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PRODUCTIONS OF BLASPHEMY:
NATIONALISM AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN THE
POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

By

Padmaja Challakere

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on the narrative representation of moments of blasphemy in the writings of Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Sara Suleri, Carolyn Steedman, and Mukul Kesavan by focusing on the issue of 'what narrative energies motivate the production of blasphemy' and 'from where does the decision to blaspheme come'. By reading these representations of blasphemy in the context of 'blasphemy' as it was invoked in the "Rushdie affair" and the reactionary nationalist work it performed, I challenge the tendency to locate blasphemy in an act, intention, program, or a proper name. By drawing on the Foucauldian sense of transgression as that which is determined by, rather than an overcoming of the limits of law, I argue that the texts of Rushdie and Kureishi offer too narrow a view of blasphemy. This is because blasphemy here is tied to an exuberant iconoclasm that is assumed to generate a radical social agency. In contrast, the texts of Sara Suleri, Steedman, and Kesavan show up the problems involved in naming an act as transgressive. The texts of Suleri and Steedman show us the labor, body, and cost of transgression that is suppressed in Rushdie's texts by giving us a history of agency that does not cross over into visibility. A feminist and materialist analysis of the scene of blasphemy's production can produce new and productive ways of thinking about blasphemy. Such a reading tells us that blasphemy in Rushdie's texts
emerges out of a male sexual anxiety about authorship and authority. Such a reading also shows how Kureishi’s anxiety about imagination in the “post-Rushdie affair” predicament has forced him to transfix London as the natural site of modernity, secularism, and imagination. This becomes clear when we read this novel against his “pre-Rushdie affair” text, “Sammy and Rosie get Laid” where he lays bare the binding of London and Pakistan. If blasphemy in Steedman’s Landscape for a Good Woman and Suleri’s Meatless Days takes the form of an exposure of nationalism’s power to conscript woman’s body as a cultural signifier for nation-making, in Kesavan’s historical novel Looking Through Glass blasphemy is a metaphor for the failed activism of the ordinary people of Indian nationalist history.
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With all my affection
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Introduction: Transgression, Blasphemy, and Postcoloniality

Synonymous in metropolitan West with the “Rushdie affair”,1 and with a Joycean focus on “third world literature,” Salman Rushdie stands also for the category for postcolonial literature. No one who thinks about literature and its relation to the politics of national and racialized identities can fail to be stuck by what has come to be called the “Rushdie affair.” Blasphemy as it has been put to use in (and since) the “Rushdie affair” is legible only within and cannot be understood outside its political effects. The nationalist identity formations produced in and through the “‘Rushdie affair’” had material effects not only on race-relations,2 and on the polemic of immigration but also on the theoretical debates about transgression, representation, and criticism. The shifting and contradictory meanings of blasphemy that emerged within the “‘Rushdie affair’” cannot but be considered in any conceptualization of blasphemy.

Within the liberal discourse of support for Rushdie, blasphemy emerged as a heroically transgressive act exemplary of enlightened thinking, western secular consciousness, and free speech. The liberal coding of Satanic Verses’s blasphemy as transgression has had the effect of making blasphemy a spectacular event within the national-cultural history of Britain. If the liberal discourse sees blasphemy as inherently liberatory, the culturalist/literary discourse tends to read blasphemy as generating a transgressive political and social agency. In contemporary literary and cultural studies blasphemy is assumed to generate radical social and political agency. Blasphemy as that which ‘makes impure’ or de-sacrilizes has become a metaphor for the oppositional, the
contestational, and the resistant. In this tradition, blasphemy denotes transgression which reverses the limits and prohibitions embodied by religion and law, and stands for the spirit of imagination.

The literary and philosophical possibilities of transgression, for example, are elaborated in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* which reads Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of carnival as “an analytic category that provides an ethic of symbolic inversion and transgression”(18). Stallybrass and White summarize Bakhtin’s notion of carnival as “that world of fairs, popular feasts and wakes, processions and competitions, comic shows, and open air amusement” where we are confronted by the “transcodings and displacements effected between high/low image of the physical body and other social domains”(9). Understood from this perspective, blasphemy is that which keeps us in touch with the bodily, and that which foregrounds the physicality of the body over and against its repression, sublimation, or metaphorization.

Within academic postmodern discourse, blasphemy as the naturalized metaphor for the oppositional, the transgressive, the politicized, and the subversive has come to be assigned an automatic radical power and is perceived as a self-evident template for transgression of authority. The following chapters relate this ‘postmodern’ sense of blasphemy with ‘blasphemy’ as it emerged within the parameters of the “Rushdie affair”—that is blasphemy as it emerged out of the discourse of liberal support for Rushdie. The dissertation draws attention to the irreconciliability between the liberal enchantment with blasphemy and the reactionary nationalist work performed by the liberal invocation of blasphemy within the “‘Rushdie affair’.” Instead of reading blasphemy as a metaphor for
freedom from limits, this dissertation sees blasphemy’s possibility as intimately tied to the prohibition that provokes it. At the same time, it refuses to locate blasphemy in an act, a site, a project, or a specific program. Instead the dissertation focuses on the narrative representation of moments of blasphemy and transgression in the writings of Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Sara Suleri, Carolyn Steedman, and Mukul Kesavan. By focusing on the issue of ‘what narrative energies motivate the authorial performance of blasphemy’ or ‘from what comes the decision to blaspheme,’ it attends to the narrative processes that produce blasphemy. Through a materialist and feminist reading of the scene of production of blasphemy, I consider these texts in relation to the unleashing of reactionary narratives of nationalism that developed out of the liberal enthusiasm for “blasphemy” within the “Rushdie affair.” I argue that these texts disrupt a reading of blasphemy as a self-evident template for imagination, free speech, and transgression of authority. Instead, these texts open up new ways of thinking about blasphemy that suggest that blasphemy is not an overcoming of the limits of power since what is coded as ‘transgression’ can be transformed into a source of ‘authority’. More importantly, they suggest that the tendency to assign an automatic radical power to blasphemy has consequences that are politically conservative. Before we move into a discussion of how blasphemy is narrated in these texts, it is necessary to pay attention to ideological force that has accrued in the category of blasphemy, imagination, and democracy within the “Rushdie affair.”

The “Rushdie Affair” and the Liberal Response:

Within the liberal support for Satanic Verses, blasphemy made its appearance as that which stands for the spirit of imagination and free speech. This sense of blasphemy as
the proof-text of imagination recalls the importance that Romanticism attached to the power of imagination. For example, in the Prelude, Wordsworth invokes imagination as "another name for absolute power/And clearest insight, amplitude of mind/And reason in her most exalted mood" (Prelude XIV, 190).\(^5\) In Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, imagination designates "the great instrument of moral good."\(^6\) The liberal support for Satanic Verses may be said to resurrect this Romantic notion of imagination and naturalize blasphemy as resistant and oppositional.

This ahistorical notion of imagination produced a narrative of courageous imagination that associated it with a Western national, literary and cultural space. Such a notion of imagination as the spirit of a national-literary culture delivers us to a spatial logic within which a metropolitan site such as London becomes (as it does in Kureishi’s recent novel about the “Rushdie affair,” The Black Album) synonymous with Imagination. Within such a spatial logic imagination emptied of historicity is linked to a consciousness, a certain cultivated sensibility. We could say that the embeddeness of Satanic Verses in conventional notions of blasphemy (posed commonly as the opposition between the liberal support for and reading of the book and the Muslim opposition to and reaction against the book) emerges out of this spatializing logic in which imagination is linked to the tradition of Western Enlightenment. The chronicling of imagination as aligned with a tradition rather than as the effect of history (and its particular contexts and subject-constitution) heroicizes blasphemy as the emergence of a beleaguered transgressive consciousness.
The liberal conceptualization of blasphemy as emerging from a Western tradition of imagination recalls the modernist enchantment with the artistic sensibility and consciousness. Michael H. Levenson's book *A Genealogy of Modernism*\(^7\) observes that modernism affirms the centrality of the authorial consciousness and represents it as "seeking newer and newer ways of seeing, mediating, and constituting the world" (8). He emphasizes the extent to which modernism privileges both the author's "inward turn to his consciousness and at the same time its opposite, namely the outward projection of the author's consciousness" as he sees, experiences, counters and represents prevailing laws and attitudes (8). Perhaps it is this modernist sense of a "presiding consciousness" or sensibility that underpins the liberal tendency to see "Rushdie affair" in terms of a clash of consciousness and of subjectivities. Within this mapping, blasphemy emerges as the heroic agency of the author who is anxiously producing imagination's authority in the face of the continuing authority of dominant institutions. In the "Rushdie affair" aftermath, the binary construction of the author and (fanatical) authority, the individual and institution came to be mapped on to the opposition between Western Imagination and Islam\(^5\).

Within such a logic, a "blasphemous" text like *Satanic Verses* is represented as a part and parcel of a tradition of imagination ranging from Thomas More, Jefferson, Gallileo, Mill, Milton, Voltaire, and Byron. The cultural politics of invoking such a lineage is best exemplified in Tony Harrison's *Blasphemer's Banquet*\(^9\), a TV program aired in response to the protests against the novel by the Bradford Muslim community. The narrator-producer, Tony Harrison, used the image of a poet drinking to Rushdie at the Omar Khayyam restaurant in Bradford in the company of four other blasphemers,
Voltaire, Moliere, Byron, and Omar Khayyam. By placing Rushdie within this tradition of historical debts, the play internalizes the blasphemy of Satanic Verses as part of a western tradition of imagination and critical spirit. To locate the blasphemy associated with Satanic Verses within a tradition from which transgressive imagination evolves naturally is to spatialize blasphemy in the sense of locating it in England in particular, and in general in the West. Also, what such a representation avoids seeing is the blasphemy of Satanic Verses as produced in and through the contingencies of the ""Rushdie affair"".

The "Rushdie affair" is seen as an immigrant problem, as belonging to a spatial scene that lies outside the British nation-space, and as the natural outcome of the failure of protective (national) boundaries against the foreign body - the Paki immigrant. In Racism, Culture, Markets John Gabriel points out that the ""Rushdie affair"" transformed the stereotype of the "Paki immigrant"" into that of "the Muslim fundamentalist." James F. English's essay "Community Relations: Policing Jokes in Satanic Verses" shows how the Muslim-led protests against the novel "were used to reinforce the most negative stereotypes of the fanatic, terroristic "Arab" and to foster a whole range of anti-Asian jokes masked as jokes against censorship (I am Salman Rushdie tee shirts, for example, or jokes about forthcoming novels: Buddha, You Fat Fuck"). English observes that "black community protests served to affirm and stabilize the "white" community, the imagined community of authentic Britons, or of the "civilized West," who were once again presented with the opportunity to brandish their famed tolerance as a weapon of racialist exclusion and domination" (236). As the above passage suggests, racist Britons who considered themselves "tolerant" were addressees of the liberal discourse of support for
Rushdie. They found their attitudes and perceptions of the Muslim British confirmed and could ‘legitimately’ argue that this time the “inauthentic Britons” (read immigrants) had gone too far. ¹¹

The sense of imagination threatened by the force of “Muslim fundamentalism” at the gates of Britain not only produced a jingoistic nationalism within popular culture, the fear and anxiety associated with a seemingly threatened imagination also produced effects within fiction, such as in Hanif Kureishi’s Black Album. As Chapter 3 will argue, Kureishi’s Black Album romanticizes London as the space of a self-authorizing imagination and hence unwittingly participates in the spatializing discourse of British nationalism. The specter of imagination under threat or the failure of imagination became the site for an anxious consolidation of nationalism within popular culture.

In his excellent essay “Frank Bruno or Salman Rushdie?” Paul Gilroy¹² argues that both Frank Bruno, the defeated English boxer and Salman Rushdie, the embattled and vulnerable scholar were reconstructed in popular media as quintessentially English heroes. Gilroy points out that for weeks the two stories, that of Frank Bruno’s defeat by Mike Tyson and of Rushdie’s plight, were articulated together. While Frank Bruno’s defeat by Mike Tyson in 1988 transformed him instantly into “our Frank,” his “black English masculinity became a counterpart to the esoteric and scholastic image of Rushdie - the middle-class intellectual immigrant - so remote from the world of ordinary folk that he was able to misjudge it so tragically” (88). As Gilroy argues both these stories resonating the “heroism of the vanquished echoed, replied, and reworked the same range of visceral themes: belonging and exclusion, sameness and assimilation” (88). The juxtaposition of
these two stories in the popular media had the effect of producing a national narrative of 'British character and dignity.' As Gilroy puts it:

Alongside the lofty principles and abstract excellence invoked by Rushdie’s supporters in the nation’s literary elite, Frank’s triumph must appear trivial and base. But, every bit as much as the responses to Rushdie’s book, Frank’s five stumbling rounds in Vegas offered a means to clarify contemporary British identity and values. The image of each man stood as a convenient emblem for one of Britain’s black settler communities, marking out their respective rates of progress towards integration. Each image increased its symbolic power through implicit reference to the other - its precise inversion. The same complex interplay was to be repeated exactly one year later when Frank’s wedding to his long-time sweetheart coincided with the anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa (88).

The production within popular culture of this ethos of the noble defeated warrior as well as the sense of vulnerability yielded a social discourse of patriotic nostalgia for the British Empire. Steven Connor explains the lineaments of this impulse in his book *The English Novel in History: 1950-1995* by focusing on the historical, political, and cultural shifts of race, nation, and the novel form within the post-imperial British national culture:

Over the course of the twentieth century, but with accelerating force in the years since 1945, the assurance of the special relationship between the history of Britain and global history has steadily been eroded. Where the history of Britain and the English-speaking peoples had at one time seemed to be identical with the history and development of culture in general, the final splintering of the Empire and the
redefinitions of world power after the Second World War made that association less than credible (3).

Britain's "loss of confident belief that it was the subject of its own history," Connor suggests, raises the issue of "problem of address" in the novel form. Given that the narrative form in which "a modern society dreams its integrated state and addresses its constituent members in the name of that embattled imagination" is "no longer as unified or as determined as before," how can national identity and political culture be imagined and narrated in the novel form? (11) While on the hand the "Rushdie affair" allowed this crisis-ridden national imaginary 'a legitimization by reversal' by engendering the image of a paradigmatically British tradition of democracy and imagination, it also produced a discourse of panic within which the threat to core British values could be dramatized. If the liberal support for Rushdie invoked the blasphemy of Satanic Verses as being part of 'Western literary tradition of dissent,' it also naturalized the fatwa and the Islamic fundamentalist reaction to the novel as part of a generalized immigrant Muslim response.13

The Politics of (reading) the Fatwa

Another troubling feature of the liberal response has been that "Khomeini's fatwa" has become the most visible image of the Muslim response to Satanic Verses. It almost stands in for the Muslim-led protest against the novel. The phrase fatwa has acquired such a proverbial status that it has become unnecessary to cite the text of the fatwa or examine its rhetorical or political context in any discussion of the "Rushdie affair." In most journalistic and critical responses to the "Rushdie affair," the fatwa has become a passing invocation that needs no further elaboration, a code-word that describes a quintessentially
Muslim response to anything liberal and modern. As Spivak observes in “Reading The Satanic Verses,” the daily visible spectacle of Khomeini in his Islamic robe on “the fully telematic transnational cultural shuttle” has achieved such a status of reality that it covers over everything, and especially “the history of the “production of Ayatollahod.” This blown-up, cinematic figure of Ayatollah “taken at its at its face-value” brings into being a self-referential world in which the fatwa stands for the Muslim protest. This undifferentiated response, she suggests, is what gave Khomeini’s fatwa its rhetorical and political power.

Hence the necessity and significance of a text like For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech. As the Publisher’s Note declares, this is the “first collection of texts by Arab and Muslim writers expressing support for Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses and for freedom of expression as a universal right.” What is remarkable about the essays collected here is that the denunciation of Khomeini’s fatwa is here framed within a historical theorization of its production. Most notable in this regard is Ayatollah Djalal Gandhejeh’s essay, “For Rushdie.” This essay breaks down the too-commonly used code-word fatwa to reflect upon its politics, its rhetoric, its timing, and its consequences. It speaks of the “intolerable character of the decree of death that the fatwa is” and does this through a meticulous analysis of the text of the fatwa. Notably, this is perhaps the only critical text on the “Rushdie affair” that cites the text of the infamous fatwa:

The author of The Satanic Verses, a text written, edited, and published against Islam, and against the Koran, along with all the editors and publishers aware of its
contents are condemned to capital punishment. I call on all valiant Muslims wherever they may be in the world to execute this sentence without delay, so that no one henceforth will dare insult the sacred beliefs of Muslims. (149)

Ayatollah Gandhjejeh points out that even the most cursory reading of the text of the fatwa shows it to be "deliberately blurring." This "fuzziness of sentence which gives no precise details concerning the identity, nationality, or even the number of persons condemned by the document," he argues, "cannot but be noticed by anyone knowledgeable in Islamic Jurisprudence" (149). Then he goes on to argue that it is not Rushdie's Satanic Verses but Khomeini's fatwa (which is but a "blanket order for collective murder") that is "anti-Islamic" and "blasphemous." In Gandhjejeh's words, "by addressing himself to fanatical populist elements, who had already been shamelessly manipulated, Khomeini succeeded in bringing the religious beliefs of Muslims into even greater disrepute"(150). Ayatollah Gandhjejeh's concern is to show that Khomeni's fatwa is a "political maneuver that blasphemously uses religion to mask the contradictions of his regime," and "create an international crisis so that he can divert attention from its innumerable problems, the problems to which he has no solutions, following the bitter defeat by Iraq" (155).

By reading the "political maneuvering" written into the fatwa, Gandhjejeh's essay shows it to be an effect of violence long underway. This violence, he implies, was spurred on and framed by the political events which include Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's (the Shah's) campaign of modernization/Americanization (which was economically and ideologically rooted in oil-revenues), the atrocities of the SAVAK on government
dissidents, the crisis over the constitution and Ayatollah Khomeini’s strategic return from exile in 1977, and his seizure of power in 1979.\textsuperscript{15} Gandhjejeh’s materialist reading demonstrates how and under what social/political conditions “Ayatollah cast himself as a fundamentalist from within a specific historical scene,” to borrow Spivak’s phrase. These histories are constitutive of Khomeini’s declaration of the notorious \textit{fatwa} on February 14, 1989. It is the force of these histories that is emptied out in the standard invocations of the \textit{fatwa} as a proof-text of Muslim fundamentalism.

**The Politics of (not) Reading Satanic Verses**

Aamir Mufti\textsuperscript{16} in “Reading the Rushdie Affair” argues that the “liberal shock” at the ‘Muslim refusal to read the novel’ dominates the rhetorical context of most commentaries on the “Rushdie affair”. While the liberal supporters of Rushdie claimed for their activities the rigor and seriousness of real reading, the Muslim response to the novel is characterized as philistine, backward, and fanatic. Mufti argues that the liberal reading of the novel also operated within philistine pop-cultural forms of consumption and the much-vaunted “shock”\textsuperscript{17} at the Muslim refusal to read the novel conceals this reading-as-consumption. Such a mode of reading has fixed the response to the novel in terms of racialized categories of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ the ‘liberal reading culture’ and the ‘fanatic book-burning culture’. More significantly, Mufti argues that there is no place for such an expression of liberal shock and outrage because the Muslim refusal to read, considered from one perspective, reflects a pop-cultural mode of reading. It involved “the consumption of extracts published in print media in English and in translation, commentary in print, on the airwaves, from the pulpit, fantasticated representation in the popular
cinema, rumors, and hearsay" (97). Such ‘mass cultural consumption’ and its formations are, Mufti suggests, necessarily a part of the “postcolonial global ecumene” so that it is unproductive to apply standard notions of ‘reading’ and literary ‘reception’ to *Satanic Verses*. We do not have the luxury of refusing to engage with pop-cultural modes of consuming texts, nor can we refuse to read the political, cultural, and historical effects that texts produce without their being read. As he puts it:

Conceptions of reception based on an almost Victorian image of the solitary bourgeois reader have allowed recent commentators—Tim Brenan and Talal Asad among them—to more or less dismiss the novel as produced for (and consumed by) Western audiences alone. Working under similar assumptions, Western accounts of the world-wide demonstrations against the book’s publication have often expressed amazement at the passion of crowds that have obviously not read the book. A reconceptualization of reception appropriate to the realities of the postcolonial global *ecumene* . . . must account for forms of mass “consumption” other than “reading” in the narrower sense of the word (97).

This call for a refocused attention on “reading” and its relation to mass “consumption” becomes clear when we recall that the liberal discourse tended to conflate the protesters of the book with book-burning Islamists. While the Muslim refusal to read is commonly perceived as a repudiation of modernity, and reason, Mufti’s essay reminds us that “the violence of the novel’s reception is an accurate indicator of the novel’s sweeping re-arrangement and rethinking of the terms of the Muslim public sphere”.18 The most productive intervention of *Satanic Verses*, according to Mufti, is that its “multilayered
engagement with the origin myth of Islam’ is a “forceful refusal to accept the authority of
the authoritarian political constellations and discourses, usually grouped under the label
fundamentalism, that have emerged across the Muslim world in the last decade” (97). Mufti
suggests that in this sense, Satanic Verses both “draws its sustenance from the
cultural discourses of Muslim South Asian diaspora” and makes volatile “the terms of the
discussion itself within the Muslim public sphere” (97). For Mufti, the blasphemy of
Satanic Verses consists in its positing of “doubt” which “becomes the sign of resistance to
the fundamentalist hijacking of Islam”(108). While “doubt” is typically set in opposition to
religious belief, Mufti borrowing from Sara Suleri, suggests that Satanic Verses cannot be
seen as enclosed within the frontiers of doubt as anti-religion:

It would be dangerous and naïve . . . to see the novel as embodying an
unambiguously anti-religious viewpoint for that of course is precisely the view of its
fundamentalist critics. As Sara Suleri has convincingly shown . . . “Rushdie performs
a curious act of faith; he chooses disloyalty in order to dramatize his continuing
obsession with the metaphors that Islam makes available to a postcolonial
sensibility.” For the effect of this disloyalty is not to replace belief with the final
certainty of disbelief. It is rather to posit doubt as “the opposite of faith,” as the
inevitable corollary of faith, or as Suleri puts it, as “the very historicity of belief
(108).

As Mufti, borrowing from Suleri, points out, the blasphemy of Satanic Verses is
part of the cultural discourse of Islam and it is in the context of this literary-cultural-
critical space that its blasphemy needs to be situated. Within Suleri’s formulation,¹⁹Satanic
Verses takes on a blasphemous tone in order that it may invoke the cultures of Islam historically. So, blasphemy becomes not only Rushdie’s way of critiquing “fundamentalist appropriations” of Islam, but also of showing how religious belief constitutes itself by monopolizing and hijacking all the affective spheres of culture. By reading Rushdie’s blasphemy as a category within the cultural framework of Islam, Suleri counteracts the liberal tendency to stake out proprietary rights on blasphemy.

If doubt is the category through which Satanic Verses articulates blasphemy, it is only through doubting naturalized categories of what constitutes reading, that we can repoliticize blasphemy. We must consider the reading of the novel not just in relation to its “not reading,” but rather examine “the refusal to read” also as a mode of reading perpetuated by the “Rushdie affair”. Instead of focusing on who/which group read the novel, we must ask rather how should we read or perhaps not read the text?

Given that the liberal response to the “Rushdie affair” has vested blasphemy with an automatic radical and political force, a transgressive potential, we must transvalue blasphemy as a self-evidently positive model of subversion. Only by interrupting a staging of blasphemy as production, a writing project, or activism can we can repoliticize blasphemy. The first and second chapter on Rushdie’s and Hanif Kureishi’s writings will explore in greater detail the need for and the nature of this interruption of blasphemy-as-transgression.

The category of transgression is discussed astutely in Foucault’s “A Preface to Transgression.” Here he argues that “transgression is not a transcendence of the limit” but “is an action which involves the limit”(33). By suggesting that transgression is that
which shows or “reveals the limits of authority,” Foucault points to a new understanding of transgression. Transgression in Foucauldian terms is not that which “overcomes, negates, or crosses limits” but is that which shows up the extent of our dependence on narratives of authority - religious, political, and national. He speaks of transgression as that which is determined through and in limits of authority:

Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses . . . . The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of meaning they possess; a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable; and reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows . . . . Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust (34-35).

According to Foucault then, transgression does not embody a reversal of prohibition, nor does it open up the possibility of existence beyond the limits of prohibition. What Foucault suggests is that the “action of transgression” illuminates the limits of the law/prohibition in the way in which “a flash of lightning in the night . . . owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation.” Inasmuch as moments of defiance not only release a sense of transgression but also heightens one’s awareness of the narratives of law, they also show up the liminality of transgression itself. From this Foucauldian
angle it would seem that the texts of Rushdie and Kureishi offer too narrow a view of blasphemy by linking it with an exuberant iconoclasm that has the power to annihilate limits. However, in the texts of Sara Suleri, Carolyn Steedman, and Mukul Kesavan, blasphemy is not contained within metaphors of successful resistance and intentional subversion. Instead, the texts show up the processes involved in the constituting of an oppositional project, and the problems involved in naming an act as oppositional and resistant. The autobiographical novels of Suleri, Steedman, and Kesavan may be said then to unsettle the postmodern reading of blasphemy that sees it as the overcoming of authority, limit, or prohibition. These texts suggest that it is difficult, even impossible, to stabilize transgression with a program, a project, or an act.

Chapter Outline

The second chapter, which is divided into two sections, goes back and forth between Satanic Verses and Midnight’s Children to challenge the developmental narrative within Rushdie criticism which reads Midnight’s Children as the metonym for a Joycean cultural postmodernism and reads Satanic Verses as the metonym for a (discomfitingly) political postcolonialism. By showing that Midnight’s Children’s mode of blasphemy takes the form of showing that postcolonial India cannot be seen as an “Other” to colonizing Britain but rather as its effect (in the way in which Saleem is Methwold’s son), I challenge the politics of aligning blasphemy only with Satanic Verses.

In the second section of this chapter, I move from an examination of the potential of blasphemy to an examination of the deployment of ‘blasphemy’ in Satanic Verses by examining the discourse of “female agency” and “feminist practice” at stake in Rushdie’s
grounding of blasphemy in the female subject. In her essay “Reading Satanic Verses,” Spivak points out that “woman is the touchstone of blasphemy” in Satanic Verses and asks whether this can provide a model of enabling feminism? It is only by elaborating the narrative modalities through which blasphemy is mobilized, can Spivak’s question be addressed. We find that blasphemy in Rushdie’s text emerges out a male sexual anxiety that is (anxiously) producing blasphemy’s authority in the face of a threat of emasculation by a non-passive female sexuality. If woman here is shown to occupy the position of enabler of blasphemy, does this then demonstrate Rushdie’s commitment to feminism? This is the burden of Spivak’s question in “Reading Satanic Verses.”

Spivak offers as an example of ‘enabling feminism,’ the politically engaged work of the Southall Black Sisters who refused to prop up either the liberal support for blasphemy or get caught up in the Muslim-led reaction against the novel and its author initiated within the frame of “bulwark against racism.” This called for a re-imagination of the oppositional energies and political objectives that had forged the movement in the first place as the SBS had emerged as part of the anti-racist political groups (such as Rock Against Racism). As one of the activists, Hannana Siddiqui, when within the course of their commitment to anti-racist political action, they “felt the lack of a discourse pertaining to domestic and sexual violence against women,” they saw as their crucial task the addressing of these issues in the most visible way possible. The power of such work derives from the re-imagination (transgression, if you like) of an oppositional praxis.

In the context of the “Rushdie affair,” the SBS intervened by specifically demanding from both parties—the supporters and the protestors—“de-racialization of
religion" and by constructing their own polemic around a demand for an everyday secularism. What they called secularism, they took care to distinguish from the generalized discourse of secularism which aligns it with the tradition of Western Enlightenment and sees it as an automatic counter-weight to fundamentalism. Their appeal for secularism was housed in the rhetoric of the everyday, secularism as survival rather than as secularism as the language of modernity. The problematic implications and outcome of the alignment of modernity with secularism will become clear when we analyze Hanif Kureishi’s novelistic response to the "Rushdie affair" in Chapter 3.

The third chapter, "The Disclosure of London as Postcolonial Britain," suggests that Kureishi’s notion of blasphemy expresses itself through transgression in the sphere of sexuality and eroticism. In his films My Beautiful Laundrette, Sammy and Rosie get Laid, and in his novel about the "Rushdie affair," The Black Album, transgression is posed in the language of metropolitan pop culture and its presumed bodily immediacy. While this marks a useful break from Rushdie’s race, class, and gender based polemic of transgressive writing, it aligns blasphemous imagination with a stylish pop cultural metropolitan ethos identified here as London. By staging anxiety about literary culture (in the post-fatwa predicament), Black Album mobilizes blasphemy in a way that replicates the binaries of the "Rushdie affair": secularism versus fundamentalism, modernity versus tradition, and reading culture versus philistine culture. Once we accept the narrative’s linking of modernist author(ity) and imagination with a metropolitan sensibility, we are forced to read the Muslim response to Satanic Verses as representing a pre-modern, non-secular, imagination-denying other.
The problematic implications of Black Album's naturalized link between imagination, modernity, and metropolitan space become clear only when we read this text in relation to Kureishi's 'pre-Rushdie affair' film-text, Sammy and Rosie get Laid. By 'laying' bare the disavowed historical, political, economic, and social connections between Britain and Pakistan; between cosmopolitan London culture and migrant money, and generally between property and culture, the film-text uncovers Britain as a historically situated post-imperial nation intimately tied to India/Pakistan rather than as the ideal image of a metropolitan space. By showing us the intertwined nature of London/Pakistan or what can be characterized as postcolonial Britain, Sammy and Rosie get Laid compels us to enter a historical rather than an iconic London.

In counterpoint to Kureishi's notion of blasphemy as automatically inherent in a Western metropolitan sensibility, Carolyn Steedman's Landscape for Good Woman and Sara Suleri's Meatless Days trace the "itinerary of silencing," to use Spivak's phrase, of transgression. In Suleri's Meatless Days there is recognition that what are considered "domestic" and bodily functions of eating and feeding are imbricated in larger political and apparently abstract structures of nationalism. The novel draws attention to post-colonial Pakistan's disavowal of the socio-economic tensions and the scarcities of food (imposed by the partition process) by showing that while economics of nationalism dictated rationing and the instituting of "meatless days," the culture of nationalism generated a sentimentality about lavish festivals, abundantly laid-out tables, and elaborate cooking rituals. While Meatless Days shows up this nationalist mobilization of food by staging the
domestic as the scene of the political and by focusing on the meat and labor that undergirds food as culture, it does this within a bourgeois framework.

This text about the newly independent Pakistan can be productively read alongside Carolyn Steedman’s autobiographical account, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, which tells of her working class mother’s resistance to and her acquiescence to the hollow promise of middle-class subjectivity held out by the post-war Labour Government in Britain. Steedman’s mother’s desire for self-realization involves the use or rather the overworking of body-as-economy which is central to post-war Britain’s desire to reconstruct its identity. Steedman sees her mother’s anxiety about feeding her children “adequately but in the cheapest way possible” as an allegory of post-war Britain’s desire to create a classless society through producing an industrious body that can be worked into a ideal (the most efficiently nourished) national subject—the middle class body. By drawing attention to the politics of post-war socialism of the Labour government and to her mother’s politics of providing nourishment, Steedman’s text shatters the coherence of nationalist and patriarchal narratives that sentimentalize motherhood as an all-nurturing consciousness. If Steedman’s text disrupts our traditional expectations of a text that we associate with a “colonial” realm, given its engagement with scarcity of food and starvation, *Meatless Days* surprises us by expunging all accounts of food-as-subsistence. However, the texts mentioned above, one thought of as colonial and the other as postcolonial, share affinities in so much as they both show up the foundational myths of nationalism that posit woman as at once the caretaker, guardian, and as emblem of culture.
The final chapter, a reading of Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass*, focuses on the failed attempts at activism of the ‘ordinary people’ of Indian nationalist history in order to uncover the nationalist tendency to link political agency with action that is visible and free of dilemma. Instead, the novel gives us a history of agency that does not or fails to cross over into visibility. By asking us to cross the boundaries that divide the spectacular from the ordinary, and the seen from the unseen, Kesavan suggests that agency and its visibility, blasphemy and transgression are not coincident.

In examining the singular event of the 1942, the Quit India Movement activated by the Indian National Congress, Kesavan also interrupts blasphemously our memory of the Indian nationalist movement. The novel shows that the formation of the identity “nationalist” at this historical juncture involved the projection of the crisis of nationalist agency (immanent in the event of the partition in 1947) on to the Muslim body. The figure of the “Muslim separatist” was produced as a (photographic) spectacle by rendering invisible the agency of Muslim nationalists who wanted to participate in the national struggle for a “free and united India” by acknowledging and working against communalism’s possibility. The timing of the Quit India movement coincided with the British war-time efforts to foreclose the possibility of a nationalist revolution by encouraging communalist tendencies.

