu suer sang et eau pour l'édification de la France, vivotant çà et là, dans les hôtels miteux et les foyers de la Sonacotra, ne convolant qu'à trente-deux ans, en 1965, avec sa très jeune cousine, ma mère, instruite certes, mais maigre et noire, donc impossible à caser sinon avec l'orphelin illettré qui, neuf ans durant, l'avait honorée lors du congé payé, attendant le jour où, riche, non pas comme Crésus, mais tout de même loti de quelques économies, il rejoindrait pour de bon sa famille (Marouane 28).

His revulsion towards his departed alcoholic father is bound up in his turn toward ardent and scriptural forms of Islam as much as it is a desire to seek success in French culture via money, women, and real estate. He feels an immense sense of shame in having had to follow his father around as he sought aid from the bureaucratic offices of France: "préfectures de police, services de logements à loyer modéré et Caisses d'allocations familiales, éprouvant de honte à l'égard de mon père et de son nom d'Arabe, de son teint et de ses frisottis, de l'indigence de son vocabulaire et de sa façon d'étouffer ses pas sa voix, qui ma fierté a pris de large (Marouane 29). Unlike Shérazade, who is more motivated to learn the history of her immigrant circumstances,

Mohamed is driven by humiliation and a resulting will to conquer. The portrait of his father here at once describes his defeat of spirit alongside his lack of vocabulary and his frizzy hair, equating *looking Arab* to being a perpetual pariah in French society. As opposed to the hyper-sexualized and possibly dangerous Orientalist stereotype of masculinity, in Mohamed's perspective, his father possesses only qualities of impotence and dejection. Mohamed is compelled to espouse characteristics that are completely opposite to those of his father, which push him, ironically, both towards stereotypes of the libertine Frenchman and the lascivious Oriental. And it is by taking up residence in the central *arrondissements* that he feels he can inhabit both simultaneously. Where Shérázade eventually learns to inhabit the position of the critic, developing an analytical distance from the options of identity that Paris offers her, Mohamed instead elects to succumb fully to both the compulsions of assimilation and "neo-orientalism."

At first glance, it would seem that Mohamed's decision to straighten his hair and don blue contact lenses while re-naming himself Basile Tocquard are measures to appear more attractive to his real estate agent as a client and potential lover, fully internalizing the implicit racism that determines the French public and political attitudes towards postcolonial immigrants. From the time of WWI, certain categories of new immigrants were categorized as "assimilable" and "unassimilable," as Elisa Camiscioli states:

While there were few obstacles for members of the 'diverse branches of the white race,' Africans and Asians were described as impervious to the workings of traditional methods of assimilation. For this reason only foreigners deemed 'ancestrally close' to the French, such as northern Italians, Belgians, and Canadians, should be encouraged to immigrate. ...[F]or white Europeans, assimilation would succeed if they 'settled permanently upon French soil, spoke...our language, adopted our customs, received our culture, crossed with the autochthonous population, and sent their children to French schools.' Whiteness was thus a precondition for access to the mechanisms of the 'French melting pot,' while Africans and Asians, because they endangered the 'physical and intellectual qualities' of the French 'patrimony,' were excluded outright from the possibility of integration.' (Camiscioli 66)

On the one hand, Mohamad seeks to assimilate, and it seems that before he can do so culturally (and, according to his desires, sexually), he must adjust his appearance *physically*, so that he seems to be a representative of the “assimilable” races. But if we are to understand Mohamed’s desires to be both assimilation *and* conquest, we might read the “whitening” of his name and appearance more subversively: he does so to enter into the mindset of the colonist.

In the novel, Mohamed’s desire for an apartment in the *sixième* or *septième arrondissement* is conflated with his desire to conquer hundreds of French women. Where the figure of the *pied-noir* in Sebbar’s novel desires to recapture, if only on film, that which was lost with the end of empire by possessing Shérazade, Marouane’s narrative suggests that staking territory in the poshest districts of Paris would be a colonizing maneuver for Mohamed, and one that is distinctly gendered. Certainly, he still smarts at being treated like a colonial subject in the twenty-first century in being denied a lease by many a real-estate agent, in addition to being turned away from jobs and nightclubs by “les Blancs.”

Non mais pour qui se prennent-ils, ces Blancs? qui honnissent, méprisent, dénigrent les origines et les noms de nos ancêtres? qui affirment avoir semé le bien sur les terres de nos aïeux? alors qu'aujourd'hui encore, en 2007, ils continuent de nous refuser leurs beaux quartiers? leurs prestigieux postes de travail? leurs boîtes de nuit? comme si nous étions toujours les indigènes et les sauvages de leurs colonies (Marouane 31).

Acquiring real estate in the center of Paris becomes not only a way of achieving the *Frenchness* that remains ever elusive—it is specifically to embody the role of the Frenchman as *colonizer*. Mohamed’s approach to the anguished position of “double consciousness” is to inhabit the most extreme ends of the identity spectrum simultaneously, resulting in an eventual collapse of sanity and narrative fidelity by the end of the novel. However, Mohamed’s racial disguise fools no one; his real estate agent directs him to the outer *arrondissements* of Paris, describing “un

appartement dans le 18e ou le 20e arrondissement serait *parfait* pour vous, monsieur Tocquard” (Marouane 42), thereby relegating him to the largely immigrant neighborhoods just inside the *Périphérique*. It is only through the connections of his westernized sister that he is able to acquire an address in the *septième*.

XII. Reverse Colonization

Indeed, Mohamed’s wish to fulfill the role of colonizer appears to be determined by the native French assumption that postcolonial immigrants have no other motivations in coming to France. Mohamed’s sister, who assimilates by marrying a Frenchman and minor celebrity, is presumed to be so assimilated that she is subject to conversations with her neighbor who decries the infiltration of Algerians into Paris. Citing their hatred for the French since “1830”—quite possibly the most oblique reference imaginable to the inception of the French-Algerian colonial campaign—the neighbor asserts that their most potent means of colonizing France in reverse is through the reproductive capacities of Algerian women.

“Que votre mari se méfie un peu des Algériens, madame de Montélimard. Qu’il prenne conscience que ce gens-là nous haïssent depuis 1830. Qu’ils ne nous aimeront jamais. Qu’ils sont capables du pire pour nous anéantir. Et que, du reste, ils ont promis de nous coloniser à leur tour. Et savez-vous quelle arme ils ont trouvée pour tenir parole? L’utérus! C’est comme je vous le dis, madame de Montélimard. L’utérus. Il n’y a qu’à voir leurs rejets, tous ces Mohamed et Mouloud, qui aujourd’hui défigurent nos banlieues (Marouane 94).

This neighbor’s narrative of marauding Algerians invading Paris, armed with the potent weaponry of the uterus, reaches its climax with a vision of the disfigured Parisian *banlieues*. As Naomi Davidson asserts, it is the changing face of the immigrant enclave, the transformation in the “physiognomy of neighborhoods,” that strikes fear into the heart of the most xenophobic natives of France.

It seems clear that the French sensation of an explosion of the region's North African population is not explained by real demographic changes.... [P]olice records show that certain neighborhoods of the 18th, 19th, and 20th *arrondissements*, for example, the police reported as early as 1918 that the area around Stalingrad/Jaurès had a high concentration of North African bars and cafés, most of which, they claimed, were also gambling dens. The novelty of postwar Maghrébin immigration for Parisian observers was the way migrants appeared to dominate the neighborhoods in which they established themselves. (Davidson 130)

In recommending him to the 18th or 20th *arrondissement*, Mohamed's real-estate agent attempts to contain this perceived spreading of the "physiognomy" of the enclave into the Parisian center—a veritable undoing of the radical reformation of Parisian space under nineteenth century Haussmannization. When Mohamed finally acquires his apartment, he revels in its location "en plein coeur de Paris" and in its bourgeois style: "Haussmannien, altier, pierre de taille," remarking that the name engraved on its plaque has a particularly decadent literary resonance. "Mais pas que ça: un homme, un littérateur, indiquât la plaque, du nom de Huysmans, né à Paris 1848, y avait rendu son dernier souffle le 12 mai 1907. Ainsi. Dans quelques décennies. Peut-être. Mon nom serait. Gravé. Au même endroit. Né à Blida. En 1966" (Marouane 59-60).⁹⁹ As Mohamed haltingly imagines that his name might be inscribed on the exterior of the building, he is particularly interested in the future plaque bearing the place of his birth: Blida, Algeria. This wish to inscribe, and thus make official, the circumstances of his life on the wall of a Parisian edifice is also a colonizing gesture—aesthetic and gestural, rather than violent and subjugating.

But again, Mohamed wavers between his desires to transform into the perfect model of a modernist French dandy and the most timeworn stereotype of an oversexed Oriental, in effect conflating the two figures. His first impulse is to furnish his new space like a clichéd harem imagining himself the "Sultan of Saint-Germain."

⁹⁹ Marouane no doubt refers to Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose *À rebours* is regarded as one of the most important turns from nineteenth-century novelistic naturalism to symbolism and themes of decadence.

À l'angle du boulevard et de la rue de Cherche-Midi, reprenant mon souffle, je me suis arrêté devant un magasin de tapis d'Orient. Deux ou trois kilims, des coussins, une lampe aux facettes multicolores, des amphores, un narguilé, bref un petit salon oriental dans un coin de ma salle de séjour, face à la cheminée, ne serait pas du luxe. Et s'il venait à ma mère, elle qui ne quittait jamais Saint-Ouen, de me rendre visite, un endroit où elle déroulerait son tapis de prières la rassurerait sur le sort de son fils. Ô lumière des jours de sa mère, toujours fidèle à ses origines et à son éducation... Mais comme autrefois les femmes des casbahs ne s'aventuraient pas dans les quartiers européens, ma mère ne venait jamais dans le centre de Paris, Barbès et ses environs demeurant, les rares occasions où elle quittait la cité, sa frontière (Marouane 59).

Here the symptoms of Mohamed's debilitating Oedipus complex become transparent, as his vision of an Orientalist fantasia transitions into imagining a suitable place for his mother to pray in the apartment, and just as quickly shifts into a rumination of her self-colonization in the *banlieue*. In doing so Mohamed engages in his own practice of Orientalizing his mother. She is "comme les femmes des casbahs" of yore who stayed behind the invisible border that cordoned off the European quarter. The apparition of Fanon's *bidonville* returns here, and by crossing the ideological border himself, Mohamed is wracked with anxiety (the "nervous condition," once again) unable to commit fully to any particular identity, real or imagined.

XIII. Losing Mohamed's Religion

In his inability to decide on a specific mode of behavior, or moreover, of existence in Paris, Mohamed exemplifies the most contradictory Orientalist stereotypes: hypersexualized yet virginal (if not impotent), hedonistic yet fanatical, threatening yet cowering. He professes, in his musings, vast physical and financial endowments and a will to make the most of his gifts in his new abode, located in the liberated quarters of central Paris. Yet his continuous trips home to Saint-Ouen at the beckoning of his mother—to speak about his familial duties to marry as the first-born, and to demonstrate

his mastery of Islamic scripture—betrays a much more tortured relationship to his present life as a would-be sybarite. The pull of a lived, practiced way of Islamic Algerian life that Mohamed’s mother fully inhabits, constantly and naggingly on the phone, serves to undermine his nefarious plans to live out the stereotypical transgressions ascribed to the Oriental. As his mother’s persistent reproaching compels him to again and again return to his suburban home, the text demonstrates that indulging in an Orientalist fantasia is impossible for Mohamed, as it is predicated on a palpable distance between center and periphery. The “periphery” is just on the other side of the eponymous highway, and indeed, now has a substantial presence in the metropolitan Hexagon. The banalities of quotidian immigrant life that his mother lists on the phone—dinner menu items, Friday prayer times, obedient convert sons-in-law—counter Mohamed’s wildly vulgar fantasy life. The comical contrast between the imagined of Oriental harem in the Parisian center and the practice of everyday life in the *banlieue* at once undermines age-old stereotypes of Maghrebi life as well as the regular panic surrounding the idea of radicalism brewing in the *quartiers sensibles*.

However, conversations with his younger brother tap into a more serious and volatile underlying crisis of faith that may well have propelled Mohamed towards central Paris and its insidious Oriental stereotypes. It becomes clear that Mohamed is well-versed in Quranic scripture, and better-educated than nearly anyone else in his extended family, making him an outlier and alone in his depth of knowledge in both Arabic and French. Marouane constructs an implicit enmity between the privileged *filz aîné* and neglected *filz cadet*. With an excessive obsequiousness that betrays a deep underlying bitterness, Mohamed’s younger brother describes his older sibling’s illustrious Islamic schooling:

Mohamed est très calé en religion. Il en maîtrise les règles et les dogmes peut-être aussi bien que l'imam el-Ghazali lui-même. Il le doit à notre grand-père, qu'Allah le reçoive dans ses Jardins, un homme de bien et de grand savoir, un des rares hommes lettrés de Blida... C'est ce maître qui a donné à Mohamed les enseignements du *Mashaf*, qui l'a initié aux doctrines des oulémas de renom, tel el-Ghazali, justement, et qui en personne le conduisait à l'école coranique chaque matin... qui aussi l'accompagnait à l'école publique, insistant auprès des enseignants pour qu'on lui apprenne bien le français car son petit fils serai peut-être appelé à rejoindre son père en France (Marouane 137).

As the sole recipient of an elaborate French and Islamic education in the family, Mohamed was elevated to the status of an *évolué* in his youth, paving the road for him to either become a pious imam or a successful, assimilated, *laique* member of French society. His brother goes on to limn with embittered irony just how different their present conditions are as a result of his family's decision to invest all their efforts into Mohamed's development. "Si je l'avais eue, cette chance... je serais aujourd'hui... un théologien de renom... Le chômage me sera finalement un mal pour un bien, J'ai tout le temps de lire et d'approfondir mes connaissances, et un jour je pourrai entre dans une grande école islamique, à Damas ou au Caire. Inchallah" (138).

Unemployment, according to Mohamed's brother, affords him the *time* to truly dedicate himself to the study of Islam, and he looks forward to enrolling in a madrasa in Syria or Egypt.

Marouane creates a potent sense of *class difference* between the two brothers that lead them on distinctly different paths, both in terms of their public life and their individual angst. To write such sentiments in 2007, with growing paranoia about disenfranchised Muslim *banlieusards* leaving for Syrian and Egyptian madrasas to be trained in militant Islamism, is extremely charged. By contrasting the malaise of the privileged and the resentment of the deprived between the two brothers, Marouane constructs a rich *mise-en-abyme* parable about the specter of Islamic fundamentalism.

XIII. Immigration, assimilation, and narrative instability

Mohamed (especially when performing as Basile, rather than his mother's deferent "prunelle de ses yeux") often comes off as flip and vulgar, indulging in the most explicit descriptions of interludes with women who may or may not be phantasmal. Yet his bluster is tempered by an insight into his troubled psyche. We come to learn that rather than piety, the breadth of his Islamic education has led to profound doubt and eventually apostasy. He remembers the teachings of his maternal grandfather, whose "tolerance" and Sufism eventually allow him to migrate to the "impious" nation of France.

J'avoue que parfois, oublieux de la tolérance de feu mon grand-père, ce soufi qui, ignorant les faiseurs d'anathèmes, en plein Blida, ville conservatrice et fanatique, s'il en est, avait dévoilé et scolarisé ses filles, parmi elles ma mère, et, invoquant *La-kkoum-dinou-koum-wa-li-dini*, permis à son neveu mon père, d'aller trouver pitance en terre impie, je me montrais aussi rigide qu'un pontife, renvoyant des gars au chômage et des jeunes filles dans des dilemmes inextricables (Marouane 27).

