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British Muslim Masculinities in Transcultural Literature and Film (1985-2012)

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PhD Comparative Literature
University of Edinburgh
2017
I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or processional qualification except as specified.

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22/05/2017

Peter James Cherry
Abstract

This thesis examines how novels and films by British writers and filmmakers of Muslim heritage address the reshaping of masculinity through migration and interaction with other cultures within the UK. Drawing on a comparative critical framework that combines approaches from feminist, gender and masculinity studies, postcolonial, migration and transcultural studies, Islamic studies and literary and film theory, this thesis engages with five novels and four films that were written or released between 1985 and 2012, by British writers and filmmakers who were either born in a Muslim-majority nation or born to parents originating from a Muslim-majority country and who use their fictions to explore the presence and practices of Muslim cultures and communities in contemporary Britain. Through close analysis of work by Monica Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Sally El Hosaini, Ayub Khan-Din, Hanif Kureishi and Robin Yassin-Kassab, this thesis scrutinises how migrant and subsequent generations of postmigrant male protagonists construct their masculinity and how their conceptions of gender identity and performance are ‘translated’ into a British context amidst this century’s climate of Islamophobia and anti-migrant rhetoric, following events such as the Rushdie Affair, 9/11 and 7/7. In doing so, this thesis contends that through transnational movement and settlement conceptions of ‘Muslimness’, ‘Britishness’, and those of masculinity, are thrown into sharp relief and exposed as unstable and contingent constructs. By foregrounding the transcultural aesthetics and themes of this literary and cinematic corpus, however, I argue that this body of cultural production interrogates similarities and differences between the cultures they are positioned across. I use this transcultural approach to focus on how these texts depict father and son relations, religion, urban marginality and sexuality, and how through these foci, these novels creatively imagine new forms of masculinity that are forged through cultural contact, conflict and entanglement.
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Abbreviations and Textual Notes

To reduce the number of footnotes, I use in-text citations for primary texts. These consist of the author’s surname and the page number, for example: (Ali, p. 213) for Monica Ali’s Brick Lane. However, as I quote from a number of texts by Hanif Kureishi, I distinguish between these by including the initials of the text. For instance, when quoting from his novel The Black Album, I reference the novel like so: (Kureishi BA, p. 141). Full publication details of the editions cited can be found in the bibliography. The Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) referencing system is used throughout the thesis.
Introduction:
British Muslim Masculinities in Transcultural Literature and Film

‘It’s usually men who leave for other countries, being stronger, bolder, the world being slightly easier for them to negotiate than it is for women.’

The above quotation, taken from Nadeem Aslam’s 2004 novel Maps for Lost Lovers, is an evocative point with which to open this thesis’s investigation into literary and cinematic portrayals of British Muslim masculinities, suggestive as it is of themes and issues that will be pursued in this study. Travel and migration, the narrative voice intimates, is a process which is safer for the male sex and, therefore, results in greater numbers of men relocating abroad with more confidence than their female counterparts. Certainly, the narrator’s assumption tallies with the experiences of women in patriarchal societies who are rendered less transnationally mobile due to the greater propensity of gender-related violence and prejudice that targets females regardless of locale. However, in characterising men as exceptionally ‘strong’ and ‘bold’, the narrative voice also makes assumptions about the fixed nature of normatively male gender practices, understood in this thesis as masculinity. Whilst men do not arrive in new places stripped of well-established notions of masculinity and gender relations, migration necessarily involves contact with other cultures that frequently have different and sometimes contrasting conceptions of masculinity. In this thesis, I examine how literature and film depicts constructions and practices of masculinity performed by men with a Muslim cultural background: fictional protagonists who have either moved from a Muslim-majority country to Britain or have been born in the UK with a Muslim and migratory heritage.

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Contradicting the images of masculinity set out by Aslam’s narrator, this study exposes how literary and cinematic production dismembers notions of a globally-mobile homogenous masculinity and exposes the anxieties, conflicts and challenges that men face upon gendered grounds when they migrate, and in turn, illuminating the ways that the literary and cinematic corpus in this thesis shows masculinity as shaped and changed through cultural entanglement and exchange, a process that I call transculturation.3

Recent political controversies and events involving British Muslims determine that scholarly enquiry into British Muslim masculinities is an especially timely and pertinent endeavour. From the protests following what many perceive as Salman Rushdie’s attack on Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988),4 the September 11th 2001 terror attacks by the Islamist terror organisation al-Qaeda (9/11), to the July 7th bombings by the British born-and-bred Muslim men (7/7), incidents of British Muslim men conspiring to sexually abuse young women,5 and to the more recent cases of young British Muslim men leaving the UK to join the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, migrant and subsequent generations of postmigrant Muslim communities have been at the centre of debates over national identity, citizenship and belonging.6 Politicians across the political spectrum such as the former Labour minister David Blunkett and the Conservative member-of-parliament Eric Pickles have all pointed to specific ‘crises’ in British Muslim men and the need for British Muslim communities to ‘demonstrate’ their