Within such a context, the Congress demand for immediate *Swaraj* (or independence) and its eschewal of its earlier promise of ‘suspending the Quit India movement until the Hindu-Muslim question is resolved’ had the effect of escalating communalism and rendering invisible the nationalist agency of the Indian Muslim. Now, the Indian Muslim had to either prove his difference from the “Muslim Leaguer” (who wanted a separate Muslim nation) by effacing his
Muslimness (and becoming invisible) or else occupy the nationalist struggle as "the problem" or as the "enemy within." In so far as Kesavan shows how Indian nationalist history attains coherence through and against the Indian Muslim (coded as the religious-cultural-national other), he allows us to see how the "Rushdie affair," seen as an instance of the 'immigrant problem,' is also a problem of the discourse of nationalism and the culture of absolutist identity formations that it constructs.
Notes

1 In light of the extensive media coverage and criticism, “the Rushdie affair” must be quite familiar by now. Nonetheless, here is a brief gloss on the events surrounding the publication of *Satanic Verses*. India became the first country to ban the book. The Government banned the book in the name of secularism (which in the Indian context is not so much “anti-religion” as it is protection of the rights of all religions) and in the name of safeguarding against communal clashes. *The Satanic Verses* and Britain connection is dominated by the “Bradford book burning event” in which a group of Bradford Muslims, on the advice of their lawyers, burnt copies of the book since they were told that this would get them the attention of the Press. The act of book-burning doomed their hopes of “drawing attention to their grievances” because it precipitated, in Yunas Samad’s words, “a national hysteria as it evoked memories of the Nazi burning of books. Where earlier there was little interest in the protests of the Bradford community, the “book-burning” produced nation-wide protests against the “book-burning Muslims” and this act was perceived as an offense against the national-social order. In this way the “Bradford Muslim protest” brought on to the stage the racial and national politics of immigration debates, racist fears and the issue of “Britishness” as nationalism. In India and Pakistan, 21 people were killed in communal clashes and demonstrations related to the publication of the novel. Two days later, on Feb 14, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, calling for the death of the author of *Satanic Verses*. Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi argue that since the fatwa was carried out in army style quenching all accepted norms of due legal process, large sections of people in Iran, both on the right as well as on the left, opposed it. However, in the media versions of the fatwa, Iran and fatwa go hand in hand. See Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi’s *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue and Postmodernity*; Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; Yunas Samad’s “Book Burning and Race Relations: Political mobilisation of Bradford”; Talal Asad’s *Genealogies of Religion*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 and Gayatri Spivak’s “Reading the *Satanic Verses*” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. London: Routledge, 1993 for the topography of information given above.


4 In common-sense perceptions of it, blasphemy is associated that which profanes or scandalizes. Within religious coding, blasphemy is linked with heresy, apostasy, and desacrilization.


9 See John Gabriel’s *Racism, Culture, Markets* for an account of Tony Harrison’s engagement with the Muslim-led anti-Satanic Verses protest.

11 In response to accusations and criticisms from critics as diverse as John Berger, Alexander Cockburn, Kobena Mercer and Talal Asad that Satanic Verses harmed race-relations in Britain, Rushdie admonishes in his essay, “In Good Faith”: During the big march in London last summer, peaceful counter-demonstrations on behalf of humanism and secularism were knocked to the ground by marchers, and a counter-demo by the courageous (and largely Muslim) Women Against Fundamentalism group was threatened and abused . . . . If we are to talk about ‘insults,’ ‘abuse,’ ‘offence,’ then the campaign against the Satanic Verses has been, very often, as insulting, abusive, and offensive as it is possible to be. As a result, racist attitudes have hardened. I did not invent British racism, nor did the Satanic Verses. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), which now accuses me of harming race-relations, knows that for years it lent out my video-taped anti-racist Channel 4 broadcast to all sorts of black and white groups and seminars . . . . I have never given the least comfort or encouragement to racists, but the leaders of the campaign against me have, by reinforcing the worst stereotypes of Muslims as repressive, anti-liberal, censoring zealots. (411) While Rushdie is right to claim that he is embroiled in “the Rushdie affair” rather than responsible for its racist, nationalist, and fundamentalist harnessing, the issue is more complex than what he suggests. The irony is that Satanic Verses as an event itself shaped the structure of racial tensions and conflicts that the text shows up.


13 The liberal defense of Satanic Verses in the name of freedom of expression paradoxically merges with xenophobic invocations of British “community.” For example, according to Michael Ignatieff, “Where we waver in our resolve to defend crucial freedoms we are ourselves joining the mob” (Quoted in the Rushdie File). In Genealogies of Religion, Asad points out that “the streets of London have seen innumerable angry demonstrations before, by anti-racists, fascists, by feminists and gays, by abortion rights activists, trade-unionists, students . . . . More significantly, Britain has witnessed a number of major urban riots (in Nottingham, Nottinghill Gate, Brixton, Birmingham, Liverpool, etc.) in which pitched battles were fought between non-white immigrants, cars and buildings burned and blood spilt . . . .” (240). The Bradford book burning affair is, however, perceived as the ultimate marker in racial-cultural difference, not as a “law and order” or a “freedom of speech” threat because no one was arrested, injured, or killed in the Bradford community protest. In the words of Asad, “The political violence denoted by the book burning affair is a symbolic one that has to do with a perceived threat to the essential character of Britishness because of the political mobilization of a religious tradition that has no place within the cultural hegemony that has defined British identity over the last century - especially as that tradition has come from a colonial society” (248).

14 See For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech from Maghreb to Middle East, George Braziller, 1993.


17 In Spivak’s terms this “shock” (calling up the question “at the edge of a sigh,” “What shall we do with an Ayatollah Khomeini?”) turns away from the question of “How was Ayatollah produced in the first place?” See “Reading Satanic Verses” in Outside in the Teaching Machine.

18 Mufti ascribes a crucial significance to Satanic Verses’s “politics of offense” with respect to Islam by seeing it as a “forceful refusal to accept the cultural authority of the authoritarian political constellations and discourses, usually grouped under the label fundamentalism.” As such, Satanic Verses represents, “an intervention in a very specific cultural and political conjuncture within the contemporary Islamic world (especially Muslim South Asia), one characterized by the production of Islam as the simultaneous sign of the restoration of cultural authenticity and of a passage out of neocolonial structures of domination towards a more empowering future” (279).

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Chapter 2

The Cost of Blasphemy:

Sexual Difference in Salman Rushdie’s

Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses

Women’s voices have been largely silent in the debate ['Satanic Verses controversy'] where battle lines have been drawn between liberalism and fundamentalism. Often it has been assumed that the views of local community leaders are our views and their demands our demands. We reject this absolutely. We have struggled for many years in this country and across the world to express ourselves as we choose within and outside our communities. . . Our lives will not be dictated to by the community leaders.

Gita Sahgal, Activist (Southall Black Sisters)¹

One night the Persian scribe had a dream in which he was hovering above the figure of Mahound at the Prophet’s cave on Mount Cone . . . . Maybe I hadn’t dreamed of myself as Gibreel,’ Salman recounted. ‘Maybe I was Shaitan.’ The realization of this possibility gave him his diabolic idea. After that when he sat at the Prophet’s feet, writing down rules rules rules, he began, surreptitiously, to change things. ‘Little things at first. If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as all hearing, all knowing, I would write, all knowing, allwise. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or re-writing, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language. But good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God’s own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of the divine poetry? . . . The truth is that what I expected when I made that first tiny change [was that] . . . he’d say, What is the matter with you, Salman, are you doing deaf? And I would say, Oops, O God, bit of a slip, how could I, and correct myself. But it didn’t happen; and now I was writing the Revelation and nobody was noticing, and I didn’t have the courage to own up. I was scared silly, I can tell you. Also: I was sadder than I have ever been. So I had to go on doing it.

Salman Rushdie Satanic Verses (367)

While Midnight’s Children is characterized mainly as a Joycean text in its rhetorical and metafictional strategies, it is considered a magic realist text in its merging of the historical and the fantastical. The much-discussed issue of Midnight’s Children’s intertextual echoing of Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy, Kim, One Hundred Years of
Solitude, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and The Tin Drum makes it appear as though the text’s main significance lies in its “cosmopolitan borrowings.” In-so-far as standard readings of Midnight’s Children focus on the proliferation of rhetorical styles and intertextual echoes within the narrative, they obscure the political force of the novel - its uncovering of the (nationalist) silences around the partition of 1947, India’s 1965 war with Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi’s Emergency of 1975. If the canonical reading of Midnight’s Children as an eclectic postmodern text obscures the political force of the novel, a similar tendency literalizes the political questions raised in Satanic Verses. This has the effect of rendering Satanic Verses into a litmus test of blasphemy. In this way, Rushdian criticism tends to divide Rushdie’s politics between Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses. While the political questions posed by Midnight’s Children seem either as fantastical (flights from realism) or postmodernist (production of stylistic play), Satanic Verses tends to be divided between its Islamic sections and London sections. To divide up Rushdie’s politics this way is misleading because we do not have available to us any neat distinctions either between Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses or between the Islamic and the London sections of the latter novel. I hope to qualify the notion of blasphemy as it is applied to Satanic Verses and show that as a textual strategy, it is continuous with Midnight’s Children.

This chapter refuses to assume that Satanic Verses constitutes the kind of blasphemy that automatically generates radical social and political activity. If we follow Foucault’s argument about the relation of power and resistance, which holds that no mode of analysis can of itself be oppositional, but is open to both conservative and radical
appropriations, we can see how *Satanic Verses* as an event is implicated in the mobilization of simplistic polarized categories of us/them, freedom/censorship, and democracy/fundamentalism. The embeddedness of *Satanic Verses* in conventional notions of blasphemy has less to do with the opposition between the liberal secular support for the book and the “Muslim” protests against the book than with the way in which the historicity of the novel - the politics of its canonization, its conversion into a media event, its connections to the polarized forces of racism and ethnic nationalism in Britain - have been obscured. The rescue of a heroically blasphemous Rushdie within a secular modernist tradition of blasphemy has had the effect of privileging the kind of ahistorical intertextuality that has characterized the reception of *Midnight’s Children*. Since blasphemy in *Satanic Verses* does not just rest in the shock-value of individual images or scenes or dialogue, the liberal blindness to the history and ideology of its own mode of representing “blasphemy” is as limiting as the “fundamentalist” dismissal of the novel and its author in the name of blasphemy against God.

The mobilization of the ‘imagination under assault’ narrative within the dominant debates about “the Rushdie affair” has generated an imagistic rather than a historical understanding of the controversy for it failed to convey any sense of the historical-political conjuncture that shaped the present of the “controversy.” In other words, the history of the publication of *Satanic Verses* has taken the form of code-words like “the *fatwa*” and the “Bradford affair” and continues to be organized around images of ‘enlightenment and Muslim philistinism.’ In “Reading *Satanic Verses,*** Spivak recounts the historical scene within which Ayatollah Khomeini ‘cast himself as an internationalist’ from within a
particular Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979. According to Spivak, it is the blown-up, cinematic figure of Ayatollah that is currently “filling the author-function” of Satanic Verses while “Salman Rushdie himself, caught in a different cultural logic, is no more than the writer-as-performer” (219). According to Spivak, the question is not so much “if Satanic Verses is blasphemous” or the transgression-value of blasphemy. The question is rather: “How blasphemy is to be punished? Can it be punished? What is the difference between punishment and nourishment? And further, in the name of what, do we judge the [philistine] punishers” (223)? The judgment of the punisher, as Yunas Samad points out, was enacted in the name of democracy and enlightenment from within the horrified reaction to the Bradford “book burning affair” in Britain.

By refusing the developmental model of reading that brackets Midnight’s Children as the early playful postmodernist allegory that is incompatible with and leads up to the ‘real,’ and the too political blasphemy of Satanic Verses, I show that the liberal outrage from within which the ‘punishers were condemned’ has its own history of expediency. This chapter is indebted to poststructuralist formulations of blasphemy elaborated in the works of Sara Suleri, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, which focus not on the literal definitions of blasphemy or on its negative and positive implications, but rather on the question of what is engendered in the narrative performance of blasphemy. In the first part of this chapter, I show how this perspective of blasphemy can modify our reading of the relation between Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses. In the second part, I examine the relation between blasphemy as radical/revisionary history-writing and the issue of gender to argue that the blasphemous narrative moves in both the novels rely on
conventional gender politics. Conceived in these terms, blasphemy is not a sacrilege that occurs in thematic particulars of image, dialogue, but is rather figured in the narrative reconstruction of history.

In her essay “Embodiments of Blasphemy: Censorships of Shame,” Sara Suleri emphasizes the necessity of refusing to link the blasphemy of *Satanic Verses* with a “sullying of the sacred” or of “offensiveness to Islam.” Suleri reads Rushdie’s blasphemy as “a gesture of wrenching loyalty that chooses disloyalty in order to dramatize its continuing obsession with the metaphors Islam makes available to a postcolonial sensibility” (190). For Suleri, then, blasphemy does not just inform the overtly Islamic sections of the novel but is present as a “narrative strategy that epitomizes the urgent cultural fidelity represented by specific acts of religious betrayal” (190):

The Thatcherism of contemporary London takes on the features of a mutant blasphemy, while a postcolonial desire for deracination, emblematized by the protagonist, Saladin Chamcha, is equally represented as cultural heresy. Acts of historical or cultural severance become those blasphemous moments that proliferate in the narrative culminating most significantly in the seductive allegory titled “The Parting of the Arabian Sea,” one of the more moving partings in this book of several leave takings (193).

Suleri’s handling of the notion of blasphemy allows for a conception of blasphemy as deriving from belief, in this case, from the cultural context of Islam. In this sense, it critiques the liberal tendency to recuperate blasphemy as part of a Western secular consciousness. Homi Bhabha’s analysis of blasphemy as “a metaphor for a poetics of
relocation and reinscription” and as “non-smooth transition and disjunctive rewriting of transcultural experience” reads blasphemy as structural to rather than as the object of *Satanic Verses*’ narrative energies (224). In his essay, “How Newness Enters the World,” Homi Bhabha describes blasphemy as a narrative aesthetic of “slippage” and “disjuncture” in which the boundaries between the divine and the comic, between ‘high’ culture and ‘mass’ culture are exchanged. In this way, Rushdie opens the “sacredness” of God and Prophet to the kind of hybridization that commercial film and pop culture represent:

The transposition of the life of Mohammed into the melodramatic theatricality of a popular Bombay movie, *The Message*, results in a hybridized form - the theological - targeted to Western immigrant audiences. Blasphemy is the slippage in-between the intended moral fable and its displacement into the dark symptomatic figurations of the ‘dreamwork’ of cinematic fantasy. In the racist psychodrama staged around Chamcha, the goatman, ‘blasphemy’ stands for the phobic projections that fuel great social fears, cross frontiers, evade the normal controls, and roam loose about the city turning difference into demonism . . . If hybridity is heresy, to blaspheme is to dream . . . . Rushdie translates this into the migrant’s dream of survival . . . which depends on discovering ‘how newness enters the world.’ The focus here is on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life - the dangerous tryst with the untranslatable - rather than arriving at ready-made names (226).

Bhabha’s representation of blasphemy as “a dangerous tryst with the untranslatable,” the new and the unfamiliar returns us to *Midnight’s Children* which can be
said to “translate the post-Independence experience of India” in quintessential Bhabhian manner, “not as a nostalgic dream of modern progress, nor as the Utopian dream of progress, but as the Derridean dream of translation as survival (sur-vivre, the act of living on the borderlines)” (226). If Bhabha reading of blasphemy as “the disjunctive process of translation as survival” allows us to cut across the perceived opposition between Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses, Gayatri Spivak’s “Reading Satanic Verses” allows us to read blasphemy as a metaphor for the deconstructive work of questioning the pieties of counter-hegemonic formations such as postcoloniality.

**Part I: Blasphemy as the practice of history writing in Midnight’s Children and Satanic Verses**

Rather than frame the two novels teleologically, this chapter weaves them together to examine the role played by the representation of gender-transgression and female agency in the engendering of blasphemy. In both novels, the woman’s resistant relationship to gender hierarchy is crucial to the “blasphemous” narrative moves. As we will see, in both texts there is little regard given to traditional gender boundaries, and roles-social, sexual, racial, and national - are reversed, displaced, or substituted for each other. In both texts, women cross unfair gendered boundaries and the narrative uncovers the strategies of masculinist histories.

Instead of attributing an automatic subversiveness to Rushdie’s blasphemy this chapter looks into the formation of blasphemy in order to ask: What are the results when, within the framework of Rushdie’s cinematic allegory, the discourse of blasphemy employs a gender-transgressive female agency to critique conventional discourses of
nationalism and masculinism? Does Rushdie’s gendering of political agency as feminine show the power of nationalism and transnationalism to conscript woman’s bodies as abstractions? Or does Rushdie’s feminizing of agency merely re-play the traditional historical representation of sexual difference? In the face of the embeddedness of Satanic Verses in an either/or narrative of the avant garde male artist/intellectual versus the feminized, philistine, immigrant (read Muslim) reader, such a feminist reading will help re-conceptualize blasphemy in more productive ways.

As the previous chapter shows, this gender binary between the category of the avant-garde genius (represented in the image of Rushdie) and the category of the immigrant mass culture (represented in the image of the book-burning Muslim) finds representation in shows such as Tony Harrison’s “Blaspherer’s Banquet” which places Rushdie within a canonical tradition of blasphemy held up by Voltaire, Blake, Moliere, and Byron. As John Gabriel observes in Race, Culture, Markets, this cultural engagement with the anti-Satanic Verses protest invokes “the nationalist voice” of the Romantics such as William Blake and Wordsworth. Rushdie’s purported blasphemy becomes part of this older language of Western imagination - an imagination which now must be defended against the threat of “Muslim fundamentalism.” The beleagured polemic of this sentiment can be clearly heard in these lines of William Blake deployed in Tony Harriosn’s “Blaspherer’s Banquet”: “I shall not cease from mental strife/nor shall my pen sleep in my hand/till Rushdie has a right to life/ and book aren’t burnt (24). Considered in this light, what is perceived as the blasphemy of Satanic Verses depends on the privileging of a kind of inter-textuality that I have associated with the reception of Midnight’s Children.
If in *Midnight's Children* we see the Bombay film take, as it were, of the screening of Indian independence, in *Satanic Verses* we see Gibreel Farishta as an allegory for popular media, for pulp-fiction, and commercial cinema. Gibreel Farishta, the film-star who plays God in the mythological film is (like his real-life counterparts such as N. T Rama Rao and M. G. Ramachandran, mega-stars who became political leaders) so deified that he finds himself suffering from hysterical bouts of self-doubt, confusion, schizophrenia. For Rushdie, this mode of self-doubt becomes a metaphor for blasphemy (that questions the coherence of belief and the prerogative of believers on what is considered religious discourse). For Bhabha, the power of such narrative representation appears as “the displacement of the text or identity into dark, symptomatic figurations of cinematic fantasy” (226).

We see an instance of this “displacement” in the *Satanic Verses* foregrounding of Saladin Chamcha’s presto transformation in the back of the police van into a “horned and hoofed goat” - an allegory of the “Paki” immigrant. Saladin Chamcha - the Anglicized, English - identified immigrant - becomes when tortured by the police, the very type of the “Paki” immigrant he has insistently distanced himself from. When the police arrive to arrest Saladin Chamcha who they suspect is an ‘illegal immigrant,’ he tries to explain that his is the voice behind the most popular TV show: “Don’t any of you watch the TV? Don’t’ you see, I’m Maxim. Maxim Alien (140).” But for the police this staging of identity is a typical “alien” ploy. The police-officer says simply, “So you are. And I am Kermit the Frog” (140). Because Englishness as the measure of citizenship operates for the policemen as a naturalized category so that, the more Chamcha insists upon his Britishness, the more
it is in doubt. The policemen and the plain-clothes men from immigration weep with mirth and burst into loud giggaws, “We’ve got the right one here and no mistake” (140).

Chamcha’s transformation into a “horned and hoofed goat” is produced through the opposition between his assumed identity as an upper-class gentleman who has a “sacred passion for the Royal family, cricket, the Houses of Parliament, the Queen” and his given identity as Paki immigrant. One might say that Chamcha’s animal embodiment constitutes him as the monstrous double of the proper British citizen who in Thatcherite Britain is defined increasingly along racial lines. Chamcha’s survival, in the racist context of eighties Britain, takes the form of a confrontation with “newness” - a newness that takes the form of a body that is literally “satyr-cal,” that of the devil himself.

But this animal embodiment also becomes the site of revolt, of a “transgressive” agency. This is reflected in Chamcha’s new guise becoming a counter cultural fashion overnight: “The kids in the street started wearing rubber devil horns on their head. The symbol of the Goatman, his fist raised in might, began to crop up on banners at political demonstrations” (SV, 286). So, Chamcha’s body as a ‘scapegoat’ not only works as a victim-figure around which phantasmatic fears are staged, it also becomes the site for a new sub-cultural style and generates conflicting interpretations. Anahita Sufiyan, daughter of the owner of Shaandaar cafe, where Chamcha finds shelter, finds his horns “cool and freaky,” while Mishal (her sister) finds Chamcha’s horns politically useful. So we see Chamcha’s body becoming the site of blasphemous possibilities but his animal embodiment is, as Judith Butler argues in her discussion of drag, a “production of self which is the constituted effect of a discourse that nevertheless claims to represent that self as a prior
truth” (23). Drag is, according to Butler, a “compulsory performance” in the sense that it is “already underway.” The connection and tension between identity categories (imagined as a stable site) and drag, “acting,” or transgression is put forward in Judith Butler’s essay “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”. Butler shows drag as a “performatively,” as a “parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames in order to bring into relief the constructed status of the so-called original” (23). But she warns us that ‘performatively’ should not be automatically assumed to be immanent with transgressive possibilities. In a cautionary mode, she states:

Although I have concentrated in the above on the reality effects of gender practices, performances, repetitions, and mimes, I do not mean to suggest that drag is a role that can be taken on or taken off at will. There is no volitional subject behind the mime who decides, as it were, which gender will it be today. On the contrary, the very possibility of becoming a viable subject requires that a certain gender mime be already underway. The “being” of any gender . . . achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as its effect the illusion of a prior and volitional subject. In this sense, gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is a performatively in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. It is a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms produces ostracism, and punishment, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions. (23-24)

As Butler suggests, “performative” does not denote an “elected” performance by “a volitional subject” but is rather a name for a “possibility” that is always “already
underway.” The story of Chamcha’s unfixed self, as Rushdie describes it, calls to our mind Butler’s notion of embodiment as “performative” in so much as Chamcha’s animal embodiment is “already underway” given the force of the stereotypical description that sees him as a ‘Paki’ immigrant.

It is instructive here to compare Rushdie’s staging of Chamcha’s monstrous embodiment in *Satanic Verses* with his staging of Saleem Sinai’s (the narrator’s) vulnerable male body in *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie’s use of the beleagured, masochistic male body becomes his way of rendering the postcolonial writer’s relation to colonial history and culture. What enables Saleem’s narrative to become substitutable with a postcolonial writing of history is the chancy chronological accident that synchronizes the making of an “independent” nation-state with Saleem’s birth. This synchronicity allows the narrative to substitute Saleem’s body for the metaphors of nation-formation. We are to read Saleem’s impotent, unwholesome body, and his “physical disintegration” as an allegory of the dismemberment of the Indian subcontinent during the partition of 1947 into violent massacres and two new nation-states; India and Pakistan:

Please believe me I am falling apart. I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug - that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history . . . has begun to come apart at the seams. In short I am literally disintegrating . . . That is why I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. We are a nation of forgetters (*MC*, 37).
Writing and imagining are the only ways of understanding and intervening in such an entrance into post-coloniality. The narrative aligns postcolonial perspective with perspectives from popular culture— the infectious “yarns” of the boatman Tai, the stories of Marie Periera, Saleem’s nurse, and Saleem’s favorite film “The Lovers of Kashmir,” starring his beloved Aunty Pia Aziz— which have been rendered unimportant vis-à-vis the tradition of British culture. The amalgam of Bombay movie narratives in *Midnight’s Children* can be seen as the narrative’s resistance against plotting the story of decolonization as the story of arrival into post-colonialism, modernity and progress. In Saleem Sinai’s efforts to write out his entrenchment with the ‘appearance of a new nation,’ we are shown the anxiety-ridden process of constituting and reconstituting the narrative of a new nation. As Saleem puts it in cinematic metaphor:

Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars faces dissolve into dancing grain, tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves . . . . Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time (MC198).

In the process of rendering the story of decolonization, Saleem realizes that his relation to the events cannot but be emotional rather than factual, interested rather than neutral. The process of fabricating a new myth - that of a *new* independent nation - is a risk-filled, error-prone enterprise for, it necessarily relies on mediation. Certain horrific
experiences, such as that evoked by the assassination of Gandhi, will necessarily initiate mechanisms of repression. Such forgettings and repressions not only create a problem for verisimilitude but also have the power to shape the very trajectory of historical-political events.

While at first glance, Saleem Sinai unfolds as the stereotypical Bombay cinema figure of the pyjama-kurta clad writer - the ideal movie image of a nationalist hero-writer - he soon emerges as comically different from the movie image of a nationalist writer. First, he presents his body as “buffeted by too much history” (MC, 37). Then, he bypasses in his story-telling, the standard representations of India exemplified in popular fiction and cinema which emphasize the “cool, blue mountains of the Himalayan range.” Thirdly, he writes from and brings on to the historical stage a dingy commercial pickle factory in Bombay where among vats of “lime pickles and lemon kasaundies,” he is engaged in taking up received history and transforming it into a pungent narrative “chutney”:

Rising from my pages comes the unmistakable whiff of chutney . . . . Things, even people have a way of leaking into each other, I explain [to Padma], like flavors when you cook. . . . Likewise, I intone earnestly, the past has dipped into me . . . . And certainly Padma is leaking into me. As history pours out of my fissured body, my lotus is quietly dripping in, with her down-to-earthly, and her paradoxical superstition, her contradictory love of the fabulous (MC, 39).

By conceiving of story-telling in terms of the “impure” process of pickle-making which engages more than one’s vision, and causes us to invoke and acknowledge the other sensory functions of touch, smell, and taste, the narrator draws us into sensory materiality
of historical representation. This culinary metaphor also exposes how the authority of the colonialist historical narrative, by evacuating the body and the bodily, emerges as a field that is intellectual, abstract, and authoritatively. On the contrary, in Midnight’s Children what has literally “leaked into” Saleem are the stories from Methwold, Aadam Aziz and Tai. The “leaking and dipping” of stories “like flavors when you cook” is at the foundation of Saleem’s narrative where spicy food functions as the metaphor for the materiality of history.

Given that Saleem Sinai in the opening moments of the text unfolds his fantasy of bodily dispossession, the “fissured,” “cracked” and “singularly unlovely body,” Padma’s function is to be the body for Saleem, the wholesome body associated with the working class. Padma’s masculine beauty, the strength in her “biceps and triceps” and her too-visible body movements are presented as the controlling metaphors of Saleem’s writing:

Strong enough to squat forever, simultaneously defying gravity and cramp, my Padma listens unhurriedly to my lengthy tale. O mighty pickle woman! What reassuring stolidity, how comforting an air of permanence in her biceps and triceps.

. . . for my admiration extends also to her arms, which could wrestle mine down in a trice, and from which when they enfold me in their futile embrace, there is no escape . . . . I am racing ahead at breakneck speed; errors are possible and overstatements, and jarring alterations in tone . . . . In this condition I am learning to use Padma’s muscles as my guides. When she’s bored I can detect in her fibres the ripples of uninterest; when she is unconvinced, there is a tic which gets going in her cheek (MC, 270).
We see Padma’s muscular reactions working to shape, supervise, and contain the narrative form of Saleem’s story. In this representation of counter-story or postcolonial history-writing, we see that Saleem has a history that he is “prone to forget” and therefore driven to project while Padma serves the function of both the audience and behind-the-screens assistant whose job it is to both draw out and edit the story. Driven as Saleem is by “the great work of preserving - memory as well as fruit (39),” he can defer only to flux and imagination. It is Padma’s responsibility to impose form, and to recall Saleem into a narrative plastic enough to unfold as a story. In presenting Padma’s body as muscular and strong, the narrative makes a gesture of disturbing the traditional coding of sexual difference. But this very gesture frames Padma’s ‘control’ over the narrative as an effect of her laboring-body, and her “down-to-earthiness.” So we see Padma becoming the figure for the materiality of the history that Saleem articulates in his transgressive postcolonial narrative.

Part II: Blasphemy, Gender, and Sexuality in Satanic Verses

While the narrator of Midnight’s Children relies on Padma’s labor of editing and her critical comments, her participative agency is discounted. In a similar way, the “shocking” blasphemy in Satanic Verses - the ‘Hijab’ or ‘The Curtain’ - triggered by Baal, the dissident poet-satirist of Jahilia, has at its heart the work of the whores of “the most popular brothel in Jahilia.” This scene of Satanic Verses is the most objectionable and hurtful scene in the view of the protesters of the novel. Its blasphemous plot involves Baal’s success in convincing the whores of the “The Curtain” that if they dressed up their eroticism in a more mainstream way in the context of the new regime of abstinence put
into place by Mahound’s victorious return to Jahilia, they could earn higher profits. Baal convinces the twelve whores to take on the names and roles of the twelve wives of the Prophet. When we see why Baal uses his poetic persuasion to make the whores role-play as the wives of the Prophet, we see the novel’s problematic linkage of blasphemy with its representation of female agency.

This is the time of Mahound’s take-over in Jahilia and Al-lat, the pagan goddess has been destroyed by the soldiers of Mahound. So Baal, realizing that “his end is now near,” takes refuge in “The Curtain.” But he is forced to disguise himself as an eunuch, because the Madam wants him to wear another identity:

The Madam had the eunuchs dye the poet’s skin until it was blue-black, and his hair as well, and dressing him in the pantaloons and turban of a djinn she ordered him to begin a body-building course, since his lack of condition would certainly arouse suspicions if he didn’t tone up fast” (SV, 377).

Baal knows that such a fabrication - the black and blue dye, the body-building and wearing eunuch’s clothing-- has its dangers. He risks becoming female in disguising himself as a eunuch:

The whores so enjoyed having a eunuch-who-wasn’t one that they tease him, flaunting their bodies before him, placing their breasts against his lips, . . . kissing each other passionately just an inch away from his face, until the ashy writer is hopelessly aroused; whereupon they would laugh at his stiffness and mock him into blushing, quivering, detumescence” (SV, 379).
The masterful derision and witty repartee that until now had been Baal’s prerogative is now employed by the “whores” - the “lowest” on the scale of the working class - in his perspective. So the construction of blasphemy is not only a professional necessity for Baal “who makes his living from wits and insults,” it is also a sexual necessity. It is the fear of emasculation at the hands of the whores that drives Baal to script, what turns out to be, the most blasphemous of his artistic productions. Only such an outrageously blasphemous production can shift his relation with the whores from the “enunch” model into the “heroic” model. When Baal is found out by the followers of Mahound and asked the reason for “this most Byzantine of insults,” in a dramatic act of authorship, Baal “takes of his absurd turban” and says: “I am Baal. I recognize no jurisdiction except that of My Muse; or to be exact, that of my dozen Muses” (392). Baal’s anxious performance of masculinity as transgressive writing is linked to the specter of castration posed by a non-passive female sexuality that is outside bourgeois heterosexist coding. His production of “this most Byzantine of insults” creates the possibility of consolidating his identity as the fearless, masterful poet-satirist, “the owner of the sharpest tongue and the keenest wit in Jahilia,” who is in possession of “a dozen Muses.”

But when Baal is finally dragged in front of Mahound for punishment, he seems oddly out of control and cannot stop laughing hysterically. It is as a hysterical, crisis-ridden hero - and in this respect like Saleem in Midnight’s Children - that we see Baal: “I’ve finished. Do what you want . . . ‘Whores and Writers, Mahound. We are the people you can’t forgive.” We see in this scene of Baal’s death in action, as it were, a triangulated plot in which Baal manipulates the despair of the whores to settle his score with Mahound.
More significantly, the loss of Baal's blasphemous "self" is written out as the romantic tale of loss of masculinity.

A similar movement of enforced feminine disguise and fear that this disguise may be impossible to recover from and have a "real" transformative power on identity is seen in Chamcha's experience of incarceration in Hind Sufyan's Bangladeshi restaurant. Chamcha's goat-man body requires him to "abandon his trousers, live inside a woman's baggy salwar pantaloons" (so that he can tuck in his lengthening tail) and hide in this Southall restaurant. In Chamcha's case this fear of feminization takes the form of a racial and cultural fear of going Indian and he lashes out at his hosts:

You are not my people. I've spent half my life trying to get away from you . . .

Conscious of having insulted their hospitality, Chamcha tried to explain that he thought of himself, nowadays, as, well, British . . . "What about us? Anahita wanted to know. What do you think we are? - And Mishal confided; "Bangladesh isn't nothing to me. Just some place Dad and Mum keep banging about . . . But they weren't British, he wanted to tell them, not really, not in any way he could recognize. And yet his old certainties were slipping away by the moment, along with his old life (259).