Mohamed's Islamic education in Algeria, then, contradicts common public discourse in France surrounding the virulent forms of Salafism presumed to be brewing in proto-terrorist cells across the Maghreb. Indeed, Mohamed seems to mourn the *plurality* of the Islam his grandfather teaches him. His regret indicates that the possibility of practicing a Sufi form of Islam, or really any form of Islam that may be deemed *interpretive* rather than *scriptural* is foreclosed to him. Mohamad's fraught personal relationship to Islam is perhaps made more complex by the attitudes of the French state which ironically corroborates a fundamentalist, monolithic understanding of the religion. As Naomi Davidson asserts,

The reason the French state treated immigrants from North Africa 'only as Muslims' is that French Islam saturated them with an embodied religious identity that functioned as a racialized identity. The inscription of Islam on the very bodies of colonial (and later, postcolonial) immigrants emerged from the French belief that Islam was a rigid and totalizing system filled with corporeal rituals that needed to be performed in certain kinds of aesthetic spaces. Because this vision of

Islam held that Muslims could only ever and always be Muslim, ‘Muslim’ was as essential and eternal a marker of difference as gender or skin color in France.
(Davidson 2)

Thus it would seem that it is in the very act of immigrating that Mohamed’s access to Islamic plurality is denied because of the French state’s insistence that there is *only one* Islam, which ironically colludes the sentiments of Islamic fundamentalism. And in legislating this monolithic version of Islam under the auspices of *l’état laïque*, the French state also effectively *racializes* Islam. Where Republican universalism ostensibly makes France race-blind—meaning there can be no official discourse on race, i.e., no state census—the establishment of *laïcité* in France in the twentieth century has made it distinctly possible to displace questions of *race* onto the question of *religion*. Davidson goes on to argue that “the equation of ‘Muslim’ with ‘Algerian’...at once denied [Algerian immigrants] a potential political identity that threatened its authority (Algerian) while at the same time making it impossible for them to lay claim to a different one (French), because of their innate ‘religious’ identity” (Davidson 10-11).

Mohamed’s obsessive and confused wavering between racial, religious, and sexual identities is (much like Shérazade) not simply a product of cultural “hybridity” as it were, but can be seen as a direct product of official French discourses surrounding postcolonial Algerian immigration.

Moreover, it is exactly Mohamed’s extensive education in both Islamic and western traditions that gives him the scope of mind to doubt. Much of his anxiety stems from his behavioral extremity—he is as much a student and practitioner of hedonistic French Orientalism as he once was of Quranic teachings. And yet he professes a fundamental lack of faith and tendency towards apostasy that no French vision of a monolithic Islam could account for.

Mohamed alias Basile, le maître, Mahmoud le pur, le disciple...Et si tout simplement je n’avais jamais possédé cette foi. Et si, produit d’un long et assidu enseignement, elle n’avait fait me frôler sans jamais atteindre la fibre? La vrai

fièvre, l'authentique, celle des gens à l'âme sans faille. Comment, autrement, un être peut-il à ce point se détacher de ce qu'il croyait la certitude même? (132).

At bottom, *La vie sexuelle d'un Islamiste à Paris* is the story of losing one's religion, but French culture cannot and does not offer to fill the void left in its wake for Mohamed. What follows is the dissolution of not only Mohamed's sanity but also the narrative threads that bind the novel together.

As the narrative progresses, Mohamed's growing paranoia, coupled with the text's increasing instability speaks to the psychological damage wrought in the performance of "neo-Orientalism." Mohamed is unable to "re-orientalize" and reclaim a degree of agency by inhabiting the position of the critic. Instead, he collapses *into* the narrative of residual Orientalism, in the novel's *disorienting* coda. By the end of the text, Mohamed has expressed his fear that his landlady is a female novelist, Loubna Minbar, who is stealing his life story in the service of a splashy future publication. It also comes to light that each chapter actually begins as a confession to a psychologist. Mohamed's family retrieves him from his apartment, which turns out to be a squalid hovel. The possibility of assimilating into Parisian culture, either by performing Frenchness, or more damagingly, French Orientalism, is revealed to be a complete farce. As Mohamed's family escort him away from his cherished *immeuble*, his neighbors recite banalities that emptily praise his capacity to integrate.

Si gentil.
Si discret.
Si bien intégré.
En une année, on ne l'a jamais entendu.
Ni visite. Ni sortie.
Merci, merci, disait ma mère.
Au début tout allait bien. Il ne sortait que pour s'acheter des cigarettes. Il se faisait livrer par le Monoprix et par des traiteurs.... Je m'occupais de son ménage. Il avait des piles de livres partout dans l'appartement. Puis il m'a retiré les clés et il s'est mis à me téléphoner pour me faire des reproches, qu'il ne retrouverait pas telle ou telle chose... Un vie d'ermite. J'ai pensé qu'il passait par une mauvaise

déprime qu'il finirait par s'en sortir, mais après la visite de sa soeur, son état a empire. (Marouane 315)

In their concern, they reveal Mohamed to be an elaborate spinner of tales, one so bound up in the various narratives mapped onto him that he inhabits no perceivable reality. In this way, Mohamed is the opposite of Shérazade, who actively resists being fixed to any one narrative, let alone tangled up in scores of them. As Mireille Rosello writes of Mohamed, “as the story progresses, the only freedom left to the character is the right to document his gradual lack of control over the narration. This is the story of a man who wants to take control over his life and tells the story of how he wants to start writing at the same time” (Rosello 180). However, he is distinctly incapable of creating a coherent narrative for himself or of rendering a representation of himself that is not caught in an echo chamber of pre-existing stories. By the end of the narrative, he himself does not know whether he is a character in a metafictional text by one Loubna Minbar. We are left without any trust in Mohamed’s sanity, nor assurance as to whether the events in the narrative actually happened, or even who has been narrating throughout the novel. The schizophrenia that undoes the entire novel reveals the consequences of breaching the boundaries of class, education, and religion that are all reified in the boundary between the *arrondissements* and *banlieues* of Paris—residues of France’s colonial policies in Algeria. Unlike *Brick Lane* or *White Teeth*, the exemplary and somewhat contemporaneous British novels that celebrate multiculturalism and integration despite the weight of historical trauma, neither *Shérazade* nor *La vie sexuelle* provide us with a model for assimilation or successfully living in the Parisian center as a postcolonial immigrant. Granted, there was no precedent for a hybrid French-Algerian middle class in the colony and subsequently in postwar France, as opposed to the concerted efforts in British colonial policy to fabricate a bourgeois middle class in the Subcontinent. Thus the text indicates that moving into a higher echelon of French society for a

working-class Algerian immigrant involves completely internalizing even the most insidious historical stereotypes of one's own culture. As *La vie sexuelle* demonstrates, this perhaps more dangerously alienating than the widespread immigrant illiteracy of the previous generation, and the consequences of this practice are profoundly unsettling.

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Chapter 4

The Council Flat and the Globe: Multiculturalism and Settling in *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*

Bengali, Bengali
Oh, shelve your western plans
And understand
That life is hard enough when you belong here

—Morrisey, “Bengali in Platforms”

By the late 1980s, the South Asians immigrant communities populating Britain’s urban centers had established themselves as a formidable cultural and political force. *The Shadow Lines* and *The Satanic Verses*, both published in 1988, plumb the archival and mythological histories that determined the conditions of South Asians migrating and circulating through Britain and the Subcontinent. The latter novel resulted, of course in the Rushdie Affair, which would leave an indelible mark upon the status of British South Asian Muslims, and become a determining factor in both the conditions of migrating *to* and settling *in* the U.K. The narratives of those two sprawling, dynamic novels are in perpetual motion, moving between myriad geographical locations and historical moments to solve the puzzling configuration diasporic movement to and from England. The 1980s were a pivotal decade for black Britain as a whole—not only did it establish the salience of cultural minorities to the production of British culture at large, but, as

this dissertation has demonstrated in its discussion of *The Satanic Verses*, the 1980s also marked the fissuring of cross-ethnic solidarities among Commonwealth immigrants. As James Procter argues in *Dwelling Places*, there is a discursive shift that occurs in literature from this period that portrays the immigrant experience: from migration and “journeying” to settling and “dwelling,” as he puts it. “Travelling rhetorics tend to underplay the extent to which diaspora is also an issue of *settlement* and a constant battle over territories: over housing and accommodation, over the right to occupy a neighborhood, over the right to ‘stay put’” (Procter 14). The process of *settling* in the United Kingdom for immigrants arriving from South Asia, though following many similar patterns to their Caribbean contemporaries, takes a very distinct turn after the late 1980s, and the literature representing this period of immigration shifts in kind. I use “settling” to mean simultaneously to inhabit, to negotiate, and to compromise, and the way this term shifted between its various connotations throughout the late twentieth-century. The landscape of South Asian settlement in the U.K. changed markedly at the end of the twentieth century as the public and political strategy of multiculturalism was implemented to address the growing immigrant populations. The place of South Asian immigrants in British culture shifted again in the wake of the Rushdie Affair and the attendant social phenomenon of a seeming uptick Islamic fundamentalism within the second generation.

This chapter examines two decidedly post-Rushdie Affair novels that portray the changing terms of legitimacy and citizenship for South Asian immigrants from the 1980s to the turn of the twenty-first century. *White Teeth*, published in 2000, was widely lauded and sometimes criticized as a celebration of the new multicultural composition of postwar London. The novel spans from the late 1970s through the new millennium, focusing on the intergenerational experiences of two intertwined families, one Bangladeshi and the other

Jamaican-English in the North London neighborhood of Willesden. That its author, Zadie Smith—a young woman of English and Jamaican parentage herself—centers her narrative largely around the perspective of a middle-aged Bangladeshi man already speaks volumes about the kinds of cultural contact and mixture afforded in the immigrant enclaves of London. *Brick Lane*, published just three years later, is similarly focused upon the fate of a Bangladeshi family in a London immigrant enclave, but its tone is far less ebullient. Monica Ali's novel sprawls neither historically nor spatially in the manner of Smith's novel, nor does it attempt to encapsulate the variegated postcolonial histories that comprise contemporary multicultural London. Indeed, *Brick Lane* scarcely moves out of the Estates housing complex in which its characters seem to languish after the long, hard journey to London from Bangladesh. Where *White Teeth* seeks to capture the dynamism of millennial London by moving breathlessly between historical, generational, and ideological perspectives, *Brick Lane* remains fixed and unmoving, bound by the perspective of its wifely protagonist and the walls of her constricting tenement flat. Smith's novel attempts to encompass the totality of the expansive interconnected histories that seemed to bring the world unto the London enclave. Ali's novel, however, turns decidedly inward with a tight focus upon the paradoxical insularity that results from the transition of *migration* to *settling*. The gulf that separates these two novels tonally, and moreover, ideologically, is perhaps produced by the turn of world events in the mere three years between their publication dates: the gaping rent torn in the political fabric of the multicultural West which was the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001.

Both *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* depict tumultuous lives of immigrant families struggling to understand the bounds of belonging in late twentieth-century London—from the 1980s to the new millennium in the case of Smith's novel, and just after September 11, 2001 in

Ali's. Though very different in style, both texts focus closely upon the fates of two different Bangladeshi families and the ways they do and do not interact with the multiethnic society around them. At the center of these two works is the question of assimilation—whether the Bengali families will assimilate to the standards of a proper English life, or whether the U.K. itself will assimilate to accommodate its new multicultural constituency. *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* approach the thorny issues of assimilation belonging by depicting the transition between the period when Commonwealth immigrants were largely migrating and circulating men to the period when substantial immigrant families and by extension, immigrant communities, were established in the outer enclaves of London. In so doing, the settings of both novels span from the 1970s through the turn of this century, and almost by necessity, take on in their narratives the increasingly formidable presence of conservative Islam among the second generation of South Asian immigrants. They are both examples of what literary scholar Mark Stein calls the novel of “transformation,” as opposed to the canonical *Bildungsroman*. What distinguishes the novel of “transformation” is that “a *performative function* can be ascribed to these fictions in that they are not only inscribed by the cultures they inhabit: the texts in turn mold these very cultures.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the late-twentieth century immigrant novel that depicts British South Asians not only *portrays* the transition from a period that was immediately postcolonial to the post-9/11 moment of globalization, it also *catalyzes* that transition.

Between the Rushdie Affair and the turn of the twenty-first century, partly in response to the end of the Cold War and partly in response to concerns about the volatile resistance building within the U.K.'s growing immigrant population, Britain implemented efforts to assuage hostilities between immigrant groups and the British public in a move towards

¹⁰⁰ Stein specifically calls the “black British” novel one of transition, but here I extend his definition to include the transition *out* of the “black British” cultural formation and into one centered more on ardent forms of Islam for British South Asian Muslims at the turn of this century (Stein xvii).

“multiculturalism.” Bhiku Parekh, a consultant at the Runnymede Trust, Britain’s largest racial-equality think tank, describes multiculturalism as neither “a political doctrine...nor a philosophical...theory” but rather “a perspective” with central insights that are attentive to cultural difference as well as “internal cultural pluralism” (Parekh 238). Fundamentally, this “perspective” promotes the celebration of differences between the myriad groups of people who have come to settle in the U.K., as long as there is an agreement that everyone is different in the *same way*. Multiculturalism as a political strategy grew out of the impulse to mollify percolating hostilities between the British host culture and its formidable population of postcolonial immigrants. It transformed not only public and political discourse surrounding immigration in the 1980s and 1990s, but also made its mark on the novels that address the phenomenon in their narratives.

Both of these novels focus upon the aftermath of the initial great wave of Commonwealth immigrants and the attempts to establish a rooted (rather than a migratory) existence in London. Both novels proceed from the vantage point of the turn of the twentieth century and in that capacity, they bracket the historical moment of their specific protagonists. *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* are explicitly post-Rushdie Affair; in addition to incorporating the event in their narrative diegeses, their reception has been unavoidably colored by the potent afterlife of *The Satanic Verses*. Where Rushdie’s novel seemed to predict the dissolution of black British solidarity and the percolation of a new cultural form that harkens back to puritanical strains of Islamic thought, both *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth* address the burgeoning of that new cultural form in its lived iteration. Both novels feature young Bangladeshi men who turn to a global, deracinated form of Islam to address the impossible paradox of trying to establish postcolonial roots in the former imperial center. This tendency stands in direct opposition to the paradigms of

cultural conformation imposed upon second-generation immigrants from multiple directions. The principle demand from the dominant culture is to assimilate and become seamlessly British, rendering ethnicity and cultural ties transparent (i.e., a French-style “universalism”). Pressure comes also from the first generation of immigrants, reinforced by the uninterrupted family structure and communal ties that were facilitated by the 1971 Immigration Act, to preserve the “roots” and integrity of the originary culture and “replant” them in England unchanged. The intensive *inward-looking* focus upon domesticity and family life in *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* is, in both cases, a rumination on the after-effects of the late twentieth-century shifts in immigration policy. They are stories of “settling,” asking at a profound level what it means to belong in an increasingly multicultural London. And ultimately, both novels negotiate the fraught question of who should be allowed to *stay* within the bounds of the British nation-state, and who eventually must migrate away. In this negotiation is the implicit injunction to compromise and do away with the historical particularities—and indeed the traumas—that immigrants bring with them to twenty-first century Britain. In the case of *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*, the novel of immigration finds itself uneasily transitioning into the novel of multiculturalism.