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3 This term will discussed rigorously later on in the introduction; however, the term is taken from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007).
6 Recent events beyond Britain, such as the Madrid bombings by a local cell of the Islamist terrorist network al-Qaeda on 11th March 2004, the attacks upon French Satirical Magazine Charlie Hebdo by local so-called Islamic State militants on 7th January 2015, the 13-14th November attacks upon Paris by French citizens who had sworn allegiance to the so-called Islamic State and the 22nd March 2016 attacks upon Brussels by a Belgian ‘IS’ sympathisers, have also all contributed to debates over Muslim communities within Europe and the West.
allegiance to British values. Alongside hostile narratives from media outlets such as The Daily Mail, these utterances give traction to impressions that Muslim males are a homogeneous and threatening presence within Britain; men who, despite living in the UK, are prone to a pathological form of masculinity supposedly inculcated by their religio-cultural background. As Louise Archer explains:

whereas issues of identity and ‘crisis’ among white males have been predominantly explained in terms of social class […] the problems facing ethnic minority males have been located inherently within their ‘race’ and culture, and the young men themselves have been positioned as part of ‘the problem’.

Prominent media and political narratives, then, entrench notions of a ‘problem’ with British Muslim men and their masculinity. Whether the controversy is over arranged marriages, protests over conflict in Iraq or attacks on homosexual men or knife crime, negative incidents are used to prove a popular thesis that British Muslim men are exceptionally liable to violence, misogyny and homophobia. Rather than viewing these episodes as enacted by a minority within Britain’s Muslim population or exploring the possible socio-economic or political reasoning behind these nadirs, media and political discourses frequently locate the source as a monolithic imagining of Muslim culture and its constructions of masculinity.

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7 For Blunkett’s comments on Muslim men taking part in ‘tests of allegiance’ to Britain, see Tahir Abbas, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: The British Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); for information on Erick Pickles’ urge that Islamic leaders make exceptional efforts to ‘prove’ that Islam and British identities are compatible, see Patrick Wintour, ‘Muslim Council of Britain Objects to Pickles Letter to Islamic Leaders’, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/19/uk-muslim-council-objections-eric-pickles-letter> [accessed 15 August 2016].


9 Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin note how *The Sun* sought to underplay the British identity of Mohammed Siddique Khan, one of the men responsible for the 7/7 terrorist attacks, by referring to him as ‘British born but of Pakistani origin’ and describing the emergency services as ‘True Brits’ in *Framing Muslims*, p. 67.

10 Louise Archer, “‘Muslim Brothers, Black Lads, Traditional Asians’: British Muslim Young Men’s Constructions of Race, Religion and Masculinity”, *Feminism & Psychology*, 11.1 (2001), 79–105 (p. 80).
These viewpoints are increasingly pervasive in the contemporary juncture and leave little space for alternative voices that posit more nuanced analyses of Islam and Muslim communities as well as self-representation from British Muslims themselves. Although there are a variety of divergent public voices from British Muslims such as the Marxist novelist and critic Tariq Ali, the journalist and founder of the organisation British Muslims for Secular Democracy Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and public intellectuals and writers like Mehdi Hasan, Kenan Malik, Sarfraz Manzoor, Tariq Modood, Rageh Omaar, Ziauddin Sardar and Mona Siddiqui, who have contested negative stereotypes of British Muslim men as potential terrorists, misogynists or homophobes, their voices are often drowned out by the cacophony of vituperation that characterises popular British Muslim representation.¹¹

Within the climate of heightened fear and suspicion of Islam and Muslims, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin note how the figure of the bearded Muslim fanatic, or ‘Islamic Rage Boy’ as they refer to him, ‘is probably the most recognizable of all widely circulated Muslim stereotypes.’¹² Identifying the continual reproduction of Islamic Rage Boy through literature, media, television, cinema and pop-culture, Morey and Yaqin observe that his unkempt and ranting visage stands in for a particular type of masculinity that is predicated on illiberal approaches to gender and sexuality, vicious anti-Western sentiment and a slavish devotion to a fixed and rigid Islam. The circulation of Islamic