Chamcha's uncertainty about his racial and gender identity is experienced by him as emasculation. More importantly, we see racial difference here coded in terms of gender and class. It is hardly surprising that the transformation of Chamcha from a stately British gentleman to a demon figure becomes a real nightmare for the residents of Brickhall. The
narrative suggests that being a British-Asian is like the difference between the verse and the meaning, the word and its sound:

Whether the slowly transmogrifying Saladin Chamcha was turning into some sort of science fiction or horror-video movie mutey... whether he was evolving into an avatar of the master of hell, - or whatever was the case... the mullahs at the Jamme Masjid... and Dr. Uhuru Simba, the man mountain in the African pill box hat... and Jumpy and Hanif; - and the bus conductor too, they had all dreamed him, rising up in the street like Apocalypse and burning the town like toast.... And in every one of those thousand and one dreams he, Saladin Chamcha, gigantic of limb and horn-turbaned of head, was singing in a voice that was so diabolically ghastly and guttural that it proved impossible to identify the verses (SV 286).

The processes by which Chamcha’s body is conscripted into various scenarios - counter cultural, racist, and national - makes it impossible to “identify the verse,” to put together a fixed identification that can be adequately signified as an identity category. This ‘overembodiment’ reminds us of Padma’s class and gendered embodiment in Midnight’s Children which becomes the material for Saleem’s transgressive writing. As we have seen, Baal’s transgression in Satanic Verses relies upon and is spurred-on by the labor of the whores of Jahilia. More significantly, Baal’s aggressive blasphemy in Satanic Verses in the face of his eunuch-like relationship with ‘the whores’ is the result of an imagined castration - a ‘fear’ staged around sexuality that is outside bourgeois heterosexist coding.

While in Midnight’s Children, the narrator’s anxieties about sexuality crystallize around the narrative’s imaging of the working-class figure, Padma, we can illustrate the
narrative’s transference of issues of sexuality into that of gender and class from the perspective of another female character, Amina Sinai. Saleem’s mother, Amina Sinai, appears at first as the proper domesticated woman, the embodiment of the new Indian middle class woman. But after the Government of India freezes the financial assets of this Muslim family - “the bank account; savings bonds; the rents from Kurla properties” - Amina breaks down the boundaries of proper/improper, private/public, life/art. So while “Reverend Mother”[ Saleem’s grandmother] takes control of the kitchen “doling out fish salans of stubbornness and birianies of determination” and Ahmed stayed in bed “moaning from time to time ‘Smashed, wife! Snapped - like an icicle,’ Amina, with the Brass Monkey growing inside her, stalked the paddocks of the race-course named after Goddess of wealth; braving early morning sickness and varicose veins, she stood in line at the tote window, putting money on three-horse accumulators and long-odd outsiders . . . . and won, and won, and won” (MC, 164). Putting her dowry money on “three-horse accumulators and long-odd outsiders,” she wins money and reclaims the lost property through a law-suit. If the narrative endorses Amina’s resourcefulness, it also renders Amina’s success in horse-racing as a disturbance that catapults her into a range of “bad-mother” stereotypes. Not only is Amina now in a sexual pact with a regular “wrong number caller,” she is responsible for deep psychic disturbances in the mind of our child-narrator. This becomes the narrator’s alibi for spying on his mother. When he finds his mother with her lover and ex-husband, his description of Amina’s romantic rendezvous employs class-stereotypes to explore the more threatening issue of his mother’s sexuality. Significantly, the image of Amina’s encounter with the “wrong number caller” figures in
Saleem’s mind as the stuff of a “B” grade Bombay film, the monstrous double of his favorite film, “Lovers of Kashmir:”

On the reccine topped-table, a packet of cigarettes: State Express 555 . . . . Unable to look into my mother’s face I concentrated on the cigarette-packet, cutting from the two-shot of lovers to this extreme close-up of nicotine. But now hands enter the frame - first the hands of Nadir Quasim, their poetic softness somewhat callused these days; hands flickering like candle flames; next a woman’s hands, black as jet inching forward like elegant spider . . . . hands lifting up off the reccine table . . . beginning the strangest of dances, rising, falling, circling one another, weaving in and out between each other . . . but always jerking back, fingertips avoiding fingertips, because what I am watching here on my dirty glass cinema screen is, after all, an Indian movie, in which physical contact is forbidden lest it corrupt the watching flower of Indian youth . . . . I left the movie before the end, wishing I hadn’t gone to see it (emphasis mine, MC, 260).

The iconography of the “cigarette packet, the cheap reccine-covered table-top,” and its contribution to “dinginess of Pioneer café” is central to the scene shot by our narrator-projector, Saleem Sinai. What is stressed in these descriptions is the low-class-atmosphere of the café. Not only is Amina’s eroticism configured in terms of class difference, the narrator alludes to “bad art” through his mother’s sexuality. The emphasis on the link between objects and action in this scene marks the physicality of the scene. Thus, the subjectivities of Nadir Quasim and Amina are offered to us as an image of the seamy side of the “Indian movie romance.” By pointing to the ways in which a gendered
and sexualized body is turned into metaphor (either through racialization or class-marking) in multiple scenarios, Rushdie seems to suggest that bodies are unstable and contingent rather than natural sites of transgression and power.

As in the case of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, and Baal and Chamcha in *Satanic Verses*, blasphemy is generated through anxiety about castration anxiety and depends to a great extent on the enactment of male vulnerability. Given that femininity is theatricalized in both texts through loss of masculinity, how shall we read the politics of Rushdie's representation of resistant women in *Satanic Verses*? If the "writing scene" in *Midnight's Children* offers a commentary on Padma's seeming ability to establish her intervention in Saleem's narrative, *Satanic Verses* renders Zeeny Vakil - social activist, Marxist, writer - as an instrument of transgression. Chamcha is disturbed by Zeeny Vakil's outspokenness, and in his exchanges with her, he emerges, not as the TV star "who can do a thousand voices," but as one who finds no recognition of his identity in his voice. So blatantly self-betraying is Chamcha's voice that in response to Zeeny Vakil's harangue about his anglophile disposition, his voice comes out sounding like the voices he caricatures. It is as if Peter Sellers had transformed into the object of his caricature. Chamcha's voice becomes uncontrollably like that of the voices and accents he mocks on his radio show: "I have a gift for accents. Why *I should* not employ" (SV 59)? As Zeeny Vakil puts it with crushing wit, "Why I should not employ? Mister, actor, your mustache just slipped again"(SV 60):

They pay you to imitate them, as long as they don't have to look at you. Your voice becomes famous but they hide your face. Got any ideas why? Warts on your nose,
cross-eyes or what? Anything come to mind, baby? You goddamn lettuce brain, I swear. . . . Such a fool, you the big star whose face is the wrong colour for their colour TVs, who has to travel to wog-land with some two bit company, playing the babu part on top of it, just to get into some play (SV 60-61).

As it turns out Zeeny Vakil is right to suspect that while on the radio Chamcha “can convince an audience he is Russian, Chinese, Sicilian, the President of the United States,” he is an actor situated in someone else’s script and his voice is in the service of a racist ontology. The political canniness of women characters in Satanic Verses has prompted critics like Srinivas Arvamudan and Rukmini Bhaya Nair to herald Satanic Verses the novel as a proto-feminist novel. In his essay, “Being God’s Postman is No Fun Yaar; Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses,” Arvamudan has this to say:

If the episodes of the goddesses and the Meccan brothel show Islam as antifeminist, the strong characters of Ayesha, both the Jihilian and the London Hinds, Zeeny Vakil (Chamcha’s Indian girlfriend), and Mishal Suflan, the young daughter of London Hind, show no dearth of Muslim women portrayed as much stronger than their male contemporaries. Needless to say, the book flirts with the cultural anthropology of Islam’s imposition of what was then local Meccan patriarchy and polygamy onto rest of the Arabian tribes, which tended to exhibit matrilineal and polyandrous practices (13).

The strong characters of Ayesha, Zeeny Vakil, and Mishal provides for Srinivas Arvamudan an important site for the ongoing process of satire that “both deconstructs and relentlessly pursues” the charged relation between Islam and feminism. Implicit in
Aravamudan's connecting of "the strong Muslim women" to "a matrilineal cultural practice" is the notion that the novel's feminism is negotiated by "the strong female characters." However, when we attend to the symbolic function of the female body in *Satanic Verses*, it brings up the question "Do women in Rushdie's text reflect postcolonial feminism and does the 'feminist hermeneutics' clear up a space for them? Rushdie's representation of Zeeny Vakil, Rekha Merchant, and Hind does pose a challenge to masculinist representations of women.

In her essay *Reading Satanic Verses*, Spivak argues that it is understandable to hail Rushdie's text for addressing issues related to women but it is problematic to "read the representation of powerful women" as "performance of feminism." In her response to Srinivas Aravamudan's and Rukmini Bhaya Nair's reading of the gender dynamic in *Satanic Verses*, Gayatri Spivak observes in a footnote in "Reading The Satanic Verses":

I feel solidarity with men who let women in. But I cannot see this gesture as performance of feminism. On this I must take exception from my friend Srinivas Aravamudan's outstanding essay, "Being God's Postman is No fun Yaar." 'To create women as strong characters,' is not necessarily to pursue the issue of feminism and Islam. And it is here that I must split from Rukmini Bhaya Nair's impressive "Text and PreText: History as Gossip in Rushdie's Novels". . . . The private-public divide is old gender coding. We must set these things on the move (317).

While women are agents of crucial political functions, the question remains whether Rushdie's representation of female agency addresses the historical process of
gendering? Only a feminist reading that investigates the cost of blasphemy in relation to the politics of gender construction can help conceptualize blasphemy in politically useful ways.

Towards a Feminist reading of the “Rushdie Affair”

The political position adopted by Southall Black Sisters offers just such an example of feminist reading or intervention. As Spivak observes it was this black feminist group in Britain that intervened most usefully in the polarized debate between the so-called ‘secular liberals’ and the Mullahs by protesting what they called the “racialization of religion.” They refused to affiliate themselves with either the Bradford community leaders in their “bulwark against racism” polemic or with the liberal support of Rushdie. Thus, in the writings and activities of Southall Black Sisters, we see a refusal - a refusal to be locked into the politics represented by the “Labour Council leaders” or the “black community leaders” in Britain.

While this refusal of anti-racist politics might seem troubling, given that SBS as an organization started out with anti-racist activism, Southall Black Sister’s position of distance from the available political positions, as Spivak suggests, makes an interesting and productive political undertaking. It transgresses transgressive politics - in this case anti-racist politics as articulated by the Muslim-led protestors and the support for an embattled writer as articulated by the liberals - because these radical positions have now become sources of authority. As Gita Sahgal, the spokesperson for SBS remarks, their position of ‘refusal’ represents “a blasphemous restating of the orthodoxies of the movements which gave rise to it”\textsuperscript{15} Their way of demystifying the rhetoric, both of
imagination and community, is to tie the "Rushdie affair" with the other social-political conditions: the overlapping of multiculturalism as a state policy and racism, the politics of blame, and the debate about Independent schools and Islamic education.

The Southall Black Sisters (1979) appeared, at first, as part of the emergent anti-racist political groups (like Rock Against Racism). Initially SBS consigned itself to protesting against the increasing racial attacks and fascist marches (by groups like National Front and the Enoch Powell groups) who called for repatriation of Black and Asian immigrants. It is in this context that, as Hannana Siddiqui\textsuperscript{16} points out, the SBS "felt the need to address the issues around the oppression of women." When the struggles of the South Asian community to deal with increasing racism and police aggression failed to produce a discourse of opposition against domestic violence in their communities, the SBS publicly defended their right to organize a visible protest to draw attention to the death of Mrs. Dhillon, a victim of domestic violence, in the face of the bad press it would bring to the emergent "anti-racist groups."\textsuperscript{17} It is this paradoxical action of negating "the status quo of the oppositional movement" that Gita Sahgal records as a "political necessity."\textsuperscript{18} Such work of negation functions as an affirmation and presents a good example of cathecrestical reading, or of the 'transgression of both political and epistemological limits.'

The necessity and the difficulty of SBS' "cathecrestical" position which refused to underwrite either the liberal-humanist orthodoxy or the religious, anti-racist fundamentalist orthodoxy in Britain becomes easier to understand when we look at, what has come to be called, the 'Shahbano case' in India. In the political and the communal maneuverings of
this case, Spivak sees the origins of the “Rushdie affair” as it played itself out against the communalized electoral politics and the politics of gender relations in India.

“The Shahbano Affair”: Gender, ‘Secularism,’ and the Law

By highlighting the political-historical conjunctures that communalized Shahbano’s political action of challenging the divorce laws and demanding maintenance from her ex-husband, Spivak shows the difficulties of reading transgressive political action as, in and of itself, feminist agency. Before we move into the details of the Shahbano case, it is important to understand that secularism as it is enshrined in the Indian Constitution and as it appears in the Indian context means recognizing the rights of all religions. One must recognize that secularism in the Indian context is not so much an anti-religious policy, as it is the protection of the rights of all religions. We will see how the Shahbano case was over-determined by the specific context of communalized politics and by the ineffectiveness of state-enshrined secularism to provide a counterweight to it.

The ‘case’ had its origins when Shahbano’s long battle for maintenance was legitimated by the Supreme Court of India under the guidelines of Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (entitled “Order for Maintenance of Wives, Children, and Parents”). Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code states, “If a person having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain a) his wife, unable to maintain herself, or b) his legitimate or illegitimate minor child whether married or not, unable to maintain itself ... or his father or mother, unable to maintain himself or herself .... A magistrate of the first class may, upon proof of such neglect, order such a person to make a monthly allowance ... not exceeding five hundred rupees in the whole, as such magistrate thinks
fit, and to pay the same to such person as the magistrate may from time to time dictate."

On April 1978 Shahbano filed an application, under section 125 of Code of Criminal Procedure, for maintenance at the rate of Rs. 500 a month. Mohammad Ahmed Khan (Shahbano’s ex-husband), appealed to the Supreme Court that he had, under guidelines of the Muslim Personal Law, already paid her the mehr (dowry) amount of Rs. 3000 and maintenance at the rate of Rs. 200 for the period of the iddat (3 months following the divorce) and under this law had no further responsibility for her maintenance. When confronted with the Shahbano case, the Supreme Court ruled that “since Shahbano was unable to maintain herself” and hence was in terms of the guidelines of the Section 125 “destitute,” Mohammed Ahmed Khan was legally duty-bound to pay her a maintenance amounting to Rs. 179.20 per month. The Supreme court also rightly decided that the “while the provisions of the Section 125 Cr. P.C. do not supplant the personal law [whether Muslim or Hindu], the personal law has no repercussion on the applicability of section 125 Cr. P.C. unless applicability is restricted under some Constitutional provision” (35). The ruling Congress government showed its support for the Supreme Court ruling.

The government which had voiced its full support for the Supreme Court ruling changed its decision when its electoral fortunes fell in a local by-election. Out of inconsistency born of electoral fear, it adopted a position of paternalistic intervention on behalf of the Muslim community in India and passed a bill supposedly sensitive to Muslim interests. This bill called the “Muslim Women Bill” states that “Muslim women fall outside the purview of Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure. More troublingly, it legitimizes the Muslim Personal Law within which “the divorced woman’s husband is obliged to return
only the mehr and pay her maintenance during the first three months following the
divorce, and if she is unable to maintain herself after this period, her maintenance will be
the responsibility of either her relatives, or her children, or the State Wakf boards.21"

The political scene produced by the government’s amendment gave rise to grave
communal tensions in which dominant Hindus describing themselves as “secularists”
protested that the “Shahbano case” exposed the vulnerability of the government’s secular
program to the increasing fundamentalism of the Muslim minority. As Madhu Kishwar
argues in “Pro-Women or Anti Muslim,” this “secular” protest built a problematic
credibility for Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code and covered over the fact that
“maintenance laws in India are far from satisfactory whether under the Criminal Procedure
code, Hindu law, or Muslim law” (53)22. First of all, Section 125 Cr Procedure Code came
to be hailed as the mark of a secular, progressive, and feminist law and contributed to a
self-congratulatory sense of Hindu identity. The Shahbano case served to exonerate Hindu
patriarchal practices and presented it as embodying secularism. Kishwar points out that the
persistence of the clause in Section 125 CPC, “if she is unable to maintain herself” should
tell us that this law “functions against destitution rather than functioning for maintenance
(53).”

So when Hindu fundamentalist organizations like the VHP (Vishwa Hindu
Parishad) and the BJP (Bharatiya Janatha Party) took up the all-too familiar narrative of
the “unfortunate plight of Muslim women” and used Shahbano as a rhetorical figure to
decry the backwardness of Islam and the ruling government’s ‘encouragement of Islamic
fundamentalism’ (exemplified in “the concessions given to Muslims” in the Shahbano
affair), Shahbano rejected the Supreme Court ruling. She had become now the metonym of Muslimness in contemporary India. As Zakia Pathak and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan point out, it was at this point that Shahbano, in a supposedly voluntary act, wrote an open letter rejecting the Supreme Court verdict and confessed to her error in challenging the laws laid down religious authorities:

Since this judgment which is apparently in my favor, is contrary to the Quran and the hadith and is an open interference in Muslim Personal law, I, Shahbano, being a Muslim, reject it and disassociate myself from every judgment which is contrary to the Islamic Shariat. I am aware of the agony and distress to which this judgment has subjected the Muslims of India today. (211)

Pathak and Sunder Rajan are careful to point out that Shahbano’s “voluntary” self-identification as a Muslim in this letter is not about her ‘elected agency’ or about whether she really is a Muslim or not. In other words, the coding of Shahbano within the terms of religion bears little relation to the question of whether her religious identity is voluntary or involuntary. Rather, this situation of ‘agency,’ as Spivak argues in her essay, shows the silencing of woman, the “double silencing” that derives from the fact that Shahbano is only heard through the mediation of “the script of religion and gendering.” As she puts it:

There is no polarization between self-censoring and other-censoring (conversion and coercion); that is the opposition that we must learn to undo. The definition of choice as internalized constraint is invaluable here . . . . Shahbano as the same citizen of a postcolonial nation invoked by Rushdie in his letter to Rajiv Gandhi has her agency
censored by the script of religion and gendering. In this context, to bring up the question of the staging of free will in the subject has an ethico-political agenda that may give support to the very forces that recode her as gendered and therefore make her dependent on heterosexuality difference. The question of free will... is rather to be seen in connection with the presupposition of individual agency in collectivities. It is here that Shah Bano stands censored (231).

By carefully exposing the narrative process by which Shahbano’s agency is suspended so that she “became invisible except as the occasion for the mobilization of a collective nationalist resistance,” Spivak shows the functioning of the matrix of [dominant] religion as secularism as nationalism (231). And borrowing from Gita Sahgal, Spivak asks a larger question: “How can woman become ‘one of the doubters and transgressors?’ How can women become transgressors “before they can participate in their [the collective agency in the name of the national and the secular] clearing a space for themselves” (231). As Spivak points out, “in the context of the international collectivization brought about by way of Rushdie’s book, of which Shahbano is among the first efficient causes, she has dropped out, become invisible” (231).

While Shahbano’s recantation points to the extent to which different communities made symbolic use of her body in the name of female agency, women’s groups in India remained mostly silent. Or rather the agency of women’s groups in India took the form of “not speaking.” As Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma25 point out, “there was a noticeable absence of statements from the women’s movement on the issue except for a condemnation of the Muslim Women Bill’. This “silence” derives from the commitment of
women's groups to prevent their discourse from being harnessed in the service of
communalist interests. More important, however, is their awareness of the impossibility of
signifying within the communalist framework, the issue of Shahbano's maintenance. Can
the "silence" of the women's groups within the context of Shahbano's 'withdrawal' be
read as an interruptive model of agency? Or can we only read this silence as a submissive
gesture of withdrawal? For Spivak, Shahbano's "voluntary statement" dramatizes the
(im)possibility of voluntary agency as the measure of "performance of feminism."

If Shahbano's speech is already "silenced by the script of religion and gendering,"
the narrative energies of both the Rushdie texts, as we have seen, are concerned with
"clearing a space" for transgressive action. In both novels bodily displacement and gender-
crossing serve as tropes for blasphemy. But having viewed the vexed connections between
'performative embodiment' (feminization of Chamcha, Baal, and Saleem as well as the
class stereotyping of Padma, Amina, and the 'whores'). we may conclude that
representation of blasphemous feminist agency that the texts seemed to promise does not
occur. However, women characters in Satanic Verses are strong, intelligent and polemical
and in contrast to Midnight's Children, women here are more directly linked to political
activity. Like Zeeny Vakil who sees through Chamcha's pretensions, Rekha Merchant lays
bare of the historicity of Gibreel's grand religious angst:

Archangel, my foot. Gibreel Janab you are off your head. You've played too many
winged types for your own good. I wouldn't trust that deity of yours either if I were
you . . . . This notion of separation of functions, light versus dark, evil versus good
may be straightforward enough in Islam- but go back a bit and you see that its a pretty recent fabrication. (SV, 323).

In the Jahilia section, we see Hind’s implacable opposition to Mahound’s monotheistic narrative, and in it we get the glimpse of a grand failure that allows us to identify with her courage. When Mahound, after his success with the people of Jahilia, tries nervously to appease her: “But you’ll profit. There is no threat to your temple revenues,” Hind, in a direct and risky challenge to his power, responds by saying that he and his discourse are not speaking to her, but speaking for her:

I am your equal. If you are for Al-Lah, I am for Al-lat. And she doesn’t believe your God when he recognizes her. Her opposition to him is implacable, irrevocable, engulfing. The war between us cannot end in a truce (SV, 121)

But when we attend to the symbolic function of the female body in Satanic Verses, we see that either the female agency enables the authorial performance of blasphemy or woman’s polemical force is recuperated by her sexuality. So the feminist question must be not whether Rushdie represents female agency in his “blasphemous” text but rather what conventions are being employed in the representation of female activism.

The most problematic consequences of such a mode of representing female activism is evident in the Ayesha chapter which tells the story of a girl-seer, named after Prophet Mohammed’s youngest wife, who makes a living by selling enamel toys on the Grand Trunk road. In Sara Suleri’s Rhetoric of English India, we find a narrativization of the incident on which the Ayesha chapter in Satanic Verses is based:
The Ayesha episode of the *Satanic Verses* is based on an actual historical event that occurred in Pakistan. The Hawkes Bay case took place in February 1983 when 38 Shia Muslims walked into the Arabian sea in the expectation that the waters would part allowing the pilgrims to walk on to Basra and to the sacred site of Karbala. They were inspired by a young woman, Naseem Fatima, who claimed to be in direct visionary contact with the twelfth Imam. By the time the Karachi police reached Hawkes Bay, most of the pilgrims had drowned. (202)

The heart of the Ayesha narrative revolves around Ayesha’s power to defiantly assert her right to lead her village on a pilgrimage to Mecca by making them believe that “the waters of the Arabian sea will open for them.” If the dialectic of the novel has always been against epic history, against “the ramrod-backed type” absolutism, the Ayesha chapter seems to throw back this question at the reader. It is left to the reader to speculate whether Mirza Saeed’s kind of “compromising, accommodating,” and doubts laughter is privileged in counterpoint to Ayesha’s “purity of faith” or whether Ayesha’s fanatical faith is ironically romanticized through Mirza’s laughter and scorn. In the face of the doubting Mirza’s sarcasm, Ayesha admits that “the archangel sings to her to the tunes of popular hit songs” (498). Since for Mirza Saeed it is unthinkable that faith can work through popular culture, he is the only one of the survivors who does not witness the parting of the sea. However, on his death-bed, Mirza Saeed, the urbane doubter and transgressors, “is infected by Ayesha’s supernaturalism.” Mirza Saeed’s body becomes the site of a revelation (true or false, we do not know):
‘Open,’ she was crying. ‘Open wide! Tentacles of light were flowing from her navel and he chopped at them, chopped using the side of his hand . . . . ‘Open,’ she said. He closed. He was a fortress with clanging gates. He was drowning. She was drowning too. He saw the water fill her lungs. Then something within him refused that, made a different choice, and at the instant that his heart broke, he opened . . . . His body split apart from his Adam’s apple to his groin, so that she could reach deep within him, and now she was open, they all were, and at the moment their opening the waters parted, and they walked across the bed of the Arabian sea (SV, 507).

Are we to read this passage as the novel’s confirmation of Ayesha’s power to question Mirza Saeed’s and by extension the reader’s “skepticism”? Or is this the narrative’s flirtation with religious faith through the use of Ayesha’s erotic power? The question is unanswerable. “If religion is the broaching of the universal within the historical,” to borrow Spivak’s phrase, the universal, (the male ethos), is achieved here through Ayesha’s sexual power (223). At the center of this possibility of faith is the vision of a sexual consummation, a literal marking of Mirza’s body with faith.

Moreover, Rushdie’s handling of Ayesha as the intercessory figure in Mirza’s experience of faith links her to the tradition of the female pagan figures - Al-Lat, Uzza and Manat. They are supposed to have “inspired the Satanic Verses” and personify “the disputed historicity of Satanic Verses.” Given the narrative’s articulation of a dialectic which supports “multiple, mixed-up contending voices” associated with Al-lat, Uzza, and Manat, how shall we read the narrative’s romance with Ayesha’s fanatically fundamentalist faith? It is as if in Ayesha’s body, the narrative can guilelessly merge Mahound’s “unitary
canonic language” of absolutism with the carnival emblematized by Al-Lat’s polytheistic discourse. Just as the Ayesha chapter deflects the question of blasphemy’s relationship to religious faith by romanticizing Ayesha’s fanaticism, Midnight’s Children deflects the issue of the narrator’s sexual anxiety by presenting Padma’s sexuality as insatiable and threatening. Like Ayesha’s power in Satanic Verses, we are to read Padma’s influence over Saleem as bound up with a threatening sexuality that so “infects” the body of Saleem Sinai that it nearly “finishes him off.”

At the feet of the Western Ghats, she searched for the herbs of virility, mucana pruritus and the root of feronia elephantum; who knows what she found? Who knows what mashed with milk and mingled with my food, flung my innards into a state of “churning” from which, as all students of Hindu cosmology will know, Indira created matter . . . . never mind. It was a noble attempt; but I am beyond regeneration - the Widow has done for me. Not even the real mucana would have put an end to my incapacity; feronia would not have engendered in me the ‘lusty force of beasts (MC, 232).

Padma’s body and her sexuality is represented as having the power to put the narrator “into a delirium” from which his ‘narrative’ as transgressive-history-writing can barely surface. It is odd that in a narrative where history is interpreted mainly through the trope of infection and of “people and things leaking into each other,” Padma’s virility drug is offered as being curiously fatal in its effects. When Padma gets back to Saleem after the fateful mistake about the “virility herb,” she apologizes for the power of her desire, and the “artifice” to which she was forced to take recourse in order to satisfy her desires. Only
after Padma has confessed that “love will drive a woman to any craziness,” can their relationship resume “the perfect harmony” of a narrative partnership—of recounter and recountee.

After the sexual crisis is averted, Saleem “miraculously” recovers from his delirium and claims that he has finally reached the “the fantastic heart of his story” and is now determined to pursue his writing. This is because he has been able to rhetorically convert the story of his impotence into a story of Padma’s anarchic sexuality. But Padma sees through Saleem’s narrative which pretends that he has to defend himself from the threat of her rapacious desire. She tells him, “Love you?” “What for, my god? What use are you little Princeling, as a lover” (142)? If Padma’s canny observation uncovers Saleem’s disavowed obsession with and anxiety about virility, the narrator shuts off Padma’s teasing by re-coding it in a way that reifies his “non-functional” finger:

Arm extended, its hairs glowing in the lamplight, she [Padma] jabbed a contumacious index finger in the direction of my admittedly non-functional loins; a long, thick digit, rigid with jealousy, which served only to remind me of another, long lost finger . . . the fisherman’s pointing finger, the unforgettable focal point of the picture which hung on a sky blue wall in Buckingham villa, directly above the sky-blue crib in which, as Baby Saleem, Midnight’s child, I spent my earliest days (MC, 142)!

Padma’s account of Saleem’s impotence that mocks what she calls “the non-functional finger” is transformed by him to generate the memory of another romantic experience— that of Tai’s, the boatman’s, pointing finger and the fascinating stories which
form the source of Saleem's transgressive history writing. Saleem's blasphemous and artful transposition of the specter of sexual crisis into a romance between the narrator and history is a political lesson for the reader. It shows how Saleem manages or absorbs Padma's criticism so that she can be invoked as the non-castrating interpreter and reader of his "postcolonial" story.

As in the case of Baal and Chamcha in Satanic Verses, it is Saleem's physical disempowerment that "returns the fluency to his pen" and allows him to render the mechanisms of repression during the 1975 Emergency. The one that concerns him the most is the aggressive population control policy deployed by the government. The excesses of the "Family Planning" program spear-headed by Sanjay Gandhi, the Prime-Minister son led to one of the worst horrors in post-independence India as poor people were subjected to forcible sterilization programs. It is estimated that about 7.5 million vasectomies were performed on working class men without their consent during the Emergency. While the excesses of this population management fell with unmitigated weight on working class women as well as men, here it is turned into a sexual drama that allows Saleem to foreground his castration. Saleem's lacking, sexually inert bodily ethos (after the post-virility-herb episode) is offered as the effect of the ethos of 'desexualization' produced by the "Widow's" declaration of State of Emergency on June 25, 1975 which lasted till the elections in 1977.

Although forced vasectomies and sterilization programs mainly affected the poor and the disadvantaged sections of society, it allows our narrator to dramatize his loss of virility and the threat posed to him by Padma's castrating sexuality. Castration is no longer
an imagined retaliation as in Baal's case, instead it is the literal specter of sterilization. Padma's misplaced agency is proof that "female agency" such as that of "the Widow" has "done for him," fixed Saleem in a way that he is "incapable of regeneration."

While the exchanges between the narrator and Padma seem to disturb our familiar ideas of male and female, passive and active, this disturbance is managed at the end in such a way as to render Padma's agency as absent. Padma, like her female counterparts in Satanic Verses, is present mainly as a transparent body into which the narrator projects the possibility of a transgressive ethics of writing. The representational system that renders woman's body as a stand-in for transgression, revolution, or postcoloniality cannot be read as feminist.

As Spivak argues in "Reading the Satanic Verses," it is problematic to "read the representation of powerful women" who play an active role as symptomatic of the "performance of feminism." That is because the confirmation of agency as that which succeeds in phallocentric culture belongs to a discourse that leaves uninterrogated the terms of phallocracy (masculinity as law). The complexity and difficulty of Southall Black Sister's position of 'refusal' forces a rethinking of female agency and its relation to blasphemy. While this chapter has shown the ideological costs of reducing blasphemy to transgression, the next chapter examines the cost of locating blasphemy within a spatial scene that we associate with the Western metropolis. We find the foundations of such a move in Hanif Kureishi's impulse to associate blasphemy with imagination and represent imagination as natural to the postmodern artistic sensibility.
Notes

1 Quoted in Spivak, "Reading The Satanic Verses," Outside in the Teaching Machine, p.232
2 For essays and books that emphasize Midnight's Children's intertextual allusions to Tristam Shandy, Mahabharata, and to the narrative strategies of Sterne, Borges, Marquez, and Gunter Grass see articles by Linda Hutcheon, Timothy Brennan, Stephen Slenon, Rustom Barucha and Marguerite Alexander. These articles have tended to focus on the novel's rhetorical strategies and its "syntactic, mixed-up narrative technique." The problem with these readings is that they see Midnight Children's intertextuality as inherent to the text rather than as part also of the process of the text's reception. Aijaz Ahmad clues us into the nature of this reception when he points out that the front cover Picador edition of the novel declares on the cover that "it is like a continent finding its voice." Ahmad points out that this hyperbole makes it appear as though Midnight's Children was the first literary text written in and to have successfully voiced the Indian subcontinent. This reading of Rushdie's seems at first glance to depart from this tendency. But Aijaz Ahmad's essay is also focused around and critiques Salman Rushdie's narrative style on the grounds of its "too numerous debts" to modernist writers - as much from many styles and ideologies in which the East has been represented within the larger compass of the modernist moment as from Garcia Marquez, and Borges. In Ahmad's essay too, we see the inevitable invocation of Rushdie's intertextual allusions as the sole locus of meaning. See Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (London: Routledge, 1990); Stephen Slenon, "Modernism's Last Post," in Past the Last Post: Theorizing Postcolonialism and Postmodernism (Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Timothy Brennan, Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989); Marguerite Alexander, Flights from Realism: Themes and Strategies from Postmodernist British and American Fiction, 1990 and Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory; Classes, Nations, Literatures (London: Verso, 1992).
3 It is significant that Prime Minister of India, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi instituted defamation proceedings against Rushdie for the narrative's representation of her in the figure of the "Widow."
5 For the text and analysis of the political maneuvering structured in Khomeini's declaration of the fatwa see Ayatollah Gandheij's essay in For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech. See Yann Richard's book Shiite Islam: Polity, Ideology and Creed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995 for an interesting perspective on Khomeini's fatwa. argues that Khomeini's fatwa was not so much an "anti-West" operation as it was a response to the Sunni and Shiite divide central to political maneuvers in Iran, and to the ideological threat posed by the "increasing Saudi control over Mecca and Medina." The publication of Satanic Verses afforded an opportunity for Khomeini to prove that Shites are in fact concerned with "defending the integrity of Koran and the respect due to Mohammed" in the face of the Saudi measures to represent Shiite believers as "not true Muslims." Most significantly, it allowed him to "set himself as the true leader" because he alone, of all the Muslim representatives, had the courage to take seriously "the constitutional law" (152) which explicitly states that "Iran will defend the rights of Muslims" and "will give its support to the legitimate right of the underprivileged for their rights against the powerful in every region of the world" (204). The trouble with the representations of the liberal outrage about fatwa is that it is centered on the visible image of Islamic identity - r Khomeini (as if all of Iran functioned as Khomeini), we are, not surprisingly, uninformed about the 100 Muslim authors who wrote statements in support of Rushdie in a volume "For Rushdie."