I. *White Teeth's* Melting Pot

Zadie Smith’s much-celebrated novel, *White Teeth*, is a text preoccupied with histories—linear and circular, historiographic and recounted, meticulously dated and glaringly implausible. Published twelve years after *The Satanic Verses*, the novel portrays a London that appears to have mellowed, in many ways, from the incendiary violence in Rushdie’s text. It seems to portray an England that has achieved some degree of (precarious) multicultural harmony. Yet

under the text percolates a sort of millenarian tension, as though it has brought the entirety of colonial and postcolonial history onto the head of a pin and is waiting for some sort of societal explosion. With its multiple, multiethnic points of view and interweaving of colonial and postcolonial histories into its own narrative, *White Teeth* was widely hailed as the novelistic incarnation of multicultural England. But its very surplus of information—personal histories, facts, names, dates, flashbacks from multiple perspectives—results in an over-full narrative can barely hold together, and indeed begins to fall apart upon applying the slightest analytic pressure. The histories presented through each character in *White Teeth* are riddled with improbabilities, inaccuracies, and logic loopholes. The vast world that appears to fit into middle-class immigrant neighborhood Smith depicts in the novel remains without depth—or rather, the appearance of depth without obligations to historical fidelity—reflecting quite clearly the underlying logic of multiculturalism, which celebrates difference on the condition that there should be no inquiry as to *why* that difference exists. (“We’re here because you were there,” as a slogan made popular among Britain’s non-white immigrant populations goes.) However, *White Teeth*, despite its laudatory reception, can hardly be categorized as propaganda for a multiculturalist agenda. Its representation of the unprecedented cultural configurations that result from decades of immigrant influx is by equal measures celebratory and cautionary.

At the close of the twentieth century, *White Teeth* categorizes the previous hundred years in this fashion:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O’Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checkups (Smith 271).

Reading somewhat like Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus," engraved at the foot of Ellis' Island's Lady Liberty and extending a welcome to all "huddled masses," Smith here depicts the London of *White Teeth* as multicultural utopia whose historical determinants have become little more than salt on old wounds. On metropolitan soil, the improbable nomenclature of these playground dwellers indexes a utopian *mélange* of ethnicities, histories, and cultures, the specificity of which becomes secondary to the description of newly formed identities.¹⁰¹ As Sarah Upstone notes, Smith's representation of London establishes "locations filled with evermore subtle and narrow spatial allegiances.... No longer divided simplistically by race between the migrant and indigenous population,...[h]ere it is economic difference, and not race, that divides the city" (Upstone 93). Moreover, the economic status of immigrant families determines the specific ethnic mixture of the enclave. *White Teeth* takes place largely in Willesden, a North London neighborhood that is slightly more middle class than the East End neighborhood from which Samad Iqbal, the novel's sometimes protagonist, and his Bangladeshi family, depart in the first chapters of the novel. There, the Iqbals' lives intertwine the half-British half-Jamaican Jones family. Similar to *The Satanic Verses*, Smith's text depicts South Asian and Caribbean immigrants living together alongside Jewish and English families, the difference being that the characters no longer seem to suffer from class-based friction. Class inequity mingles out as does racial inequity in the vision of a multicultural England, replaced with the rainbow of cultural difference. *Middle classness* is logically the greatest aspiration of multiculturalism. The move into the middle class for the postcolonial immigrants in *White Teeth*, the flattening of racial and socio-economic difference, is contiguous with a flattening and ironing out of historical details that reveal the legacies of forceful subjugation and domination that drove

¹⁰¹ The question arises here of the relationship between "multiculturalism" and "creolization." The former is generally associated with a cultural heterogeneity that occurs in the "global North" as a result of immigration, and the latter with the cultural admixtures resultant from the mass migrations of the slave trade and indentured servitude.

colonization in the first place. In the world of *White Teeth*, the specificities of those histories appear to no longer matter—we simply know that history *exists*. History becomes no more than an ornament or a trope. The stakes of *White Teeth* appear to be to represent the totality of multicultural London's temporal and geographic vectors. The novel's obsessive catalogue of dates in world history follow timelines that are not always clear, and in many instances, rather implausible.

The surplus of history coupled with the very improbability of those histories makes *White Teeth* appear to crumble under the weight and scope of its own grand project. In addition to the false histories that riddle the narrative, its characters repeatedly express dissatisfaction about the state of contemporary London and their own place in it. Thus as soon as the text presents the notion of a stable multicultural narrative of contemporary London, it subverts and undoes the possibility. The formal instability of the text indicates that a stable multiculturalist narrative of contemporary England is not sustainable. *White Teeth* puts on display the societal and cultural solutions Britain offers to the class and race anxieties wracking a text like *The Satanic Verses*. Yet it simultaneously betrays an internal ambivalence to these solutions by demonstrating, through the instability of its form and its characters, that these solutions (i.e., upward mobility, racial tolerance, middle class life) are only treatments to the symptoms of much deeper historical traumas.

II. Illogical Histories

The novel obsessively catalogues dates in world history, but the logic of its timelines are not always clear. The keeper of many of these histories is Samad, who variously identifies as Bengali, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and Muslim, but never English. The way Smith decides

to draw Samad's character, a WWII veteran who fought on behalf of Her Majesty's Armed Forces on the Western Front, is full of logical improbabilities. Smith is careful to provide many meticulous details about Samad's past, but none seem to quite add up to an imaginable personal history. Supriya Nair remarks that a "seemingly meticulous attention to history in the entwined chronology of the chapter headings, aligning each character with apparently meaningful paired years (Archie 1974, 1945; Samad 1984, 1857; Irie 1990, 1907 etc), Smith forces us to reconsider what we deem to be History and how it gets recorded as such" (Nair 3). Certainly, a number of these years figure prominently in Britain's long relationship with its (post)colonies—1857 being the year of the Sepoy Rebellion and Britain taking imperial control of India rather than remaining a trading company, and 1945 marking the end of WWII and the last gasps of empire. Other years are noticeably absent, for example: 1947, the year of Indian Partition; 1952, the year the *Empire Windrush* ship brought thousands of Caribbean migrant workers to English shores; 1962, the year of Jamaican independence; and 1971, the year of Bangladeshi independence from West Pakistan. By focusing on historical moments that are not common touch points in postcolonial timelines of decolonization and nation-formation, the novel foregrounds minor histories and narratives outside of the paradigmatic *Bildungsroman* qua national allegory. But by eschewing "accuracy," as it were, the novel calls into question the very purpose of limning these "minor histories."

Samad's confused sense of history leads him to seek resolution (and perversely, assimilation) through an extramarital affair with his twin sons' young teacher. Seducing a custodian of English culture and knowledge, low on the educational totem pole as she may be, affords Samad access to some form of social capital in London. Poppy Burt-Jones, whose surname could not be more typically English, also bears a first name that is heavy with British

military significance. Poppies, of course, represent fallen Commonwealth soldiers during the World Wars, and also signal the end of empire. Samad's failure as a soldier fighting in Europe on behalf of Her Majesty's Army during WWII may be responsible for his attraction to Poppy, whose name indexes the mortal fate many war heroes. To Poppy, Samad explains his Subcontinental heritage.

'I'm not actually *from* India, you know,' said Samad, with infinitely more patience than he had ever previously employed the many times he had been required to repeat this sentence since moving to England. Poppy Burt-Jones looked surprised and disappointed. 'You're not?'

'No. I'm from Bangladesh.'

'Bangladesh...'

'Previously Pakistan. Previous to that, Bengal' (Smith 112).

Though this exchange reveals a great deal about Samad's presumptuous pedantry, the explication of his nationality makes very little sense. Having fought in WWII during his twenties, Samad, whether in East or West Bengal, would have been born in a united India, and thus he *is* actually from India. Moreover, following the timeline of the novel, Samad would have arrived in London sometime during the 1960s, before the establishment of Bangladesh as sovereign nation-state. And thus Samad is not actually *from* Bangladesh—he would have emigrated from East Pakistan—unless he is claiming Bangladeshi nationality as a technicality. Moreover, by distinguishing the region of Bengal as the predecessor of (East) Pakistan and Bangladesh, he seems to imply, rather confusingly, that Bengal is and has always been outside of India. Though calling Samad's claims of national affiliation into question may seem like hair-splitting, the convoluted logistics of citizenship in South Asia were life and death matters in the mid-twentieth century, and it would not seem that an immigrant so invested in his ancestry would have overlooked these technicalities of border drawing and allegiance-pledging, particularly when trying to impress a potential lover.

The issue of Samad's problematic Bengaliness becomes further complicated as Smith delves into the history of his exalted ancestor, Mangal Pande. Pande, (or "Pandey" in many historical accounts) shot the first bullet in the Indian Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. Samad claims to be a direct descendent of this Sepoy with insurgent tendencies, whose legacy is dubious in both British and Indian historical accounts. In a drunken defense of his military capabilities to his army-buddy, Archie, while stationed in Italy, Samad expounds for the first time of what will be a lifelong and exhaustive rehearsal of his ancestor's achievements.

'I am an officer! Not some mullah, some sepoy, wearing out my chappals in hard service. My great-grandfather Mangal Pande'—he looked around for the recognition the name deserved but, being met only with blank pancake English faces, continued—'was the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!'"

Silence.

'Of 1857! It was he who shot the first hateful pigfat-smeared bullet and sent it spinning off into oblivion!' (Smith 75).

Again, Samad's allegiances are confusing in this statement, as he is simultaneously claiming that he should be a high-ranking soldier fighting on behalf the British army on the Western Front, and that his military capacities are inherited from his mutinous great-grandfather who inspired an uprising *against* the British Imperial army. Historical accounts of the Pande legend cast doubt on its accuracy. As historian William Dalrymple remarks, "If Mangal Pandey was the sepoys' inspiration, they certainly did not articulate it, nor did they rush towards Barrackpore or Calcutta [where Pandey's revolt took place]. Instead it was, unequivocally, the capture of Delhi which was the great transforming masterstroke for the Uprising" (Dalrymple 22). Smith's drawing of a genealogical line between Samad Iqbal and Mangal Pande does not make historical sense, and thus her stakes in this lineage, and thus the stakes of drawing this genealogy come into question.

As multiple critics have noted, Mangal Pande is an unlikely relative of Samad Iqbal, a self-professed ardent Muslim. Tabish Khair observes: "Mangal Pande is not just a Hindu name, it

is a twice-born, pure-as snow Brahmin one. It is difficult to imagine the descendants of the Mangal Pandes of India converting to Islam, let alone a firebrand version of it, and that too after the snuffing of the last symbols of Muslim glory in 1857” (Khair 1). As Ghosh illustrates in *The Shadow Lines*, the fraught history of difference within the larger umbrella category of “Bengali” was no small matter at any point in the twentieth century, even in diaspora. It was grounds for the British empire to partition Bengal in half twice, first for administrative purposes in 1905 and second to establish the border between Indian and Pakistan in 1947 along Hindu and Muslim demographic lines. The sectarian violence of these Subcontinental partitions, particularly the second, is well-documented at this point; needless to say, one’s religious lineage is hardly an arbitrary matter in questions of identity formation for any migrant hailing from India-Pakistan-Bangladesh in the U.K. It seems all the more confusing that Samad would indulge such hagiographies of his ancestor to impress his English cohorts, since, as Ashley Dawson notes, “unfortunately for Samad, British colonial historians have represented Mangal Pande in less than the heroic light that he deserves, turning him into an intoxicated and incompetent buffoon who unwittingly got caught up in the sweep of history” (Dawson 158). Furthermore, the chance of any Bengali, Muslim or Hindu, fighting on behalf of the British during WWII in Europe is extremely slim. Thomas Janoski comments on the peculiar position of Indian soldiers before decolonization, who were obligated to fight in the wars as royal subjects but not granted the full benefits of British citizenship. “During World War II, nearly a million and half Indians served in the military, especially in the Burma campaign against the Japanese. However, British regiments of Asians or Africans did not fight in the United Kingdom or Europe” (Janoski 64). The historical implausibility of Samad Iqbal being a descendent of Mangal Pande, and moreover proclaiming this ancestry as a soldier in Italy, could possibly be chalked up to a research

oversight on Smith's part, but Samad's importance as a figure of deracinated Bengalianness in Britain remains. Dawson argues that by "wittily drawing on the analysis of the subaltern studies collective, Zadie Smith uses the case of Samad's great-grandfather to demonstrate the extent to which the historical record can be manipulated to serve the interests of those in power" (Dawson 158). In this sense Smith plays with the very narrativization of history by making *both* the British ridicule and Samad's recuperation of Pande equally absurd, yet the sense of anger and rebellion that fuel Samad remain relevant despite the historical implausibility of their source.

Of course, *White Teeth* as a work of fiction and a representation of contemporary London, bears no responsibility for historical accuracy. But Smith's investment in providing historical detail, spurious as it may be, raises the question of the ways "history" becomes a slippery signifier as the establishment of postcolonial immigrant communities in the United Kingdom move further and further away from the colonial era. As Supriya Nair assesses, "all things are possible in the morphed spaces and identities of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial 'mitosis,' one of the chapter headings in Samad's section of the novel" (Nair 4). Here Gayatri Spivak's bifurcation of the word "representation" into *darstellung* and *vertretung* again becomes important to consider. The historical "inaccuracies" of Smith's portrayal of Bengalianness in the text are less important than its instrumentality as a fictional trope, which in turn, is much more concerned with the political representation of the immigrant condition in the United Kingdom than the Partition of India. The historical preoccupations of *White Teeth* remain at the level of simple preoccupations—that is, points of worry, obsession, rehearsal, and repetition with difference—rather than verisimilar temporal anchors. Samad Iqbal, after all, is a fictional character who, rather than being a typical example of a Bangladeshi immigrant, exemplifies only the qualities of Bengalianness that are relevant to late-twentieth century multicultural London life.

Samad's confounding and apocryphal relationship to Bengali-ness, displaced as it is in the metropole, and professed with such confidence, could only be imagined in diaspora, where local disparities between class, caste, language, and religion can become secondary to the allegiances formed against the host culture's hegemony.

Samad's Bengali-ness, then, is a purely *literary* invention, constituted of historical and political elements that would be close to impossible in the world outside the text, but reflected and refracted from the *metropolitan* perception of Bengali-ness. The features of Samad's obsession with his homeland are those from a British perspective well informed of South Asian history, rather than those reflecting a lived-experience of migration from Bengal to the United Kingdom. Thus Smith's representation of contemporary immigrant families who had settled and formed communities in the enclaves of London at the turn of this century bears the correct *signifiers* postcoloniality, but the accuracy of the details (the "signified") become arbitrary. In this sense, the *aesthetic* sense of representation—"Bengali" as only a signifier—supersedes the impulse to represent the Bengali immigrant populations of Britain in a *political* sense. More important than probability of historical accuracy is Samad's literary lineage to Pande, which marks him at once as a participant in the long military history between Britain and India, but also as a subject with a genetic disposition toward resistance. Indeed, the presence of Bengal within the bounds of the British Isles is a story of military itinerancy. Historian John Eade writes of that the arrival of Bengalis increased significantly during the two World Wars:

The increased presence of Bengalis and other migrant workers from Britain's imperial possessions in London, Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields and other ports was the focus of local hostility in the years immediately following the end of the First World War. The first oral accounts from Bengali lascars who came here before and during the Second World War suggest an increase not only of those employed on British ships but also in the numbers of sailors who 'jumped ship' and found work in cities across the country. (Eade 92)

The influx of South Asians to the United Kingdom, and particularly Bengalis (largely Sylhet region of Bengal) is a postwar phenomenon and one with a specifically military lineage—a history referenced in Chapter One of the dissertation. *White Teeth* condenses this history in Samad’s own trajectory, and moreover, renders the complex changes in national borderlines within the postcolonial Subcontinent a matter of near irrelevance.