¹¹ See Tariq Ali, “‘It Didn”t Need to Be Done’”, London Review of Books, 5 February 2015, p. 12; Kenan Malik, ‘Muslims Are Not a “different” Class of Briton: We’re as Messy as the Rest’, The Guardian, 15 May 2016, section Opinion <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/14/muslims-class-islam-citizen-britain> [accessed 3 September 2016]; Tariq Modood, ‘Muslims In The West’, The Guardian, 30 September 2001, section US news <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/30/september11.terrorism3> [accessed 3 September 2016]. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, for example, wrote in 1997 about how liberal sections of the British media were ‘unwilling to listen to the voice of very powerless people who felt offended by the book […] I knew the way all Muslims were being treated was unfair – these supposed dangerous people were my mum, my aunts, my uncles. My liberal associates were talking about them in terms of pure hatred.’ See Chris Weedon, ‘Constructing the Muslim Other’, in Representing Culture: Essays on Identity, Visuality and Technology, ed. by Claudia Alvares (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 39-53 (pp. 42-43).
¹² Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, Framing Muslims, p. 23.
Rage Boy is therefore crucial not only in ‘cement[ing] the threatening strangeness of the Muslim Other’, but also in representing British (and Western) masculinities in counter-image as rational, liberal and open-minded.\textsuperscript{13}

To a large extent, my thesis is about how novels and films from British writers and filmmakers of Muslim heritage challenge these stereotypes by exposing the heterogeneity within British Muslim practices of masculinity. However, in doing so, my study also engages with much broader questions about the relationship between migration and masculinity and how, ultimately, transnational movement transforms identities. Contrasting with popular images of the British Muslim male as ‘stuck’ in values that originate from elsewhere, the novels and films in this thesis paint a very different picture of British Muslim masculinities as complex, varied and contradictory. In my selected corpus, the protagonists examine differences and similarities between cultural conceptions of masculinity and explore the possibility of creating transcultural gender practices that draw across the British and Muslim cultures with which they have affiliations. However, it would be remiss not to emphasise that these literary and cinematic texts also all show how the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries’ climate of increasing Islamophobia profoundly frustrates exchange and encounter between British and Muslim cultural identities. Transcultural exchange in the body of writing and film that I analyse takes place within highly unequal and uneven dynamics of power.

Stephen Frears, 1986), Hanif Kureishi’s *My Son the Fanatic* (dir. Uyadan Prasad, 1998), Ayub Khan-Din’s *East is East* (dir. Daniel O’Donnell, 1999) and Sally El Hosaini’s *My Brother the Devil* (dir. Sally El Hosaini, 2012) – that all respond to this context and all work to broaden the representation of British Muslim men and how they perform masculinities. At the same time, as novels and films, these are imaginative forms of production that do not seek to convey a provable truth but rather present depictions from which they challenge, magnify and question norms and creatively expound upon alternative ways of being. By analysing literature and film together, this study also uses a comparative framework that highlights what representational limits one form of artistic expression has and what another can enhance thereby bringing an especially comprehensive impression of British Muslim masculinities to the table for scholarly scrutiny.

What kinds of anxieties, uncertainties and vulnerabilities come to the surface of masculine practices when men move from one country to another? What kinds of stereotypes do men encounter and how do they negotiate these expectations and prejudices? How do migrants’ perceptions of Britishness change when they relocate? How does their relation to previously learnt gender practices alter? How do these forms of national and cultural attachment differ between migrants who made the journey to Britain and to subsequent generations of postmigrants who were born in the UK? To what extent does migration result in resistances, conflicts or new synthesised forms of masculinity? And what do these instances tell us about British and Muslim constructions of masculinity? These are all questions that underpin my reading of the novels and films

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within this thesis. By making these enquiries, the literature and films I analyse emerge as a crucible for thinking through the asymmetrical and complicated nature of transcultural identity formation. It is my contention that through transnational movement and settlement conceptions of ‘Muslimness’, ‘Britishness’ and those of masculinity, are thrown into sharp relief and explicated as unstable and contingent constructs. I argue that the literary and cinematic corpus examined in this thesis perceptively and productively examines the similarities, differences and hierarchies between cultural notions of masculinity, and creatively imagines transcultural ways of being British, being Muslim and being male.