9 See John Gabriel's Racism, Culture, Markets. Routledge, 1994 for a discussion of the ways in which "Blasphemer's Banquet," a TV program aired in response to the protests against the novel by the Bradford Muslim community, converged discourses of nationalism and the literary tradition of blasphemy.

10 India, the world's leader in film production, has since the early 80s seen the transformation of film-stars into politicians and leaders. Amitabh Bachchan, the mega-star of Bombay cinema, and super-stars like N. T. Rama Rao, M. G. Ramachandran illustrate the power of this media-ffect and provide the basis for the representation of Gibreel Farishta. It is in the metaphysical and psychic concussions of this actor that Rushdie places the figure of Mahound: "To turn insults into strengths, Whigs, Tories, blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn, like-wise our mountain climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the devil's synonym, Mahound" (93, SV).


12 The concept of postcolonial negotiation and critique is elaborated interestingly in Timothy Brennan's Salman Rushdie and the Third World in which he argues that the "counter-techniques" in the narrative of Midnight's Children are organized around Padma's "plebian credulity." For Brennan, Padma's reactions provide the conditions of a "counter-technique" that can subvert the "intermediary role played by third world cosmopolitans." The problem with such an account is that it makes Padma's body the mark of the "plebian" position. In other words, it essentializes class position instead of reading class and gender positions as they re-work each other.

13 Srinivas Aravamudan's essay, "Being God's postman is No fun Yaar" (Diacritics, Summer 1989) is an illuminating semantic-historical analysis of how terms like "420," "satanic verses," "Hijab," Ayesha, and Hind episodes. function in the economy of reading Satanic Verses in the aftermath of Khomeini's fatwa.

14 Rukmini Bhaya Nair also argues that female agency in Satanic Verses offers a new axis of defiance because "narration in Satanic Verses is shaped as gossip, an undervalued form of everyday talk that is now creatively empowered to reclaim metaphors of an elite history." According to Bhaya Nair, we see the political climate of Jahlilia - the combined impact of the Prophet's inner conflicts and Hind's negotiations through the comic gossip of women. See "Text and PreText: History as Gossip in Rushdie's Novels." In Economic and Political Weekly, 24:13, 1989.

15 Cited in Spivak's "Reading the Satanic Verses." For studies focusing on the activities of SBS, and Women Against Fundamentalism (a group founded by SBS), also see Against the Grain: A Celebration of Survival and Struggle Southall Black Sisters (ed. Gita Sahgal), Blackwell, 1990


17 In practice, the SBS began to focus increasingly on domestic violence and on immigration policies as they impacted on black and Asian women. (The most notorious example of a specifically misogynist immigration policy is the intra-vaginal exams performed at Heathrow airport to check if Asian women immigrants "were really married" to the immigrant visa applicants). In response to several protests by women's groups, this practice was discontinued.

18 Quoted in Spivak's "Reading Satanic Verses."


21 Cited in Madhu Kishwar's essay "Pro-Woman or Anti-Muslim." The Shahbano Controversy.

22 Kishwar, Madhu. "Pro-Women or Anti-Muslim: The Furore over the Muslim Personal Law." The Shahbano Controversy.

23 See Zakia Pathak and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, "Shahbano," In Signs 14.3 Spring 1989. As the quotation marks around Shahbano in the title indicate, Pathak and Sunder Rajan read Shahbano as the effect of a discourse. In other words they attend to the figure of Shahbano created by the communitarian...
discourse in India. Accordingly, they are particular about insisting that “this open letter is not the “source of Shahbano’s subjectivity” but one response among the others that form the “series of exteriorized actions” - the media representations, the “responses” of several political groups and the Govt. press releases - that construct Shahbano’s subjectivity. This “open letter,” interestingly, is troped both as apology and as dissatisfaction with the “public outcry.”

26 See Madhu Kishwar’s essay “Pro-Women or Anti-Muslim?” This essay calls attention to the issue of legal “maintenance,” an aspect conveniently eclipsed by the communalist framing of the Shahbano case. The repeated invocation of Shahbano as a metonym the backwardness of Muslim Personal law masks, absorbs, and deflects the influential discourse of Hindutva and “anti-Muslim” discourse in India today. See The Shahbano Controversy, ed. Ashgar Ali Engineer, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 1987)
28 The preoccupation with virility, castration, sterilization is to be found, for instance, in the stories in East, West: Stories. Pantheon Books, 1994.
29 The “Widow” is Rushdie’s ludicrously twisted name for Indira Gandhi—the late Prime Minister of India whose “disciplining projects” as a national leader have been compared in popular parlance to the workings of the “Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect” (522). The “lurid misogyny” of the term has been commented on by several critics. As Erner Nolan writes in James Joyce and Nationalism, “the repulsive national mother of Circe anticipates similar attacks on woman-as-nation allegory by later postcolonial writers notably Salman Rushdie’s portrayal of Indira Ghandi (sic).” The representation of Indira Gandhi as “the Widow” gives us pause not only because this representation is blatantly misogynist but also because it is symptomatic of wider fears, anxieties, and phobias. The figure of the Widow is typically constructed as the distorted Mother image who, instead of nurturing, harms her charge. Within this belief system, the “Widow” is believed to possess a castrating sexual prowess that can harm fertility and bewitch manhood. We are to believe that Saleem’s “incapacity for regeneration” and loss of virility is the result of the debilitating influence of Indira Gandhi’s declaration of Emergency in June 1975, the censorship of Press and the other repressive measures that followed. Though in principle the government’s adherence to the new National Population policy in 1976 did not sanction forced vasectomies, the overzealous efforts of the state-officers coupled with government promise of free radios and transistors formed the impetus for, what is estimated to be, over 7.5 million vasectomies.
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Chapter 3

The Disclosure of London as Postcolonial Britain: Hanif Kureishi

We've got a big job to do in the inner cities . . . No one must slack.

Margaret Thatcher quoted in Sammy and Rosie get Laid

Thatcherism is rather like Islam. It is an intoxicating force to test yourself against.

Hanif Kureishi, New York Times Book Review

Actually we are not into music: we’re into chaos.

Neil Spencer, The Faber Book of Pop Ed. Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage

In the previous chapter I have argued that the liberal discourse of support for Rushdie positioned Satanic Verses within a tradition of imagination identified specifically as western, secular, and modernist and that this has been instrumental in the simplification of the relation between transgression and authority. This chapter will examine how Hanif Kureishi, well-known for his films My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) and Sammy and Rosie get Laid (1988) situates himself in relation to the ‘Rushdie affair,’ particularly in his recent novel, The Black Album. How does a writer, playwright, film-maker such as Hanif Kureishi whose films have avant-garde credentials within Black British cinema¹, engage the work of another postcolonial writer who has become the very representation of avant-garde blasphemy. This chapter builds on the questioning of the liberal response to the “Rushdie affair” by tracing the language of imagination in Kureishi’s Black Album and Sammy and Rosie get laid.
The language of imagination as it figures in Hanif Kureishi’s work starts out from the opposition defined by George Steiner,² that of the “word culture” associated with the university culture (read only by a few) against the “sound culture” associated with pop culture (and consumed by many). Most of Kureishi’s work—*My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* (1988), *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and *Outskirts and Other Plays* (1992)—can be read as an attempt to respond to the significance of “sound culture” and its connection to the defiant political imagination of the sixties. Pop culture in Kureishi’s work is an articulation of eroticism that disrupts what Kureishi, citing Steiner, characterizes as the “word culture.” Pop culture’s visuality is associated with bodily immediacy, imagination, and power and, for Kureishi, the sixties imagination derives its power from pop cultural forms rather than from the “word culture.”

This chapter will argue that *Black Album* (1995) marks a radical shift from Kureishi’s earlier work in that imagination here is linked to “word culture”. This shift in defining imagination as locatable in the “word culture” is the result of the “‘Rushdie affair’”³ and Kureishi’s own anxiety/panic about the predicament of the ‘word’ in the aftermath of Khomeini’s *fatwa*. This chapter will also show that while *Black Album*’s difference from Kureishi’s earlier work lies in its rehabilitation of literary culture, pop culture under the aegis of ‘Cultural studies’ preoccupies the narrative. It becomes the vehicle for representing “word culture” or literary culture. I will argue that despite the primacy that the narrative gives to a postmodern pop culture, a) the narrative is unable to deal adequately with pop culture or mass culture as it appears in the “Rushdie affair”, and
b) literature retains an unproblematized intrinsic power.

Interestingly, "word culture" disguised as "pop culture" is what allows Kureishi to place imagination in the sphere of modernity. By tracing this movement, we can also see how Black Album automatically aligns modernity with a metropolitan ethos. Modernity here refers both to modernization and to the mode of thinking about history in which the principles of Enlightenment are invoked to describe "us" against "them" and in which the 'traditional' is associated with the 'un-enlightened' and the 'non-secular'. London as the ideal metropolitan site for the modern artistic self is instrumental to Black Album's linking of modernity with imagination and literary culture. As will be evident in the following pages, the necessarily complex issue of secularism, central to the "Rushdie affair" is erased/displaced in Black Album because it is assumed to issue automatically from modernity. In this sense, Black Album is fundamentally about London as the scene of imagination, about London as both synonymous with imagination, modernity, and secularism.

This becomes clear when we examine Black Album's representation of London in relation to the London dramatized in Kureishi's pre-fatwa film text, Sammy and Rosie get Laid (1988). In this film, Kureishi and Frears not only lay bare the historical, social, and psychic ties that bind London to postcolonial Pakistan but also show the hypercosmopolitanism of the protagonists - Sammy and Rosie –to be underwritten by the power of money that comes from Pakistan. This money, within the film, comes from Rafi Rehman, an ex-revolutionary, but now authoritarian and corrupt leader of postcolonial Pakistan. In this film, made in the shadow of the third consecutive Labor defeat in Britain,
Kureishi and Frears are concerned with mapping London culture on to Thatcherite institutions such as free entrepreneurialism, massive cuts in welfare and education, the moral panic about muggings, new crime laws, inner-city re-development projects, slum demolition and militarization of police. However, unlike *Sammy and Rosie get Laid*, *Black Album* is unable to represent London as worked upon by the constantly shifting, overlapping institutions. This is the case because the “Rushdie affair” has compelled Kureishi to transfixed London, albeit in a complicated way, as the name for a certain cultural consciousness and sensibility; as the spiritual/emotional center for imagination and the arts.

In the first section of this chapter, I call into question *Black Album*’s staging of a supposedly natural connection between freedom of imagination, modernity, and metropolitan space. In the second section, I take up the examination of the Frears-Kureishi film *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* and its representation of a historical and materialist London to lay bare *Black Album*’s submerged relation to a historical representation of London. Through a comparative reading of *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* and *Black Album*, I show that in the place of a materialist and historical London the latter text offers an imagistic or iconic London.

At the most immediate level, *Black Album* is about Shahid’s passionate involvement in the incompatible worlds of Deedee, his cultural studies teacher and his fellow student Riaz, a Muslim community worker. Shahid oscillates between his desire for Deedee and his desire for Riaz. He finds himself drawn to Riaz’s creed of social work and when entrusted with the task of translating Riaz’s poetry, he imports the language of desire from the sphere of pop culture. Shahid’s exercise in translation, titled *The Heretical*
Artist, becomes the narrative’s blasphemous text that provides the ground for the conflict between Shahid and Riaz. The clash between Shahid and Hat (one of Riaz’s followers) around the issue of violation of trust is presented as the informing force behind the violent determinations of the “Rushdie affair”. Pop music and literature emerge as cultural traditions that are threatened, on the one hand, by the repressive forces of Islamic fundamentalism and on the other, by the Thatcherite enterprise culture. The destructive effects of the Thatcherite enterprise culture on imagination are staged early in the novel.

Foray into word Culture

Imagination is represented through Shahid’s first autobiographical activity. This “first effort at writing” is focused on a certain moment in his high school classroom when “the six boys at the back row of his class . . . chanted at Shahid, “Paki, Paki, Paki, Out, Out, Out.” Shahid’s re-telling of this story calls forth a range of outraged reactions from his bourgeois family. For Shahid, the telling of this story, “Paki Wog Fuck off Home,” in “a jagged, cunt-fuck-kill prose expressed him like a soul singer screaming into a microphone” (61). But for his mother, it is nothing but an indulgence in morbid hatred:

People do not want hate in their lives. She began to rip up what she’d read . . . .

More than anything she hated talk of race and racism. Probably she had suffered some abuse and contempt. But her father had been a doctor; everyone - politicians, generals, journalists, police chiefs - came to their house in Karachi. The idea that anyone might treat her with disrespect was insupportable. Even when Shahid vomited and defecated with fear before going to school, or when he returned with
cuts, bruises and his bag slashed with knives, she behaved as if so appalling an insult could not exist. And so she turned away from him. What she knew was too much for her. (61)

When Shahid’s father learns of this writerly impulse, he lectures his son in the Thatcherite idiom of prosperity-oriented politics: “Can’t you stick to your studies? My nephews are lawyers, bankers, and doctors . . . These artist types are always poor - how will you look your relatives in the face? We must . . . live in the real world” (63). Shahid realizes that his socialization into “truth” and “imagination” can only occur outside the familial sphere:

It began to dawn on Shahid that there were a multitude of true things that couldn’t be said because they led to uneasy thoughts. Disruption of life, even, could follow; the truth could have serious consequences. Clearly the unsaid was where it all happened. (63)

The move from a business owning family in Kent to a ‘derelict’ college in London “filled with Africans, Irish people, Pakistanis and even a group of English students” (1) is about learning the intricacies of saying and not-saying the “multitude of true things”. Shahid’s engagement with writing comes to us, then, as an oedipal tale in which the son/writer must leave his bourgeois parental home and create a space for himself within the structure of a University. Black Album’s focus on the modern university as a counter to the bourgeois family space is not so surprising. What is surprising is the narrative positioning of the University as the site of imagination, when we consider that in the
Kureishi’s early texts - especially, his Whitbread prize winning novel *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), the hero’s imaginative and ethical development is set in relation to theater, pop-music, and punk culture. The crucial significance of pop music or “sound culture” for Kureishi is that it highlights the limitations of literature/novel:

I adored the stories I read, but as I started to write I couldn’t help feeling that this tiny skill, this intricate work, rather resembled lace-making. It was elegantly useless, the creation of a frisson for a literary minority who were rather like train-spotters in their numbers and probably in their eccentricity too . . . . But I was aware of the potency and influence of another language, which spoke to millions - pop music. If I read a novel, there was no one to discuss it with, whereas if a hot album came out, one felt excluded if one had not heard it . . . . The retreat from the word, this was called by George Steiner, as professors marked their papers in University buildings rattling with rock music. (xxi)

Imagination, for Kureishi, emanates from pop-culture, its immediacy, physicality, and erotic energy. With *Black Album*, he seems definitely to move towards literary culture but this culture is brought under the aegis of a ‘Cultural Studies’ mode of pop culture.

When Shahid first meets Deedee, his cultural studies teacher, the pop cultural apparatus that supports Kureishi’s conception of sexuality becomes obvious. The sexual dynamics involved here demonstrate the eroticism that attends knowledge. More importantly, this scene places eroticism within the space of pop culture:

Her [Deedee’s] office was only three times the size of a telephone booth. Pinned
above the desk were pictures of Prince, Madonna and Oscar Wilde, with a quote beneath it, "All limitations are prisons." Deedee interrogated him about his life in Sevenoaks and his reading . . . . Noticing him looking at the Prince photograph, she said, ‘You like Prince? . . . Grasping that this was not chatter but part of the interview, he strained to order his words into sense, . . . she coaxed him. ‘He is half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine, and macho too. His work contains and extends the history of black American music, Little Richard, James Brown, Sly Stone, Hendrix . . . . He's a river of talent. He can play soul and funk and rock and rap - Off he went being exemplary, until that is, she crossed her legs and tugged her skirt down . . . the whole eloquent movement - what amounted in that room to an erotic landslide of rustling and hissing - was so sensational and almost provided the total effect of a Prince concert that his mind took off into a scenario about how he might be able to tape-record the whisper of her legs, copy it, add a backbeat and play it through the headphones. (21)

Clearly what is involved in this intense enthusiasm for Prince's music is not music alone, but rather its "grooviness," its erotic charge, and its gender indeterminacy. In echoing the music of "Little Richard, James Brown, Sly Stone, and Hendrix." Prince brings alive the breath of the "60s youth culture" in the face of, what Kureishi in "Some Time With Stephen" calls, "the mean monogamous spirit of our age" (183)⁶. In Prince's cross-dressed sexual performative, Shahid and Deedee can access a fascinating network of transgressive identifications. Music here not only produces sex, but becomes sex.

It is hardly surprising that the "erotic landslide" that describes Deedee's
movements are transposed into music in Shahid’s imagination. Shahid is not only able to fantasize the complete scene of a Prince concert, in fact this music scenario becomes the only place where Shahid can “copy” or evoke the erotics of Deedee’s movement. In other words, Shahid cannot imagine sex apart from its “copying” in music videos. The mode of eroticism transcribed in pop music is presented as the site of a radical pedagogy responsibilities traditionally assigned to scholarship are mapped on to passion, curiosity, enjoyment and their intersection with knowledge. It is in this sense that the narrative places the question of sexuality within a discourse of pop culture. Within Black Album, this cultural studies mode of pop culture becomes the metaphor for an erotic imagination.

As its title—a reference to the recently released album by the artist formerly called Prince—makes clear, it is not through an evacuation of pop music but rather through an embedding of literature within the interstices of pop culture that Black Album approaches “word” culture.

Pop music and literature (or rather the correlation of pop music and literature) “occupy the narrative as natural practices of the [modern] Self,” to borrow Ian Hunter’s words. In other words, literary imagination shored up as pop culture is emptied of, what D. A. Miller in Novel and the Police calls the “policing role” which means that it is emptied of any institutional force, ideological power, or surveillance. That role is occupied here by Islam which is represented in and through Shahid’s friend-mentor Riaz, and ‘his followers’: Chad, Hat, Sadiq, and Tahira. Islam’s role in the novel arises in the context of Shahid’s eroticized translation of Riaz’s poetry, “The Martyr’s Imagination.” Shahid, who is now considered “a brother” by Riaz and his group has been asked to work through
Riaz’s poem collected under the title, “The Martyr’s Imagination,” and “convert it to print” (78).

**Translation as blasphemy**

Shahid’s way of surrendering himself as a translator is to sexualize the affect for religion in Riaz’s poetry. Riaz’s emotion for religion becomes familiar to Shahid only when he writes from the language of his desire for Deedee: “I’d been enjoying myself with Deedee; it seemed natural to express the puzzle of this wonder” (194). So where Riaz’s poetry stages religion as the transcendental love that awaits us beyond the ills of the present, Shahid substitutes the erotics of desire. Shahid’s translation may be seen as an emotional/desiring engagement with the language of the Original. In this sense, Shahid is the classic Benjaminian translator who in order to translate the emotionality or language of a text has to ‘give up its content or meaning.’ What Hat sees in Shahid’s mixing of “that stuff about girls crossing their legs with religion” is the arrogant putting aside of the author as an intending subject and originator of meaning (195). Hat sees no reason to believe that the process of reading can be indeterminate or can give rise to meanings that can undo authorial intentions. When Shahid tries to explain that he “had begun to type Riaz’s work in good faith but there were certain words he couldn’t bring himself to transcribe,” Riaz understands it as Shahid’s refusal to make good on the promise of translating (195). Shahid explains to Hat, one of Riaz’s followers he feels closest to, that once he had begun to “play with words and ideas” and had “begun not-transcribing, he got carried away” and found that his interests as a translator were “fueled by what men and women do and the things they make rather than what God is supposed to do” (195).
Viewed from Hat’s side, Shahid’s claims to be ‘on their side,’ always suspect, are now exposed. The ungodly translation proves it all:

How do you think brother Riaz felt, standing there so proud all, waiting for his rhymes to come out printed and clean so he could hold it in his hands and show his friends? I know he is hoping to make a little money from it . . . .

It was a celebration.

Of what, yaar?

Passion.

Hat looked as if he could strangle Shahid. ‘I can be a bit dirty-minded myself, but that stuff, you are a . . . sewer rat.

Don’t you have sexual fantasies?

Hat’s eyes nearly burst. ‘Everyone knows I like looking and stuff. But I don’t go and put an essay on girls crossing their legs -

And the smell on their hair, and on the skin behind their knees . . . .’

Hat, apart from the negative things you’ve said, did you like any of what I did? Did you, Hat?

‘You are a raving evil spirit and a double agent working for some other people!’ (195)

In translating Riaz’s poetry, Shahid is giving shape to his “desire for experience, imagination, dedication, and “his appetite for compelling exhilaration” (62). The narrator explains that in translating Riaz’s poems, Shahid was invoking his childhood experience of a Lorca play, The House of Bernarda Alba, witnessed at the Kent University theater. The “excitement and disturbance” released by this play made Shahid “yearn for other experiences as affecting” and compelled him to “tape opera, jazz, and pop records from the library . . . listen repeatedly to Bartok, Wagner, and Stravinsky” and search out good movies”(62). Given that Shahid’s experience of the Lorca play involves the translation of literary culture into sound culture, we can connect it to the scene in which Shahid first meets Deedee. As we have seen, Shahid’s experience of Deedee’s “eloquent movement”
assumes the shape of sound culture. This shifting or translation - whether it be from theater to “opera, jazz and pop music” or from “word” culture to “the scene of a Prince concert” - is crucial to Shahid’s sense of himself as a writer.

While the narrative sensitively presents Hat’s anguish in regard to Shahid’s translation of Riaz’s text, it also interrupts this representation with its mocking, and witty tone. The narrator speaks of Riaz’s tone as being categorical and prescriptive and of the impossibility of recovering any immediate meaning from it. As exemplary of Riaz’s imagination, Shahid “remembers” these lines: “The wind swept sand speaks of adultery in this godless land,/Here Lucifers and colonialists are in charge/The unveiled girls smell of the West and envy the shameless” (194). These lines, we are to understand, inevitably produce translation as experimentation and blasphemy because Shahid can make no contact with the meaning of these lines. Shahid’s translation can go forward only on the condition that he first denies the mortification of the body implicit in these lines. So in his translation, Shahid aspires to affirm the language of desire and its physicality.

Shahid’s medium is pop culture and its attendant eroticism and accordingly, he can understand and read and write the religious emotion in Riaz’s poetry only through celebrating his desire for Deedee. Shahid’s relation to the celebration of desire is presented as that which fundamentally separates him from the characteristics embodied collectively by Riaz, Hat, Chad, and Tahira; characteristics that we are to see as part of a composite Islamic identity. Given Kureishi’s identification with Shahid, it is not surprising that the narrative treats Riaz’s way of life (and the repression and orthodoxy out of which such a way of life is supposedly created) with savage irony.
The most problematic aspect of the novel, however, is that it reduces the political mechanisms of "Rushdie affair" to an intersubjective conflict between two individuals, Shahid, the writer and Riaz, the ‘always already’ Islamicist. Not only does Kureishi’s voice stand implicitly behind Shahid, the narrative represents the difference between Shahid and Chad, (and Riaz and the rest of them) as an irreducible cultural difference that marks the space between modernity and non-modernity. Only when we intervene in the narrative’s articulation of modernity as intimacy with pop culture and read the narrative’s cultural framing of modernity against itself, can we see Riaz as a modern subject. It is only then that we can see that for Riaz, the issue is not mosque or religion or the precepts of Islam in and of itself but rather that of how to use religion to secure social agency and intervene in the problems of racial and social oppression in the underclass immigrant areas of London.

In this sense, the narrative’s representation of Riaz provides us with a useful scrutiny of the “postcolonial subject” in Spivak’s essay “Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value.” According to Spivak, this term when read historically can be understood as a name for those “who are from formerly colonized countries and are able to establish “a sociability because they have had access to the culture of imperialism” (220). If we take seriously and literally the semantics of the word “access,” it suggests both economic access and future investment in the constitution of the “host” country, Britain rather than India, in this case. This subject is signaled not by his/her nostalgic connection to homeland but by his/her involvement with the British nation-space, and the British Constitution. As Brownlow, Deedee’s ex-husband, remarks with more than a touch of
resentment, “Riaz could end up with chat show” (254) and sure enough by the end of the novel, we learn that Riaz has been invited to appear as a guest on a late-night talk show. By looking at these events, we can get an idea of Riaz’s impulse towards the “modern” which is otherwise usually an object of attack in his scolding sermons. At one moment in the narrative, we find Shahid recognizing this modernity when he hears Riaz lecture in the mosque:

He [Riaz] entitled his talks ‘Rave to the Grave?’, ‘Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve’, ‘Islam: A blast from the Past or a Force of the Future?’ And ‘Democracy is Hypocrisy’ . . . . The momentum of his conviction made him fluent, amusing, passionately coruscating . . . . No subject could hold him. He may have begun his talk under the guise of discussing the Islamic identity but soon he would be expatiating on the creation of the universe, the persecution of Muslims worldwide, the state of Israel, face-lifts, nudity, the dumping of nuclear waste in the Third World, perfume, the collapse of the West, and Urdu poetry. (67).

Modernity, in Riaz’s view, is capitalism and its conditions of exploitation, greed and moral degeneracy. Modernity, for him, is that which provides the ground for “the hypocritical and smug atmosphere of the Western civilization” (82). Riaz’s Muslimness resides in his desire to connect himself to an identity that most empowers him in the context of the historical and political situation of racism in contemporary Britain and official multicultural discourse. In this sense, Riaz is using conservative Islam to insert himself within the framework of British multicultural discourse within the context of increasing racism.
Only by attending to the political and cultural scene of Riaz's Islamicization, we see in Riaz's sermons, the historical-social context of his self-representation as Muslim. His hope is that in Islam, the immigrants of Southall and Bradford will find a social vocabulary that will lead them out of social emasculation and powerlessness and help them to counter the "threat" of modernity. Only by reading through (and in this sense, translating or converting) the narrative's representation of the "aubergine affair" and the "book-burning affair," can we unravel the textual logic of representing the Muslim response as "backward," unreasonable, and ridiculous; as the very erasure of modernity. This becomes fully legible in the "aubergine affair" in which the narrative links thinking, modernity, and secularism in one tight-knit unit while it links traditionalism and fundamentalism in one chain.

The "aubergine affair" as the topography of the 'book-burning affair'

The narrative's performance of the aubergine exhibition, admittedly the funniest episode in the novel, is made from the point of view of Deedee, who takes on a tone as irreverent as it is sardonic. One morning Shahid finds himself beckoned to the house of a prominent Muslim family while a long line of people wait outside to get a glimpse of a supposedly miracle aubergine believed to have been written upon by God himself. Shahid's real nervousness begins when he overhears Riaz negotiating with the Labour council member, Rugman Rudder, to have the aubergine placed in the Museum or at the very least in the Town Hall (148). Later we learn that while the council member promises to "support Islamic schools which is definitely on his agenda," "with the aubergine he
wouldn’t go for the full exhibition” (253). As he puts it, “It just is not the right time” (253).

Kureishi is here presenting a very real problem of the situation characterized by officially sponsored multiculturalism. The overlap of racism and official multiculturalism allows, in his terms, “a cynical bastard” like Rugman Rudder to claim popular support on the grounds that “seventh day Adventists mention my ailments in their prayers and Rastafarians shake my hand as I walk my dog” (148). The “aubergine affair,” we are to believe carries the belief that will make possible the scene of conflagration—the Bradford book-burning affair”—in which flames will consume the pages of Satanic Verses. This exhibition is to be seen by us not only as the feeding source of the book burning affair but as that which reveals the structure of an Islamicized social sphere. It implicates Shahid within a set of definable values that are coded as absurdly traditional and Islamic:

Deedee, I have heard about this aubergine. It’s true. And I have been over there to take a peep. Definitely I won’t deny that.

God has written on it, hasn’t he?

That’s what some people are saying. But they are simple types. Unlike you, they can’t read French philosophers. A few years ago they were in their villages, milking cows and keeping chickens. We have to respect the faith of others - the Catholics say they drink Jesus’ blood and no one jails the Pope for cannibalism.’

Is it true that you’ve persuaded the Rubber Messiah to place this . . . this manifestation in the Town Hall?

Mr. Rudder had stated that publicly that he wants a closer association with our community. If aubergines are what we believe, its gonna be respected. Its our culture, right?

Is it your culture? Is it culture, at all?

You’re being a snob.

Really? And you are fooling yourself . . . . What would your father have said?
I don’t like it when you’re so critical all the time.

I don’t give a damn. Because I’ve been around and this aubergine takes the biscuit. I am not going to respect a communicating vegetable and I am not going to compete with one either . . . What sort of people burn books and read aubergines? . . . No, I’m giving you an ultimatum . . . It’s me or the enchanted eggplant. (175)

The aubergine exhibition destroys the hope of Shahid’s integration into Deedee’s world view. Whatever his protests, Shahid now emerges in Deedee’s eyes as an iconic Muslim. For Deedee it is “these sort of people” who “burn books and read aubergines”(133). In his 1994 promotional “book signing” show in New York, Kureishi chose the aubergine excerpt to read to his audience. Doubtless a popular performance, this reading echoes the liberal positioning of the Muslim response as laughably “philistine” and “shocking.” We must ask whether Kureishi’s reading of the “aubergine affair” excerpt marks out the space within which Satanic Verses must be read? Or whether this witty reading enacts the kind of ‘non-reading’ that has characterized most responses to the “Rushdie affair”? The implication of Deedee’s remark that the violence of fundamentalist discourse and absurd beliefs such as that in the “miracle aubergine” are one and the same sets the tone for our reading of the book burning affair.

The ‘shocking’ book-burning affair

In the college yard, Shahid sees Riaz “appearing irrelevant, dazed even as Lenin might have” while the students, mostly unaware of the context, collect around him and nearby a couple “kiss mouth to mouth looking up (186). Deedee’s troubled question: “What are you going to do with the book? You are going to burn it, aren’t you? Do you understand what this means allows Riaz “a platform for appeal” (186-187). Now we see
the provisional nervous gestures of Riaz shaping into a masterful polemic as he steps on a
make-shift box to fashion a microphone with his hands and says: "In one moment I will
explain . . . Is the free speech of an Asian to be muzzled by the authorities" (187)? We see
the procedures of this event form themselves contingently and the book-burning event
appears, from this perspective, not as the culmination of a polemic but as an overblown
gesture of a polemical response.

When we analyze carefully the narrative representation of the "book-burning
affair," we see the impossibility of automatically linking the Muslim response to a rejection
of reading culture. We also see the impossibility of categorizing the Muslim response as an
ahistorical other to the Western Enlightenment discourse. Deedee insists on "discussing"
Satanic Verses in class, and says, "Let us talk, it is literature which is what this class is
about today—Orwell and all. It being threatened, freedom going down" (189). Hat tells
Deedee to put the book down: "Our parents pay taxes, here should be brainwaves and
British scholarship, the envy of the world, not curses" (189). The students respond by
banging their fists on the desk. Construing this as a horrifying display of resistance to
education. Deedee fashions a new course starting the next day: "The History of
Censorship: Importance of Immorality. Plato, the Puritans, Milton, Baudelaire, Brecht."

However, when we focus attention on the specifics of the student’s protest, the
ironies in Deedee’s invocation of Enlightenment discourse emerge. "British scholarship" is
exactly what Deedee had in mind when, in an attempt to prove the presence and authority
of debate and its crucial importance, she fashioned the new course around blasphemy and
says: "This is a classroom, there must be discussion, debate, argument" (96). But
Deedee’s mode of demonstrating this fails as education, in so much as it further alienates her students. The students do not want these “curses” and they do not want Satanic Verses to be tied up with “British scholarship”. It is important to recognize that the student’s reaction against Satanic Verses emerges not from an anti-Enlightenment discourse, but rather from a conservative mainstream position that is no less committed to “brainwaves and British scholarship” but wants to apply this in the interests of a successful career. This response puts us in mind of Shahid’s father’s exhortation earlier in the novel: “Can’t you stick to your studies?” Aamir Mufti’s argument that “shock” has no place in understanding pop cultural responses is useful here. The book-burning, then, must be seen not as shocking beyond engagement but as a kind of ‘reading’ produced by the political contingencies of the “Rushdie affair”. We must, in other words, refuse to think of the book-burning as “shocking;” as beyond imagination.

Even though the “book-burning affair” and the encounter with Riaz’s group over the translation forces Shahid to go over to Deedee’s side, Hat’s friendship is important to him. Shahid is consumed by guilt that his translation could generate such hurt: “They had a burned a book, but what had he done? He had abused a friend’s trust without even considering it. How could he complain now” (213). Kureishi suggests that Shahid cannot dispense with this guilt. The narrative’s account of Shahid’s attachment to Riaz is one of the most poignant moments in Black Album and deserves attention.