As demonstrated by the novel, the differences between Bengal, Bangladesh, (and Sylhet for that matter) are immaterial for the larger British public, which understands Bengalis as one monolithic immigrant community. Indeed, it becomes evident that the nation-state of Bangladesh is, for all intents and purposes, an *empty* signifier in the narrator’s categorization of it as a cultureless hinterland space of perpetual natural disaster.

It is different for the people of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, formerly India, formerly Bengal. They live under the invisible finger of random disaster, flood and cyclone, hurricane and mudslide. Half the time their country lies under water; generations wiped out as regularly as clockwork...It is really the most ridiculous country in the world, Bangladesh. It is God’s idea of a *really good wheeze*, his stab at black comedy....You don’t need to give out a questionnaire to Bengalis. The facts of disaster are the facts of their lives. Between Alsana’s sweet-sixteenth birthday (1971), for example and the year she stopped speaking directly to her husband (1985), more people died in Bangladesh...than in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden *put together* (Smith 176).

Rather ironically, buried this dismissal of Bangladesh as a divine joke is the singular moment in the text that explicitly mentions the year of its independence from Pakistan, 1971—here listed only as the birthday of Alsana, Samad’s wife. The narrator reflects on the misfortunes of Bangladesh as Alsana worries about the welfare of her teenage son Magid, whom Samad has sent “back” to Bangladesh as a protective measure against the corrupting influences of British life. Concerned about his safety during one of Bangladesh’s many cyclones, Muslim Alsana turns to Rabindranath Tagore’s poetry, as opposed to Quranic verses, for comfort. Rabindranath

Tagore as an intertext is more compelling than the Quran for Samad and Alsana, and in assigning the Hindu poet to the first generation of Bangladeshi immigrants, Smith categorically assigns Islam to the second generation. This choice, again, reflects *White Teeth*'s specifically *literary* engagement with Bengaliness, rather than any fidelity to the practices of Bangladeshi custom.

Smith's novel traffics in preformed aesthetic and discursive representations of Bengalis and Bangladeshis in London with seemingly little anxiety. *White Teeth*, as opposed to *The Shadow Lines* and *The Satanic Verses*, does not demonstrate the perceivable anguish of negotiating aesthetic and political representation. Smith's novel, quite significantly, is devoid of an ambivalent migrant intellectual figure, whose quandaries propel the plots of Ghosh's and Rushdie's texts. Class differences imported from the homeland seem to fizzle away in a milieu of middle classness, and instead each character in *White Teeth* grapples with questions of identity and self-definition in terms of *culture*. Indeed, the character who resembles the residual "Babu" figure is a complete and utter farce—Magid, Samad's London-born son, who learns the habits of a "proper" English gentlemen while exiled in Bangladesh during his adolescence.

III. Second-generation Insurgency

Samad sends Magid, one of his twin sons, off to Bangladesh to both reform the son and absolve the lustful sins of the father. The desire for Englishness that Samad indulges with Poppy Burt-Jones is counteracted by his twin sons' decisions as adolescents. In an attempt to right his wrongs as frustrated immigrant, Samad banishes Magid to the Chittagong Hill Tracts without consent of the rest of his family.¹⁰² However, rather than becoming an exemplary Bengali as his

¹⁰² In the fascinating literary afterlife of *White Teeth*, many accounts, including a first-person interview in Claire Berlinski's inflammatory text, *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent's Crisis Is America's, Too* (2006), identify writer Zia Haider Rahman as the inspiration for Magid (and Millat to be based on his brother, Jimmy, both of whom grew up with Zadie Smith in 1980s Willesden). *In the Light of What We Know*, Rahman's 2014, novel centers

father hopes, Magid returns in 1991 as a caricature of colonial sycophancy, donning “his bow ties,” reading “his Adam Smith and his E.M. bloody Forster” and professing “his atheism,” much to Samad’s chagrin (Smith 351). For Magid to return in the image of a perfect colonial subject, or rather, the perfect pre-war liberal Englishman, seems out of the realm of possibility for 1980s Bangladesh, which at that point would have been twice removed from its direct ties to British colonial influence. Magid’s inexplicable return as a simulacrum of the Bengali Babu—already a simulation of a nineteenth century Englishman—further reinforces the function of Bangladesh in Smith’s text as simply an *elsewhere*. Where in *The Shadow Lines*, Dhaka is understood by the narrator to be not more than a mirror image of Calcutta, in *White Teeth*, Bangladesh is not even a copy; it figures only as *excess* to the more important narrative of British immigration. It becomes simply a representation with no discernible original, a postcolonial outside to Britain that feeds migrants and their culture into contemporary multicultural London without having any specific history of its own.

Millat, Magid’s twin, on the other hand, swings in the opposite direction from the regression into a colonial “mimic man.” His adolescent identity, while roaming the streets of North London turns towards a vision of cosmopolitanism that is quite different from that of genteel Enlightenment secularity. Magid’s evolution begins at a point that bears resemblance to the permutations of 1980s black British youth culture. In the time period of *White Teeth*’s narrative, black Britain had begun its transformation into a cultural movement that is less racially inflected and one that draws more on ethnic and eventually religious affiliation—a logical outgrowth of the splintering in racial solidarities around the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

around the coming of age of a young Bangladeshi immigrant growing up in a working-class neighborhood of London and clawing his way into the upper crust of British and international society after an extended adolescent sojourn back to Sylhet. Rahman’s meditative and philosophical narrative appears to be a somewhat scathing literary response to Smith’s ebullient first novel.

Smith dubs a version of this movement at the intersection of black British, South Asian, and Islamic cultural formations the “Raggastanis.”

It was a new breed, just recently joining the ranks of the other street crews: Becks, B-boys, Indie kids, wide-boys, ravers, rudeboys, Acidheads, Sharons, Tracies, Kevs, Nation Brothers, Raggas, and Pakis; manifesting itself as a kind of cultural mongrel of the last three categories. Raggastanis spoke a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujrati, and English. Their ethos, their manifesto, if it could be called that, was equally a hybrid thing: Allah *featured*, but more as a collective big brother than a supreme being, a hard-as-fuck *geezer* who would fight in their corner if necessary; kung fu and the works of Bruce Lee were also central to the philosophy; added to this was a smattering of Black Power (as embodied by the album *Fear of a Black Planet*, Public Enemy); but mainly their mission was to put the Invincible back in the Indian, the Bad-aaaaass back in Bengali, the P-Funk back in Pakistani (Smith 192).

Not surprisingly, the swagger of Millat’s cohorts in 1990s North London resembles the counter-cultural *bricolage* that constituted the youth culture in Rushdie’s depiction of Brickhall. All points in the postcolonial world come together in a new microcosmic second-generation immigrant identity, which heterotopically reconfigures the dynamics of colonization and appropriates an anticolonial spirit. “Raggastanis” draw from cultures in the Caribbean and various places in the Subcontinent, as well as contemporary African American hip hop culture (and especially that subculture’s fondness for martial arts films). The social mish-mash that informs the “Raggastanis” is as much a reflection of the mixed heritage of its constituents as the roiling progression of globalization, and as such it is at once astonishingly modern and directionless. What distinguishes Smith’s “Raggastanis” from Rushdie’s Brickhalls their *explicit* engagement with Islam, and particularly a rootless and decentered vision of Islam that is quite separate from the Islam Samad appears to practice, bound up as it is in his attachment to being Bengali.

Quite significantly, the Bradford riots that made pyres of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 appear in the narrative diegesis of *White Teeth*. Where in his novel, Rushdie can only prefigure the role Islam would take in immigrant youth movements, Smith's text depicts what would be the tense historical turning point between the Rushdie Affair and September 11, 2001. At the time of its publication in 2000, the dominant discourse in world politics had not fully centered itself around the question of a strident and virulent form of radical Islam, but *White Teeth* anticipates its future importance in the portrayal of Millat's youthful development. Allah "features" for the "Raggastanis," but he is a deity on a similar level to Bruce Lee. In taking up Islamic features, the "Raggastanis" pose no greater perceived threat to the Londoners of *White Teeth* than if they had not adopted "Allah" as a hero on par with kung fu masters. As such, Smith's novel is very clearly a "pre-9/11" text.

Millat's religious convictions begin to solidify further around the Bradford book burnings. Significantly, Smith's narrative articulates his anger as one fueled by his maltreatment as a *racial* other, and that his objection to *The Satanic Verses*' religious blasphemy somehow addresses the racial and ethnic prejudice he has faced from the British public.

Millat knew nothing about the writer, nothing about the book; could not identify the book if it lay in a pile of other books, could not pick out the writer in a lineup of other writers....But he knew other things. He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelled of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshiped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered (Smith 194).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Millat seems to resent the singularity of the term "Paki" as specific to the South Asian category of Commonwealth immigrants. This is a slightly different affective register from the pan-immigrant solidarities of "black Britain." Ashley Dawson turns to the now-canonical postcolonial work of scholarship, *The Empire Writes Back*, to explain the way "Paki" was equated with other epithets in the mid-twentieth century. "Intent on blocking such divide-and-rule strategies, activists among the immigrant communities in Britain adopted the unifying label *black* in order to strengthen the bonds of solidarity among those subjected to racism in the metropolis. As the contributors to *The Empire Writes Back* pointed out, it made little difference whether immigrants to Britain were

White Teeth, then, pinpoints the turn to a more puritanical form of Islam among immigrant youth as a response to racial ostracizing in twentieth-century Britain. Indeed, the narrative makes clear here that the differences between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Bengal are of very little consequence to both second-generation youth and their British abusers alike. Millat is a “Paki” no matter what, regardless of Samad’s spurious claims to be a Pande-descendent. Though this youthful anger and retaliation is depicted in Rushdie’s *Brickhall*, what Smith demonstrates in *Millat* is the choice many South Asian Muslims made in the 1990s to refuse to see *The Satanic Verses* as representative of their struggle, in either the political or aesthetic senses. After Bradford, Millat shifts his focus from the hoodlum resonances of his “Raggastani” crew to something decidedly more Islamic. *White Teeth* thus depicts a youth counterculture at a crossroads, negotiating between various representations of themselves in art, in literature, and in public discourse. Their agency seems to lie in choosing the most potent aesthetic representation—the one that will have the most political impact.

White Teeth narrativizes a social transformation that *The Satanic Verses* could only gesture towards, in part because the publication of the latter novel is what brought it into fruition. In *Millat*, Smith depicts the phenomenon of a British South Asian youth culture that shifts from a *racial* affiliation to a *religious* affiliation, seeing more social impact in the latter. Millat begins to fraternize with a group humorously entitled “KEVIN,” that is, “Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation.” This organization is simply a means to find solidarity against the outwardly racist treatment that the immigrants suffer at the hands of the British public at large. The narrator explains the origins of KEVIN in a manner not unlike the “Raggastani” movement;

called ‘blacks, browns, darkies, nig-nogs, or Pakis’ (Dawson 19). Millat seems to have less interest in “taking back” these slurs in solidarity with other ethnic groups and finds empowerment in the newer configuration of global Islam.

it draws just as much from the cultural foundations of black Britain as Millat's old crew, but now the engagement with Islam is more explicit and ardent.

[T]he idea of KEVIN had been born within the black and Asian community. A radical new movement where politics and religion were two sides of the same coin. A group that took freely from Garveyism, the American Civil Rights movement, and the thought of Elijah Muhammad, yet remained within the letter of the Qur'an. The Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation. By 1992 they were a small but widespread body, with limbs as far-flung as Edinburgh and Land's End....KEVIN: an extremist faction dedicated to direct, often violent action, a splinter group frowned on by the rest of the Islamic community; popular with the sixteen-to-twenty-five age group; feared and ridiculed in the press (Smith 390).

The greatest aspirations of KEVIN as an organization are to disrupt the unveiling of a genetically modified rodent named "FutureMouse©" in a haphazard climax that brings together all the various subplots of *White Teeth*. Thus KEVIN remains relatively innocuous through the course of the novel, but in its articulation Smith hits upon a growing trend among South Asian youth in the U.K. The narrative relates the trajectory of a middle-aged halal butcher, Mo (short for Mohammad), who joins KEVIN as a last straw to combat the lifetime of discrimination he has faced in London, habitually getting beaten by "decrepit drunks, teenage thugs, the parents of teenage thugs, general fascists, specific neo-Nazis....But they all had one thing in common, these people. They were all white. And this simple fact had done more to politicize Mo over the years than all the party broadcasts, rallies, and petitions the world could offer" (392). Again, in the character of Mo, Smith links racial disharmony to the move towards a religious conservatism in British South Asians. In so doing, the bonds of black British solidarity are further troubled; though KEVIN draws from Garveyism and American Civil Rights, its adherence to a Quranic fidelity excludes non-Muslims.

In portraying the evermore-Islamic rhetoric of Millat's youthful cohorts, *White Teeth* identifies a turn to religion as a move that is counter-intuitively countercultural. Adhering to strict Muslim principles that are *not* handed down from the first generation of immigrants but instead arrive through community organizers becomes an act that is simultaneously resistant to the hegemony of British culture as well as the tethers of the parental culture. However, the turn among young British South Asian Muslims to Islamic organizations for solidarity in 1990s London may not have been as resistant as young men like Magid may have hoped. The formation of religiously linked groups among second-generation British South Asians may be correlated to late-twentieth century policies of the British Home Office toward immigrant groups. Sociologist Nazli Kibria observes:

During the 1960s to the 1980s, multiculturalism supported the formation of community organizations based on national origins for British Bangladeshis.... But in the 1990s there was an important shift. Multicultural policies began to support the Muslim affiliation of British Bangladeshis...[reflecting a] change in state funding that occurred at this time, away from Bangladeshi-based groups. The focus instead was on mosques and Islamic community organizations, which were invigorated by public funds as they began to successfully enter into partnerships with local authorities for the delivery of social services to British Muslims. (Kibria 101)

This strategy fell in line with Britain's efforts to assuage hostilities between immigrant groups. The U.K.'s switch from funding the cohesive community of Bangladeshis in Britain's immigrant enclaves to funding Islamic groups may well have been a strategy of ameliorating the tensions that arose during the Rushdie Affair. By funding religious groups, "multiculturalism" as a social condition, meaning harmonious difference, is encouraged. However, critics of multiculturalist initiatives in contemporary Britain claim that policies that fund community organizations formed around ethnicity, nationality, or religion prevent these groups from being anything other than monolithic entities with singular desires and political positions. In transitioning focus away from

Bangladeshis as a cohesive community to groups organized around the Islamic faith, the U.K. government began to subsume Bangladeshi minorities under the rubric of Islamic others, thus equating Bangladeshis and Muslims and paving over cultural differences within these groups. Categorizing and governing immigrant groups based on religious grounds looks very much like the British imperial logic that drew the borders between India and East/West Pakistan in 1947, only in the 1980s and 90s, it occurred on metropolitan soil.