**British Muslims**

Whilst the stereotypes that Morey and Yaqin analyse in their study *Framing Muslims* are commonplace in the contemporary Western imagination, Western (and specifically British) misrepresentation of Muslims is not a recent phenomenon. Islam and Muslim cultures have been ‘demonized as an object of counter-identification for the West’ throughout history as notably expressed during the Crusades that took place during the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. Morey and Yaqin, however, take their cue from the work of Edward Saïd who explains the role that cultural narratives played in the Western colonial domination of Muslim-majority areas such as the Middle East, North Africa and parts of South Asia, during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In his ground-breaking 1978 study *Orientalism*, Said draws on an exhaustive corpus of Western European literature, art, ethnographical and travel writings to trace how Islam and Muslim peoples were rigidly stereotyped into the West’s ‘Other’. The crux

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of Said’s argument is how homogenised representations of Islamic faiths and Muslim cultures that have depicted Muslims variously as despotic, backward, uncivilised and sexually perverse legitimated the West’s imperialist incursions into and domination over the Muslim world. Said astutely observes how British translators, anthropologists, novelists and writers, such as Richard Burton and Lord Byron, were particularly influential in propagating notions of intractable Muslim cultural inferiority during Britain’s colonisation of vast swathes of Muslim people. In so doing, Orientalised depictions of the Middle East overlooked and erased the ways that the Muslim-majority Middle East and Christian-majority West had been mutually shaping each other in fields as varied as literature, language, art, mathematics and science for centuries. As Byron Porter Smith’s monograph *Islam in English Literature* testifies, Islamic religious narratives, folk tales from the Middle East and even the life of the prophet Muhammad have in fact influenced a wealth of canonical English literature ranging from the work of William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, John Bunyan and John Dryden.

The historian Humayun Ansari describes how Orientalist scripts negatively impacted on Muslim migrant communities within Britain. Indeed, the moustached figure of the ‘Turkish Tyrant’ as fanatical and backward that circulated in cultural discourses during the fall of the Ottoman Sultanate in the 1923 is recognised by Ansari as a predecessor to contemporary hostile stereotypes of the British Muslim male. Although there are records of Muslim settlement in Britain from the medieval period, it is from the nineteenth century and onwards that Britain has witnessed the largest migratory

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19 Ansari, p. 82-84.
movements from the Muslim world. Ansari notes that there is an adverse relationality between increased migration from the Muslim world to Britain and the growth in anti-Muslim prejudice within the UK. In particular, Ansari notes how the erosion of the Ottoman Empire and Britain’s ‘heightened sense of superiority as it extended its rule over Muslim lands’, were significant triggers in a nascent Islamophobia.

Institutional and cultural racism towards Muslims was most conspicuous, however, during the biggest wave of migration from the end of the Second World War in 1945 and into the 1950s and 60s. Following the traumatic division of the Indian subcontinent into two independent states by the British colonial administration, the Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, in 1948, many Pakistanis migrated to the UK in search of better working and economic conditions. Initially, the British government welcomed these workers as a chance to boost the country’s declining economy. However, a significant proportion of the British mainstream population were less accommodating. Whilst much of this prejudice was not directed at Muslims exclusively, but demonised Black and Asian individuals and communities more generally, a notorious address by the then-Shadow Secretary of Defence Enoch Powell on 20th April 1968 marks a watershed for race relations in the UK. Since known as ‘the Rivers of Blood’ speech, Powell drew on biblical and classical allusions to describe how Britain would face apocalyptic destruction of its land, resources and culture if current levels of migration were to be maintained. It is no coincidence, then, that the speech appears in

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Ayub Khan-Din’s film *East is East* and has been referenced by Hanif Kureishi as a significant moment in the development of his political consciousness.\(^{24}\)

Indeed, amongst the migratory groups that Powell attacked were the parental generations of many of the writers and filmmakers in this thesis. In case of point, Hanif Kureishi and Ayub Khan-Din’s fathers both migrated from the newly-independent Pakistan to the country’s former colonial power of Britain where they settled and married British women during the 1950s. The writer Suhayl Saadi’s mother and father were also in this generation of migrants as they relocated from Pakistan to the UK during the same decade.

Other writers and filmmakers included in my thesis migrated or their parents migrated at later times and sometimes under different conditions. However, all share the experience of coming from or having a cultural allegiance towards a Muslim-majority nation that was colonised. Monica Ali, for example, was born in Bangladesh to a British father and a Bangladeshi mother and subsequently moved to Bolton, Lancashire. Meanwhile, Sally El Hosaini was born in Wales to an Egyptian father and a British mother. Robin Yassin-Kassab was born in Britain to a British mother and Syrian father. However, Syria is a slightly different case as it was colonised initially by the multi-faith but Sunni Muslim-led Ottoman Empire in 1516 and occupied by France from 1917 until 1946. Nadeem Aslam was born in Pakistan to Pakistani parents who fled political oppression from then-leader General Zia ul-Haq’s Islamisation programme in the 1970s.\(^{25}\)