**Translation as cross-dressing**

Shahid’s infatuation with Riaz’s creed is crystallized in the scene in which he is
“dressing up” for a date while listening to his favorite music. Shahid finds that the corridor outside his dorm room is completely occupied by “impatient children, and men and women in ill-fitting overcoats.” Riaz, it turns out, is holding his usual “weekly advice surgery” in his room (while Chad is “watching out for the landlord”) because the Community hall has been vandalized by the police. Shahid is persuaded to stay back and help out and when he takes a cup of tea into Riaz’s room, he comes upon a scene that becomes the moment of his engagement with Riaz’s activism. Not surprisingly, this is the moment when Shahid for the first time appears to himself as a Muslim immigrant:

The man sitting opposite Riaz was weeping and talking so intently that he didn’t notice Shahid come in.

These boys, please, sir, are coming to my flat and threatening my whole family every day and night. As I told you they have punched me in my guts. For five years I have lived here but it is getting worse. Also my sister and brother and his wife are writing to me saying, have you forgotten me, you are living in luxury there, why don’t you send the money we need for medicine, the money for the wedding . . . . Sir, I am having two jobs, one in the office during the day and the restaurant until two at night. I am flaked fully out, and the entire world is leaning on me . . . .

Riaz glanced up, his face as impassive as always; but pity had him flush (30).

The Indianisms and the accent aside, the narrative offers in this poignant and funny scene the social reality of racism and poverty while it also divulges Riaz’s community work. Riaz’s social work for which Islam provides the stage gives us a sense of, what
Spivak calls in "More on Power/Knowledge,¹⁴:" the "local foci of power/knowledge - pouvoir/savoir." In explaining "the everyday sense of the doublet" at the heart of Foucault's writings, Spivak observes that "pouvoir is not just power . . . if only because, in its various conjugations, it is the commonest way of saying "can" in French language." So pouvoir/savoir in Spivak's terms, derived from Foucault, is "being able to do something - only as you are able to make sense of it"( emphasis mine, 34) This concept of agency as can-do-ness can help us to begin to understand the subjective component of Shahid's identification with Riaz. Shahid's involvement in Riaz's activism and in the translation project (both in relation to writing and self-representation) must be situated within such an ethics of "can-do-ness."

As before with Deedee, Shahid involvement with Riaz and his creed is represented as an erotic cross-dressing. This cross-dressing is most apparent in the scene of the vigil at the home of the Bengali family that is under danger of attack by racist groups. Shahid's "eyes are shining like diamonds" as his mind is replaying last evening's lovemaking with Deedee. Moved by the sight of Shahid's "luminous face," Chad persuades him to accept a gift, a white "salwar-kamiz." Chad delights in the spectacle of Shahid as a Muslim and the erotic overtones of this exchange are unmistakable:

He watched as Shahid changed, for the first time, into national dress. Chad looked at him over before taking, from behind his back, a white cap. He fitted it on Shahid’s head, stood off for a moment, and embraced him.

Brother, you look magnificent.
As before, Shahid is afraid of losing himself in this “performance” of a Muslim identity. While he is not quite at home in this “possible” self, he goes to a mosque for the first time in the traditional clothes of a Muslim and “prays as best as he can, hearing in his head Hat’s exhortations and instructions” (109). Later walking the streets of the working-class ghetto in a salwar-kamiz, Shahid feels “conspicuous,” afraid that “some white boy was going to plant a knife in him” (109).

Shahid’s encounter with Strapper, “a young white boy with soft blond hair” (who had sold him Ecstasy on his first evening out with Deedee) brings into relief the significance of cross-dressing as a metaphor for ‘translation’ or ‘cross-over’. Shahid observes that Strapper has a “filthy laugh,” that “his skin is pockmarked and raw in patches, that his eyes bloodshot and that at the back of his hand is “tattooed a marijuana leaf” (119). As nervous as Shahid is, he still notices that this “soiled boy has nevertheless shown up in reasonable loafers, Chinos, and zip-up blouson” (117). Reassured by the clothes, Shahid asks Strapper to show him where the Paki-busters live while Strapper in turn assures him that “there are no Paki-busters out tonight as they are all indoors watching the match on TV” (117). Dress becomes the basis of a sociality, the one sign that both Shahid and Strapper can most successfully steer by. We see in the implications of this scene, the emergence of the figure of the Benjaminiian flaneur, the paragon of modernity, whose image heralds the metropolitan city/space as we know it.
The Enactment of London

Since Shahid and Strapper are both “dressed against the civilization,” they walk the nocturnal streets of London lamenting that these days “love does not go out of the family” while Strapper recounts his experience of “police, courts, kid’s homes, rehabilitation centers, social workers,” of “stuff that people only watch on television” (118). It is only in Strapper and Shahid’s walk - male, homosocial, and flaneur like - that Black Album stakes out the social and political history of London. Otherwise, the London of Black Album, expressed through the romance of Deedee and Shahid’s courtship, is the London of middle-class consumerism, the London where pop culture, drugs, sex, religion and its attendant possibilities are endlessly available for consumption. In this sense, Black Album’s presentation of London is suburban in its tone. It is the suburban sense of the city as a consumerist haven:

Shops were selling T-shirts, cheap jewelry, belts, bags, wispy Indian print scarves.

Ex-students with pink mohicans and filthy dogs stood at small street-stalls selling bundles of incense and bootlegs of the Dead, Charlie Hero, and the Sex Pistols . . .

People were magnetized by the pubs or the French style brasseries which were becoming popular; or they queued for the late nighter, Truffaut’s Fahrenheit 451 . . .

. Deedee bought Lipstick Traces and he followed her to the till . . . with some stories by Flannery O’Connor and a couple of anthologies with the money Chili had given him. (93)

But in Sammy and Rosie get Laid, Kureishi sees beyond the consumerist alignment of city and modernity to show us Sammy and Rosie’s unwitting involvement in the
material operations that are damaging to the life of the inner city. The London of this film is marked by Thatcher government’s massive inner-city renewal programs, the new urban design,16 the Docklands project17 and the Operation: Swamp (a stop and search police operation instituted to clean the streets of mugging). We see London as the proof text neither of a British cosmopolitan mythic, nor of an avant garde sensibility, but rather as a narrative that is in a constantly shifting relation to and is structured by the institutions of political power.

In the very first scene of the film, the camera closes in on a police raid on the home of a black family in which a black woman gets shot. Rafi’s arrival in London coincides with this scene of police brutality. Based on the real life incident of the police shooting of a black woman, Mrs. Cherry Groce18 and the death of Mrs. Cynthia Jarret from heart-attack during a police raid at her home, this scene shows us the making of a riot. Rafi can only compare this neighborhood to “downtown Beirut,” his beloved London turned inside-out. In Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order19 (1978), we can see the meticulous documentation of the link between race and crime and its intimate relation to the policy debates on law and order and immigration. As Hall points out, the word mugging imported from United States, became the ground on which conservative articulations of race and culture assumed coherence while the moral panic about “mugging” became an alibi for “extreme social, judicial, and political response to the crime problem”:

The underlying image of the United States . . . played a major part in the transfer of the mugging label from the United States to Britain. First, the idea of a “special
relationship" legitimized the transfer of an American term to the British situation. Second, this transfer allowed the designation of British events as incipiently ‘American’ in character. Third, the vision of the United States as the potential future could then be used to legitimize the measures being demanded and taken to control mugging. (26)

This sense of “mugging as a black juvenile crime” led to increased confrontations between the police and black youth, the “up-crime of the underclass areas like Brixton and Tottenham in London, Moss Side in Manchester, Handsworth in Birmingham,” the institution of the Sus Law (which allows the police to arrest anyone they deem suspicious), and the construction of a special Illegal Immigration unit at Scotland yard. As we can see, policing came to animate issues relating to not just law and crime, but also and especially, the social formations of “youth,” “tradition,” “city” and the community. While policing and state policy about law and order came to be shaped by the racist rhetoric of “blacks as social problem,” the entrepreneurial thrust of the Thatcher government also shaped the category of “the productive citizen” and the “enemy within.”

Kureishi-Frear’s first film My Beautiful Laundrette shows the ironies of this division when it suggests that within the Thatcherite legitimization of the “entrepreneurial drive” and “meritocracy,” a landlord such as Nasser and a drug-launderer like Saleem are able to occupy the position of the “productive citizen.” Johnny and Omar’s cross-race, cross-class homo-erotic love is written into the paradoxes of Thatcherite enterprise industry. The business culture and its associations with criminality (for which the Laundromat built with Saleem’s drug-money stands as a metonym) becomes in this film
the site for a homoerotic romance that triumphs over the racism and anti-immigrant violence of 80s Britain. Spivak and Judith Williamson observe that this homoerotic love modeled on straight love is responsible for the film's "stunning success." Judith Williamson comments on it in terms of how films work and how the description of films and its audience, either as mainstream or avant-garde, is a class-inflected category:

Thinking about actual films and how they work - I'm glad also that Stuart Hall brought up My Beautiful Laundrette - because outside the Screen [the avant-garde journal of film criticism] circles that I to some extent move in, a lot of people I know who are not theoretical just love My Beautiful Laundrette ... and many of them are not people who have thought about heterosexism. (180)

In "Sometime with Stephen," Kureishi recalls Frears telling him about a gay man in London who was "pleased and grateful that the two gays boys in the story don't wind up mad or dead" (184). But as Judith Williamson suggests we can also read the film's international success as being related to its incorporation of same-sex desire as a story of romance set against violent prohibitions. In this sense, it establishes a typically heterosexist Hollywood spectatorial look. Also, given that the same-sex romance of Omar and Johnny is framed by the dramatic rise of fascist parties such as the British Nationalist party and increased racism in Britain (events most probably unfamiliar to an international audience), it becomes a specifically British story that needs to be narrated and elicits the kind of sympathetic response that Judith Williamson speaks of. In her essay, "Sammy and Rosie get Laid," Spivak while arguing that in My Beautiful Laundrette "interraciality is presented in a lyrical way, between the Pakistani boy and Daniel Day Lewis with all the
erotic furniture of heterosexuality,” Spivak argues that the representation of homoeroticism in *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* is “richer” (248). According to Spivak, in this film “the lesbians are not a [didactic] model in the same way as Johnny and Omar,” as “a solution to the interracial problem.” According to Spivak, lesbian desire here becomes the site for expressing “a range of heterogeneous languages” - not only the expository fact-finding usage of English (that allows them to get access to the file detailing Rafi’s crimes) but also the language of wit, defiance, and abuse when confronted by Rafi’s abuse in Urdu.

To argue, as Spivak does, is to assume that *My Beautiful Laundrette* is the lyrical first film that and Kureishi’s politics as it passes into the next film *Sammy and Rosie get laid* become more hard-edged and polemical. While, *Sammy and Rosie get laid* is darker in tone, both films are concerned with the manner in which categories of race and class become nationalist categories. *My Beautiful Laundrette* carefully writes Omar and Johnny’s romance into the Thatcherite enterprise culture plot. It is this new business culture and its associations with criminality that serve as the place for the dialogue and romance between Johnny and Omar. The film is careful to insist that it is the promise of upward mobility held out by Thatcher’s backing of small business that brings Omar and Johnny together to open a Laundrette.

As we have seen, the love of Johnny and Omar is politicized in so far as it is shown as imbricated within structures of race-related violence, institutions of policing, and class formation in London. In *Sammy and Rosie get Laid*, Kureishi turns his attention more insistently to how the institutions of policing and city-re-development projects
shaped and were shaped by the nationalist rhetoric of race in 80s Britain. For Rafi Rahman, Sammy’s father, who is in London to see his son and daughter-in-law, the riots and disturbances in Sammy and Rosie’s neighborhood are a sign of the destruction of Britishness. Nothing in this neighborhood which he calls “downtown Beirut” bears any trace of the England he knew as a student. On the other hand, for Rosie, the radical social worker, the anti-police riots in her neighborhood in the wake of violent police raids are an “affirmation of the human spirit”. These riots, with which the film opens, are an attempt to re-claim the city in the face of the collusion between white British nationalism and Thatcherite “enterprise culture” which wants to develop the inner-cities into the “economic nucleus” of a new and rapacious capitalism. The film begins with Thatcher’s voice-over; “Then there are those inner cities about which something must be done.” It is to this London enclosed within the narratives of a new racism, new capitalism, and new modes of resistance that Kureishi takes us in *Sammy and Rosie get Laid*.

The sexual activity suggested by the title of the film is represented by playing with all the semantics of the verb “lay.” So the film ‘lays bare’ the Thatcherite redevelopment schemes and slum-demolition projects to ask: Is Sammy and Rosie’s central London, “a neighborhood in decline,” going to be completely “laid over” by the white bourgeois claims of Thatcher’s “new middle class”? Are Sammy and Rosie going to be “laid” under the burden of Rafi’s check and its pressure to “move to someplace civilized”? Does the “laying bare” of Rafi’s past crimes put him unambiguously on the other side of Sammy and Rosie? Is displacement and dispossession the punishment to be “laid on” the poor and the homeless for not being “productive citizens”?
Spivak draws our attention to Sammy and Rosie’s insistent claim “We are Londoners, we are not British” and sees this claim as central to the cinematic/rhetorical practice of the film. By carefully reading the rhetoric of this claim, we can, according to Spivak, come to an understanding of what holds up migrant diaspora culture and what connects nationalism and diaspora culture:

In that difference[“We are Londoners, we are not British”] of status or identification we can grasp all the overdetermination of the migrant diaspora rather than the diasporic postcolonial. It is quite often understood as a sort of chromatic issue, as a question of skin color. It is of course very much more complicated, not a cultural exchange but a moving target based on city - civitas (for civil-ity rather than civilization), polis (for street politics rather than political system) . . . Inhabitants of the “inner city,” the target of Thatcher’s voice, which opens the film; yet also disengaged, part of a lyrical pseudo-culture that feeds upon it. Sammy who attended the trendy University of Sussex, regularly visits the Institute of Contemporary Art, is also completely into a version of “Oedipalism” with his Dad [Rafi] while at the same time talking a good game about all that 1960s stuff . . . . And so the whole texture of the social and the cultural political differences within it become part of the heterosexual couple’s couplingship. (251)

Spivak’s contention is that the issue of what determines London-ness is all too often seen as an issue related to culture or consciousness rather than to institutions, political and legislative. This modernist notion suspends London as a stable cultural and aesthetic category allowing us to ignore the daily production of street politics. In one
memorable scene, we see Deedee make her way to her lover through wrecked cars and looted shops while police sirens and sounds of baton-blows rip the air. The image of politically engaged Rosie walking through the turmoil of a riot-torn neighborhood to see her lover, Danny, becomes the ground on which the film celebrates Rosie’s connection to the city. This life in the extremis is, in other words, Rosie’s everyday life as a social worker. But this scene, in so much as it renders Rosie as an authentic Londoner, draws on another connection between riot-torn London and the shape of Rosie’s emotional and professional investments. This is the connection that the film makes between eroticism and Rosie’s intimate connection to the city. In Rosie’s erotic attachment to Danny, the flaneur and authentic Londoner, we see the film formulate a link between eroticism and its energy and London as a metropolis.

If slum-demolition, city-renewal, and development permeate the film through the disembodied voice-over of Thatcher, real estate, and the preoccupation with houses permeate the film through Rafi. It is through Thatcherite legislations and the power of landed property embodied by Rafi that the film addresses the question of Sammy and Rosie’s cosmopolitanism and its political value. Rafi has brought a lot of money with him, the money from the sale of his factory in Pakistan and this money. This money, tied to the legacy of Rafi’s political crimes in Pakistan, is marked out for securing a safe home for Sammy and Rosie. In this sense, the London culture of the protagonists, Sammy and Rosie, is shown to be enclosed within the fractures of colonial culture in Pakistan. The issue is not, as it is in Black Album, just a question of immigrant presence in London and the transformations that emerge as immigrants, to use Rushdie’s words, “impose their own
needs on the land.” We see in Sammy and Rosie get Laid Pakistan as the secret/repressed pivotal term in the making of a London(er). While the politics of nationalism denies the historical links between Britain and Pakistan, Sammy and Rosie get Laid “lays” bare this binding: of London and Pakistan, of Sammy (who wants to repudiate his “Pakistaniness”) and his father Rafi, (who wants to escape his participation in the violence of postcolonial Pakistan), of Rosie and Rafi (the activists at opposite ends who in different ways absolutize individual responsibility). In so far as the film brings these discomfitting connections into sharp focus, it offers a political mode of diaspora discourse of the kind put forth by Gayatri Spivak in her essay “Diasporas: Old and New.”

Spivak’s main objection to current diaspora discourse is that it focuses on the exchange and movement of culture and identities rather than on the movement of capital. As Spivak sees it, this movement of capital refers within the post-Soviet context to “the movement of economic citizenship in a unilateral direction away from any possibility of social redistribution into the hands of multinational corporations.” Spivak makes it clear that the rhetorical elaboration of movement in current diaspora discourse allows this movement of capital to go unexamined and in so doing, it participates in the transfixeding of nation-space and identities into repositories either of “transnational,” “postcolonial,” or “colonial” selves. The ironic and contradictory alliances, such as one between Riaz and Rudder Rugman, are a crucial aspect of the workings of postcolonial agency. Postcolonial scholarship must, according to Spivak, take into account the implications of such alliances, negotiations, and neocolonial transactions.

By not showing us Riaz’s insertion into the religious fundamentalist discourse and
by setting him up vis a vis a self-evidently modern Shahid, and by aligning modernity with a subjectivity or consciousness coded as “London,” Black Album perpetuates the binary oppositions of the “Rushdie affair” and prevents a challenge to the traditional construction of the “Rushdie affair” as an “immigrant problem.” In so far as Black Album fails to provide the ground for a critical reading of the conceptual binaries - ‘fundamentalism versus Western literary modernism’ - Shahid functions as the consumer/spectator of the ‘Rushdie affair.’ His concern is to ‘read’ the extremity of the threat to literature from the “Islamic fundamentalists,” a phrase which has accumulated unproblematized rhetorical power since the “Rushdie affair”.

The ‘readings’ or translations undertaken in this chapter show that blasphemy cannot be understood as implicitly radical and as a name for ‘imagination.’ Nor can we assume a natural coincidence between the category of word culture and modernity, or between that of pop culture and transgression. Rather, our sense of the relation between imagination and transgression/blasphemy must move away from using ‘imagination’ in the Romantic sense of the word. Only through a materialist reading of the political/legislative scene of culture can we make our notion of blasphemy more productive. The next chapter charts how two novels written by women writers Sara Suleri and Carolyn Steedman find a means of invoking blasphemy without reducing it to a transgressive consciousness. Both these texts are organized around unmasking the relation of economic, political, and legislative scene to culture.
Notes

1 See Jim Pines' useful essay, "The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema" which argues that films like the Passion of Rememberance, Territories, Handsworth Songs, Burning an Illusion, Pressure, Playing Away, and Majhdar made by independent black film collectives such as Black Audio, Sankofa, and Cello are to be distinguished from the avant garde films within Black British Cinema such the films made by Kureishi-Frears. The films mentioned above constitute what has come to be called "Third Cinema" which refers not necessarily to films made by "third world people" but are films that are concerned to represent issues relating to anti-imperialist struggles and decolonization and "draw on narrative techniques as diverse as "Soviet montage, Brechtian epic theater, Italian neo-realism, and even the Griersonian social documentary" (28). See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam eds. Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. Also see Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen eds. Questions of Third Cinema. London: BFI, 1989.
2 See Kureishi, Hanif "Eight Arms to Hold You" in London Kills Me where Kureishi cites George Steiner's essay "The Retreat from the Word" in Language and Silence (1967) where he observes that "the musical sound, and to a lesser degree the work of art and its reproduction, are beginning to hold a place in literate society once firmly held by the word" (30).
3 If the term "Rushdie affair" suggests a political event, we must not forget, as Edward Said reminds us in "The Orthodoxies," that it is not only a case, but a man and a book." And, while I have taken as my task here the questioning of representational problems in the popular-literary manifestations of the Muslim response to Satanic Verses, I think it is important to remember Rushdie's predicament as delineated in his essay, "In Good Faith" (1990): "Do I feel regret/Of course I do; regret that such offense was taken against my work . . . . And I feel sad to be so grievously separated from my community, from India, from everyday life, from the world." This aspect of Rushdie's predicament is addressed with great sensitiveness in the volume For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech. New York, George Braziller, 1994.
4 Bhabha, Homi, "Postcolonial and the Postmodern" in The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994. Writing on the "ideological discourses of modernity," Homi Bhabha claims that the postcolonial project is an attempt to intervene in the ideological apparatus of this discourse which . . . gives a hegemonic normality to the uneven development and differential histories of nations, races, communities, peoples"(171).
5 Andrew Higson has argued in British Cinema and Thatcherism that the ascension of films like Chariots of Fire (1981), Another Country (1981), A Passage to India (1985), A Room with a View (1986), A Handful of Dust (1987), Maurice (1987) and Little Dorrit (1987)" in the Thatcher years has to do with making cinema an enterprise industry in the international marketplace "where Britishness is a commodity with the highest cash value. It is within the context of this double move which markets a national past with a spectacularly imaginative "visual display"(of the British Raj in its glory days) while at the same time seeking to slough off the "sick" imagination associated with the sixties (by cutting into higher education and University funding), that we should read the post-Satanic Verses celebration of imagination and vision as uniquely British traditions.
7 See Bataille, Inner Experience. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969; and Death and Sensuality. New York: Walker, 1962. In his book Death and Sensuality, Bataille describes the sacred in general and eroticism in particular as a force that has the potential of allowing human beings to approach "the limits of the possible." The sacred, according to Bataille, deriving as it does from the "sacral" - 'soiled' and 'pure' - should be regarded as being vitalized by the obscene. But the homogenizing languages of science, philosophy and poetry have, estranged the sacred from the erotic and taken us away from confronting the "obscene, the non-assimilable, the shocking, the disturbing, the violent, and the repugnant. In Bataille's view, the sacred is dead from too much elevation, from being recuperated by society.
The myth about Prince’s “Black Album” turned on the fact that as soon as it was released, it was withdrawn for mysterious reasons by the artist. From the moment of its withdrawal, the “Black Album” (perhaps named because of the album’s black front) became a fantasized, taboo commodity, available only in bootleg. Even though, it was released seven years later with much fanfare, its taboo aura remains for it has been released only in “limited attention.” I am grateful to Laura Helper for this information.


D.A. Miller, The Novel and the Police. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. In Novel and the Police, D.A. Miller reads the detective novel as a special case of the novel and argues that it functions as the “bad cop of surveillance.” By functioning as paradigm of the “policing role,” the detective novel allows us to see the “ordinary” novel or the novel in general as “a space vacated by detectives,” and by implication free of the apparatus of surveillance.

In his famous essay, “Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin argues that the translatability of a work is a function not of its content but rather of language or the emotionality of the original. See, W. Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in Illuminations, Translated H. Zohn, London: Cape, 1970.


The Islamization of British Muslims is depicted interestingly in Gurinder Chada’s documentary, “I am British But.” The film’s subject is black music’s, and in particular bhagranufin’s (a fusion of bhangra, rap, and reggae) role in organized anti-racism and the construction of “black British identity.” In one arresting image an Indo-Caribbean, riding a horse across the classical English countryside (the staple of what Andrew Higson calls the “Heritage films”) speaks of his need for a faith: “I just decided that I needed a faith.” To grasp the import of the oddity of this image, it is important to recall that the farming countryside of Britain is characterized by a virtual absence of non-whites and that the classical rural pastoral is invariably imagined in terms of Englishness. Here, the film imagines the British nation mystically (in the classical rural pastoral idiom) while it simultaneously evokes the call of Islam. While the protagonist speaks of his socialization into Islam, we cut to a montage that shows him against the farms, the hills, and valleys of England, while on the music track a Sufi song, “Ali Moula Ali Moula Ali Dam Dam” is played out. As this song by the famous Pakistani Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn fades out, the protagonist tells us how his Muslim identity has been constituted. He has, he tells the audience “decided” to adopt Islam because his grandfather who was taken from Punjab to work on the farms in British Guyana lived as a Muslim. The protagonist’s decision is presented as being part of that historical and discursive shifting that occurred three generations ago. By giving us the historical specificity of the formation of a British Muslim, the film’s montage sequence enacts a postcolonial response to the liberal attitude within the ‘Rushdie affair’ which sees the British Muslim as the product/text of failed assimilation and backward cultural assumptions.


The bulldozer scene at the end of the film specifically addresses the London Docklands Development Project (LDDC) in which the working class areas of East London were broken down to create ostensibly “a balanced community.” Nowhere have the divisions and the exploitation of the poor and the homeless been greater than in the Docklands project.

See, Geoffrey Pearson’s excellent essay “City of Darkness, City of Light” in The Other City ed. Susanne
Macgregor and Arthur Lipow for a genealogical account of the 1980 Brixton uprisings. According to him, these uprisings occurred in two waves, in April and July and the inescapable subtext of these uprisings is the militarization of the police, and the increased police abuse of the Sus-Laws in the black areas and the inner cities. But in its response to the "riots" the government as well as the media centered on the issue of "greed and the deploring standards of morality". In the words of Mrs Thatcher in the House of Commons, "the violence in Liverpool had nothing to do with the city's problems of pay, housing, and unemployment. It was a spree of naked greed. (Times, July 10, 1981)." Also see Stuart Hall (in Policing the Crisis) who argues that the 1983-84 riots in London, the 1985 riots in Handsworth (Birmingham) and Tottenham (London) were triggered by police stop and search operations, and the uprisings in Britain were anti-police struggles, not race-riots. But in the state response to these abuses of police-power, these riots were disassociated from social problems of unemployment which in Brixton had reached a staggering 70%. Instead, the Home Secretary Douglas Hurd described these riots not as social phenomena but as crimes, "a cry for loot," as did Mrs Thatcher. See Layton-Henry, Z. The Politics of Immigration. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

22 Kureishi in his film-dairies notes the ironies involved in a film My Beautiful Laundrette becoming the model profit-making small business in line with the Films Bill of 1984 which asked films to become answerable to market forces, given that the film caricatures the Thatcherite ideology of "enterprise culture."
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Chapter 4

Food, Memory, and the Autobiographical “I” in
Sara Suleri’s Meatless Days and
Carolyn Steedman’s Landscape for a Good Woman

While the previous chapter examined the politics of Kureishi’s elaboration of poetics of blasphemy in Black Album, this chapter looks at how two novels written in the 80s - Sara Suleri’s Meatless Days (1988) and Carolyn Steedman’s Landscape for a Good Woman (1987) -- pose the issue of transgression. These texts do not offer transgression as the triumphal breaching of the boundaries of law/prohibition. While these texts are emotionally invested in the notion of transgression, they disturb the idea of transgression as a project or a stable practical possibility. For example, in Landscape for a Good Woman, Steedman’s mother’s desire for transforming her class identity provides for Steedman a useful allegory for transgression. But the narrative’s exploration of her mother’s heroic if failed efforts is not just an example of a transgressive spectacle. It is also a materialist account of the mechanisms of nationalism that provoke as well as determine acts of individual and collective resistance. This narrative of the mother’s desire undercuts our cliched assumptions about motherhood and allows us to historicize the economic and gendered configurations of welfare-socialism in post-war Britain.

This chapter examines how the narratives of female embodiment, nation, class, and practices of eating reveal themselves in different but intersecting ways in both texts. As these texts invoke it, blasphemy is the name of the materialist insistence to read the narratives that are presumed to be revolutionary, whether it be socialism or nationalism.
By calling attention to the material and the economic context out of which the discourse of nationalism builds its idea of political agency, these texts suggest that no political agency can have an automatically resistant or hegemonic trajectory.

At first glance, the post-war Britain of Steedman’s text and the newly emergent Pakistan of Suleri’s text are so different that they preclude any possibility of juxtaposition. But Steedman’s and Suleri’s texts, while they are written in and from two seemingly different realms, one “colonial” (the late 40’s Britain) and the other “postcolonial” (post-independence Pakistan), have historical and temporal affinities because they both reveal how nationalist narratives of revolution produce the image of ‘woman as the guardian of culture.’ Both texts reveal the ideological connections between household and the market, between food and the body, and between the institution of the family and that of the nation. In *Meatless Days*, the ‘history-making’ activities of the narrator’s father, Z. A. Suleri, a famous journalist, are shown to be produced within the context of the narrator’s mother’s editing of her husband’s articles even though the father’s work is untouched by any domestic concerns. Both texts suggest that female homeworking, domestic arrangements of familial space, and the shaping of issues related to marriage and mothering are central to the political structures of nationalism. Both texts show how food, nourishment, and mothering appear not simply as domestic concerns but become tropes for national progress.

While *Meatless Days* clues us into the implicit link between the threatened economy of Pakistan (carved out from the Indian subcontinent) and the compulsive sumptuous economy of a bourgeois household that national culture demands, Steedman’s
text shows the relationship between the post-war Labour Government’s promise of middle class materialism and the class-specific forms of mothering, nurturing, and family formations that it engenders. In the section that follows, I will first look at how these two autobiographical texts take up the problem of eating, feeding, and their class-specific manifestations. I will then look at how they represent mothering as constituted and coded in gendered and class-specific terms within the politics of nationalism.

Part I: Food and its Body

*Meatless Days* attempts to show that the rituals of bourgeois domesticity - the abundant table, the sumptuousness, the lavish celebration of festivals - serve to secure the subject of a nation that has emerged from the partition of 1947\(^1\) starved for resources. Suleri suggests that it is the culture of Islam that is called upon to secure the coherence of a nationalism that is facing problems of scarce\(^2\) financial, administrative, and social resources - problems engendered by the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Crucial to the unity and harmony of the national culture of Islam are the customary and the religious laws related to cooking, eating, and sharing of food. While this national culture of Islam is enacted on the site of food and rituals of eating, in narrative terms *Meatless Days* is haunted by food as material, meat, and animal body. The text centers on the question of ‘food as meat’ to suggest that food can be as estranging, and unfamiliar as it can be intimate. *Meatless Days* focuses on the flesh-and-blood body of food and by so doing shows the disjunction between food as subject (in this case, of cultural Islam) and food as body. Suleri’s staging of the disjunction between ‘food as allegory of culture’ and ‘food as meat’ draws our attention to the newly formed national
culture of Pakistan as a historical body that is still painfully raw from the wounds of the partition.

Like Meatless Days, Steedman's Landscape for a Good Woman places the narrative of woman's negotiation of national history within the framework of food and its embodiment. It reads how the utopian promises of nationalism - in this case, that of welfare socialism of the Labour government in post-war Britain - are coded through rituals of eating and feeding, and systems of nourishment in the nuclear family. The narrative shows the ideological connection between the Labour government's propaganda about healthy diet, its incentives for child-bearing, its subsidies to mothers, and the constitution of mothering. This welfare socialism finds expression in programs such as the Food-Reform, a model of a cheap, healthy, and meatless diet recommended by the government which holds out the promise of a stream-lined, healthy middle-class body to working-class subjects. Steedman's mother moved by Food Reform's promise of "no sickness" lays down "a strict pattern of nourishment" for the children. By following a diet prescribed by Food Reform program of the government, she imagines herself as producing a body that that is "invulnerable to sickness":

Food reform promised an end to sickness if certain procedures were followed, a promise that was not, of course fulfilled. I spent a childhood afraid to fall ill because being ill would mean that mother would have to stay off work and lose money. But more fundamental than this, I think, a precise costing of our childhood lay behind our eating habits. Brussel sprouts, baked potatoes, grated cheese, the variation of vegetables in summer, a tin of vegetarian steak-pudding on Sundays
and a piece of fruit afterwards is a monotonous but healthy diet and I can't think of any cheaper ways to feed two children and feel you are doing your best for them.

(42)

The narrator remembers the year when, under the regime of this new diet, she and her father were faced with a salad of "grated carrots for Christmas dinner," and her father had walked out. This pattern of nourishment - brown bread, vegetables, dairy products, and the eschewing of meat - allows Steedman's mother the illusion of controlling her class identity. It represents the fantasy of a shift away from the narrative that imprisons the working-class bodies around her. While Food Reform imposes her within a monotonous diet predicated on renunciation, it holds out the promise of a healthy and wholesome body. In terms of the food provided by her mother, Steedman remembers that "we were never hungry, we were well-nourished, but in the cheapest way possible" (93).

This story, then, of the mother's attention to the minutest detail of Food Reform is also a story about a woman's efforts to free her body from a working-class class stereotype. But the mother's protest against the cultural logic that defines her body fails in so much as Food-Reform does not allow her to overcome the cancer with which her body, in the final years of her life, becomes identified:

She had conducted a small and ineffective war against the body's fate by eating brown bread, by not drinking, by giving up smoking years ago. To have cancer was the final unfairness in a life measured out by it. She had been good, it hadn't worked. (1)
The narrator represents her mother’s death from cancer as the final testimony of the failure of Food Reform and more importantly of the impossibility of achieving a change, through personal intention alone, in the system of (stereotypical) identities inhabited by the body. Steedman locates the moment of transgression in her mother’s desire and belief that she can, through individual will and effort, situate herself in the ‘Landscape for a Good Woman’ - a dehistoricized and deterritorialized landscape - in which “self-determination” linked to middle-class gender ideals is privileged. While the promise of this possibility is shown to be historically produced by the welfare socialism of 1950s Britain, as Steedman renders it, the promise of Food-reform and the national discourse of socialism that produces it emerge in the end as a false promise. But following on the lines of the logic of Food Reform, Edna conceived of good mothering as the most efficient use of her capacities to “keep the children nourished and warm” in the most economical way possible:

She looked at us sometimes, after we’d finished eating. Good Kay, eh? What I see on her face now is a kind of muted satisfaction; she’d done her best, though her best was limited: not her fault. Children she’d grown up with had died in the 1930s: ‘They hadn’t enough to eat.’(42)

Steedman’s mother’s mode of mothering cannot be separated from the history of poverty, hunger and starvation in the 1930s which claimed the lives of the people she grew up with. Therefore mothering is for her entwined with her efforts to keep her children adequately nourished and characterized by an anxiety about starvation. The narrator’s realization of this represents itself in this sentence: “Thirty years after my mother passed
her childhood in the North, she brought forward again and again that territory of deprivation and hardship to demonstrate the ease of our existence” (112).