IV. Multiculturalism as a Mollifying Strategy

Multiculturalism as a state position towards immigrant groups in late twentieth century Britain grew out of the impulse to mollify percolating hostilities between the British host culture and its formidable population of postcolonial immigrants. However, measures toward living in racial harmony in contemporary Britain do little to address the long history of structural violence that created mass populations of colonized subjects across the globe whose logical trajectory is to circulate into the former imperial center. London remains the center of social and financial capital in the Commonwealth, in the form of education and jobs. As Pathik Pathak remarks, “The problem is that multiculturalism as anti-racist praxis is bereft of an adequate critique of *state* racism. It acknowledges that racism plagues society but cannot accept that it is endemic to liberal societies or a compulsion of the capitalist system” (Pathak 23). Magid’s eventual turn toward KEVIN in *White Teeth* is an attempt to face the social injustices he and his ilk suffer on a systemic level. And this necessitates the bypassing of Samad’s desperate attempts to instill a regard for (literary) Bengaliness within his sons. In fact, any attempt, by Samad or otherwise, for both Magid and Millat to rediscover their filial connections to Bangladesh or Bengal is thwarted at every stage in their development. What *White Teeth* demonstrates is that Bangladesh functions

in turn-of-the-millennium London as merely a departure point for its formidable population of first and second-generation South Asian immigrants, and is, for the most part, interchangeable with the rest of the Subcontinent. Magid's "return" to Bangladesh may as well have been a trip in a time machine back to nineteenth-century Bengal. The only memories of Bengal in the text are Samad's myriad references to the 1857 Rebellion, and that is a spurious historical memory. The space of Bengal/Bangladesh in the universe of *White Teeth* remains outside of time and stuck in the nineteenth century, and is thus just as "Orientalized" as any British colonial account of the region. Moreover, the haziness of detail surrounding Bangladesh as a nation-state with a complex political history reinforces that *White Teeth* is less a novel about migration and more about its aftermath; i.e., the settlement and rooting of a diasporic community. The novel demonstrates the simultaneous process of acquiring relevance in the host culture while the specificities of the original culture become more and more arbitrary. This process is most clearly expressed through the character of Millat.

If Magid is the twin who travels backward in time, Millat looks forward with an anticipatory gaze that is almost uncanny. Gearing himself up for his assigned task by KEVIN to disrupt the unveiling of "FutureMouse©," Millat stands in the center of London at Trafalgar Square near a statue of Sir Henry Havelock, the very Brigadier-General responsible for hanging Mangal Pande. Very near to it, he discerns the spot where his father, Samad, committed a petty act of vandalism before the twins were born by carving his surname, "Iqbal," into the pavement, only to be immediately consumed by a sense of shame. He warns his sons, "It meant *I wanted to write my name on the world*....Like the Englishmen who named streets in Kerala after their wives, like the Americans who shoved their flag on the moon. It was a warning from Allah. He was saying: Iqbal, you *are becoming like them*" (419). The rebellious twin Millat objects to

Samad's self-identification with the British conqueror in his colonizing gesture, just as he rejects the Pande legend.

No, thought Millat, the first time he heard this, no, that's not what it meant. It just meant *you're nothing*. And looking at it now, Millat felt nothing but contempt.... That's why Pande hung from a tree while Havelock the executioner sat on a chaise longue in Delhi... *That's the long, long history of us and them... But no more.*

Because Millat was here to finish it. To revenge it. To turn that history around. He liked to think he had a different attitude, a second-generation attitude (419).

In this reverie, Smith lays bare the stakes of *White Teeth*. The fire that fuels second-generation immigrant anger is not simply the abuse it suffers at the hands of London drunkards and the condemnations of National Front speeches, but reaches much further back into deep historical trauma of British colonization. And its vindication will not be reached, according to the logic of the novel, by waxing nostalgic about failed mutinies on the Subcontinent as Samad does. Neither will it be reached through the aping of an obsolete Englishness as Magid does (which seems to lead to such questionable developments as GMO rodents). Instead, Millat will avenge the centuries-long injustices of colonization and its aftermath through the channels of a rootless, global version of Islam that sees itself as outside of the binaries and failures of (post)colonialism. It is an affiliation that is born and strengthened in the European metropole and is *informed* and fueled by the ethnic, racial, religious, and social disharmonies propagated and exploited by colonization, but it does not employ the terms of colonialism. Where the British public sphere and hostile Englishman employ tired binary tropes of the colonial era to combat the incoming hoard of culture-diluting immigrants, Millat's generation looks to another cultural configuration for answers that lay outside of a simple colonizer/colonized relationship. Though at this moment Millat seems to refuse the legacy of his Pande ancestor, Smith demonstrates through Millat's ire that despite any questions of historical plausibility, what continues on the inheritance of anger

and the tendency towards insurgence. Mangal Pande is Millat's spiritual and literary predecessor, and *White Teeth*, published at the very dawn of the new millennium, sees taking up of global Islam by British South Asian youth as a millenarian move. The text anticipates a new incarnation of the Sepoy Rebellion among the second-generation British South Asian youth, but one that would ostensibly break the molds of the colonial era.

V. Hysterical Realism

White Teeth, however, ends on a note of irresolution, as the disparate plot threads tangle together in a haphazard conclusion that includes the unveiling of FutureMouse©, the return of a Nazi scientist Archie and Samad allegedly killed in Italy, the unsuccessful attempts of KEVIN to derail the event, and Irie's realization that she is pregnant with either Magid or Millat's child. All temporal and historical referents in the novel return in this one flashpoint with a millenarian, apocalyptic sensibility that lands in a rather muddled anticlimax. Perhaps, as was the case with *The Satanic Verses*, the real-world event that would ostensibly bring all these historical threads together in a spectacular, sudden tragedy had not transpired in the non-fictional world, and thus could not be sufficiently imagined within the bounds of the narrative. KEVIN, an allegedly radical group of Muslim youth, is hardly a dangerous terrorist cell but a band of buffoons who cannot organize themselves well enough to have much impact whatsoever. Irie, now pregnant from either Millat or Magid with a half-Bangladeshi baby, absconds to Jamaica, where the genetic constitution of her child will fit into the established cultural formations of creolization, rather than the artifice of multiculturalism. *White Teeth* projects very little onto the future twenty-first century London, fixated as it is on the improbable histories that comprise its present.

And yet despite the buoyancy of its prose, the narrative's fixation upon possible and proximate apocalypse suggests that the novel predicts a dire outcome for its crammed contemporary setting.

Indeed, sixteen years into the new millennium, it is almost too tempting to read 9/11 and its aftermath into the plot of *White Teeth*. Supriya Nair does so, claiming that "Smith's inability to write a happy ending and the fact that references to the Manichean conflict of the apocalypse in deeming the novel [seems] portentous" if we move "from the time frame of the novel to post '9/11'" (Nair 2). Nair moves the plot of the novel forwards in time almost as a matter of course, as though the subsequent turns of world history leave us no choice. It seems that its contemporary critics, who often accused the novel of a simplistic celebration of multiculturalism in late twentieth-century London, do not detect its rather obvious eschatological references. In a 2000 *New Republic* review critiquing Zadie Smith (and David Foster Wallace, among others) for flip, clever prolixity (as opposed to "anything really affecting, sublime, or beautiful") in the depiction of contemporary Western life, James Wood infamously denounced *White Teeth* as prime example of "hysterical realism," a late twentieth century genre that is "evasive of reality while borrowing from realism itself" (Wood, "Human" 28). Following that review in a *Guardian* essay published weeks after September 11, 2001 (echoing, to some degree, Adorno's oft-cited sentence about the barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz), Wood raises the stakes of his previous assessment of *White Teeth* by holding the novel seemingly responsible for failing to anticipate the gruesomeness of 9/11 with stylistic sobriety. "[T]hat the novelist's task is to go on to the street and figure out social reality—may well have been altered by the events of September 11, merely through the reminder that whatever the novel gets up to, the 'culture' can always get up to something bigger" (Wood, *Guardian*) Wood's indictment seems to place "social reality" and "the novel" into some sort of competition. Moreover, his evaluation of Smith's prose refuses to

see *White Teeth*'s maximalism as a symptom of its time—a fitting literary form to render the manifold, volatile historical and cultural intersections that comprised multicultural London at the end of the twentieth century. Smith's novel approaches violence as a trope rather than a rupture—it details the kindling for the coming insurrections in the U.S. and Europe, but not the events themselves. Published just three years after *White Teeth*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* confronts the question of Bangladeshi Muslim youth head-on as they transition from a mildly problematic subpopulation to a perceived violent threat for the British public. And yet Ali's novel seems equally perplexed about bridging the historical gap between the residues of colonization for the population of Bengalis who have largely settled in London's East End and the new political exigencies of an increasingly fraught relationship between conservative forms of Islam and Western multiculturalism.

VI. Settling as a Threat in *Brick Lane*

Brick Lane was the first novel of its kind that in its entirety depicted, in a realist, free indirect style, the quotidian life of Bangladeshis living in Estates housing on London's East End, giving insight into the latest population of working class migrants who have historically inhabited the borough of Tower Hamlets.¹⁰⁴ The text portrays the development of British immigrant community formation from the 1970s to just after September 11, 2001. By focusing so tightly upon one singular, claustrophobically close community, *Brick Lane* brings shades of nuance into the central problem of acquiring cultural capital that exists among all immigrant

¹⁰⁴ The setting of the novel, the eponymous Brick Lane, is historically the downtrodden immigrant dwelling of French Huguenots and Jews and, as of the mid-twentieth century, floods of East Pakistanis and subsequently Bangladeshis. According to sociologist Tahir Abbas, the borough of London where Brick Lane can be found, Tower Hamlets, "has the highest percentage of Muslim population of all the local authorities in the UK and is also the third largest in size. It is the centre of the Bangladeshi population in Britain and the borough contains nearly a quarter of the total Bangladeshi population of the UK" (Abbas 28).

groups who aspire to settle and assimilate, by varying degrees, into the host culture. Ali's novel compounds age-old questions of migration from rural to urban spaces with the complex, postcolonial cultural matrix of late twentieth century London and maps the paradigms of the rural and the urban directly into that of emigration from the postcolony to the metropole. In doing so, it makes distinctions within the depicted Bangladeshi community that would not necessarily be evident to U.K. culture at large. The narrative proceeds from the vantage point of the turn of the twentieth century, bookending the historical moment the British Bangladeshi community transitioned from "migratory" to "settled" to the potential "the enemy within" from the perspective of the British public sphere.¹⁰⁵ The novel also circulates back through Bangladesh in its narrative by way of epistolary contact, and posits a dynamic relationship between the relatively new nation of Bangladesh and the increasingly rooted community of diasporic Bangladeshis in London. Thus the narrative has the quality of seeming intensely confined and cloistered while simultaneously expanding its horizons out to the far reaches of the increasingly globalized world.

Because the narrative, which spans from the 1970s to 2002, is confined to the perspective of Nazneen, the novel's homebound protagonist, its conversance with world historical events is often oblique. We very rarely leave the claustrophobic walls of the Tower Hamlets housing complex in which Nazneen lives with her husband and children, but the novel demonstrates the profound impact such large-scale events can have upon the microcosm of a small community when its members are bound—not personally, but politically, historically, and ethnically—to the

¹⁰⁵ Jane Jacobs remarks on the concomitance of postcolonial migrants settling and building communities in metropolitan England and increasingly inflammatory rhetoric by the conservative National Front party. "[P]recisely at the moment when a corporeal edge of the empire came into the heart, politicians like Enoch Powell began the process of displacing a narrative of nation based on imperial might and replacing it with a narrative of nation based on an indigenous and pure Englishness. That is, the dependency of British power on the people and resources of the empire was defined as incidental and accidental, thereby rendering uncertain the right of the colonised to inhabit that heart, making them both 'outsiders' but also now 'an enemy within'" (Jacobs 71-72).

actors (and some might say perpetrators) of these events. Indeed, *Brick Lane*, published just two years after September 11, 2001, stands at a literary precipice. It cannot fully account for the role political Islam will play in what will come to be the one of the most pressing issues in early twenty-first century Britain (and, by extension, Europe): that of the status of immigrants who resist assimilation in pursuit of more transgressive allegiances. And yet it broaches the question only to retreat into an ambivalent—if not fully capitulatory—multiculturalist denouement that many critics have judged harshly. The novel confronts the question of Bangladeshi Muslim youth head-on as they transition from a mildly problematic subpopulation to a perceived violent threat for the British public. However, Ali's novel seems equally perplexed about bridging the historical gap between the residues of colonization in the population of Bengalis who have largely settled in London's East End, and the new political exigencies of an increasingly fraught relationship between conservative forms of Islam and Western multiculturalism.

The novel is set largely amongst cloistered Council Flats the tenement-style apartments that have housed thousands of South Asian migrants in East London since waves began to arrive in the postwar period, on the eponymous street that is variously called "Spitalfields," "Brick Lane," or "Banglatown." Its narrative arc transpires through a dialectical tension between the extreme insularity of the Bengali community, hailing mostly from rural Bangladesh, and the tumultuous worldly conditions that bring that very community into metropolitan London and subsequently imperil its future there. Though quite often Ali's prose mimics the claustrophobia Nazneen, *Brick Lane's* protagonist, feels as she is veritably trapped in the panoptical Estates complex, the novel simultaneously portrays the enclave as one that opens up to encapsulate the world at large, transcending the boundaries of London or Britain as such. Far from static, the titular immigrant enclave of *Brick Lane* is an elastic, transitional, contradictory space—one that

houses an overly intimate community while simultaneously crystallizing the world historical and geographic contingencies that comprise the postcolonial condition. It is in this tension that Nazneen negotiates her place, most clearly by shifting her affections and fidelities between her dogged and atavistic husband, Chanu, and her firebrand, radical lover, Karim, only to “settle” for neither by choosing an English way of life.

As Nazneen’s loyalties waver between Chanu and Karim, so the novel appears to posit the fate of the British South Asian community. Chanu and Karim orient themselves very differently within hegemonic British culture and also tether themselves to distinct temporal and geopolitical vectors within the complicated, historically fraught relation of South Asia to the United Kingdom. Chanu is a first-generation, middle-aged Bengali who arrived in London when Bangladesh was still East Pakistan, and maintains nostalgia for the “rigid paradigms” of the metropole-colony relationship Bengal had to India before Partition. The character of Chanu represents a figure of elite colonial urbanity from a bygone era with little to no efficacy in millennial, multicultural London. Karim, Chanu’s foil, is a London-born, second-generation immigrant who has never set foot in Bangladesh, yet sees himself as radically other, not only to British culture, but the western world as such. He is a youth who has spent his life simultaneously listening to Caribbean dub music and the *azaan* of his local mosque. His appeals to a new world order are predicated on an idea of an Islamic world *ummah* that is a veritable imagined nation and has little material substance. These two figures of postcolonial masculinity manifest the myriad temporal and spatial borders present in the immigrant enclave of Brick Lane—between the Subcontinent and England; Bangladesh and India; colony and postcolony; urban and rural; secularism and Islam; youth and obsolescence. Nazneen— significantly bound to a feminized, cloistered domestic space until the novel’s end and rarely depicted in dialogue

with the two men in her life—performs as a figure of negotiation, in large part, within the bounds of her rich internal monologue. It is she, in her deliberation between the two paradigms the men in her life represent, who becomes an allegory for the most acceptable way to “settle” in contemporary Britain.

VII. The Impossibility of Cosmpolitanism

The narrative proceeds through the prismatic lens of Nazneen’s perspective, caught as she is between the residual colonial aspirations of Chanu and the future-oriented Karim who seeks a world-Islamic revolution. Nazneen, confined almost entirely to her Council Flat, is nonetheless representative of the most threatening presence to conservative members of British society. As Charlie Forman notes in his 1989 study of Spitalfields, the area of London that houses Brick Lane itself, “there was an explosion of violence when the women started arriving in the mid-1970s. This coincided with the high-watermark of the National Front, which picked up nearly 10 per cent of the vote in Bethnal Green in the October 1974 election. The climax of fascist activity was at the point when migrants decided to settle” (Forman 49-50). Thus we see clearly that the hostility directed towards immigrant populations becomes far more piercing when the matter of *arriving* shifts into one of *settling*, and that this question is pointedly gendered. As a female Bangladeshi immigrant who neither threatens the English workforce by “taking jobs”¹⁰⁶ nor the English “way of life” by preaching radicalism on the streets, Nazneen ironically represents the most insidious type of immigrant precisely because she has the capacity to reproduce and establish a family—i.e., she and those like her are harbingers of a truly “settled” immigrant population.