\(^{25}\) I will elaborate on each writer and filmmaker’s backgrounds within the chapters of the thesis. However, Claire Chambers’ book of interviews with contemporary British Muslim writers, *British Muslim Fictions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), is the source for much of the information on Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam, Monica Ali and Robin Yassin-Kassab in this introduction. For accounts on Ayub Khan-Din’s background, see Ayub Khan Din, ‘East Is East: The Play I Almost Didn’t Write’, *The Guardian*, 21 October 2009, section Stage <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/oct/21/east-is-east-ayub-khan-din>
The majority of the cultural production analysed in this thesis, then, was written and released during the last decade of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. This is a period in which, as previously outlined, scholars across a variety of disciplines— including politics, sociology, media, literature and film—have pointed to ways that ‘Muslims and Islam have come to figure increasingly as [Western] secular modernity’s fundamentalist Other.’ In the British context, there are three specific events that have sharpened Islamophobic discourses and therefore impacted upon the ways that writers and filmmakers in this thesis approach British Muslim identities.

The first of these nadirs is the so-called Rushdie Affair. Protests following what some perceived as Salman Rushdie’s attack on Islam in his 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses* have been described as a ‘transitional moment’ which ‘cast a long shadow over perceptions of Muslims and Islam’ in Britain and, to some extent, internationally.

Inspired in part by the life of the prophet Muhammad, the novel is a formally complex text that features Rushdie’s signature magical realism alongside a blend of contemporary events to creatively explore complexities of migrant life in modern London. For some

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27 This is not to discredit earlier controversies involving Muslims in Britain, such as 1984-85’s Honeyford Affair. However, scholars such as Tahar Abbas, convincingly argue that the Rushdie Affair had, until 9/11, the widest reach in the circulation of negative depictions of Muslims in Britain. For a thorough exegesis of the socio-political situation of British Muslims in the media, please see Tahar Abbas, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 85-107.

28 Ahmed, *Writing British Muslims*, p. 65; The international reach of the Rushdie Affair is most conspicuous in the pronouncement of a *fatwa* (legal ruling) on the suppression of the novel and the murder of its writer by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution which saw the overthrow of the monarchy and the foundation of an Shia Islamist Republic. Subsequently, most Muslim-majority nations banned the novel from translation and publication in their respective countries. A significant caveat to these rulings was Turkey which allowed the novel’s distribution; however, in 1993, the Turkish translator of Rushdie’s text, Aziz Nesin, narrowly survived an assassination attempt in the city of Sivas which is thought by many to be connected to the novel. For more on the *fatwa*, see: Mahmood Monshipouri, ‘Iran’s Foreign Policy and Islamic Ideology’, in *Iranian Foreign Policy Since 2001: Alone in the World*, ed. by Thomas Juneau, Sam Razavi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 56-70 and for the Turkish translation, see: Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004), p. 290.
Muslims in the United Kingdom, the novel was declared blasphemous due to its rendering of the prophet Muhammad’s life into literary representation. In other words, the yoking together of what is perceived by many as an irrefutable narrative upon which lives are defined, based and constructed within the imaginative realm of literary fiction was deemed by some as heretical. Furthermore, the novel’s title skirts with controversy as the ‘satanic verses’ refers to a group of verses which are generally omitted from most authorised versions of the Koran because they allow intercessory prayers for three female pagan goddesses which erode ‘the authority and omnipotence of Allah.’

For a confluence of these reasons, the novel’s publication was met with outrage by many Muslim people in the UK which translated into mass demonstrations in areas with large Muslim populations – most notably in the cities of Bradford and London.

It is crucial to note, of course, that there were a number of religious and secular Muslim voices that opposed the novel’s suppression. The events of 1988 and 1989 are often represented in a manner that suggests universal outrage from Muslims and so has been used to underpin Islamophobic viewpoints. Nevertheless, it is also vital to ground the protests in the ethno-cultural and social marginalisation of many of the protestors. To this end, Yunas Samad puts the relationship between class, race and religious affiliation for the Bradford protesters into context:

It was the perception that they [Muslim protesters] were again humiliated which was responsible for making religious consciousness dominant over other identities. But there was no increase in religiosity and restaurants still served alcohol and attendance for prayer in the mosques remained thin […] The youth were resorting to Islamic idioms and metaphors to express their discontent against society which refused to accept them on an equal footing. Symbolically this was

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epitomised by their exclusion from the Yorkshire Cricket Club, despite being excellent cricketers who were born and bred in Bradford.31