Steedman’s text, published barely a year after Margaret Thatcher’s infamous scrapping of the free milk program in schools in 1986 which earned her the epithet “the milk-snatcher,” pays tribute to the post-war state-intervention that “poured milk, vitamins, and orange juice down the throats of its children.” Steedman describes herself as a child of this moment, a moment when the nation-state made a commitment to improve the situation of poor children. Steedman speaks of how the height and weight of her generation overshot that of the previous generation. But more importantly, she recalls what it felt like to be a child of this moment, one in which the nation-state seemed to valorize, at least in material terms, childhood. For Steedman, this made possible a sense of being wanted, a sense of not feeling like a liability:

It was a considerable achievement for a society to pour so much milk and orange juice and vitamins down the throats of its children, and for the height and weight of these children to outstrip the measurements of only a decade before; and this remains an achievement in spite of the fact that the statistics of healthy and intelligent children were stretched along the curve of achievement . . . . and only a few were allowed towards the golden city . . . . What my mother lacked I was given and though vast inequalities remained between me and others of my generation, the sense that a benevolent state bestowed on me, that of my existence and the worth of that existence . . . . demonstrates in some degree what a fully
material culture might offer in terms of . . . the structures of care and affection that it symbolizes, to all its children. (122)

While Steedman is thankful for this beneficent state intervention, her knowledge as a historian is at odds with her memory of what these beneficent welfare programs felt like. Even though as a historian she knows that the post-war economy did not embody socialist principles even as it presented itself as socialist, she is concerned with preserving the memory of this time. She is very well aware that the welfare policies of the Labour government and post-war materialism did not, as it is too easily assumed, improve the situation of women. But the imperative of keeping the memory of the post-war welfare socialism is expressed in this way:

I think I would be a very different person now if the orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn’t told me in a covert way that I had a right to exist, was worth something . . . Being a child when the state was practically engaged in making children literate and healthy was a support against my own circumstances, so I find it difficult to match an account of the welfare policies of the late 1940’s which calls ‘the post-war labor government . . . the last and most glorious flowering of late Victorian liberal philanthropy,’ which I know to be historically correct, with the sense of the self that those policies imparted (120).

Steedman is here referring to Elizabeth Wilson’s argument in Only Halfway to Paradise which states that the welfare policies of the post-war Labour government constituted a “move towards nationalization and monopolization rather than steering the country in any sense towards socialism” (34-35). Wilson argues that the welfare-policies
of the 1940’s-50’s were not socialist projects, but were characterized by a duplicitous language of socialism whose aim was to “make all classes appear middle class”(6):

In the fifties, Britain was a conservative society described in the rhetoric of a radical ideology. This held out in one hand the image of a social revolution achieved, a political achievement, while with the other it demolished politics as a valid activity... This was a society in which simultaneously socialism had been achieved and the need for it negated.... In fact, this socialism was the socialism at which Marx and Engels had sneered at long ago. It was not a socialism achieved by working-class seizure of power, but an illusion of socialism achieved by contriving to make all classes appear middle-class - a bourgeois without proletariat. (6)

Steedman, like Elizabeth Wilso¹’n, maintains that the 1950s marked “the first scene of Labour’s eschewal of socialism in favor of welfare-philanthropism”(7). Within this welfare-philanthropism, the category of the citizen was coded in class-terms. Central to the nation-state’s desire to create what it called a “classless society” was the belief that every citizen, if only s/he had the necessary will and self-determination, could access the ideal national subjectivity - the middle class body. The narrative suggests that this promise made under the banner of Labour government’s social programs and economic incentives was both short-lived and hollow.

While Steedman represents her mother’s desire for things and for a middle-class identity as presenting a problem for traditional Marxist biographies, in yet another way, we could see Edna as upholding the values that serve capitalism: values of thrift, economy,
hard-work, and "getting by." I will suggest that within the mother's vigorous determination to change her class status, we can see not only her resistance to the discourse of socialism, but also her internalization of the national discourse of welfare-socialism. The narrator's mother and the welfare-socialism of the nation-state can be said to pursue the same goal, that of working the body into producing a desired national identity, the middle class identity. Within the gender dynamics of this logic, the working class body is equated with femininity, while the middle class subject is connected with a masculinity that has struggled with and triumphed over the femininity inherent in it.

In relating the discourse of mothering to this market economy, Landscape for a Good Woman discloses the social mechanisms of middle-class conservatism underlying the political economy of Britain's post-war socialism. It is within the hollow promise of such a political economy that masquerades as socialist, that Steedman's mother locates her initial enthusiasm for and her futile efforts to shift her working-class identity. In Meatless Days, Suleri is concerned to elaborate the failure of the promise of decolonization, and the economic and political difficulties that haunt post-independence Pakistan. These difficulties are figured through cultural and material issues of food and its availability; more particularly through the tension between the economic and the cultural aspects of food.

The Materialism of Meatless Days: From Food to Meat

The very form and title of the novel draws attention to food; food as subject and food as object, food as social ritual and food as meat, food as a dish and food as flesh, its function in the animal as well as its form. Meatless Days interferes with our intimacy with
food in order to illuminate the corporeal aspects of eating and food distribution. Because food in its bourgeois form enhances sentimentalized and romantic narratives of the nation, the narrator is concerned to re-body food; that is locate it in terms of its flesh, effluvia, texture, and odor. This re-bodying is linked to Suleri’s desire to disturb the romantic narratives of the nation. Correspondingly, the body of the nation becomes the topos where the issue of nourishment, consumption, and sharing is situated. Suleri posits food as the horizon from which the cultural politics of nationalism and disappointments of decolonization can be understood. It is in the narrative representation of the festivals of Eid and Ramzan that we see the enchantment with the ritual sharing, cooking, and eating of food.

Festivals, Sumptuousness, and Sacrifice: “Dadi’s” relation to the Body of Food:

In showing the particular importance of food to the celebration of festivals, and the importance of festivals to the cultural imaging of the nation, Suleri also shows the place of women in the production and preparation of food. While food emerges as the vehicle for a romantic celebration of the human capacity for solidarity, generosity, and aesthetic creativity during festivals, the sublimation of food as culture both depends upon and consolidates the exploitation of labor, particularly of the Third world gendered subject. The allegorical conversion of food from necessity to aesthetic form nevertheless has positive effects and the narrator wistfully remembers Ramzan, “the Muslim month of fasting” as “a season of perfect meals” that established a completely different sense of time and of the body’s relation to activities of everyday. The narrator tells how vividly she remembers the way in which on appointed evenings “both the city and body shuddered
with expectation to spot that little slip of the moon that signified Ramzan,” and indicated that the fast had begun (30). As vital to the narrator are the memories of “waking up an hour before dawn to eat the pre-fast meal and chat in whispers”. From this vantage point, the narrator meditates on Dadi’s (grandmother’s) passionate relation to food, implying that if she “liked the getting up at dawn, Dadi adored the eating of it all and fasted only because she so enjoyed the sehri meal” and its rich abundance (30):

   The food itself, designed to keep the penitent sustained from dawn until dusk, was insistent in its richness and intensity, with bread dripping clarified butter, and curried brains, and cumin eggs and a peculiarly potent vermicelli, soaked overnight in sugar and fatted milk . . . . We’d start eating dates, of course, in order to mimic Muhammad, but then with what glad eyes we’d welcome the grilled liver and the tang of pepper in the orange juice. We were happy to see the spinach leaves and their fantastical shapes, deftly fried in the lightest chick-pea batter, along with the tenderness of fresh fruit, most touching to the palate. (31)

What makes this occasion⁵ so memorable is that the narrator feels that on this one occasion “food and body seem happily to sit at the same side of the table” (29). If Ramzan calls upon the believers to encounter the discipline of fasting, of denial, and of renunciation so that they may prepare for a future of (divine) enjoyment, Dadi responds only to that part of Ramzan which is about breaking the fast and luxuriating in the richness of food. Dadi’s intense enjoyment of food plays itself out in her violation of the siren that announces the beginning of dawn and that of the beginning of the Ramzan fast. The
narrator sees Dadi’s indulgence of food as a transgression that goes beyond the taboos in order to enter into a “sacred” communication with God.

**Food and the Survival of the National Body:**

While Suleri draws attention to the cultural politics of festivals and the rituals of cooking, eating, and sharing of food they engender, she also reads the food scarcity and the restricted economy of post-independence Pakistan and shows that within the context of national food scarcity, the metaphor of feasts and food occupied an important cultural and historical position. The text suggests that in proportion to the poverty of the national body, the notion of the prosperous household and the generous host is recuperated. Describing the conditions that led to the declaration of martial law in Pakistan in 1970, Ayesha Jalal in *The State of Martial Rule* underscores the significance of the economic aspects of the partition process and, in particular the food shortages that it engendered:

There was nothing in the exchequer to meet the most ordinary requirements of the government, much less . . . furnish the requirements of their gimcrack defense establishment. Pakistan’s claims for additional sums of India’s undivided cash reserves and Pakistan’s share of the central revenues, in particular the export duties on raw jute from Eastern Bengal floundered on Indian intransigence . . . With 17.5 per cent of the total financial assets of undivided India, not all of which were available for its immediate use, Pakistan had a very nearly impossible task at hand. If it was to survive as an independent entity, it had to create a new administrative structure for its central government, resettle millions of refugees, build new provincial governments in both western Punjab and eastern Bengal (which were
separated by thousand miles of Indian territory], take the first steps towards establishing an industrial infrastructure, modernize [sic] its defense forces, and to do so without anything remotely resembling a financial machinery . . . Clothes and food grains were in short supply, so were a number of other essential commodities. In the districts of North West Frontier a ‘complete breakdown of food supplies had been reported.’ In East Bengal rice was selling at staggering prices . . . Widespread hoarding, black-marketing and smuggling into India by enterprising traders and landlords of western Punjab had made a mockery of the centre’s [sic] procurement drive (71-73).

The narrative is concerned to show that the anxieties about the recently fathered nation, its “moth-eaten size” (as described by Jinnah) and its resources, its business and its culture, are imbricated with food and its functions. Suleri shows how culture-as-food is salvaged from the scarcities imposed by the newly drawn border between India and Pakistan. While the economics of nationalism dictated rationing, the culture of nationalism called for bourgeois households with abundantly laid-out tables and lavish festivals. The restricted resources and cattlestock of the nation necessitated the institution of ‘meatless days.’ The rationing stipulated that in order to conserve the national supply of cattle, no meat be purchased on Tuesday and Thursday. But woman as mother, householder, and servant was charged with the duty of managing this paradox of nationalism, wherein she had to simultaneously guarantee an ever-renewing supply of meat on the table while at the same time comply with the national “rationing of meat.” So the rationing only engendered newer and more creative mechanisms of storing, cooking, and consuming meat:
Every Tuesday and Wednesday, the butcher's shops would stay firmly closed without a single carcass dangling from the huge metal hooks that lined the canopies under which the butchers squatted, selling meat, and without the open drains at the side of the narrow street ever running with a trace of blood. As a principle of hygiene I suppose it was a good idea although it really had very little to do with conservation: the people who could afford to buy meat, after all, were those who could afford refrigeration, so that the only thing the government accomplished was to make some people’s Mondays very busy indeed. The Begums had to remember to give the cooks thrice as much money; the butchers had to produce thrice as much meat, the cooks had to buy enough flesh and foul and other sundry organs to keep an averagely carnivorous household eating for three days (31).

As the passage makes clear, ‘those who could afford meat could also afford refrigeration,’ and so the institution of “meatless days” was rendered ineffective. Paradoxically, it only produced more lavish meat consumption among the middle class. By highlighting the middle class emphasis on the abundant table, the narrative clues us into the importance of food-as-culture in the political imagining of the nation. By focusing on the politics of consumption and its metaphors, Suleri reads the nation-space of Pakistan as a body framed within the material discourse of scarce resources: fields, rivers, cattlestock, and fisheries:

Items of security - such as flour or butter or cigarettes or tea - were always vanishing, or returning in such dubious shiny attire that we could barely stand to
look at them. We lived in the expectation of threatening surprise: a crow had been
drowned in the water-tank on the roof, so for a week we had been drinking dead
crow water and couldn’t understand why we felt so ill; the milkman had
accidentally diluted our supply of milk with paraffin instead of water; and those
were not pistachios, at all, in the tub of Hico’s green ice-cream. Our days and our
newspapers were full of disquieting tales about adulterated foods and the
preternaturally keen eye that the nation kept on such promiscuous blendings. I can
understand it, the fear that food will not stay discreet but will instead defy our
categories of expectation in what can only be described as a manner of extreme
belligerence (29).

Within this political economy of scarcity, food reinvented itself by assuming
unexpected forms, names, and shapes while eating itself became mixed up with a larger
discourse of “learning to live in the expectation of surprise” and adapting to the idea that
food might assert its own subjectivity-contrary to all expectations. In tracking this
experience of eating as self-othering, the author locates the discourse of food in a
bodily/materialist frame, rather than within a discourse of nostalgia.

The economy of food that Meatless Days exposes is focused around two aspects
of eating; first, the self-consciousness about desire and the body that encounter with food
engenders and second, the experience of food’s betrayal. The narrator recalls her first
bodily experience with food as involving gol-guppas, a “small hollow oval made of the
lightest pastry that is dipped into a fiery sauce made of tamarind and cayenne and lemon
and cold water”(39). She remembers that when “a friendly elbow accidentally knocked
the spicy *gol-guppa* sauce all over the narrator’s lap,” her body’s astonishment had “called attention to passageways that as a rule she was only theoretically aware of owning” (39). As she puts it, “the groin’s surprise . . . all of which folded up like a concertina in protest against such an explosive aeration kept her pupils stayed dilated and her interiors gaunt and hollow-eyed” for days (39). The narrator recalls this experience as her first sexual understanding of her body. It awakens her senses to a new knowledge of body parts and “passageways that she was only theoretically aware of owning” (39).

In this sense, the *gol-guppa* experience is one of a nourishing self-knowledge, one that connects her with her body and its desire. It contrasts with her later encounter with the truth of “*kapura,*” familiar to her as “sweetbread.” The knowledge that *kapura* is not sweetbread but sheep-balls confronts her with her first recognition of the discontinuity between her *experience* of food and her *knowledge* of it. Of the moments connected to eating, it is the story of the “*kapura*” or what she knows as “sweetbreads” that presents food (or rather the knowledge of its production) as a traumatic experience. When Tillat, the narrator’s sister, asks her if she knows ‘what *kapura* are,” the narrator is confident in her response: “Of course, they are sweetbreads and they’re are cooked with kidneys and they’re very good” (22). When Tillat explains gently that “they are testicles, that’s what *kapura* really are,” the narrator is unable to accept the possibility of its truth. Even though the narrator feels certain of the impossibility of *kapura* being anything but sweetbread since that is what her mother has told her, she begins to “inquire into the exact status of *kapura* and the physiological location of its secret first in the animal and then in the meal” (22):
Even though I was made to feel that it was wrong to strip a food of its sauce and put it back into its bodily belonging, I certainly received an unequivocal response. *kapura* as naked meat equals a testicle . . . But, and here I rummaged for the sweet realm of nomenclature, “couldn’t *kapura* on a lazy occasion also accommodate something like sweetbreads, which is just a nice way of saying pancreas is not a pleasant word to eat?” But no one was interested in this finesse. “Balls, darling, balls,” someone drawled and I knew I had to let go the subject (22).

When Suleri learns that *kapura* as “naked meat equals a testicle,” it not only tampers with her sense of intimacy with food but opens her to the knowledge of the indeterminacy of boundaries between food and body. Once the narrator learns that *kapura* as meat is testicles, nothing in her memory stands in the same relation to knowledge anymore. It makes it impossible for her to reconcile her mother’s cultivated sensibility with the possibility that she might have with deliberate calculation misnamed *kapura* as sweetbreads, so that her daughter might “consume as many parts of the world as possible”:

It was, after all, my mother who told me that sweetbreads were sweetbreads, and if she were wrong on that score, then how many simple equations had I now to doubt? The second possibility that occurred to me was even more unsettling: maybe my mother knew that sweetbreads are testicles but had cunningly devised a ruse to make me consume as many parts of the world as she could before she let me loose in it . . . . what else have I consumed on her behalf. (24)
From *Kapura to Kirnee*: Claiming the Body’s Materiality

The truth about *kapura* completely unsettles the narrator’s sense of the form, name, and shape of food. This painful knowledge motivates a memory that she had long suppressed. This memory is that of her revulsion when handed “overpowering glasses of fresh buffalo milk” each morning. This was the time when their cook Qayuum had bought two water buffalo and her mother, “beaming at the prospect of fresh milk,” suggested that the children attend the milking time. The narration of this moment is significant in establishing the discourse in which the narrator’s panic about food’s betrayal is located:

Of milks it is certainly the most oceanic, with archipelagoes and gulf streams of cream emitting a pungent, grassy odor. Trebly strong is that smell at milking-time.

She (mother) kept away herself, so she never saw the big black cows, with their ominous glassy eyes, as they shifted from foot to foot. Qayuum pulled and pulled at their white udders and in, a festive mood, called up the children one by one to squirt a streaming jet of milk in their mouths. When my turn came ... I ran as fast as I could away from the cows and the cook, past the vegetable garden and the gold-fish pond ... where I lay down in the grass and tried to faint, but couldn’t (25).

For the narrator the sight of the milking-cow is the overarching image of the animal body in all its materiality. She cannot bear the milking time because of what it makes visible of the animal body, its processes and its effluvia. Unable to bear this proximity to the physicality of the animal body, the narrator flees to the vegetables in the vegetable garden every morning where “sitting amidst a bed of cauliflowers “emerging like
a fragrant little heads,” she “chews as many craters as she can into their jaunty tightness” (25). The solidity signified by the cauliflowers presents an escape from the encounter with the oceanic indeterminacy of buffalo milk. The soft materiality figured by the body of the milking cow so threatens her sense of her body that she must chew at the hardness of the “the bumpy vegetable brain” in the cauliflower bed. Within this flashback about the disturbing memory of the milking time is set another flashback that until now has been completely forgotten. This is the memory of the punishment to which the narrator is subjected when it is discovered that it is she who is responsible for destroying the cauliflower bed. Mair Jones makes her eat kidney so that she may learn discipline, and the complicated ritual of endurance it imposes”(26). The narrator’s encounter with the indeterminate texture and taste of kidney or what Qayuum calls as “kirnee” marks her most oppressive experience of food:

I tried to be unsurprised by the mushroom pleats that constitute a kidney’s underbelly and by the knot of membrane that folds it into place . . . . Wicked Ifat came into the room and waited till I had started eating; then she intervened. “Sara,” said Ifat, “do you know what kidney’s do . . . kidneys make pee” . . . . It is to my discredit that I forgot this story, both of what the kidney said and what it could have told to my still germinating sister. Had I borne something of these lessons in mind, it would have been less of a shock to have to reconceive the kapura parable; perhaps I’d have been prepared for more skepticism about the connection between kidneys and sweetbreads - after all, they fall into no logical category of togetherness (26-27).
The confrontation with *kapura*'s real meaning allows the narrator a recognition of the repressed experience of the *kirnee* punishment. Now the narrator's memory of her childhood eating-rituals cannot be assimilated into normal ways of thinking and knowing about food. The remembrance emerges instead as a blasphemous breaching of normal ways of thinking about food.

Clearly in emphasizing the body's materiality through the tale of *kapura* and the *kirnee*, Suleri is rejecting the bourgeois notion of food as culture. It is no accident that the bourgeois form of knowing about food suppresses any awareness of the body (as labor and as animal body associated with it). Suleri's strategy of narrating the story of milking-time, of *kapura* and *kirnee* has the effect of breaching the narrative of food as culture. By rendering the body's materiality, the text appears to write into visibility the body or the labor of food that has historically been suppressed. But in the account of the narrator's encounter with the milking cow, we see the image of the cow standing as an allegory for the body. One might say that the image of the milking-cow becomes the synecdoche for labor. By having the animal body embody labor, this account renders invisible the sight of the servant who is milking the cow. In other words, the issue of the body and of labor is always articulated in relation to the image of the animal. The labor of the domestic servants and the labor of food-making is never shown to us. What the text presents as labor is the unassimilable image of the animal body.

While *Meatless Days* may be said to be concerned to reclaim the body of food from the traditional sense of it as culture, it leaves unexamined the issue of class and labor as it is imbricated in food-production. However, Steedman in *Landscape for a Good*
Woman not only postulates the identity of her mother and father in terms of their labor, but focuses on the issue of food as sustenance or food as that which reproduces labor power. The issue of labor, class, and its materialist analysis will become clear if we turn to passages in the two texts that deal with the issue of migration.

Nationality, Class, and the Crisis of Migrancy: Meatless Days and Landscape for a Good Woman

In Steedman's text, the issue of the migration of her parents from Lancashire to South London is an issue not simply of cultural and emotional displacement. Instead, migrancy is described within a historical narrative of class and exchange of labor power. Migration is necessary for survival, the only defense against the threat of hunger and starvation that accompanied the depression:

By the time my father could sit down in a pub with me, slightly drunk, tell me and my friends about Real Life, crack a joke about a Pakistani that silenced a whole table once, and talk about the farm labourer's - his grandfather's journey up from Eye in Suffolk working on the building of the Great Northwestern Railway, up to Rawthenstall on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border, I was doing history at Sussex and knew more about the date and timing of journeys like that . . . . The setting for the tale my father tells is the Blackpool Tower ballroom, it's summer, and Robin Richmond is playing the organ. Which Year? My calculation now says it must be 1934, but he doesn't mention dates himself . . . . Then suddenly Robin Richmond becomes part of the story. My father implies that he's been carrying on with the organist's woman. Anyway there is a woman in the story, a woman to fight over.
There is a fight . . . . Someone knocks my father out anyway, and he either gets into, or is pushed inside a car . . . . The story suddenly cuts to South London, to Balham and Ellis wakes up, not knowing where he is. (52)

Steedman reads her father’s tale as “an allegory that covers plainer tale” (52). In the story which lurks beneath this romantic story, the move from Lanchashire to South London is related to “the economic exigencies that forced them to exchange one set of skills for another, to turn their hand to whatever came along” (67). Steedman locates her father’s story within the history of all the workers who migrated because of the closing down of mills and industries and the complete collapse of the market. Through embedding the story of her parent’s migration within a wider historical frame, she takes it beyond that of individual suffering, and represents it as part of a migration of labor power:

My parents were immigrants. Strangers to a metropolis during a great depression, they left a northern country, impossible stories left behind them . . . . They had brought with them nothing but their labour . . . . And yet, there was a particular emphasis in my father’s allegory of escape, told in the pub in the 1960s, when he came to the part about going back home to collect a few things (67).

Instead of arresting the story of her parent’s migration within a personalist idiom, Steedman sets it within the history of class. She places it within the real workings of the historical and economic situation, and within other migrations such as that of child-workers7 “from Coventry to Burnley’ to work either in the textile mills, or in the traveling circus. It is in this sense that the story of the narrator’s mother determination to change
her class situation becomes the story not just of personal achievement but also that of social consciousness within a particular historical circumstance.

While *Landscape for a Good Woman*, a text written from and about a colonial realm, has no problems representing the narrative of starvation, the story of hunger and starvation cannot be narrated in *Meatless Days*. Oddly enough even though *Meatless Days* takes up the issue of Partition and the political and cultural ideologies of a newly-independent “third-world” nation, the narrative shelters us from the history of poverty and deprivations sketched out in *Landscape for a Good Woman*.

The narrator’s childhood recollections, as we have seen, are set free from a history of class. The recollections are all subject to the shadow cast by the narrator’s father’s migrations, first from Delhi to Lahore “when some Indian Muslims in England decided that it was high time to talk about Islamic independence and invented that new coinage, Pakistan” (110), and then from Lahore to England to “propagate what he called the Pakistan cause in the capitals of Europe”(114). While Z. A. Suleri’s political activism entails an identification with the nation which focuses too exclusively on the bonds of geographical fellowship, his journalistic passion for truth cannot survive the censorship imposed by Ayub Khan’s declaration of martial law in 1970. When “Papa” ‘feels like a minority’ in his own country and his efforts to fight the censorship land him in jail again and again, he makes arrangements for himself and his family to move to England and carry out his political activism from there. But he is soon overtaken by the desire to return to his nation because he feels a “minority” in England. What is important to note is that this restless movement between Pakistan and England is talked about only in terms of the
emotional and psychic difficulties of displacement. The possibility of this movement—the economic and social text that makes it possible—is ignored. In other words, the space of the nation, while examined for its imbrication in patriarchal social structures, is not recognized as being enclosed within class privilege. It is in the description of the outcome of the father’s migrations on the mother’s body that we see the narrative most effective in engendering a materialist analysis of nationalism.

We are told that the political theater of father’s nationalism writes itself on the narrator’s mother’s body in troubling ways. Mair Jones’ (the narrator’s mother) reproductive labor becomes the father’s measure for keeping account of the family’s several migrations between London and Pakistan. While his masculine ethos of service to history is enabled by the mother’s assistance in the “daily production of print,” it enables him to both sublimate and escape the material nexus of labor (child-bearing) that enfolds the body of Mair Jones. The narrator remarks on it in this way:

Shahid was born in the year that the Evening Times became a morninger; the Times of Karachi and I followed close behind . . . . When Pip emerged from jail and found General Ayub in charge, the parliament disbanded: it made him decide that he had his fill of editing for a while and should look for something different. So he became a foreign correspondent once again and shipped us off to England. Before we left Mama had another child, Tillat, whose vastness of eye and absence of nose entranced us all, although Mama was getting fatigued . . . . Papa felt odd about living in England, as though he were a minority once more, a person absented from the functioning of what he himself had built. He wrote, however,
with a ferocity of soul, sending off dispatch after dispatch, so that in the place of
the clanking of a printing press, the music of our day changed to Papa on the
telephone . . . . I think Pip feared for his progeny as well . . . . We were growing,
he noticed, into a dangerous phase - what choice had he but to make Mama pack
our bags again and return to Pakistan, to forestall us lest we become totally
possessed by someone else's history? Before we left Irfan was born. My mother
was very fatigued (117-119).

The issue of newly independent Pakistan's nationalism is restricted not just to the
world of Z. A. Suleri's world of journalism, but implicates the details of the bourgeois
domestic life. Suleri exposes the extent to which her father's authorship depends not only
upon domestic duties performed by his wife and children but also upon their daily labor of
proof-reading and editing. She does this by underlining the mother's contribution to the
newspaper which remains as invisible as it is fetishized:

Odd to think that just one man could keep us all so busy. There we were, attendant
on his tempestuous career, waiting like proof-readers to go through the galleys of
his days, breathless with surprise . . . . I did not like to have to handle so much
newspaper and sometimes felt as though my fingerprints were wearing out with the
impact of all that ink (122)

This calls to our attention the gendered structure of household industry hidden in
the family while at the same time that it complicates the father's claim to historical
authority and authorship. *Meatless Days* takes us into the middle-class interior of the
Suleri household to show how the duty-bound relations that underlie familial relations
sustain Z. A. Suleri’s authorship and the sphere of public history that he imagines as the sphere of history-making. The household, then, is not only the space of ‘motherhood’ and ‘domesticity’ but is the political space from which the father’s articles emerge “proof-read,” “edited,” and revised. While the mother is locked in the role of the reader and editorial assistant, the daughter-narrator, “bone-tired from ten years of reading articles in galley proofs,” finds herself wanting to “put continents between newsprint and my mind” (158). This is how the narrator explains her move from Lahore to a University in the United States (158). Her mother’s involvement with the deadline driven world of galley proofs and articles is crucial to the narrator’s self-reflection about an ethics of writing:

She (Mair Jones) found him (Z. A. Suleri) moving - his very doggedness, committedness, a moving thing - long after she had glided off into a realm beyond the non-committal, a creature of such translucent thought that my father could not follow, could not see. But he respected her almightily, fearing the ill-judgment she was too courteous to give, so that daily he would watch her finish his latest article to ask her anxiously, “How does it read? I: reads well, Zia,” she’d say, which once he had pushed through his baffling single-mindedness, it often did . . . . to mock him would be too simple: he demanded to be mocked, and had enough detractors as it was proliferating through his day. So my mother gave him the seriousness of her concern, following the self-interruptions of his talk to say, “I see, I see” (159).

Even as the narrator is moved by her father’s journalistic passion, she remembers that it was her mother who had to “live through thirty years of daily production of that print” and “the daily necessity of sympathy” (158). “I see” succinctly characterizes the
mother's mode of engagement not only with her husband, but also with the nation that she has adopted. This combination of "gentle concern," and distance is subversive in so much as it not only complicates the master-narrative of the European woman in colonial discourse but also the narrative of motherhood. Mair Jones’ aloofness also provides a foil to Papa’s anxious identification with the nation. But in the narrative’s celebration of the mother’s independence from the mundane obviousness of the world, we also see a tendency to represent her as somehow separate from the turmoil of the everyday world. In Mair Jones’s refusal to become completely absorbed by the everyday world of her children, the narrative locates a special sensibility, at once aristocratic and cultivated:

"You can’t change people, Sara," she once told me, watching with compassion my crazy efforts on that behalf. How she could smile and shake her head, to see my complete regression into a woman who does not care for character at all and wants to change only the plot. Was it because she had so many children that she exempted herself from similar pedantic tricks, preferring, of necessity, to configure her mind around what need not be said, much as she congregated all our fussy eating habits around a meal? (155)

When the narrator finds herself entangled in the world of other people’s cares and problems, Mair Jones’s advice to her is to move beyond the crass calculations of “plot” and into the realm of “the story”. She urges the necessity of focusing one’s mind on “what need not be said,” on that which is not linked in an essential way to the obvious and the mundane. Nuz, the narrator’s step-sister, thinks of Mair Jones as a kind of Mrs. Ramsay. The text suggests that like Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, Mair Jones is
somehow instinctively able to preserve a private space for herself, an independent, pre-
maternal consciousness. To the extent that the narrative represents Mair Jones’ maternal
position in the rhetoric of consciousness and instinct, the narrative obscures the daily
chores and realities of maternal work. The work-ridden world of food-preparation and
household chores is the preserve here of servants and cooks and we do not enter this
world except in the idiom of nostalgic remembrance:

Food certainly gave us a way not simply of ordering a week or a day but of living
inside history, measuring everything we remembered against a chronology of
cooks. Just as Papa had his own yardstick - a word he loved - with which to
measure history and would talk about the Ayub era, or the second martial law, or
the Bhutto regime, so my sisters and I would place ourselves in time by
remembering and naming cooks. In the Qayuum days, we’d say, to give a
distinctive flavour to a particular anecdote, or in the Allah Ditta era. (34)

The cooks are represented as dramatizing and “flavouring” the narrator’s
remembrance of childhood events, and this is the sum of their representation in *Meatless*
Days. On the other hand, *Landscape for a Good Woman* is consistently about the labor of
mothering, the problem of everyday chores, and the structure of deprivation that
characterizes working class mothering. The making visible of the unseen work of
mothering within a social and economic situation that devalues unpaid labor is an
important concern of *Landscape for a Good Woman*.

It is in terms of labor or work that Steedman describes motherhood. In her book,*
*Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Sara Ruddick observes that motherhood
is not as much consciousness as it is "the acceptance of responsibility of child-care." In Ruddick's view then, motherhood is a function of the mother's relationship to the child, and can be understood most productively as the 'maternal work.' Instead of reading mothering as a transhistorical consciousness, Steedman shows the class-specific constitution of this subjectivity in 50's Britain. The narrative suggests that in the mother's adoption of the Food Reform and in her anxiety about nourishment, we can see her adoption of mothering as work. While "mothering" and "work" (coded as job and/or career) are conventionally constructed as alternatives, Steedman's mother views herself simultaneously as mother and as worker:

The coat and the lipstick came from her own work. 'If you want something, you have to go out and work for it. Nothing comes free in this world.' About 1956 or 57 she got an evening job in one of the expresso bars opening along the High Road, making sandwiches and frying eggs. She saved up enough money to take a manicuring course and in 1958 got her diploma, thus achieving a certified skill for the first time in her forty five years (37).