¹⁰⁶ Tahir Abbas notes that Muslim population of Britain “has very low female participation rate in the labour market” (Abbas 23).

The story that Ali depicts is an archetypical one for this enclave: the protagonist, young Nazneen is brought over from the rural Mymensingh region of Bangladesh by her much older and seemingly urbane husband, Chanu, who works a laborer's job but has constant schemes to earn a professional degree as well as return to Bangladesh. In the novel, both Chanu's and Karim's dejection reflects systemic antagonism towards London's ex-colonial immigrant population. But it is implicitly the arrival and settling of homebound, insular women similar to Nazneen, rather than angry young men, that pose the greatest perceived threat to Britain's conservatives. As discussed above, the uptick in violence towards South Asian immigrants in Britain is concomitant with the arrival and settling of women and children, signaling the formation of rooted communities within the bounds of the United Kingdom. Yet *Brick Lane* posits Nazneen as an often unspeaking, deeply observant figure of conciliation who is eventually able to negotiate a suitable multiculturalist existence in London where Chanu and Karim fail.

The confinement of Nazneen's living quarters and the novel's limitation to homebound Nazneen's perspective—her very *lack* of interaction with the bustle of London street life—gives us a unique insight into the relationship between the Bangladeshi Muslim community and London society. Unlike the rampant dialogism in *The Satanic Verses* or *White Teeth*, novels that seem as though they want to contain the entirety of the postcolonial world, the narrative is cordoned off by Nazneen's own consciousness in tightly-constructed free indirect discourse. Nazneen's perspective is punctuated only by epistolary contact from her sister, Hasina, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In this capacity, *Brick Lane* bears formal resemblance to *The Shadow Lines*, though Ghosh's first-person narrator rapidly volleys between locations and memories, reproducing the sensory confusion of nostalgia. Nazneen, however, observes her present situation with so much careful attention to minutiae that the narrative seems hardly to move forward, even when plot

details make clear that fifteen years pass over the course of its arc. Ali offers an almost suffocating number of details in Nazneen's mildly voyeuristic observations of her fellow council-flat neighbors:

A television aerial dangles from a window like a suicide. A pile of boxes blockades another window. Razia's place is curtained, and the back of a head bobs around behind the curtain: Shefali or Tariq hiding from Tariq or Shefali. The tattoo lady leans forward, watching the yard and drinking. Her hair slides down the sides of her head like an oil slick. She has dyed it, but it remains unwashed. She is wearing a man's undershirt...How can she just sit and sit? What is she waiting for? What is there to see? (Ali 59).

The painstaking and excessive description of each tiny shift in Nazneen's vision while she stares out her window conveys the sense of boredom, stagnation, and veritable immobility that characterizes Nazneen's homebound life—demonstrating how the texture of quotidian life shifts after *settling* is a far cry from the mobility associated with *migration*. Our access to the immigrant enclave of Tower Hamlets in *Brick Lane*, is restricted to Nazneen's own perception, and follows her as she journeys out by degrees, both bodily and spiritually, from the curtained “shapes and shadows,” as Jane Hiddleston puts it, of her cloistered council estate and the insular Bangladeshi community housed therein. Hiddleston writes that Ali's “relentless piling up of details” in her minute descriptions of Nazneen's daily life offers an “exploration of...[immigrant] Bengali culture and experience [that] consists both in an unveiling of certain pervasive social and cultural structures and in a commentary on the discourses informing our knowledge of those structures” (Hiddleston 64). Though Nazneen is a keen observer of her surroundings, as David Gunning notes, her “difficulty is that while she can see the world around her, she lacks the ability successfully to decode its true meaning” (Gunning 96). She is initially constructed as an absolute innocent in the novel, lacking formal education or maternal guidance due to her mother's premature death in Mymensingh. Hiddleston employs the culturally charged

metaphor of “unveiling” to describe Nazneen’s *Bildung*, which consists of gaining enough agency to exit the Council Flat and navigate London’s urban protocols well enough to co-found a small seamstress business—that is, participate in capital.

Nazneen’s naiveté is not simply a product of her foreignness to British life; it is compounded by her lack of familiarity with *any* place outside of her North Bangladeshi village before her arrival in London as Chanu’s young bride. He himself is a born-and-bred urban dweller, having settled in London after establishing himself as an adult in Dhaka. Chanu’s distaste for his compatriots in London is that of an elitist would-be cosmopolitan who has little patience for the rural community networks that are re-established in London’s East End, somewhat like Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*, the difference being that Chanu inhabits, for all intents and purposes, the very same class sector as his Bangladeshi cohorts.

‘You see,’ said Chanu when he explained this for the first time, ‘most of our people here are Sylhetis.’¹⁰⁷ They all stick together because they come from the same district. They know each other from the villages and they come to Tower Hamlets and they think they are back in the village. 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 when 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 (Ali 14).

Chanu’s harsh assessment of the Sylheti Bangladeshis who have settled in Tower Hamlets reflects prejudices imported from his urbanite past in Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital city. He is at

¹⁰⁷ Sylhet is a region of Northeastern Bangladesh which has its own regional dialect (Sylheti, as opposed to Bangla). It is historically distinct from Bengali culture at large, with its own linguistic and cultural traditions and strong ties to Islamic identity. As sociologist Anne J. Kershen notes about the Sylheti community that established itself on London’s East End in the 1970s, “The Sylhetis are a syncretic Muslim people living an agrarian, pre-industrial existence with few signs of entrepreneurial activity. The young men were poorly educated, had few skills and little experience of the harshness of urban industrial life. On arrival in London they found themselves living in overcrowded male ghettos taking up employment in a variety of previously unknown trades. Life in the *bidesh* [abroad] did not bring comfort and immediate riches, but, initially, it did bring regular income and the ability to send home the remittances which ‘play a vital part in the macro-economic viability of Bangladesh (Kershen 79).

once classist and unwittingly condemning of his own wife (admittedly hailing from Mymensingh and not Sylhet) who is similarly rural and uneducated. His offense stems partially from being interpellated by the British majority as indistinct from the substantial Sylheti minority community within the larger South Asian immigrant population, again resembling Chamcha's bristling in *The Satanic Verses*, but with an even more explicit awareness of the way he is being received by the British public. Part of Nazneen's trajectory, then, comes to be the need to distinguish herself from the class associations of the larger Sylheti population of London—a standard set by Chanu's Bangladeshi urbanity and reinforced by the British urban demand to assimilate.

Nazneen's development is predicated on her leaving the bounds of her Council Flat and integrating into London at large, a process that progresses slowly and by fits and starts. To further reinforce the difficulty of this task, Ali offers us a parallel narrative of the rural-to-urban literary trope in Hasina's sordid journey into Dhaka. Nazneen's urban education is mirrored and refracted in her sister's letters, which describe the misfortunes of her slide down the Bangladeshi class ladder in a tragic, quasi-Victorian plummet. Hasina's letters reflect, in an almost caricatured fashion, the plight of the solitary urban woman in Bangladesh who falls victim to an array of humanitarian crimes the West associates with the Global South, such as abusive marriage, exploitative garment work, forced prostitution, and acid attacks. By contrast, Nazneen's journey into urbanity is less fraught, though marked with an anxiety that is rooted, to some degree, in her self-identification with her sister's subalternity. Her first attempt to step outside of her Estates complex into London street life in a thwarted act of *flânerie* disorients her and has her immediately positioning herself in relation to Hasina. "She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug...Nazneen

wept, but as the tears started to come she knew that she was weeping more for her own stupidity than for her sister. . . . It could not help Hasina for Nazneen to be lost. And it could not give Nazneen any idea was Hasina was suffering” (Ali 37). Nazneen’s tendency to understand Hasina’s struggles in Dhaka to mirror her own experience in London recalls way the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* sees Calcutta, Dhaka, and London as iterations of each other. However, *Brick Lane*’s portrayal of Dhaka, appearing through Hasina’s stilted correspondence, is afforded particularities. Hasina’s extremely Dhaka-specific experiences related in her letter, such as being exploited as a garment-worker and fearing street acid attacks from jilted ex-lovers, eventually convince Nazneen of the vast differences between her urban reality and her sister’s. The immigrant enclave, cloistered and segregated as it may be from central London, is not equivalent to a developing city in the global South. Though Nazneen immediately compares own confusion to the wretched subaltern status in which Hasina finds herself, she just as quickly rationalizes herself out of this role in realizing her own agency in her seemingly defiant act of walking through the city.

Nazneen’s initial encounter with the rush of life in central London firmly establishes her role as a figure quite different from city-dwelling male figures typical of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature. In her first solitary foray out past Brick Lane itself, she finds herself desperate and lost, dizzily trying to orient herself as she encounters London’s adjacent financial district.

Every person who brushed past her on the pavement, every back she saw, was on a private, urgent mission to execute a precise and demanding plan: to get a promotion today, to be exactly on time for an appointment, to buy a newspaper with the right coins so that the exchange was swift and seamless, to walk without wasting a second and to reach the roadside just as the lights turned red. A leafshake of fear—or was it excitement?—passed through her legs (Ali 35).

The stark contrast between the seeming aimlessness of her own life and the driving ambition she perceives of the Londoners around her indexes a chasm between cultural norms that precedes, by many decades, the arrival of Bengali migrants to England. Nazneen's *frisson* at suddenly witnessing the daily dynamic motion of bureaucratic capitalism is, in some capacity, a rehearsal of nineteenth-century Subcontinental phenomenon of upwardly mobile Calcutta residents incorporating British conceptions of time into their daily lives. Bengali bureaucratic city-dwellers (the modernizing Babus) would have run on what Ranajit Guha identifies as "*ophish bela*," that is, office time, or the "ten-to-five day." The foreign import of time structured around a bureaucratic workday created

an emptiness for all those not directly involved in the day-return trip to *ophish-para* [office quarters]. The first to be trapped in this vacuum is, of course, the woman of the house. When she tries to overcome the weight of the lonely segment of the day, the private foil to office time, and transform it creatively into a hiatus made reading or some other occupation of her choosing at home or in the world beyond, that initiative is opposed by all the powers of patriarchy. (Guha 344).

The gulf that she feels between herself and the hurried urbanites around her suggests an inability in Nazneen's character to perform the role of an archetypical literary city-dweller: neither is she exemplary of a bourgeois metropolitan *flâneur* nor a middle class colonial Babu.¹⁰⁸ Both of these figures were ones that arose from parallel processes of nineteenth-century modernization which produced new kinds of urban subjects in European and colonial cities alike. Significantly, both of these literary urban archetypes are male; as Guha notes in his discussion of the "*ophish*"-goer,

¹⁰⁸ The "Bengali Babu" is a male figure discussed in Chapter One of the dissertation. This figure arose in nineteenth century colonial India, emblematic of the rising middle class of native Indians, who was educated in English and worked clerical jobs in offices. This term also came to have pejorative connotations by both Indians and British colonists alike and "Babus" were lampooned by both camps for pretentious posturing. Historian Hugh Tinker notes that "[P]rofessional emigration acquired a momentum of its own....Bengal, which supplied northern India with professional people during the nineteenth century and even later, contributed professional emigrants to all the countries where Indians settled. The small Indian community in Britain before 1939 included many who were Bengalis. Even in India, these professional people had already become different, had, in a sense, emigrated out of the traditional culture" (Tinker 8).

any attempt by women in these urban nineteenth-century paradigms to partake of the ever-widening world was quashed by the domestic demands of patriarchy. Neither does the bustle of street life provide solace nor inspiration for Nazneen as it would a *flâneur*. Her experimental entry into London by mimicking the habits of a cosmopolitan nineteenth century urban male is a decided failure.

Indeed, Nazneen's escape into the city is foreshortened by her need to return home to prepare dinner for her husband, but not before the text further establishes her provincialism (and lack of claim to cosmopolitanism) when she is hailed on the street by a fellow South Asian immigrant.

He said something. Nazneen recognized Hindi but she could not understand it. He tried it again, in Urdu. Nazneen could speak some Urdu, but the man's accent was so strong that she could not understand this either. She shook her head. He spoke English this time. His eyes looked huge behind their lenses, like they had been plucked from another, much bigger creature. She shook her head again and said, "Sorry." He nodded solemnly and took his leave (Ali 38).¹⁰⁹

Though Nazneen distinguishes herself from Hasina in her defiant city-walk, she cannot fully identify with the Subcontinental solidarity this South Asian man seeks as they pass each other on Brick Lane. In this brief interaction, Ali indicates the progressive historical separation of Bangladesh from the larger Subcontinent—he attempts to communicate with her in Hindi, the national language of India, and then Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. The contiguity between those two languages is one that facilitates a linguistic and cultural bond among diasporic South Asians from these twinned nations, despite contemporary political dynamics in the region

¹⁰⁹ As sociologist Ceri Peach notes, there is little integration or solidarity among South Asian immigrant groups, despite seeming ethnic ties, as the fractures of nationalism and religion that divided the Subcontinent on religious and linguistic lines in 1947 and 1971 reverberate into the diaspora. "Within urban areas in which they have settled, Pakistanis and (particularly) Bangladeshis have shown high rates of segregation... Bangladeshis showed the highest degree of segregation of any ethnic population in the 1991 census... They showed a moderately high degree of segregation from the Pakistanis... while the Pakistani/Indian segregation level was lower than the Pakistani/Bangladeshi level. Thus, even though Pakistanis and Bangladeshis share a religion and once shared a nationality, ethnicity appears to be a stronger bond than religion among these Muslims (Peach 28).

itself. The stranger, however, does not speak Bangla, and neither can Nazneen presume that he would do so, the way he can presume a facility with Hindi or Urdu of her. Here Ali very subtly indexes the linguistic undergirding of Bangladesh's independence movement from Pakistan—a reality that materializes in the lack of communication between Bangladeshis and other South Asian groups in diaspora, particularly for those without extensive education. The Indian stranger and Nazneen must eventually resort to communicating in English, and the residue and persistence of hegemonic British colonial practices becomes apparent.