The distinction Samad draws here is that the anger of the Muslim men in Bradford was often not a genuine performance of Islamic piety but rather what Rehana Ahmed describes as ‘a sense of their marginalisation as Muslims’.32 Ahmed and Samad both show, then, how the Rushdie Affair became a focal point in which widely-held feelings of disempowerment and feelings of threat from a normatively white, secular population were manifested in violent protest against Rushdie, a figure who was roundly respected by a British cultural elite. These protests often incorporated features of Islamism – understood by this thesis as politicised displays of Islamic faith33 – but as Samad and Ahmed argue British Muslim identities became inherently politicised during the Rushdie Affair in a manner that is sharply contrasted to Islamist movements in Turkey, the Middle East and South Asia, for example. In this sense, the Rushdie Affair brought the now depressingly familiar figure of the Islamic fundamentalist to the forefront of the British cultural imaginary. This is especially germane for my thesis as protagonists like Farid in My Son the Fanatic, Riaz and Chad in The Black Album, Ammar in The Road From Damascus and Karim in Brick Lane all develop Islamist views within the context of post-Rushdie Affair Britain and so are imaginative explorations of the continuing after-effects of this incident upon British Muslim masculinities.

Whilst some scholars, such as Tahar Abbas, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin and Elizabeth Poole, argue that the Rushdie affair of 1988–89 was the starting point in the widespread circulation of negative depictions of British Muslim men, the September 11th

32 Ahmed, Writing British Muslims, p. 66. Ahmed’s emphasis.
2001 attacks upon New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon by the Islamist terrorist organization al-Qaeda have had a more demonstrable effect on both British and international perceptions of Muslims. As journalists, politicians and academic commentators across the political spectrum have voiced, 9/11 marks a point of rupture from which the world has changed inexorably. Most controversial amongst these voices has been the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, who alleged that 9/11 was symptomatic of a ‘clash of two civilizations’ — the so-called Muslim Orient and the secular West.

Particularly pertinent to my thesis is how the 9/11 attacks were accompanied by a reign of physical and verbal attacks upon Muslims, or those whose racial or sartorial appearance was perceived as denoting an Islamic faith or Muslim cultural background, in the years and months following the attacks. Alana Linten and Gavan Titley note how women of colour who wore veils, regardless of their religious or cultural background, were singled out for abuse and were more likely to stopped and searched by security forces. Peter E. Hopkins’ work, however, has shed light on how post-9/11 Islamophobia has uniquely impacted on the lives of British Muslim men. Drawn from fieldwork interviews with a range of young British Muslim men from a variety of different class

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36 Jasbir K. Puar’s study *Terrorist Assemblages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) explores how Sikh men suffered at the hands of Islamophobia despite not being Muslim thereby demonstrating the racial elements of post-9/11 Islamophobia, see pp. 106-223.

37 See Alana Linten and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London: Zed Books, 2011), pp. 85-6. The wearing of veils is not unique to followers of Islam as many denominations of Orthodox Christianity, for example, recommend females to don headscarves. Many women who follow Islam also chose not to wear headscarves and some denominations of Islam also forbid the wearing of the veil. It is, therefore, a deeply complex and often personal issue that will be touched on further in my second chapter.

backgrounds, Hopkins interprets the 9/11 attacks as a watershed moment whereby the Muslim male body became stereotyped as a visible cipher for ‘otherness’. Racial appearance, facial hair and clothing, then, became perceived as conspicuous symbols of threat in an atmosphere that was ‘looking for security and safety’ amidst ‘an increased fear of “terrorism” and “Islamic fundamentalism”’. 39

Such racist and Islamophobic profiling was abetted by the incidents of 7th July 2005 in which four young British-born Muslim men detonated four bombs on London public transport. In the aftermath of the London attacks, a vast corpus of popular media reinforced perceptions of intractable difference between the ‘Muslim’ and the ‘Western’ worlds, and fed a contagious paranoia about Muslims living within Britain. Pertinent examples were the sheer number of television documentaries that purportedly sought to depict the ‘reality behind the threat’ from Britain’s Muslim population. For instance, Generation Jihad (2010) took to London council estates to investigate the ‘terrorist threat’ from young British Muslim men. 40 Another germane case study is a 2014 edition of the British Broadcasting Cooperation’s (BBC’s) Panorama documentary series entitled From Jail to Jihad?, which examined Islamic radicalization in British prisons. 41 Due to the political context in the UK outlined, then, the current climate has rendered the study of migrational and settlement experiences of people from Muslim- majority countries to Britain exceptionally pertinent.