In the face of the conventional tendency to detach woman's position as a worker from woman's position as mother, Steedman's mother tries to bridge the division between worker and mother. Edna persists in her desire for things: for a house, for insurance, for social status and this desire informs her sense of herself as mother and worker. Steedman suggests that her mother's desire for things - a "new look skirt, a timbered country cottage, to marry a prince" - can be seen as challenging the stereotypes that define working-class identity (9). The mother's efforts to produce herself and her children as
middle-class subject disrupts the romantic communitarian myth of the "old working class" found in autobiographical texts like Jeremy Seabrook's *Working Class Childhood*. Popular working-class biographies such as this tend instead to sentimentalize the working class rejection of materialism and are "nostalgic for a time when people who were united front against cruel material privations . . . discovered the possibilities of human consolations they could offer each other"(8). By silencing the language of desire, of envy, and of feelings that work against one's class constituency, such texts masks the political content of working class subjects. It is to her working-class mother's desire for social mobility and ambition that the text gives voice as Steedman tells of how her mother, "working-class Conservative from a traditional Labour background came away wanting things" (8):

This is a book about . . . things (objects, entities, relationships, people), and the way in which we write and talk about them: about the difficulties of metaphor. Above all, it is about people wanting things, and the structures of political thought that labeled this wanting as wrong . . . Changes in the marketplace, the growth of real income and the proliferation of consumer goods were used by my mother to measure out her discontent: there existed a newly expanding and richly endowed material world in which she was denied a place (22-36).

By recounting the story of her mother's yearning for things-- a desire produced and sustained by post-war materialism--Steedman's narrative both reflects upon and breaks with the kind of working-class history implicated in a text such as Jeremy Seabrook's *Working Class Childhood*. What Steedman emphasizes in the text is not just that her mother, a weaver from a traditional working class background, came away
wanting things, but rather that this wanting and fantasy have specific cultural markings that are disavowed by working class biographies. Typically, writers of biographical and autobiographical narratives who depict their mother's resistance against the imposed conditions of poverty emphasize the mother's endurance, self-sacrifice, and her benign compliance to the cares and constraints of mothering. Steedman undermines this narrative of the self-sacrificing mother to re-member her mother's ambivalence about mothering, her longing for things, her independence, and her life-long struggle to assert her desire. Commenting on Steedman's representation of mothering and its relation to the 'classic narratives of class critique and psychoanalysis', Leigh Gilmore has this to say in her book

**Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Woman's Self-Representation**:

Steedman's mother's life was shaped by loss and longing. She surveyed the difficulty of her working-class life and wanted things. The mother's interpretive legacy for her daughters, "the impossible contradiction of being both desired and a burden" reproduces the "impossible contradiction" that founds their family. Steedman pieces together the family secret of illegitimacy and the interpretation that she and her sister were inducements to marriage and the better life it signified to her mother . . . . Steedman refuses to be read and read her family's life in the master-narratives of class critique and psychoanalysis. She follows a route of persistent estrangement from master narratives, all the while homing in on the relationship of mother and daughter, the relationship insufficiently interpreted by dominant theories of human development and social theory (37-38).
As Gilmore argues, the autobiographical narrator’s renegotiation of her maternal heritage is also a renegotiation of “two identity-authorizing discourses of psychoanalysis and Marxian class critique.” Steedman suggests that while in the Marxian discourse of class critique mothers appear as naturally tough, hard-working, self-sacrificial and nurturing, within Freudian discourse they appear as the too bodily, the non-symbolic object of desire. In the texts of working class autobiographies that Steedman considers, such as Jeremy Seabrook’s *A Working-Class Childhood* and Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, although mothers are center-stage and are glorified, they are not present as subjects. In contrast, Steedman reads endurance not so much as a natural quality associated with motherhood but places her mother’s endurance in its historical context, in the context of post-war materialism and the hollow promise of welfare-socialism addressed to the working-poor.

In her mother’s stoical efforts to police her diet and that of the family, Steedman sees a struggle between rejection and identification with her working-class class embodiment. As a child, Steedman had thought that “they were middle-class,” when she saw her mother’s thin body. As she puts it, "She looked so much better than the fat, spreading South London mothers around us, that I thought we had to be middle class” (37). For the child, the mother’s body seemed to have a different aura than those of the working class bodies around her. This mythical aura, the narrator remembers feeling, was somehow connected to ‘the food we ate.” Only later does she see her mother’s thin body as a gendered expression of her mother’s exertions to procure middle-class necessities, her
tendency to overwork, and her determined effort at saving "forty thousand pounds for a house that was never bought."

We learn that the mother's decision to conceive a child is itself, in this sense, a calculation; at once courageous and naively erroneous, that her lover and the father of her children would marry her. The mother's decision to enter into mothering is part of her determined effort to achieve middle-class subjecthood. What the narrator is moved by, and what is most significant for her, is Edna's "calculated will" towards middle class subjecthood. In the case of the Steedman's mother, agency takes the form of calculating (within the conjuncture of economic pressures that structures her position) what "value" or labor power she possesses. It is her reproductive body that she "chooses" as the labor-power of her will to subjecthood:

In this case, then, she was a woman who had something to give, and her rights in her children derived not only from the illegality of my father's position (for in one sense he legalized us, by paying for us, supporting us, staying around), but also from the choice she was able to make, specific to time and place, and - relatively newly - to her class, about the disposal of her body. Her production of children and the wishes and desires that the productions embodied were a manifestation of a process that has become much more widespread and discussed over the last ten years, of a bargain struck between working-class women and the state, the traffic being a baby and the bargain itself freedom, autonomy, state benefits and a council house: the means of subsistence (70).
It is this bargain, "in and of the self," that connects Edna to the nationalist modes of post-war budgeting, bargaining, and reconstruction of the (national) body (70). This self-determination to "bargain" her reproductive labor power - the one thing she possessed - is both located within and serves the historically specific situation of post-war materialism and its promise of middle-class subjecthood to the working-class. This promise relies, as we have seen, on a sense of the body-as-economy that can be worked to its utmost efficiency. The decision of the mother to use her reproductive body to access a class sociality becomes the benchmark by which motherhood is measured in the text:

She made us out of her own desire, her own ambition, and everything that came her way in the household was a by-product of our presence and her creation of our presence. We were an insurance, a roof over her head, a minimum income. We were her way of both having him and repudiating him (57).

As the passage indicates, motherhood functions as the contradiction that inhabits Edna's body. While it allows her to imagine the possibility of a middle-class identity, it also imprisons her and reminds her of her failure.

It is against the background of such an awareness that the narrator looks back over her childhood historically and sees herself and her sister as "two living barriers to twenty yards of cloth [needed for the New Look skirt]" (30). The narrator remembers her mother telling her, "Back home . . . I'd be able to get it at the side door of the mill; but not here, not with you two" (30). The narrator points out that while the father's income provided the money for the rent, the bills, the food, and the school fees, it was the mother who "defined their class position, and the emotional configurations that follow on such an
assessment" (56). It is the "illegality of their position" that allows the narrator to see that it is her mother who has named the children as her creation and has defined their class identity:

If we'd lived within my father's earning power, been uncomplicatedly his children, two meals a day round the kitchen table, parents sharing a bed... then our household would have represented to its children, the unambiguous position of the upper working class. But it was my mother who defined our class position... until we were in our thirties, my sister and I continued to believe that she bore the major burden of supporting us... As children we believed that without her we'd go hungry and the knowledge of how little we cost came very late indeed. (56).

Edna's creation of herself as a mother is readable in her determined efforts to be a competent and a "good mother." The mother's role required, for Edna, not only the capacity for renunciatory budgeting (of the kind prescribed by the Food Reform) but also the elimination of worldly enjoyment - of "going out dancing or drinking" (30). The need to be recognized as a "good mother" haunts her as she tells her children again and again how she has tried to do her best by them despite the injustices that she has suffered. In this telling, the narrator hears her mother confess that she has had to relinquish herself and her desires on account of her children. For Steedman this signifies the mother's ambivalence towards her children. Such an ambivalence, she claims has not only been historically disavowed but has been considered as deviant.

Steedman wants not only to understand her mother's ambivalence in historical terms but wants also to emphasize the importance of preserving this ambivalence in any
accounting of mothering. In her words, "accounts of mothering need to recognize non-mothering, and recognizing it would have to deal in economic circumstances and social understanding that arises out of such circumstances" (88). The narrative suggests that the post-war shortage, the rationing, and the budgeting of resources are not just phenomena that show us a materialist rather than a sentimental predication of the subject, mother. Instead, it shows the operation of economic text in any narrative that reads mothering and non-mothering. In this sense, Landscape for a Good Woman may be said to disturb the conventional discourse of motherhood by desentimentalizing it.

In contrast to this, Suleri’s Meatless Days tends to sentimentalize mothering by locating in the sensibility of the narrator’s Welsh mother, the promise of transgression. In Mair Jones, the narrator’s mother, we find the staging of a fantastical sensibility which by “raising obliquity to an art” and by cultivating an aesthetic line of defense is shown to escape the corruptions of everyday politics.

The text’s recuperation of a class-transcendent culture in the sensibility of Mair Jones is also indicated in the way in which she is represented as being outside the ambit of isms-national, cultural, or racial. In this sense, the narrator’s Welsh mother’s evocation of the nation is represented as being a break away from the geographically constructed domain of home and place-based loyalties. While the father’s sense of being-at-home remains inside the more rigid conventions of identity and geographical fellowship, it is Mair Jones who, for the narrator, produces an imaginary of the nation that is politically more compelling.
So Mair Jones in *Meatless Days* becomes a symbol for an imaginary of a nation that transcends place-related loyalties. It is through Mair Jones that the narrative reconceptualizes the nation by suggesting that the nation is defined through the richness of daily life such as friends, family, and food “left behind”. By defining the nation in terms of friends and food *left behind* as though it were possible to re-member the nation only after leaving it (or only after its specter as a homeland had eclipsed), *Meatless Days* disturbs both idealized and the xenophobic defenses of the fiction of nation. The mother’s and the narrator’s affirmation of national culture as it emerges in the remembrance of the everyday “flavourful anecdotes” associated with food and cooking are presented as a foil to the father’s naive affirmation of the nation and its political structure. However, to the extent that the narrative invests its energies in illuminating the special sensibility of Mair Jones, which is represented as a given, it traffics in naturalized notions of ‘culture,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘sensibility.’ We have seen in Chapter One and Two the troubling consequences that emerge when such notions are deployed.

But what makes *Meatless Days* so interestingly different is that it shows how functions coded as domestic and private are intimately tied to the formation of the national public sphere. The domestic activities, and the symbolic and material economy of a bourgeois household not only serve the interests of nationalist fundamentalisms, but the very notion of a (private, feminized, protected) home is the function/effect of a nationalist patriarchal ideology.

While the father as the intellectual and journalist sees himself as the interpreter, critic, and agent of national history, the narrator opens to scrutiny the disavowals and gaps
in her father's version of history. At the center of Papa's blind-spot is, of course, theror of the 1947 partition in which an estimated six-hundred thousand people lost their
ives, and millions lost their property, friends, and relatives. This "break, that of Britain
aving the shores of India, that place of many countries, many people, which they had just
tidied into two" is what Papa insists on explaining in terms of his "two-nation theory." For
the daughter-narrator, any matrix for remembering the connections and the trauma that
connect the two separated nations - India and Pakistan - should be embedded in an
emotional and bodily recognition of the wounds of partition. It is this "body" of history
that is exempt in Papa's "two-nation theory." Only to the extent that the body of
(national) history is seen and the costs of nationalism acknowledged, can an alternative to
Papa's history-writing:

Today I often regret that he was not in Pakistan at the time of the partition to
witness those bewildered streams of people pouring over one brand new border to
another, hurting as they ran. It was extravagant history's wrenching price: farmers,
villagers living in some other world one day awoke to find that they no longer
inhabited their familiar homes, but that most modern thing, a Muslim and a Hindu
nation. There was death and panic in the cities when they rose up to flee, the
Muslims traveling in one direction, the Hindus in the other. (116)

Papa's version of the two-nation theory cannot be sustained in the face of re-
memberance of this body of history. Were Papa able to witness the partition, would it
break logic that binds his nationalism and "confer upon it the blessing of doubt," the
narrator wonders (116). So the narrator reads the father's adventurous tale of the nation
and his sense of its dreams, failures, and possibilities through the perspective of the mother’s analysis which, we learn, is as fine-tuned as it is “distracted,” as gentle as it is powerful. The daughter pushes against the limits of Papa’s authority and his imaginary of the nation by turning her gaze on the household dynamics that sustain it.

While *Meatless Days* underscores the need for rethinking our cherished myths about selfhood and motherhood as being separate, its representation of Mair Jones’ sensibility presents a romanticized middle-class model of motherhood. As we have seen, *Landscape for a Good Woman* represents mothering as labor-power, as work related to child-care rather than to consciousness. Edna’s efforts to reconstruct her class identity produces a version of mothering that cannot but register “a mother’s ambivalence towards the existence of her children” (90).

Though Steedman does not locate such an ambivalence only in working class parenting, she posits class position or economic exchange as being at the core of all narratives of mothering. The effect of the sentimentalization of mothering, the narrator suggests, should not underestimated. The effect of such a coding is that it covers over the economic and contractual exchange that lies at the core of parenting, a covering over that we see in Suleri’s *Meatless Days*. I have argued that transgression as the name for a materialist analysis of narratives assumed to be revolutionary is figured more productively in Steedman’s *Landscape for a Good Woman* than in Suleri’s *Meatless Days*. But in so far as both texts reject transgression as a utopian possibility, they deliver us to a materialist and critical historiography.
Both texts show that the "domestic site," conventionally the site that is associated with materiality, provides an opening from which to see, critique, and analyze the disavowed material and the bodily forms of national-cultural traditions. While the texts that I have chosen to read are products of a canon-formation that names one text "colonial" and the other "postcolonial," both texts are readable as "postcolonial" disclosures of the materiality embedded in national cultural and literary histories. In the next chapter, it is such a critical historiography we see when Mukul Kesavan turns to the narrative of the Indian independence struggle - the famous Quit India movement of 1942 - to show that the failure of nationalist agency produces spaces in which an everyday political agency can be produced.
Notes

1 The partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and property. It has been described as the bloodiest migration in history. The partition is ideologically situated in the ‘divide and rule’ strategy of the British and its inexorable legacy of separatist definition of political communities within the nationalist movement. Partition as a strategy to resolve these difficulties was pursued by the British also in Palestine, Ireland, and some parts of Africa. For recent historical and critical perspectives on the partition see, Ayesha Jalal, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, Hasan Mushirul, ed. India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom. 2 Vols. New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995, Veena Das, ed. Mirrors of Violence (1990), Ashgar Ali Engineer, ed. Communal Riots in Post-Independence India (1984).


3 In Gayatri Spivak’s translation of Mahashweta Devi’s story “The Breast Giver,” we read the particular trauma of a wet nurse who is dying of breast-cancer. The cancer of this reproductive organ is shown to be paradigmatic of all women like Jasoda whose body-as-economy is inhabited by and hyper-exploited by the bourgeoisie.

4 However, the most outstanding example of Dadi’s relation to food is to be seen in the narrator’s account of the goat that Dadi brings home on the occasion of Bakr-Eid, “not the one that ends the month of fasting, but the one that celebrates the seductions of the Abraham story in a remarkably literal way” (4). This occasion memorializes Abraham’s sacrifice of his sons in response to God’s call. In the Abraham story that animates the celebration of Bakr-Id, at the supposed moment of sacrifice, Abraham, unable to bring down the knife on his son, shuts his eyes. Miraculously, in the place of his son, he finds a sheep under the knife. It is this miracle that Bakr-Id celebrates. To understand Abraham’s impossibly difficult position; to take on the experience of Abraham’s dilemma is a key process on this occasion. On one occasion Dadi brings home a young goat in order that she may “guarantee its festive texture by a daily feeding of tender peas and clarified butter” in preparation for Bakr-Id, “but the children ‘greeted the goat into the family with such boisterous rapture . . . that even Dadi knew there was no killing him” (5). But years later, Dadi has her will and ends up bringing the butcher home. Through the violence of Dadi’s act, the text invites us to witness a sacrifice. While the narrator’s first response is to note how “successfully Dadi had broken through tissues of festivity,” she cannot avoid seeing that Dadi, in her solitary concentration, is trying to make God talk to her, and trying to literally take on Abraham’s situation in extremis. Dadi’s refusal to separate the bodily from the symbolic is at the heart of her conception Abraham’s sacrifice. In his essay “Eating Well,” Derrida argues that the injunction “Thou shalt not kill” cannot be really understood unless the ‘other’ is taken to be one’s equal. Derrida has this to say about the sacrificial discourse in religious cultures that are not Judeo-Christian:

The “Thou shalt not kill - with all its consequences which are limitless - has never been understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor apparently by Levinas, as a “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general.” It has become meaningful in religious cultures for which carnivorous sacrifice is essential, as being flesh. The other, such as this can be thought according to the imperative of ethical transcendence, is indeed the other man: man as other, the other as man . . . The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the non living, man or animal, but since one must eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there is other definition of good, how for goodness sake should one eat well . . . 279)

According to Derrida any sacrificial discourse must connect the experience of appropriation or eating to that of an ethical-political understanding and responsibility to the other. The ethics of alterity embedded in the injunction “Thou shalt not kill” need not, Derrida suggests, thwart the law of desire at the heart of


Chapter 5

Witnessing ‘History’ Otherwise:
Mukul Kesavan’s Looking Through Glass

It was the kind of assignment I would never have got without the long lens. I had been commissioned by the India Magazine to illustrate an essay on the Use of Lime Plaster and Stucco in Nawabi Lucknow and the author wanted blown-up details of moulding and ornament and glaze. And since these details lived on column capitals or unclimbable domes, the only way of getting close enough was a zoom lens. I owned every inch of its potent length - Dadi’s pension cheque had closed that chapter neatly ... Her ashes were travelling in a thermos flask ... I was taking the ashes to Banaras because Dadi had written it in her will that she wanted them tipped into the Ganga at Kashi. Everyone in the family thought that they understood but they didn’t. Dadi’s wish had nothing to do with the holiness of Banaras; it was her salaam-in-death to the martyrs of 1942, many of whom had come from Banaras and its neighbourhood ... I volunteered to take the ashes - I owed her a debt and this was a good way of squaring the books. (6-7)

Mukul Kesavan, Looking Through Glass

Looking Through Glass† (1995), a novel written by the historian/novelist Mukul Kesavan, provides a good example of critical historiography because it breaks with the conventional historical impulse to arrange events in a developmental sequence. Instead it uncovers the embeddedness of the past within the present. The past in this case is the time
of 1940s - the history-heavy years leading to the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Kesavan's unnamed narrator, a photographer in contemporary India (on his way to bury his grandmother's ashes in Banaras), is attempting to capture the perfect picture for the inaugural use of his brand new zoom lens when he finds himself falling into the frame of the photograph:

The train had stopped on the bridge, just short of land ... It was slanted enigmatic light, the kind that limns photographer's frames with easy mystery, I took aim through the window again ... but the girders kept getting in the way. There was a look-out point less than six feet from my compartment ... Taking a deep breath, I walked down the aisle to the door and strode over the girder without once looking down or exhaling ... I was distracted by a figure in my peripheral vision. It, or rather he, was standing ... knee-deep in water looking up ... I would have laughed out aloud if my perch had been more secure, because a man in a white kurta much like mine, was looking up at the train through a telescope. Man-with-a-lens here was the picture I had been looking for ... And then ...(sic) well, it wasn't any one thing. It was the whistle going as I made to click; that clap of thunder in the distance, the flask rolling round my behind-it was all of these. But most of all it was the weight of the lens ... it suddenly became twice as heavy and ... ten times its normal weight and more, as it dragged me downwards. Then I was falling, hurtling towards the green river, the downswinging dhobis, the man with a telescope - and just before I knew nothing I saw my free-falling ten-ton lens beat me to the water. (8-9)
When the narrator-photographer is in the process of fixing the “man-with-telescope” into a photographic image, he himself falls into the time-space of the photographic object. Now, the photographer is himself in the grip of the photograph, as captive rather than as the controller of the frame. If the camera typically separates the seer and the seen into distinctively separate spheres, here we see the camera itself dragging the photographer into the other side, as it were. Through this image of the narrator falling into, what may be called, a freeze frame or a frozen moment, the novel asks us to cross boundaries that demarcate the past from the present. And by giving us a narrator who is also a photographer, the novel asks us to understand the ‘drive to see’ that is embedded in historical inquiry. *Looking Through Glass*’s intervention in such a mode of inquiry is to stress the mediating function of the glass/camera and to call attention to the dynamics of the “through” rather than to those of the “glass.”

**Identity, Embodiment, and Agency**

In the novel’s representation of the uses made of identity within the discourse of Indian nationalism, we see the dynamics of visibility and invisibility - concerns related to photography - as being connected with issues of embodiment and agency. The question of embodiment and its relation to agency is posed in the novel by way of the question of nationalist agency: ‘Who or what is a true nationalist?’ In exposing the tensions between embodiment and reflection (understood as representation) and its relation to the politics of visibility, the novel chronicles the ways in which Indian nationalism has frozen, shall we say, snapped the Muslim body into the stereotype of a separatist.
Under scrutiny in the novel is the popular view of agency as that which is transparent to historical vision and therefore easily identifiable (and hence representable). Kesavan’s recognition that agency is not necessarily accessible to the historian’s eye is staged in the novel as a movement in which the narrator’s certainties are put to doubt again and again. The novel dwells on the chancy, the unintentional, and the failed attempts at activism of the ‘ordinary people’ of Indian nationalist history. By so doing, it attempts to disturb our tendency to automatically link agency with the subject’s intention and with the visible realization of these intentions. For example, it focuses on the passionate and failed efforts of Masroor, the Congress Muslim hero, to stop a communalist cricket match organized by the British between Aligarh Muslim University and the Banaras Hindu University.

Set in the United Province of 1942 the novel opens with a chronicle of the British efforts to foreclose any nationalist efforts while it is engaged in the Second World war and the Indian National Congress’s efforts to adopt the Quit India Resolution and stage a mass civil disobedience movement such as the one staged in 1932. At the time that able-bodied men, particularly from Punjab and the United Province, are being recruited for the Second World War, the Muslim Congress hero of the novel is engaged in putting a stop to a communalist cricket match organized by the British government. This is to be a crowd-pulling cricket match between the arch-rivals, the Banaras Hindu University and the Aligarh Muslim University. The anxiety about communal conflicts is a pervasive one for Masroor and with the help of his friends he wants somehow to put a stop to this match. Masroor’s attempts to stop the train bringing the players from Banaras and thus possibly
cancel the match cannot of itself disrupt the persistent and now increasing British efforts to build and manage communal sentiment in India. But it is through such attempts against the forces of communalism that Masoor wants to insert himself in the nationalist struggle.

Similarly, the novel focuses on Masoor’s mother’s, Ammi’s, misguided hope that her city, Lucknow, will somehow resist communalist interpellations. The actions of Ammi and Masoor are rendered, not so much as self-conscious expressions of nationalist agency, but rather as part of an everyday response. Responses such as these occupy the historical narratives only as an absence. By reading narratives of activism in the everyday accounts of these failed attempts, Kesavan gives us a history of could-have-been, a history of the other side of the ‘looking glass.’

It is this sense of ‘failed’ activism rooted in the everyday that propels Kesavan’s investigation of post-1940s Indian nationalism which projected the crisis of nationalist agency (immanent in the event of the partition in 1947) on to the figure of the ‘Muslim separatist’ or the ‘enemy within.’ The currency of this image, Kesavan shows, emerges from the constructed invisibility of the Muslim nationalists such as Masoor “who believed in the Congress and its dream of India, free and united, and for whom it was critical that the Congress continued to believe in him” (247). This chapter will show the fraught links between agency and visibility by focusing on the disappearance or the constructed invisibility of three nationalists, Dadi (the narrator’s grandmother and social worker), Masoor (the Congress Muslim nationalist), and Parwana (the orphan girl who becomes the victim of Gyanendra’s filmsgrip, “Kamasutra”). But in order to understand the nature
of this invisibility, it is important to outline the role played by the timing and tone of the
Quit India movement.

August 9, 1942: The Quit India Movement and the authorized nationalist

In the 1940s was present, on the one hand, the British war-time attempt to
foreclose any possibility of another successful mass-civil disobedience movement such as
that of 1932 Salt Satyagraha (by building and managing communal sentiment in India), on
the other hand was present the Congress demand for an immediate mass action for
independence. To that end, Congress wanted the Hindu-Muslim unity question to be held
off. Gandhi’s new mantra for an urgent and radical civil disobedience movement in 1942
posited a program of “Do or Die.” Kesavan suggests that this rendered unenforceable the
promise that Gandhi had made just a month ago: “No Quit India movement till the Hindu-
Muslim question is resolved.” Coming at the end of a long fast, Gandhi’s “Do or Die”
slogan was intended to put before the masses a new hope and plan for a mass action - a
mass action more radical than the Salt Satyagraha of 1932.

The “Do or Die” program as it was formulated in June 1942 put a brake on
Gandhi’s earlier promise to put the issue of ‘Hindu-Muslim unity’ prior to the “Quit India
resolution.” The novel emphasizes the significance of this breach of promise (which is the
ground from which the Quit India movement originates) for Masroor and those like him.
As the narrator points out,

They had risked ostracism within the community by opposing the Muslim League’s
demand for a Muslim homeland but also knew that millions of Muslims distrusted
the Congress, that they would have to be brought around, that rhetorical ultimatums to Quit India without addressing their insecurities would alienate them forever (247).

In this sense, the timing of the Quit India puts a brake on Gandhi’s earlier commitment to resist the communalist forces and this has the effect of giving impetus to the communalist ideology of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha\textsuperscript{7}. While earlier Gandhi’s consistent stand had been “No Swaraj (Independence) without Hindu-Muslim unity,” now it is “Swaraj alone can restore Hindu-Muslim unity.” Most importantly, Congress’s new definition of the ideal nationalist makes invisible the space of agency occupied by the Indian Muslim because within this register, the Indian Muslim can be a nationalist only if s/he accepts unquestioningly the Indian National Congress’s reconstruction of nationalist agency. Within this logic, Masroor has these image-options - either that of being invisible, or becoming a “Congress lap dog” or being considered a “Muslim separatist.”

The question of invisibility first enters the novel through Dadi’s (the narrator’s grandmother’s) absence or invisibility as a nationalist subject. It is this absence, as we shall see, that forms the (pre)text of the narrator’s presence in August of 1942. It provides a useful framework in which to think about issues relating to visibility and the politics of representation. Because, Dadi as a social worker was at the time of the Quit India movement involved in reform programs such as the establishment of a shelter for “fallen women” and the implementation of Gandhi’s economic program of *Khadi* (handwoven cloth) and *Swadeshi* (re-cultivating the indigenous small scale industry). This activism became the ground on which Dadi participated in the Quit India movement.\textsuperscript{8} Given
nationalism's emphasis on direct political participation, woman's social-political activism such as Dadi's was perceived as being outside of and peripheral to 'real' nationalist activity.

In what is itself symptomatic of a nationalism which makes women's issues disappear into a "separate sphere," to use Chatterjee's phrase, Dadi internalizes the guilt about her non-participation in the Quit India movement and finds that she cannot rid herself of the memory of 1942. When the government of India awards her a "Freedom Fighter" citation for her contribution to the Indian independence struggle, her suffering becomes even more acute. Even though Dadi was jailed in the 1932 nationalist movement (the salt satyagraha), she is so burdened with a sense of guilt about not participating in the 'real' struggle for independence - the Quit India movement of 1942 - that the pension award for doing so makes her virtually disappear:

I thought she was being silly, but the guilt consumed her. Every month I found her thinner and more obsessed than before ... Dadi never spoke of what she actually did in '42, of her children, her husband, their life together. The August rebellion became a black hole in her memory that sucked everything that ever happened to her afterwards, that collapsed her entire life into a single non-event (5-6).

Agonizing about "the debit mounting against her name each time the Freedom Fighter's pension cheque arrived," she insists on returning the Freedom fighter's award: "I have the three thousand six hundred rupees they've sent me so far, she said. I haven't spent any of it. You must take it to the accountant in that office and give it back to him ... [and] make sure he crosses my name off the ledger" (3-4). But the narrator, wanting the
money for a new zoom lens camera, forces Dadi to “keep the stipend on, always in the
hope of returning every paisa” (5). So, the narrator’s “Lucknow commission” and his
chancy fall into 1942 is made possible by Dadi’s pension cheque. His very presence there
as a chronicler seems to occur through Dadi’s suspension in guilt and absence.

In this sense, the autobiographical “I” narrator’s coming into history may be said
to parallel the coming into history of the Quit India movement itself. As we have seen, the
Quit India movement develops by dint of suspending the question of Hindu-Muslim unity.
Within this logic of nationalism, the Congress Muslim must prove his difference from the
separatist Muslim Leaguer although he himself is positioned outside Congress nationalism
which is taking its religious-cultural discourse from Hinduism. As Masroor describes it:

I had prayed so hard that the Congress wouldn’t pass the resolution, said Masroor
through egg and toast. For the first half of the year, he wasn’t worried because each
time some radical asked for mass civil disobedience, Gandhi said no. There was to be
no direct action to push the British out until the Muslims had agreed. Then suddenly,
he changed his mind. Suddenly the Muslim mind became closed to him, suddenly the
masses became irresistibly urgent. Inspired by him, the members of the Congress
Working Committee met in Bombay and passed the Quit India resolution, which
side-stepped Muslims in favor of the masses. Like a bunch of yogis fired by the
power of the mind, they concentrated on the Hindu-Muslim problem and made it
vanish. Along with the problem, said Masroor, we vanished as well (247).

Masroor can become an authorized nationalist (read Congress nationalist) only in
so far as he expunges his Muslimness. In effect, Masroor has only two choices; either to
strip his identity of Muslimness and become invisible, or else emerge as the very stereotype of the ‘Muslim separatist’ who will undo the dream of a single united India. In effect, the Congress Muslim must either unquestioningly accept the Quit India resolution and Congress’s revised program for the satyagrahi (revolutionary), or inhabit the nationalist narrative as an impediment. It is this predicament of being hypervisible to the Hindus and to the British, while at the same time that he is invisible as a Muslim body to the Congress party (the party that has the power to set the agenda for nationalism), that Masroor knows too well:

Eighty ... million Muslims. This is the truth, the government’s own truth - printed, bounded, and published. But for us the Muslims, the whole truth is that there are eighty million Musalmans in this country who are invisible ... Not invisible to every one. Not to the British who count us. Not to those Hindus who hate us, who see us everywhere - circumcised monsters who bathe once a year and breed all the time. It is the Congress which can’t see us ... It first bleaches us with its secularism till we are transparent and then walks through us, as you and I walk through jinns and ghosts ... When we’re for it, we’re human beings, transparent in our humanity. When we are against it, we still aren’t Muslims, because then we are feudal or bourgeois, some abstract sort of anti-social villain (190).

Within this communal-blind logic of seeing that describes itself as secularist, an abstract notion of human essence is privileged over the body. So, the reality of bodies, in this case, Masroor’s is rendered invisible. While Masroor wants to insert himself in the nationalist struggle by recognizing communalism’s possibility, he fails to make his
presence register just as the thirteen Muslim Congressmen who had vetoed the Quit India resolution had failed to make their presence register to the Congress high command. The thirteen Muslim Congressmen had "vetoed" the Quit India resolution in the hope that they could convey to "the party they believed in" that in the present condition of mistrust of Congress by the Muslims, and in the context of the "tense Hindu-Muslim" situation, such a move would be misdirected. Within the frames of interpretation within which nationalism is obedient to Congress's assertions of nationalism, this "veto" is perceived as a betrayal. Kesavan suggests that this mistrust from "the one party they hoped would show some belief in them" puts the very reality of their bodies under erasure. As a result, the Muslim Congressmen literally disappear. As if to fulfill the nationalist imaginary in which there is no Hindu-Muslim problem, (read "the Muslim problem"), the Congress Muslims in proportion to their involvement in the Congress pact literally disappear. This mass disappearance marks the inability of the post-Quit India movement nationalism to generate a public space for a genuinely non-communal activism. As Masroor tells the narrator:

The degree of disappearance was in inverse proportion to the victim's commitment to the Congress. Some just became lighter skinned which they didn't mind. Others, more involved with the party, sometimes became translucent. With Inayat Sahib, a veteran of the great Khilafat campaign, who had grown away from the Congress after the Kanpur riot, the most that happened was during a meeting of the Municipal Board he found himself completely naked in the middle of an argument... The more committed they were, the less they left behind. One just left his name behind in the novel he had been reading when he heard the news. He had been reading Forster...
and when they found the book by the empty armchair, Aziz had become Salman on
every page ... His brother Saleem had been subbing the late city edition when the
news came down the wire ... he was translated into the left-hand corner of the day’s
cartoon, just under the last fold of the Mahatma’s loincloth (248).

When we consider Masroor’s account of the scenario of disappearance, we see
Gandhi (also called “Bapu” or father) literally becoming the ground or the conduit through
which an Indian can construct himself as a patriot/nationalist. In Masroor’s case, a mere
glance at the headlines of the August 9 newspaper is enough to bring this about. One
moment Masroor is on his knees, “reading on all fours this confirmation of everything he
feared” (46) and the next moment, the narrator sees him disappear into a military lorry
hurting down the road. Masroor has literally vanished into invisibility. As the truck picks
up speed, the narrator finds Masroor’s image flattened on a recruiting poster painted on
the side of the truck: “Take the King’s Commission: The Noblest Life on Earth” (47). The
narrator cannot tell what has become of Masroor; whether he is alive or dead, an image or
a person.