VIII. Chanu as a Postcolonial Simulacrum

It is, in fact, education in English that Nazneen's husband, Chanu, uses to discriminate against other Bangladeshis and view himself as a superior immigrant subject. Chanu engages in a fruitless pursuit of British cultural capital by haphazardly enrolling in unfinished courses at the Open University while claiming he has “studied at a British university—philosophy, sociology, history, economics” (Ali 77) and constantly reminding anyone within hearing range that he has “a degree in English literature from Dhaka University,” which seems only to serve to purpose of excessively dropping the names of William Shakespeare and other canonical writers to uninterested listeners. Chanu's bloated pretention coupled with his inefficacy is not without literary precedent in the history of Britain's long relationship to Bengal. His affectations resemble those of the prolix, archetypical Bengali Babu—the nineteenth-century figure discussed at length in chapter one of the dissertation. Thus Chanu's dismissal of his fellow Bangladeshis living in London is symptomatic of a historically colonial ideology that prevailed among colonists and Bengali elite alike—that rural Bengali Muslims are somehow “improper,” meaning they are not fully Muslim, nor fully modernized (or Britishized, as it were), and resistant to the

prospect of improvement. Chanu's obsessive rehearsals of his educational accolades are an attempt to associate himself as a member of the *bhadralok* apart from the "Sylheti riff raff," and thus all the more proximate to a proper Englishman.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Chanu can really only conceive himself in imperial terms, rattling on atavistically about the past glories of Bengal in the service of empire, when the "whole world was going to Bengal to do trade....Sixteenth century and seventeenth century. Dhaka was home of textiles. Who invented all this muslin and damask and every damn thing? It was us...And when the British took control, this what gave them strength to take all India" (Ali 148). Eventually, even the seemingly innocent Nazneen begins to grow weary of Chanu's empty boasting. She "wondered if he really had a degree from Dhaka. Perhaps he used to finish things in those days. 'I'm fed up with the Open University,' said Chanu.... I'm returning to my first love....English literature at its finest. You've heard of William Shakespeare. Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare'" (62). Chanu's anachronism comes at a sharp cost: the couple spiral into insurmountable debt to a resident Bangladeshi loan shark in Tower Hamlets (perhaps Chanu's perusal of Shakespeare did not include "The Merchant of Venice") while he holds forth on Warren Hastings' professed love for Bengal. Their downward financial spiral serves as a potent structural metaphor that encapsulates the damaging postcolonial repercussions of atavistic Babuism. Though Chanu cuts a sad figure of a belated Babu, his failure to succeed emphasizes that although the Babu is a figure of transformation, it is not one that is universally applicable to any moment of societal transition. Chanu's elevation of English history and literature bears the legacy markings of English education in colonial India used to inculcate the colonial "mimic men" of a bygone era. But in the immigrant enclave of 1980s London, professing his mastery of the English canon becomes an especially hollow rehearsal. As a twenty-first century diasporic Bangladeshi Muslim from Dhaka living in an

¹¹⁰ To use a particularly damning Rushdian turn of phrase describing Sylhetis in *The Satanic Verses*.

immigrant enclave of London, Chanu's pretensions are many degrees removed from their aspirant goals. Chanu's performance as a would-be Babu and *bhadralok* simulates a nineteenth century Englishness that was simulated by nineteenth century Hindu Bengalis living in the West-Bengali capital of Calcutta—he is a copy of a copy. Despite Chanu's best efforts to appeal to a belated colonial Englishness, his is a persona that cannot comfortably settle in contemporary London. He has no place there. By associating himself with the paradigms of cultural capital in nineteenth century Bengal, Chanu becomes a simulacrum of a colonial paradigm, entirely evacuated of political efficacy.¹¹¹ Though *Brick Lane* takes place in a setting that is indeed changing from one social configuration to another, it is the character of Karim, and not Chanu, who most clearly exemplifies this shift.

IX. Karim as a Global Insurgent

Where Chanu's cultural and political reference points are from a bygone era, Karim, a second-generation Bangladeshi immigrant in the Estates engages in livewire political and cultural activity bordering on radicalism. To understand the distinction between Karim's role in *Tower Hamlets* as opposed to Chanu's, it is paramount to understand the shape of the public discourse surrounding the place of immigrants in British society at the turn of the twenty-first century. That Chanu is one whole generation apart from Karim not only separates him in terms of age and experience, but also in terms of the cultural vectors of signification that connect him to British society. Chanu's cultural touch points, which, to be sure, are anachronistic, refer to colonial-era ideologies of race, ethnicity, religion, and education. He is, in some ways, the ideal

¹¹¹ With reference to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum in *Simulation and Simulacrum*. He writes, "Behind a performative and demonstrative logic: the obsession with historical *fidelity*, with a perfect rendering... this negative and implacable fidelity to the materiality of the past, to a particular scene of the past or the present, to the restitution of an absolute simulacrum of the past or the present which was substituted with all other value" (Baudrillard 47).

colonial subject, and Ali's placement of this character in postcolonial London half a century after decolonization is more a travesty than a tragedy—the farce of history repeating itself so many times as to become a flaccid joke. Karim, however, is breathtakingly current—a perfect millennial subject, as it were—and seemingly integrates all points of the postcolonial world in his persona, speaking a Caribbean-inflected patois, wearing the low-slung jeans of a typical urban youth, professing allegiance to the Bangladeshi nation, and most importantly, a deep fidelity to an emergent global Islam. *Brick Lane*, written over a decade after the Rushdie Affair shook the United Kingdom and two years after 9/11, takes on the question of a radical version of Islam as both issue of *intergenerational* alienation and one that alienates an immigrant group from its host culture. Karim's concerns are at once bound by the micro-politics within his Council Flat and range as wide as the whole Muslim world at large.

As opposed to Chanu's nostalgic fixation upon the glory of Bengal past, Karim is deeply invested in the status of Islam's present, identifying much more strongly as a global Muslim than a Bengali or Bangladeshi. He explains to Nazneen the lack of social traction being either of these things afforded him throughout his childhood. ““When I was a little kid...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....There was no one to look up to....We're the ones who had to stand our ground”” (Ali 191). Karim feels simultaneously alienated from the host British culture and from the inherited Bangladeshi culture handed down from his family, searching fruitlessly for representations of himself and his companions in British culture at large. We see in Ali's drawing of Karim a paradigmatic figure of the transformation Britain experiences at the turn of this century—one that is restless and resistant to

“settling,” either geographically or politically, and one that refuses to conform to any preconceived standard of identity. After trying on several personas, Karim believes in the project of becoming an advocate himself, and standing as a representative of an as-yet inchoate milieu of globally-aware Muslims.

For Karim, the question of acquiring and maintaining cultural capital in a rapidly changing London is a multi-layered problem. His childhood aspirations not only consist of assimilating to the host culture of Britain, but also into those minority groups who have more visibility than his own, “Punjabi” and “Pakistani” being more familiar terms in the U.K. in the decades of his childhood than “Bangladeshi.” This, we can assume, is partially due to the historical newness of the Bangladeshi nation, birthed only in 1971, but also because of the less prominent role that that nation plays on the world stage. What is more, Bangladesh is as foreign to Karim as it is to the majority of Britons. Nazneen comes to realize this as she reflects on him in the last moments of their affair. “Karim had never even been to Bangladesh. Nazneen felt a stab of pity. Karim was born a foreigner. When he spoke Bengali, he stammered. . . . Karim did not have his place in the world. That was why he defended it” (Ali 335). Karim is portrayed as a product of the British Bangladeshi community’s largely isolationist tendencies, and in order to gain traction among his peers in the Estates, he cannot simply represent himself as a Bangladeshi. Neither do the late-twentieth century configurations of black British solidarity serve Karim. Instead of appealing to and working within the established semiotics of Britain’s existent immigrant communities, or even trying to make Bangladesh among the known signifiers, however, Karim takes a different path.

The neighborhood mosque becomes a place where the cultural issues of immigration to London are flung wide open to encompass all of world politics. Karim leads his small

organization of young Muslims in Tower Hamlets this way: “Think global but act local...Official messages of support would be dispatched to the appropriate ummahs around the world—Oldham, Iraq, and elsewhere” (Ali 209). His speeches on Islamic solidarity have a direct and worldly political objective, though he does not articulate specific strategies of action. The universe of Ali’s novel broaches the issues of an increasingly volatile South Asian Muslim youth population without taking on the more dire outcomes of this movement. Karim’s politicking provokes the interest of Nazneen, who conflates the worldly awareness he brings into her life with her lust for him. At the center of the novel is Nazneen’s desire for Karim, which is ironically stoked by his pan-Islamic fervor. Though she very rarely leaves the domestic bounds of her Council Estates flat and her stifling life as a mother and a wife, her world expands and gains a political dimension through her relationship with Karim. As opposed to Chanu’s nostalgic fixation upon the glory of Bengal past, Karim is deeply invested in the status of Islam’s present, identifying much more strongly as a global Muslim than a Bengali or Bangladeshi. When Karim enters the space of Nazneen’s tenement apartment, he brings her into the fold of contemporary global politics and away from the musty old-worldliness of Chanu’s Babuism. This has the effect of seducing Nazneen, who finds herself negotiating between two competing visions of Bengali cosmopolitanism in her London Council Flat—Chanu’s, which allies with the colonial moment thereby deleting the possibility of Bengali Muslim legitimacy, or Karim’s, which glosses over Bangladeshi ties in favor of a pan-Islamic political ideology.

The global touch points in Karim’s vision of the world are not those of empire, but those of a subjugated and subaltern Islam. Pacing around Nazneen’s apartment when Chanu is away, he issues declarations about the oppression of his Muslim brethren across the world. Nazneen “learned about her Muslim brothers and sisters. She learned how many they were, how scattered,

and how tortured... She discovered Bosnia. He shamed her. And he excited her... In a place called Chechnya, there was at this time jihad. [He said]... It's a worldwide struggle, man. Everywhere they are trying to do us down. We have to fight back" (198). It is no accident that Nazneen is excited and eventually seduced by Karim's pan-Islamic zeal. It is a response of projected potency in the face of Chanu's effective impotence, that of the twice dejected and anachronistic colonial subject, dejected a third time by the very fact of time passage and obsolescence. Karim's performance as a charismatic grass-roots organizer stands in stark contrast to Chanu's incompetence, and Islam, as opposed to empire, takes on a libidinous charge. This marks a paradigm shift, a re-shuffling of world order, and it is marked in Nazneen's own structures of desire. "She mistook the sad weight of longing in her stomach for sorrow and she read in the night of occupiers and orphans, of Intifada and Hamas. And he prayed in her home several more times. As he took the mat from her, the tips of their fingers found each other and she smelled the crisp smell of his shirt" (176). After he has issued a rabble-rousing speech to the group of Muslims who have come together in the Estates under the moniker "Bengal Tigers," addressing his "brothers" to affiliate their own causes in the Estates to that of the global Muslim "ummah," Karim and Nazneen fervidly consummate their mutual desire. His dedication to living a pious life, of course, is radically called into question by his intense (and clearly sinful) sexual relationship with a married Muslim woman, but Nazneen's desire for him signals the potency of allying oneself with the large, worldly cause of global Islam in its most radical form. Her eventual disenchantment with Karim's resistant activism in favor of domestic and occupational stability reveals the political stakes of the novel. And perhaps most illuminating is Nazneen's final act of "settling," which is predicated not only on spurning the advances of her young, radical lover, but also an indirect rejection of her staid, latter-day colonialist husband.

X. Tagore in the Council Flat

In setting up this triangulation between Nazneen's desire for Karim's firebrand Islamic politics and her dedication to home, hearth, and tradition in Chanu, *Brick Lane* resembles one of the first novels that took on questions of nationalism, identity, and marital fidelity in a Bengali household—Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*, or in Bengali, *Ghare Baire*. That novel from 1916 features the tortured heart of Bimala, a young wife who, in the Mughal tradition of *purdah*, after marriage has never left the confines of the palatial dwellings of her landowner husband, Nikhil, in early twentieth-century Bengal. Bimala represents a near perfect figure of 19th century nationalist bourgeois Bengali sensibility, armed with a genteel knowledge of English mores and customs all while maintaining a strict adherence to Brahminic paradigms of home and family. Partha Chatterjee asserts that the nineteenth century bourgeois Bengali woman, or the *bhadramahila*, was possessed of “orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, the practical skills of literacy...and the ability to run a household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world” (Chatterjee 247). Moreover, because of the nationalist cause, the *bhadramahila* of this period saw a change in her position under *purdah*: the necessity to have “some idea of the world outside the home...made possible the displacement of the boundaries of ‘the home’ from the physical confines earlier defined by the rules of *purdah* to a more flexible...domain” (Chatterjee 247). It is this moment of transition and its attendant threats to the harmony of a traditional Bengali household that Tagore portrays in *The Home and the World*, with wife Bimala figuring squarely as both a custodian of and an allegory for Bengal itself. Her encounter with Nikhil's dear friend Sandip, a charismatic Indian nationalist who habitually makes fiery speeches against the British colonial dominion over India

and advocates the boycotting of all British goods, arouses a fervor in Bimala that is at once anticolonial and extramarital.

Tagore's version of Bengali nationalism can be mapped almost perfectly onto Ali's. Similar to *The Home and the World*, in *Brick Lane*, Chanu's adherence to the dynamics of colonial India signals a degree of complicity with the paradigm of British domination over Bengali life and culture. But what does it mean to displace this literary love triangle firstly onto the dynamics of Bengali *Muslims*, figures that only appear in Tagore's text as voiceless, disenfranchised peasants, and secondly onto the space of twenty-first century London itself? Of course, Karim, rather than appealing to sentiments of Brahminic Swadeshi nationalism as Sandip does in his charismatic, revolution-seeking speeches, talks in terms of a global Islamic "nation" as it were. Though the terms and content of the novels is very different, *Brick Lane's* structure mimics that of Tagore's in its employment of a woman's romantic affections within a singular domestic space being the grounds of deep-seated political conflict on a worldwide scale. Though diasporic, Sylheti Karim could not be more different in life circumstances to the high-caste West Bengali Sandip. What transcends the differences of geographic, temporal, and religious affiliation between Sandip and Karim is the passing on of a kind of Bengali nationalistic passion. Each possesses a future-oriented gaze that always looks forward to shedding the shackles of western domination as well as the present subaltern status of his people (other Indians in the case of Sandip and other Muslims in the case of Karim). Rather than bringing the "world" to Nazneen's "home," Karim breaches the borders of her Council Flat by bringing her the globe.

Just as Sandip brings the corruptions of "worldliness" into Bimala's home alongside its many virtues, Karim's activism degrades into directionless rioting, and thus the novel makes a structural connection between Islamism and political violence. Tagore allegorizes the prospect of

an independent India that is modern but faithful to its traditions in Bimala's return to the dominion of her husband and the patriarchal order of her domestic sphere. Nikhil grants Bimala permission to foray out into the world, and thus the sanctity of Bengal and India as a whole is preserved even as it begins to modernize. But *Brick Lane* has as little invested in preserving traditional (and thus outmoded) versions of Bengali culture as it does in sympathizing with the pan-Islamic cause. Rather than returning to the submissiveness and silence of being a homebound wife, when Chanu leaves the city entirely, Nazneen stays on in London with her British-born children to determine the parameters of domesticity herself. If Nazneen, like Bimala, is the female allegory of a nation, it is neither Bangladesh nor the Islamic *ummah* that she represents, but rather a perfectly multicultural Britain where the traces of traditional culture that remain in the immigrant enclave pose no threat to the political, economic, and social stability of the United Kingdom at large.

XI. A Final Capitulation

The time frame of *Brick Lane* transcends the constructed binaries of colonization and its postcolonial residues, catapulting into the political formations of the twentieth century, but its narrative loses force just as the Bangladeshi community's position in London becomes more dire. By virtue of its contemporaneity, the text must confront the worldwide ramifications of September 11, 2001 on the scale of the Estates complex; and thus the globe arrives on Nazneen's doorstep in a more insidious form than a wayward lover. Yet the event is treated extremely tentatively, as though the narrative cannot conceive of its significance. It relies on wispy metaphor to approach the ramifications of 9/11. "A pinch of New York dust blew across the ocean and settled on the Dogwood Estate. Sorupa's daughter was the first but not the only one.