Given this long precedent of misrepresentation of Muslim (male) identities, careful consideration will be given to the identities discussed in this thesis. For some, the classification ‘British Muslim’ continues the traditions of monolithic representation as it essentialises people by subsuming a number of heterogeneous cultures under one

39 Matthes, Writing and Muslim Identity, p. 123.
40 Generation Jihad, BBC2, 11 March 2010, 00:25.
41 Panorama: From Jail to Jihad?, BBC1, 16 May 2014, 00:35.
convenient label whilst also yoking their cultural identity to a religious faith. Such views are becoming increasingly more pronounced in the contemporary moment as the term ‘British Muslim’ is often used with little awareness for the disparate groups it supposedly describes. Fred Halliday, for example, questions whether the diverse groupings encapsulated within the term British Muslim withstand the label:

Any empirical study of particular individuals or migrant groups that are termed ‘Muslim’ will soon recognise differences of ethnic, linguistic, political and social character that these peoples, divided into at least 60 countries, exhibit, and the inadequacy, when not inaccuracy, of using terms like ‘British Muslim’ at all.

Whilst I recognise the inherent difficulties in using the term British Muslim for the reasons that Halliday puts forward, I maintain there are specific set of issues that my texts explore that necessitates the use of the term ‘Muslim’. As my thesis understands it, to be Muslim in contemporary Britain is to be understood as belonging to a wide, diverse set of cultures that are rooted in the experience of Islam. In this respect, I broadly follow Amin Malak’s sharp differentiation between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islamic’:

Muslim is derived from the Arabic word that denotes the person who espouses the religion of Islam or is shaped by its cultural impact, irrespective of being secular, agnostic or practicing believer. The term Islamic emphasizes the faith of Islam. It denotes thoughts, rituals, activities, and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam or directly associated with its theological traditions.

Consonant with Malak, then, I use the term ‘British Muslim’ and ‘British Muslim masculinities’ in a broadly cultural sense to refer to people (fictional and non-fictional) who were born in or travelled to the UK but were raised within a Muslim culture. This

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does not depend on having an Islamic faith; thus when referring to religion, I employ the term ‘Islamic’.

I opt to use the term ‘British Muslim’ as it is the closest approximate for describing a set of issues that result from the very specific case of people with a Muslim cultural background migrating, living and having been born in the UK. In doing so, I am also validating the inclusion of Muslim writers and filmmakers from secular backgrounds who may identify as ‘Muslims’ culturally – such as Nadeem Aslam and Hanif Kureishi. As Tariq Modood argues, being a Muslim is not necessarily about belief, but a sense of belonging: ‘The South Asia I am from is contoured by communal religious identities. It has nothing to do with belief. If you assert “I am an atheist” people will still think it meaningful to ask “yes, but are you a Muslim, a Hindu?”’. In the years following 9/11, writers such as Aslam have echoed such thoughts by choosing to refer to their Muslim backgrounds and identities rather than their national affiliations. In this regard, Hanif Kureishi is an intriguing case as when he began his career, in the pre-Rushdie Affair era, he referred to himself alternately as ‘British Asian’ and ‘British Pakistani’. After the anti-Rushdie agitation, Kureishi penned a novel, a screenplay and a number of essays that focused solely upon Islam and Muslim religio-cultural issues within Britain. Following 9/11 and 7/7, he has emerged as a public commentator on Islam and matters pertaining to British Muslims and referred to himself as a ‘British Muslim’ in the cultural sense of the identity.

Throughout my thesis, I draw on criticism of African American, Black British, German Turkish and British Indian cultural production which shows how there are similarities between how fictional depictions of migrant and postmigrant masculinities are

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46 Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*, p. 147.
constructed and practiced that are not exclusive to British Muslim literature and film. However, it is remiss to ignore that there are a series of specific cultural and gender mores that pertain exclusively to those who have travelled from a Muslim-majority culture. In a stylistic sense too, the writers and filmmakers in this thesis frequently incorporate a range of Islamic and Muslim cultural reference points in their output such as intertextual references to the Koran, the Hadiths and texts such as *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Layla and Majnun*.

To this end, I support Chambers’ use of a concluding thought by the sociologist Tariq Modood in his book *Multiculturalism*. Modood contends that Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘family resemblance’ ‘allows us to recognize distinct ethnic and religious groups, although these groups alter in different times and space, and are internally heterogeneous.’

Modood’s argument that it is possible to identify people from a Muslim background as a group despite all their myriad differences, just as we can detect members of the same family through eye colour, physique, posture, personality, and so on, is especially relevant for thinking about British Muslim cultural production. Although the protagonists under analysis in my thesis have affiliations to a number of different Muslim-majority locales and their creators use differing aesthetic forms and styles in their work, the fictions I examine imbricate very similar cultural encounters, gender constructions and reference points in their output.