Memory, History, and Amnesia

The morning that Masroor disappears, August 9 1942, is the day that the narrator
has marked out for boarding the train back to Delhi and to his present; “the real world of
colour television and people I knew” (53). But before the narrator can attempt an escape
from history, he sees Masroor disappear and this seeing implicates him in the eventualities
of India on the brink of negotiated independence. The very act of narrating Masroor’s
disappearance to a bewildered Ammi and Ashrafi suspends any desire he might have to
return uncommitted to his time-space. At the point of telling the story of Masroor's disappearance to Ammi who is already haunted by another vanishing, that of her husband, Intezar, the narrator forgets to remember the account of Masroor's disappearance:

I was warmed by pity, not only because they had lost Masroor but because the end of the world they knew was due. In less than five years there would be murder, rape, flight, migration, butchered trains, refugees, dispossession, enemy aliens ... in short, partition. And here they were, Ashrafi, Ammi, and Hassan, living in the lull thinking it the storm ... So I gave them hope. I pleaded a state of shock, I cited the time lag between the truck screeching to a stop and my reaching it, I even invoked the obscuring smoke of its exhaust ... The truck had been moving quite fast and keeping up had taken all my energy, so yes it might have been Masroor in a window, briefly, or why not, a door. Then there was the delirium of exhaustion, the treachery of recall and of course my amnesia which might selectively extend to the immediate present (52).

When faced by the urgency of Ammi's and Ashrafi's predicament, the narrative eye forgets, or rather stages this forgetting as the truth of what happened. Now the narrator as-amnesiac is forced to confront the unsettling experiences of 1942 with the uncertainty of a participant. While he cannot un-know the partition or forget the horrifying violence that the future is to bring, Ammi's and Ashrafi's hopes and anxieties become his own, as he himself becomes Masroor's ghostly other self. By staging that which happens under the aegis of the narrator's amnesia as the truth about the post-40s freedom struggle, the novel attempts to foreground the uncertainty of vision and historical authority. If the narrator
actively disappears as a knowing subject, it is around the disappearance of this historicizing subject that Kesavan writes the history (or rather the non-History) of people’s hopes, fears, desires and activism as it relates to the reality of their everyday life.

In Discerning the Subject Paul Smith contends that the “abstraction of the subject from the real conditions of its existence” and the customary “alignment of agency with subject understood as the unified and coherent bearer of consciousness” has resulted “in the production of a theoretical subject almost entirely absent from the political and ethical realities in which human agents actually live” (xxix-xxx Preface). In his Foreword to Smith’s book, John Mowitt summarizes Smith’s argument about the human agent in this way:

Crucial to his analysis is his contention that agency embodies both the general dynamic of activation, and activism. Moreover, he argues that activism as embodied political resistance is implicit or latent in the general dynamic of activation, what he calls negativity (xx Foreword).

Mowitt argues that Smith’s sense of agency as that which ‘is present not only within activism but also within latency or activation’ resists the canonical notion of the subject and “the way in which theoretical discourse limits the definition of the human agent in order to be able to call him or her the subject” (Smith, xxx Preface). Even though Smith’s notion of agency is, according to Mowitt, too “sanguine about such a state of latency” requiring for its viability the belief that “anything would be better than the present order of things to read sheer negativity as affirmable political resistance in itself,” Smith rightly stresses that any conception of resistance must account for activism’s inscription in
activation or latency (xx Foreword). In order to further politicize Smith’s notion of the
human agent as non-coincident with the subject, Mowitt calls for a change of emphasis: a
change that shifts emphasis from the public sphere to quotidian life in the “discerning” of
agency:

If the political meaning of agency is that it offers us a way to politicize the
contradictions that structure daily life, why not seek to discern agency in those
experiences within the quotidian field that do not require traditional theoretical
meditation in order to become political, that is explicitly connected with activism.
The gain here would be that we need no longer bemoan the absence of organic
intellectuals nor exhaust ourselves in debating the merits of vanguardism. To make
the most of these gains, one has to be able to locate the instances of experiences I
refer to. (Foreword xxi)

Ammi’s manifesto: Mourning as agency

In Looking Through Glass, we notice a change of emphasis from the public space
to the private as the narrative traces the contradictions and ambivalences of agency within
and as they structure Ammi’s (Masroor’s mother’s) political activism in the zenana (the
private sphere within the home). As if to show that agency is not visible only in the public
sphere, the narrative counterposes the activism of the female Congress worker
campaigning on the eve of a raid on a police station to Ammi’s questioning of goal-
directed female agency from within the domestic realm. In the magazine Khatoon that
Ammi runs from her zenana, she calls into question women’s relation to selfless duty by
counterposing “living against learning” and ‘imagination against household work’ (16).
Ammi’s *Khatoon* refuses to enmesh itself in the rhetoric of the domestic magazine. Instead of accounts about household tips, recipes, and beauty care, the magazine offers “first person” accounts of imaginary travels and pilgrimages that Ammi wrote under “half-a-dozen pen-names” (17):

The current issue, which was running behind schedule, featured a walking tour of Granada (including a description in cinematic detail of its unparalleled stucco and plaster ornamentation), a memoir of the great and bloody Moplah rebellion of 1921 in Kerala by a Gentlewoman of Calicut, a letter about a rail journey from Istanbul to Paris by an emancipated Turkish lady, and of course, the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca by the widowed Shakila Rehman of Mymensingh who, Ammi declared in her editorial introduction, was an inspiration to us all (17).

Ammi’s magazine is defined by its non relation to ‘real experiences’ and as she puts it: “If I start waiting on experience ... I’ll have to fill Khatoon with recipes” (17). Her agency functions as a knowing or a style that may be said to be, in Judith Butler’s sense of the term, “performative rather than intentional.” It can be grasped as her rootedness within the particulars of everyday history. It comes as no surprise that when Masroor, now in the army, suggests that she must sell the house in Lucknow and move to Delhi so that “if the country is partitioned, we’ll be in a much better position to cross the border - if we want to,” Ammi responds with an unambiguous “No” (325):

If if, said Ammi dismissively ... No, I won’t move to Delhi. Because your father might come back. Because your reason for going to Delhi is absurd. You want to live in the future like the rest of them. Delhi’s just your time-machine ... Why should
you want to wreck the only world you have for some day after tomorrow? ... Isn't it
natural for people to be attached to their lives? You I can understand: the young
always want to change the world. But Gandhi and Jinnah and Nehru? Experienced
old men who want to sweep their lives away and live like strangers in brand new
countries? (326)

When Masroor accuses Ammi of inhabiting the world of "waiting" and of the
'past' and challenges her to "do something to stop them [the Nehrus and Jinnahs] instead
of just waiting," Ammi decides to stand for the local elections. She files a last-minute
nomination as a one-woman-backed Independent party named "Anjuman Bera-I-Tahaffuz-
Haal" which she translates as "Society for the Defense of the Present." The narrator
describes this as Ammi's "staking of her present against his [Masroor's] future, her now
against his then" (336):

If I lose, I will sell the house for the highest price that this advertisement fetches and
shift to your quarters in Delhi. But if I win ... I will withdraw the advertisement and
keep the house - but you will leave the army and return to Lucknow. Then we'll wait
for your father together. (327)

What is of interest is the way in which Ammi's election manifesto makes no
promises, offers no "new republics," and no grand changes. It is a call, instead, for the
stalling of a promise, a call to slow down the acts of nation making.\(^12\)

For five years after the English leave
- no roads shall be renamed
- no statues removed
- no statues raised
- no republic constituted
- no Constitution written
- no coins minted
- no textbooks written
- no stamps issued
- no laws made
- no elections held
- no boundaries erased
- no frontiers drawn

till we sort out what we want to keep, from what they leave behind (336)

Ammi’s stalling of these acts of nationalist inscription can be understood as her desire to bring attention to the trace of the past within the everyday present. What is noteworthy is Ammi’s continual refusal to resolve the conflicts and ambivalence of the present. In the present context of “change-mongering” and “the politics of the nation-state” to borrow a phrase from Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Inscriptions: Of Truth to Size,” Ammi’s response represents an agency that Paul Smith has characterized as “activation.” While decolonization sees as its project the refusal and dismantling of the space of the empire, as Spivak\textsuperscript{13} reminds us, ‘the time-space of colonization cannot be assumed to be coincident with the space of the empire or undone in the same way’. Ammi sets her mourning against the decolonizing mode of coming to terms with the space-time of colonization. This is typically either through repression, forgetting, or through “moving on.” It is this mourning for a time-space that nationalism urgently wants to reconstitute, that the narrative presents as the blasphemous agency of everyday response.

In this sense, Ammi’s election manifesto is a call for ‘activation’ rather than for ‘activism,’ to use Paul Smith’s phrase. It is a call to suspend our relation to the space of
the new nation until we inhabit imaginatively the time-space of the present and the irreducible presence in it of the past. For Ammi, the city of Lucknow and her relation to it remains the central form of this present.

But in the eyes of the reporters of the local press, Ammi is nothing if not a Muslim woman starting another Muslim party so that a new “Republic of Islam” may be created. The Press wants to frame Ammi in a burqa in a scene that is specifically Islamic and cannot stop asking her: “Why did you as a Muslim woman set up a Muslim party when you already have the ...umm ... Muslim League” (329)? When Ammi protests that her party is not a Muslim party, and that she is “not a Muslim lady,” the reporters fail to understand her. Even though Ammi’s body cannot escape these communalist narratives of gendering, she is able to disquiet the reporter of Dawn, the Muslim League mouthpiece, who wants ‘a picture of the Muslim lady and calls her party the Anjuman-ul-Tahaffuz-Hi ... fazat-I-Islam:’

“You’ve got Islam on the brain ... The Anjuman Bara-I-Tahaffuz-I-Haal is what my party is called ... Look, I know it doesn’t matter to you but write in your notebook that Anjuman Bara-I-Tahaffuz-I-Haal is not a Muslim party - It is a Society for the Defense of the Present.”

But the reporter’s nose kept tracking the Muslim lady. “Yes,” but he went on unstoppably, didn’t she (as a Muslim) want the Muslim League to win? Didn’t she want to live in the Muslim homeland, in Pakistan?

“What for?” she said rudely.

“It will umm ... be the Republic of Islam,” he ventured.
"But it won’t be Lucknow, said Ammi." (330)

What is worth noting is that Ammi’s argument about staying attuned to the everyday present enables her to win the election. But Ammi’s candidature is “disqualified on a technicality … since all candidates for election had to own property of a minimum rateable value” (345). When she is advised to “file a plea that her husband’s property be transferred to her on the grounds of prolonged absence and presumption of death,” Ammi refuses. Ammi refuses to declare her absent husband “presumably dead” in order to produce herself as a qualified nationalist subject. It is Ammi’s refusal to conflate absence (or non-visibility) with “disappearance” that constitutes, for Kesavan, a radical sense of history and the political praxis for true activism.

The Limits of Congress Secularism

The less politicized alternative to Ammi’s mode of activism and her affinity with the everyday world is represented through the political activism of the unnamed woman Congress worker. Motivated by her belief in the Swaraj-inspired disappearance of the communal problem, the Congress worker appeals to the crowd to “loan horses, elephants, motorcycles … bicycles so that the Madhuban police-station, the last place flying the Union Jack in this part of Azamgarh may be taken and provisional government of Indian Republic of Azamgarh established” (98). While the narrative eye cannot by “any outward sign see what the communal identity of her audience is,” everything in her speech indicates that she is addressing, what she considers, a Muslim audience(98):

You must have heard them say that the Congress doesn’t speak for the Muslims, that our Quit India movement is a Hindu plot … Now tomorrow, we will march on the
last unliberated police post in this part of Azamgarh ... But I cannot prove to you that this freedom will mean freedom for Muslims. I cannot because freedom is not a thing that can be portioned. It is the air you breathe. I cannot prove that Congress is secular; I don’t know if there is a single Muslim among my comrades. But I will not apologize for this because there isn’t a single Hindu either; there are only nationalists ... Congressmen cannot ... defend their party by counting Muslim heads because we are blind to labels that divide us. (99)

The Congress activist wants to prove the ‘secular’ credentials of the Congress. But, it becomes clear that she cannot do this except by challenging the very demand for proof. She does this by insisting that becoming a nationalist will, in and of itself, annul the distinctions between Hindus and Muslims. Central to her argument is, of course, the evocation of the family as a metaphor for the new nation; a representative model of the nation that ‘transcends religious, linguistic, caste, and class divisions’. But we shall see that the mass-mediated, religion-transcendent, cut-out figure of the nationalist imagined by her has at its very heart markings that are Hindu. What we see defining itself here is the Congress logic of secularism which posits the image of a religion-transcendent nationalist without paying any heed to embodiment or rather, precisely by being blind to the body and its visibility.

It is the body, its terrifying visibility and materiality that we see in the story that Haasan, Masroor’s guardian and friend, tells the narrator. The story goes thus. In December 1920 Haasan, a Hindu brahmin, is making his living by selling banana chips and pickles in Calicut. Haasan feels called upon to make for himself a new identity, the cut-
out image of a Muslim, because he hears "rumors of British garrisons being put to flight by mobs of rampaging Muslims" (82). His uncle convinces him that his security as a Hindu merchant traveling in a state with 'Muslim rebels on the rampage' depends on his successful cross-dressing as a Muslim. So it is that Hassan designs for himself "a beard recently grown trimmed Muslim-fashion, a small lace cap, and another name, Ali Musaliar" (82) when he goes on his pickle-selling tours. Although Haasan hesitates before approaching the only eating place at Garudapuram, "a fanatically vegetarian enterprise where brahmins looped with sacred thread serve food," he stops there because he is exhausted. First the food arrives with a cockroach swimming in it. When he objects, he finds the coffee in his face and then:

Someone kicked my jaw and then another my temple. I must have stayed semi-conscious because I can remember the others closing in around me and kicking me in the ribs a few times ... . Someone shouted cut it off, cut it off and another laughed and someone else said no ... and then the terrible line of fire and pain spread across my chest ... They had etched him with the logo of their faith. This swastika. In the weeks of pain that it took for the scabs to form properly, he often wished they had lifted his lungi and looked. And seen that he was already a member of their flock, that further markings would be redundant. But it was his fault that he’d been mistaken for a Muslim. The initial markings had been his. . . He had simplified himself into a cut-out Muslim. The cook had simply gone by appearances (84-85).

To follow the logic of Hassan’s wish that his tormentors had “lifted his lungi and looked” and seen by the absence of circumcision “that he was already a member of their
flock,” it is important to be aware that while Muslim males are circumcised, Hindu males generally are not. In the communalist context of “cut out” identities where one can constitute no identity except that which is visibly marked on one’s body, there is no escape from immediate visibility. Haasan’s body is brutalized because his embodiment/drag as a Muslim has passed into immediate transparency. In this ethos of identities transformed into photographic images, Hassán’s act of self-invention is seen in the way in which a photographic image is seen, as self-evidently transparent and intelligible. It is the politics of such seeing and the annihilation of political subjectivity that results from it Looking Through Glass is concerned to make visible.

The Problem of In(visibility): Jinnah and Separate Muslim Nationhood

Masroor on his return from vanishing (after the force of the Quit India movement spent) seeks out ways of making his presence visible to the Congress in response to the symptomatic invisibility of the Muslim body. Now TB-ridden and translucent because of his thinness, Masroor takes on the “simplified” image of a Muslim - “a beard, skullcap, and a lungi” (191). To redress the invisibility imposed upon the Muslim subject, Masroor feels compelled to stage his Muslim identity. On one occasion he exhorts his audience in the mosque to construct for themselves a simplified image of the Muslim, to “burn their civilian clothes, grow their beards, and wear the skullcaps like soldiers wear uniforms,” so that the Congress can see them (191):

Since the Congress loves simple ideas like Freedom and Masses, Muslims must simply themselves. Since our problem is transparency, we must become opaque in the name of Islam. Even here, in a mosque, I can see Muslims dressed like civilians -
but remember they cannot see you in those clothes. So burn your shirts and trousers and grow your beards ... Force the Congress to look at you in your beards and burquas ... because only then will they know we are here. Only then will they see (191).

In reading Masroor’s Muslim embodiment, we must keep in mind the question: What motivates Masroor’s constitution of his Muslim identity? Who is he addressing through this Muslim embodiment? Only then can we know that Masroor’s Muslim identity or masquerade is a historically specific response to the invisibility experienced by the Indian Muslim in the aftermath of the Quit India movement. To foreground the context of Masroor’s identity and its subject position, we must consider the institution of Congress nationalism as well as the nationalism of the Muslim League and the increasingly troubled relations between the two in the years before the independence and partition.

It is this history that is at the center of recent perspectives on partition history such as Ayesha Jalal’s The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan¹⁴ and Ashim Roy’s “The High Politics of India’s Partition.”¹⁵ These texts intervene in accepted accounts of partition which automatically associate the Muslim League with the partition of India and the Congress with mobilization for a unified India. Ashim Roy observes that “the much expected disclosure of the thirty pages of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s book [the president of All India Congress from 1940-46] left sealed for thirty years ... in early November of 1988 ... deviates from the book [the earlier incomplete version] in at least one vital respect” (101-102). He goes on to observe that “in this section, Azad points his finger in a much more determined manner at Nehru’s [and
Congress's] responsibility for the partition" (102). This has allowed historians to challenge, what he calls, the "twin partition myths locked in a symbiotic relationship: the League for partition and the Congress for unity" (102).

The central text in the revisionist perspective on partition is Ayesha Jalal's book, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan which persuasively argues that any consideration of Jinnah's "demand for Pakistan supposedly elaborated in the 1940 Lahore Resolution," must "take account of the other two sides in the Indian political triangle, the Indian National Congress and the British," whether it be Congress's "maneuverings in the Center and the provinces" or the British "policies and initiatives" (4). Jalal argues that what is most striking about Jinnah's claim for a separate Muslim homeland in the 1940 Lahore resolution is that "from first to last, Jinnah avoided giving the demand a precise definition, leaving the League followers to make of it what they wished" (4). Jinnah's "Pakistan demand," Jalal suggests, had its value as a "bluff" - one that would allow him to "stage himself as the spokesman for all-India Muslims" (80) and "broaden the basis of the League in the Federal constitution without losing his position as the voice of minority Muslim interests" (13).16

Jalal sees Jinnah's Pakistan demand as a tactical move, "a bargaining counter, which had the merit of being acceptable (on the face of it) to the majority-province Muslims, and of being totally unacceptable to the Congress and in the last resort to the British also" (57). Jinnah hoped that when eventually the time came to discuss an all-India federation, "British and Congress alike would be forced to negotiate with an organized Muslim opinion" (57). However, Jinnah's calculations rested too heavily on a "mistaken
assumption that "time was in hand" and that the "Congress would rather make concessions than allow the Muslim-majority provinces to go their own way" (209) and that "the British would stay to work on the settlement." Jalal points out that within "the tempo of events in which the British wanted to snap India into a quick decision," Jinnah "could not insure that the League would not be given what it now apparently was asking for, but which Jinnah in fact did not really want" - 'a carved out, mutilated Pakistan' (57).

A contextualized reading such as Jalal's pushes against the limits of an imagistic perception of partition which foregrounds the image of Mohammed Ali Jinnah as partition's principal instigator and controller. It also shows that such a model of looking empties the responsibility of the Congress leaders, and of the British while projecting the blame for partition solely onto the Muslim body.

The preoccupation with the Muslim body as embodiment of otherness and (feminine) unpredictability and duplicity is also explored in Looking Through Glass through the story of the inscription of the female body in two cultures that (on the face of it) are diametrically opposed to one another: the Kamasutra culture of sexuality and the Akhara culture of celibacy. The binarism of the Akhara culture versus the Kamasutra culture arises from a range of conceptions central to nationalism within which agency linked to transparent and visible action (free of dilemma) is coded as masculine. By implication, any dilemma is coded as feminine, as deviant from and interruption of manly action.
"Traffic in Woman": Kamasutra and the Akhara culture of the RSS

The history of "the masculine body pressed, a body set to work in the service of the nation" (46) is detailed meticulously in Milind Wakankar's excellent essay "Body, Crowd, Identity: Genealogy of a Hindu Nationalist Aesthetics." The essay poses for itself the question: "How did the nationalist Hindu subject emerge as the ghostly double of the nationalist Indian subject" (47)? Wakankar points out that the body-building programs in the akharas (gymnasiums) undergirded by the concept of anushilan (guidelines for physical and mental discipline) as put forward by the social reformer Bankim Chandra, was the site on which Hindu communalist organizations such as the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) built their nationalist narrative. He seeks to show how communal organizations such as the RSS attributed an extraordinary significance to the "reform of the male body" by using the concept of anushilan as a metaphor for celibacy, discipline, control, spirituality, and masculinity:

If, in the Orientalist logic of colonial stereotyping, the (male Hindu, bourgeois) Bengali is "bookish" and "effete," if the (Hindu) nation needs to be rejuvenated after centuries of foreign (Muslim and British) oppression unchallenged by Hinduism's philosophical otherworldliness, what better site for collective reform than the (male, Hindu, bourgeois) body itself? ... This body was to serve as a link between culture and power, between an aesthetics and politics, and between what was after all a Hindu-elitist program for national-cultural regeneration and the dispersed Hindu national-popular itself (47-48, 49-50).
Central to Wakankar's argument is the observation that the stereotypical figure of the "alien," "invading," "unpatriotic" Muslim occupied the place of the "enemy within" within the nationalist program of anushilan. His purpose is to investigate the postcolonial state's investment in and production of (through repetition) the opposition between the "proselytizing, perfidious, and lustful (male) Muslim" and the "outraged (male) Hindu and pious son of the soil" (47). The process of "bodying forth" from the akhara culture of nationalism involves, as Wakankar suggests, the purging of all that was considered representative of the male Muslim body.

Looking Through Glass exposes the lie at the heart of Akhara culture's self-representation of itself as the culture of stoicism, manliness, virility, and discipline by framing it within the mirror perspective of Kamasutra. This narrative juxtaposition of the Akhara culture with Kamasutra culture shows the renunciatory and the puritanical politics of the Akhara culture to be part of the logic of the Kamasutra culture which is here connected to rape. When the narrator is recuperating in Banaras after his participation in the Madhuban police station raid, he is approached by Gyanendra, one of the gurus at the Pant Ram ka Akhara, to help in the making of a film based on the Kamasutra. Gyanendra's ambition is to make an "epic on a budget" with "no location shooting" or "soundtracking," as "this classic's theme demands a purely visual treatment" (138). Gyanendra has already succeeded in persuading Chaubey, another fellow participant in the Madhuban police station raid and the narrator's rescuer, to star as the hero of the film. Parwana, an orphan girl and actress, rescued by Gyanendra from a burning set, is forced into playing the role of the desiring femme fatale (the staple of Kamasutra fantasy). But,
the narrator, for his part, has no doubts about his refusal as "this is not a scene that he wants in any footage of his life" (152). However, he changes his mind when Gyanendra commissions him to "man the camera," an activity dear to him. (154)

The narrator not only finds himself a witness to Parwana's rape but also comes to realize his own complicity in it. This complicity, he also realizes, comes from his earlier assumption that the task of viewing or photographing entails no involvement or responsibility. Parwana is raped by Chaubey and it is precisely the narrator's being there as the camera or the audience that sets the scene of the rape. Only when he sees Parwana disappear, like Masroor had, from the line of his sight, he realizes that the mechanics of seeing/photographing have operated in such a way as to set the frame for Parwana's rape:

I stuck my head under the black cloth and located the viewfinder. Then I worked the bellows till Chaubey's earrings were glinting in sharp focus ... He had been bare-chested to begin with, so it took me a minute to realize he was completely naked ...

Just then Gyanendra dragged the girl into view again. She still had all her clothes on which seemed to upset him because he shook her hard ... She wrenched herself from Gyanendra's grip and spun around, clutching the window sill and breathing raggedly.

Her face was ugly with fright: eyes staring, nostrils flared, mouth spread in an unending scream which I couldn't hear but suddenly the dogs in the street were barking. Gyanendra took a step toward her, my eyes closes in self-defence and quite unmeant my shaking index finger pushed the trigger. The flash exploded and when I opened my eyes only Chaubey and Gyanendra were in the frame - the girl had disappeared (157).
Only when the narrator puts aside the "looking glass," and is able to think of himself as an interested participant rather than a disinterested historian/observer can he register Parwana's predicament. She has jumped out of the window and is now precariously balanced on the ledge below asking for his help. This is clearly the moment of the narrator's most intense engagement in the plot as well as the moment when the text poses the narrator's complicity in the violence centering on Parwana's body. We see that the narrative of rape has its roots in the celebration of the fulfillment of male desire, and the cultural sanction given to this fulfillment in Kamasutra. We also become aware that while the Akhara culture anxiously and insistently situates itself outside any sexual (read corrupting) engagement with woman (figured as a corrupting influence), the "traffic in woman" lies at its heart.

Kesavan shows not only Akhara culture's success in producing the image of the threatened feminized Hindu nation but also its success in promoting the view that unless the nation masculinizes itself (signified in this case by closing its borders against the Muslim presence), dire consequences will follow. By imagining nationalist agency as masculine, stoical, and pure, the Akhara culture hopes to suspend the body itself which it associates with the unassimilable feminized and hypersexualized other. This puts us in mind of the Quit India resolution and its hope that the attainment of immediate independence would, by itself, suspend the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. Communalism, in this case the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity, a legacy of the British "divide and rule" strategy, operates through the problematic deployment of 'secularism' by the Indian National Congress. As Kesavan understands it, a simplified and
unidirectional understanding of what the triumphant Indian National Congress calls “secularism” and what it calls the purported communalism of organizations such as Jinnah’s Muslim League constitutes the blindspot of historical accounts of Indian nationalism. As Kesavan rightly identifies it, the Congress party’s timing, control, and organization of the Quit India Movement had communal effects that strengthened the prospects of partition.

The Limits of Secularism

As Looking Through Glass renders it, while Gandhi’s use of Hindu symbolism sacrilized politics and the Congress borrowed its political and cultural platform from the demands of the Hindu majority, it was the Muslim identity that was constructed as communalist. As we have seen, even someone like Masroor who demands nothing more than inclusion in the Congress led program of nationalism is placed on the other side of the nationalist movement. Only an unquestioning obedience to the Congress program of the Quit India Resolution could allow a Muslim nationalist like Masroor a place within the boundaries of the Indian nationalism.

The rise and consolidation of Hindu nationalist parties such as BJP (Bhartiya Janatha Party) in India today is related to its successful production of the Indian Muslim as an “outsider”. Despite its scapegoating of the Indian Muslim, BJP is able to insist on its secularist credentials and exploit the contradictions of secularism as it has emerged within the Indian political-social formation. As pointed out earlier, within the Indian political context, secularism is aligned with a ‘protection of the rights of all religions’ rather than with severance of state and religion. The political and the cultural success of parties such
as the BJP, which represent Hindu majority nationalism, has strengthened the myth that unlike its Muslim communal counterparts, it is basically a secularist party. What is both dangerous and subtle about BJP’s claims to secularism is that it is able to convince the electorate that it is a ‘truly secularist’ rather than a ‘psuedo-secularist’ party because its conception of secularism is based in Hinduism which has ‘always been pluralistic and tolerant.’ So even after BJP’s role in the the demolition of the historic Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 and in the riots that followed, it is able to represent itself as basically non-communalist and secularist while it draws on communalized metaphors of the Muslim as the ‘invader,’ ‘outsider,’ ‘separatist,’ ‘fanatic,’ and ‘unpatriotic’. Just as, or perhaps because Indian National Congress was able to define its nationalism as the legitimate and secularist nationalism, in India today Hindu communalism is able to define itself as an expression of Indian nationalism. BJP has succeeded in centering communalism, in making it normal and in this sense its communalist discourse recalls the liberal discourse of support for Rushdie which rhetorically placed itself at the center of the “racists.” on the one hand, and the “fundamentalists” on the other.

Kesavan suggests that only by ‘looking through the mirror’ of the Indian independence struggle as against “looking in the mirror,” can we see the linkages between Indian nationalism and communalism and the process by which official nationalist history equates the Muslim body with a negative embodiment. By challenging us to cross the boundaries that divide the seen from the unseen, the transparent from the opaque, the novel shows that a photographic model of historical inquiry makes the object of representation disappear as surely as Mastroor, Dadi, and Parwana disappear. Only by
inhabiting the invisible spaces of history emotionally as Ammi does, or telepathically, as Kesavan does, can we imagine a space where agency and (photographic) visibility are not coincident.
Notes


3 The Indian National Congress founded in 1885 by A.O Hume started as an organization of influential Indians who professed loyalty to the British government and merely wanted administrative reforms. Only after Lord Curzon’s partition of Bengal in 1901, did the “extremist” wing of the Congress (led by Lokmanya Tilak) demand constitutional reforms. The boycott of British goods and the promotion of *swadeshi* (indigenous products) were the first of the actions against the Government to protest the partition of Bengal. The Congress remained inscribed in an elitist and bourgeoise model of protest until Gandhi started community-building projects for political change in the villages and shaped the Congress party as the party of the masses. Led by Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Congress came to be the party that presented itself as speaking for the major communities in India, the Hindus and the Muslims.

4 Abul Kalam Maulana Azad. *India Wins Freedom: The complete Version* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1988). In this recently released edition, Azad speaks of the severity with which the British put down the Quit India resolution. Not only were the leaders of the Congress (such as Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Asaf Ali, Shankar Rao Deo, Govind Vallabh Pant, Dr. Syed Mahmud, Acharya Kriplani, and Dr. Prafulla Ghosh) arrested within hours of the declaration of the resolution, even the local community workers were put in prisons.

5 Speaking on the eve of the historic Quit India resolution, Gandhi says: “You may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for ministries and the like ... We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery” (26). In his Aug 8, 1942 address to the All India Congress Committee, Gandhi commends the 13 Muslim Congressmen who vetoed the Quit India Resolution for the courage of their conviction. However, he also berates them for not considering the appeal made to them by Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru. See *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Vol. 76*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Prakashan Mandir Publishing House, 1979.

6 Gandhi’s long march to Dandi, a coastal town in Gujarat, to make salt in defiance of the British salt tax and salt monopoly galvanized people nationwide. As Madhu Kishwar points out in her essay “Gandhi on Women,” the choice of salt, the most ordinary of daily necessities, was wonderfully strategic and typical of Gandhi’s “instinctive sense” of what will move the people to action. Even as Nehru and the other Congress leaders were to rely on this “instinctive sense” that Gandhi possessed, Nehru criticizes in his autobiography Gandhi’s “habit of acting on instinct.” See Madhu Kishwar. “Gandhi on Women.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, October 12, 1985. See also Jawaharlal Nehru. *The Discovery of India*. New York: John Day, 1946.

7 The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu nationalistic organization, was founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar who declared at the Nagpur Session “We Hindus are a nation by ourselves.” At the basis of the organization was the physical culture of the *akharas* (gymnasiums attached to a temple where young men of the locality trained in body-building exercises) and the concept of *anushilan* (disciplining/cultivation of mental and physical faculties) derived from the Hindu tradition of *brahmacharya* (celibacy). See, Bipin Chandra. *Communalism in Modern India*. Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1984.

Partha Chatterjee argues that the separation of women’s issues into a special sphere was founded on the division within nationalism between the “inner world” coded as spiritual and “the outer world” coded as material—to which the terms home and the world corresponded” (120-121). What is of even more significance, according to Chatterjee, is the “ideological selection of home as the site of the battle for nationalism” in the “confrontation between colonialist and nationalist discourse” (134). He argues that nationalism, by demarcating an essentialized zone of spirituality (of which woman is the icon), set the framework for meeting the demands of the material realm and coming to terms with modernity. In other words, the “nationalist paradigm supplied an ideological principle of selection ... [in that] it was not a dismissal of modernity, but an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project” (121). Chatterjee claims that within this register while ‘there was no difficulty in envisioning women’s participation in public events or in thinking women’s suffrage,’ this agency was already foreclosed by woman’s inscription within a spiritual coding in which woman (“like the spiritual, true self that lies within us”) must retain the virtues of “self sacrifice, compassion, spirituality, charity, endurance, and emotional strength drawn from personal faith and devotion” (143). See also R. Radhakrishnan, “Nationalism, Gender, and Narrative,” in Andrew Parker et al. (eds.) Nationalism and Sexualities, New York: Routledge, 1992


12 I am indebted to my friend and colleague, Nityanand Decka, for this insight.


16 Jalal argues that this placed Jinnah in the paradoxical position of simultaneously “having to cast the Pakistan question in uncompromisingly communal terms” while at the same time “placating anxieties about communalism ... in order to gain support of conflicting constituencies, that is the Muslims of minority provinces and Muslims of majority provinces: ‘If the Pakistan demand was to have the support of the Muslims in provinces where they were in a minority, it had to be cast in uncompromisingly communal terms. This meant that those who wanted ‘Pakistan’ on Quranic principles of government could assert: ‘Quaid-I-Azam! We have understood the Pakistan demand in this light. If your Pakistan is not such, we do not want it.’ All Jinnah could do in the face of such challenges was carefully avoid the issue. Yet a patently communal line challenged the leaders in provinces - certainly in Punjab and Bengal - where Muslim supremacy over undivided territories depended on keeping Muslim ties with other communities in good repair. So Jinnah’s only refuge was to keep the Pakistan demand as unspecific as possible, hoping against hope that the forces of communalism would not combine to destroy his purposes at the center” (120).

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