Walking in the street, on her way to college, she had her hijab pulled off. Razia wore her Union Jack sweatshirt and it was spat on” (271). The “New York dust” is enough for Chanu to decide that he must leave London for Dhaka, and as the rest of the novel builds towards his eventual departure, it seems to bid farewell to the signifiers of colonization that he represents as well. Karim, too, exits the space of the immigrant enclave and apparently returns to Bangladesh to pursue a utopian vision of pan-Islamism as opposed to the pursuit of Bengal past. As the ever-elusive non-space of an idealized Bengal slips out of the grasp of each character in the novel in their own respective manner, Nazneen realizes that Karim, in the spirit of Tagore’s Sandip, has attempted to allegorize her as a pure, unadulterated version of Bengali femininity. “How did Karim see her? The real thing, he’d said. She was his real thing. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her” (339). Karim’s ideal of Nazneen is a means of negotiating the “settlement” of Tower Hamlets, which never quite seems a suitable home for a second-generation Bangladeshi. He projects onto Nazneen all that his family has lost by emigrating, and in doing so he recuperates himself from the caustic profiling he suffers by the British majority. In refusing to inhabit this archetype for Karim, Nazneen implicitly refuses the idea that immigrant community can conjure an idealized uncorrupted and unchanging Subcontinent to counteract the disharmonies of the immigrant enclave. The space of the immigrant enclave is one that is always deferred and *unsettled*, either in a constant state of nostalgia for an “imaginary homeland” (to borrow a term from Rushdie) or biding time until a more perfect future in which a multicultural harmony is reached—or perhaps even more radically, anticipating a future in which the direction of colonization has been totally reversed.

Brick Lane cannot conceive of and even seems to refuse the last option for the future of London. Nazneen, as the novel’s moral weathervane, loses her interest in Karim’s romantic and

polemical advances when a riot flares around the Estates. Stumbling through the streets, she reflects, “There were no white people here at all. These boys were fighting amongst themselves” (354). At this moment, the novel empties Karim and his cohorts of any political urgency by painting them as squabbling “boys” and ostensibly lowers the stakes by taking “white people” out of the picture. The skirmishes between postcolonial immigrants are cast, then, as juvenilia, and in this move, the text grants the growing disharmony between radicalizing Muslim youth and the British majority no credence. *Brick Lane* introduces the increasingly grave issues that Bangladeshi Muslim youth would have to face in first decades of the twenty-first century, only to wave them away in favor of a palatable form of liberal multiculturalism. After Nazneen learns in passing that Karim has likely moved to Bangladesh to further promote the causes of the *ummah*, Chanu himself retreats to Bangladesh, defeated by his life in London. The text pushes these two characters out of the frame of the novel and into the outside space of Bangladesh, which as it demonstrates through Hasina’s letters, remains deeply problematic and atrocity-riddled. In a rehearsal of an age-old Orientalist paradigm, Bangladesh remains an inscrutable space of all that is *not* suitably western, and thus an appropriate space to jettison figures that prove outmoded, threatening, or generally unpalatable to contemporary English values.

At the end of the narrative, it is Nazneen who remains in England to settle with her two daughters, having chosen neither of the options her husband and lover present to her. When she encounters a former member of the Bengal Tigers and is asked if she is interested in organizing on their behalf, she answers confidently that she only attended meetings ““before I knew what I could do”” (365). What she “could do” is start a small business sewing garments with a few other women from the Estates. The possibility of entrepreneurship stands in direct opposition to Hasina’s misfortunes in Dhaka, and provides an initiation into the capitalist and individualist

values that will make her a suitable member of British culture. Opposed to the wont of both her exiled husband and lover, Nazneen offers no critique of the state whatsoever, and in this capacity, the novel offers a fully capitulatory vision of immigrant settling—one that subscribes to the values of contemporary capitalism and poses no visible threat. She remains on Brick Lane, and as the novel ends, she dons a pair of ice skates underneath her sari, fulfilling a long-held whimsical wish. To her initial apprehension and skepticism, Nazneen's friend Razia issues this satisfied (and conspicuously assimilationist) declaration: ““This is England... You can do whatever you like”” (366). This pat ending can seem like a submission to assimilationist norms, but if we are to understand Nazneen, like Bimala before her, as the feminine keeper of a national ideal, then in this moment Nazneen becomes a prescription of diasporic Bangladeshiness in a multicultural London that bats nary an eyelash at the cultural incongruity of a middle-aged woman ice skating in a sari (to say nothing of the safety and temperature concerns of such an exercise). Nazneen, single mother in a globalized Council Flat, is an allegory for a utopian illusion of a tolerant and temperate multicultural Britain in which immigrants skate freely, untethered by the baggage of colonial pasts and radicalized futures. The London left over at the end of *Brick Lane* has purged itself of the political content of its contemporary composition and presents us with a simple vision of neoliberal achievement that strikes some faint chords of an unthreatening feminism.

The novel's last scene has proven divisive for literary scholars of the novel. Mrinalini Chakravorty calls *Brick Lane*'s denouement “deeply escapist” offering the “possibility...of assimilation, but equally, it is one of an alternative sociality to the normative...ways of belonging to either Brick Lane or the British state. The novel, however, can merely gesture toward such an alternative within a cautious frame of escape” (Chakravorty 525). However,

Brick Lane does offer Nazneen a normative option within the bounds of the British state, in that it eschews engaging the politics its male characters introduce and presents its female protagonist with the trappings of capitalism as a solution. David Gunning claims that the novel

struggles...to account for the appeal of politicized Islam to people who wish at the same time to insist on their Britishness. *Brick Lane* can only present a positive ending for Nazneen through disavowal of the legitimacy of the forms of protest espoused by the Bengal Tigers, but the force of their occupancy of public space remains as a powerful and conflicting trace even as the novel offers its improbable conclusion. The crisis of the state is reproduced in the text's instability. (Gunning 103)

But the narrative does seem to take a stance, feeble as it may seem now for a post-9/11, post-7/7 Britain, by imagining (and prescribing) the correct way to “settle” in the United Kingdom—by refusing to critique its economic or political practices (this practice being coded as male) while simultaneously continuing to contribute to its cultural richness through food and dress (being coded as female). In doing so, it indirectly undoes the inflammatory rhetoric of mid-twentieth century conservative British politicians who posited immigrant women—and their propensity to settle and multiply—as the most threatening category of foreigner. *Brick Lane*, on the contrary, casts the immigrant woman as the ultimate figure of negotiation and thus the perfect example of multicultural citizenship. Yet despite *Brick Lane*'s portrayal of Nazneen as a latter day multiculturalist Bimala, what reverberates after its publication is the unrest the text gestures toward through outcast figure of Karim. And by that token, the “powerful and conflicting trace” of the novel, as Gunning puts it, has perhaps more to do with its reception than its own light-footed conclusion.

Nazneen's settling *in* London by settling *for* a roundly British value system stands in stark contrast to the response of the very Bangladeshi population the novel attempts to represent (aesthetically and, perhaps prescriptively, politically). Bethan Benwell, James Procter, Gemma

Robinson together find that *Brick Lane* resonates quite a bit with its literary predecessor, *The Satanic Verses*, not only in its setting and content but also its reception, which has been marked by a strident boycott by the Bangladeshi Muslim communities of the United Kingdom, particularly that of the novel's namesake. "Not reading" as a strategic political practice for British Muslims, the scholars argue, is a post-Rushdie Affair stance that in some capacity recuperates agency from the depicted steamless squabbles of the novel's fictional Bengal Tigers. Drawing on Aamir Mufti's notion of "reception by pastiche" they argue that "not reading" *Brick Lane* "takes on a special significance within the context of *The Satanic Verses*, with the controversy around Ali's novel playing itself out as a further 'pastiche' of the controversy around Rushdie's in the form of a series of discursive returns" (Benwell 107). Objecting to the unflattering depiction of Sylhetis in the novel (Chanu's aspersions especially), the Bangladeshis of the real Brick Lane refused Ali's representation as both an aesthetic and political stand-in. The politics of the novel, then, do not match those of the community it depicts. By forgoing reading the novel, Brick Lane Bangladeshis seem not to subscribe to its multiculturalist compromises. Perhaps the most transparent line in the novel comes after the riots that initially disturb Nazneen die down. "On Brick Lane scabs formed quickly over the wounds. Band-Aids were applied. There was nothing that would not heal, and after a few weeks, when wooden boards and the Band-Aids came off, it was as if nothing had happened. There were no visible scars" (Ali 364). The novel wishes away the traumas and sutures of the palimpsestic immigrant enclave, allowing virtually no space to ruminate upon the consequences the irruption of second-generation violence may have on British culture. The Brick Lane that keeps calm and carries on marches toward a willful erasure of history and the quiet immigrant weed-pulling that would eventually lead to the total gentrification of the area surrounding the novel's eponymous road. Now, in the second

decade of the twenty-first century, the Bangladeshi community depicted in *Brick Lane* has largely moved away from Tower Hamlets, replaced by chic boutiques and restaurants. “Settling” for immigrant communities in Britain is perhaps endangered most gravely—more so than any Conservative Member of Parliament or radical Islamist—by the restlessness of London itself.

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Conclusion

From the “Novel of Immigration” to the “Migrant Dystopia”

Throughout this dissertation, I have employed the somewhat cumbersome term, “the novel of immigration,” to describe the texts I have examined in *Other Cities*. It is not a particularly poetic or succinct turn of phrase, but I stand by it for a few reasons. “Immigrant literature” is less generically specific; it could conceivably include short stories, poems, memoirs, travelogues, (or flash fiction, tweets, and blogs, for that matter). My study has intentionally limited itself to the form of the novel for reasons I detailed at length in the introduction. “The immigrant novel,” too, is a less precise formulation, as it seems to open itself up to questions of authorship, more so than narrative. “The novel of immigration,” in my view, indexes not only the content of the literary text in question, but the *historical process* out of which it arose. This tethering to a historical moment has become increasingly important to me in the course of conducting my research for the dissertation.

Since conceiving of this project, the political, economic, and social ground beneath it has shifted so much as to make the prospect of drawing any particular conclusions about the state of immigration by studying its literary production fairly impossible. The interminable War on Terror, the 2008 global economic crisis, the 2011 North London riots, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the 2015 Charlie Hebdo murders, the 2015 Paris bombings, and the current refugee crisis have all profoundly changed the public and political conversations surrounding the question of

immigration to Britain and France. As these world events have continued to roil and alter, once again, the status of immigrants in Europe, it has become clear to me that the eight novels I have studied in *Other Cities*, for all their vexation in representing (aesthetically and politically) the immigrant experience contemporary to their moment, are no longer representative of *this* moment in the history of migration to Europe.

In their formal experimentations and their turn away from realism, the novels I examine in my dissertation put pressure on the act of representing the postcolonial immigrant experience. The texts turn to textual instability to represent the exceeding complexity of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century immigrant life in Britain and France. Self-reflexive, associative, maximalist, sprawling, or aphoristic as they are, the novels also zoom into the possibilities and tensions that grow out of the tight living quarters in the immigrant enclaves in and around London and Paris. In their own idiosyncratic ways, each novel attempts to represent something approximating the totality of the immigrant condition, both in its contemporary paradoxes and the deep historical roots of many of its most confounding issues. The publication dates of *Les boucs* (1955) to *La vie sexuelle* (2007) bookend a period of attempted multicultural stability in Britain and France. But the formal instabilities in these novels and the anxieties of representation that trouble them index what the twentieth century novel of immigration could not possibly depict in its narrative. The tropicalized, overheated and hellish London in Rushdie's novel, Millat's ominous promise to avenge the legacy of colonization in Smith's novel, Mohamed's complete mental breakdown in Marouane's novel—these are literary gestures toward a future possibilities in postcolonial immigration.

As opposed to the eighteenth and nineteenth century phenomenon of colonial satellites across the world cropping up in the image of the European city, the late twentieth century saw

the logic of space native to the (post)colony imposing itself upon the outskirts of the French and British metropolis. Novels published in the last decade that depict migration to Europe from the postcolony imagine a more extreme form of establishing immigrant communities in urban enclaves. They depict postcolonial migration as a form of *colonization*, thereby fulfilling Europe's ostensible Orientalist nightmare. In, for instance Nadim Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2006), Boualem Sansal's *2084* (2015), or even Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission* (2015), Europe is imagined to be formidably—if not fully—colonized by its postcolonial population. This geographic and socio-political reversal is a radical ideological shift from centuries past, and in the twenty-first century, it has produced a number of fictional texts that imagine dystopian futures for Europe. This turn in more recent novels portraying migration depicts quite the opposite of capitulation to the Universalist ideals France and Britain purport to espouse. The dystopian representation of migration in contemporary literature no longer seem to focus upon the uncanniness and surreality inherent in the double displacement of postcolonial immigration. Instead, they imagine even more extreme futures for France and Britain, whose cities take on Islamic-sounding names or implement Islamic law. The question of acculturation or assimilation to European culture in these texts is a moot point. In this capacity, these novels turn entirely away from the question of political *advocacy* in representation, and instead the aesthetic representation is plagued by an overarching sense of political dread. The negotiation between political and aesthetic representation in these texts no longer hangs in tension, but succumbs fully to the anxieties of the aesthetic realm, they do not properly fall under the category of “novels of immigration,” but instead resemble something more akin to “migrant dystopias.”

What does this dystopian turn in literature tell us about the outcomes of turn-of-the-century debates surrounding multiculturalism, communalism, *laïcité* (or secularism), and racial

disharmony? If, for instance, in 2000, *White Teeth* was roundly lauded for celebrating the cosmopolitan ethnic rainbow of millennial London, what do the dystopian novels featuring British South Asian immigrants tell us about a post-9/11, post 7/7 United Kingdom? From the vantage point of 2016, the vision of a harmonious multicultural society that evens out into a functioning, ethnically diverse middle class that the coda of *Brick Lane* seems to wish into being smacks of a naïve utopianism. In contrast, Nadeem Aslam's version of Bradford, England, as a bewitched Pakistani colony in *Maps for Lost Lovers*; Gautam Malkani's depiction of relentless immigrant corruption in a capital that has become fully *Londonstani* (2006); and Lawrence Hill's portrayal of an African refugee's hellish journey into the allegorical island nation of "Freedom State" in *The Illegal* (2016) all undo the paradigms of utopian multiculturalism.

Contemporary French fiction demonstrates a cultural paranoia that seems to flip the anguish of earlier novels depicting illiterate and unacculturated North African migrants. Instead of immigrants failing to achieve "Frenchness," we now see fearful visions of France succumbing to an imagined Islamic hegemony. Michel Houellebecq's 2015 novel, *Soumission* (which infamously graced the cover of *Charlie Hebdo* the day of the attack) and Boualem Sansal's *2084*, which also came out in 2015, imagine France as an Islamic state under sharia law, echoing some of the apocalyptic predictions of a third-world France in Jean Raspail's 1973 immigrant-phobic work, *Le Camp des Saints*. The political underpinnings of these texts harken back to centuries even prior to colonization to the European anxieties of the Crusades.

By giving the process of migration to Europe—the reversal of the spatial trajectory of colonization—a patina of surrealism, these texts create a dystopian mythos around an increasing urgent sociopolitical question. As recent events in Europe demonstrate clearly, the question of migration and immigration has never been more urgent. The literary forms that represent this

process give us a great deal of insight into the ideological and aesthetic ramifications of this political moment—for the colonial past, the postcolonial present, and the uncertain future. The configurations of social life in Europe are changing rapidly—they are very much *in process*, to use Raymond Williams’ idiom. Dystopian or otherwise, the novel, we must remember, is always symptomatic. As the transformations in migration patterns between Britain, France, and their “Others” begins to further change the shape of their cities through inundation, upheaval, and spectacular violence, it remains to be seen what the form of the novel will reveal—and indeed, how the novel itself may play a role in that transformation.