**Masculinities**

Just as the label British Muslim is contestable, sensitivity is also required when defining the slippery concept of masculinities. As should be apparent from my discussion on the

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‘Islamic Rage Boy’ stereotype and the need for more nuanced representations of British Muslim men, it is impossible to talk about masculinity in the singular. To this end, transnational migration is a fruitful case study for thinking through the pluralistic nature of masculinities, as Mike Donaldson and Richard Howson perceptively point out:

Migrating men do not arrive in their new homeland bereft of notions about their own manliness. To the contrary, they usually bring with them firm beliefs and well-established practices about manhood and gender relations.49

Transnational movement, then, leads to an inevitable encounter with different ways of men behaving and conducting themselves. Donaldson and Howson, therefore, present a constructive starting point for thinking through how the male protagonists in my literary and filmic texts move to Britain with particular gender ideals in mind and how these are challenged by confronting different male gender practices.

In order to conceive of how cultural encounters shape masculinities, then I find the work of Raewyn Connell particularly illuminating. In her influential 1993 study Masculinities, Connell proposes a framework for defining masculinities as heterogeneous and continually shifting patterns of social practices that are generally associated with the position of men in any society’s set of gender relations.50 Connell argues that masculinity, like all forms of gender behaviour, is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and is shaped by what bodies do. However, it is not a social practice reduced to the body. To this end, whilst it is customarily men who enact or perform patterns of practice that are socially or culturally defined as masculine (these often including being a family’s breadwinner or showing physical strength), this is not exclusively the case. This standpoint opens up possibilities for those who do not have a male body to perform

behaviours that are defined as masculine. Separating masculinity from its exclusive association with male anatomy enables Connell to examine the ways in which masculinity is socially constructed.

My thesis, therefore, takes a similar approach to Connell in viewing masculinity as pliable and subject to alteration. In other words, like Simone de Beauvoir’s famous assertion regarding female identities, my study is premised on the notion that ‘men are not born; they are made’ and as such ‘they construct their masculinities within particular social and historical contexts.’ Connell’s theorisation upon the socially constructed nature of masculinities is, therefore, crucial for my own reading of the literature and films in this thesis whereby I argue that the male protagonists are negotiating their own gendered behaviour against the backdrop of living in a new country with separate, and sometimes contrasting, gender expectations. For the subsequent generations of postmigrants whose lives are also shaped by their parents’ migration, the socially constructed nature of masculinities becomes particularly apparent as they translate across differing perceptions of male gender performance.

By assuming a social constructionist approach to masculinities, my thesis is also greatly influenced by Judith Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as performative. Butler’s notion of gender performativity, as unconsciously repeated sets of norms that are learnt through culture, is the point from which I understand why and how masculinities are practised. Indeed, Butler argues that gender does not express an innate part of the self but rather is an effect of performative acts. Deborah Lupton and Lesley Barclay summarise Butler’s thoughts eloquently,

The production and maintenance of gender is performed through bodily practice (for example, styles of walking, hairstyles, body shape and dress), communicative practices (ways of interacting with others) and thinking practices (ways of thinking about the self and gendered others). These practices inevitably take place in the context of institutions such as the family, the workplace, the education and legal systems, the government apparatuses of the state and the economic context. 

Viewing masculinity as a set of performances, then, allows me also to see how the male protagonists repetitively enact certain practices and why encountering divergent gender performances disrupts or challenges an internalised routine that has been inculcated within the male subject since birth.

Furthermore, Butler’s model also casts gender as an active habit hence she talks about subjects ‘doing their gender’. Subsequent theorists such as Saba Mahmood and Caroline Ramazanoglu have pushed this further to show how assemblages of race, ethnicity, cultural background, religion and sexuality coalesce and influence the way that individuals ‘do’ their gender. Certainly, many of the protagonists in my thesis unconsciously repeat performances of gender learnt from their geographically distant homelands. However, in her study of Islam in British and German transcultural literature, Frauke Matthes makes a crucial distinction to the Butler model by observing how performances of gender are consciously re-valued by Muslim protagonists in a non-Muslim environment. This can take the form of defensive performances aimed at ‘preserving’ a notion of ‘essential’ gender identity or in allowing different forms of masculine practice to influence their identity. In either of these two examples, ways of ‘doing’ masculinity are changed or renegotiated in ways that reveal the dynamics between

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55 Matthes, *Writing and Muslim Identity*, p. 30.
British and Muslim conceptions of gender, and expose a plurality of different male gender behaviours. It is in this nexus that the core of my thesis is based: exploring how migration and settlement affects performances of masculinity and, in the process, how transnational movement challenges fallacious notions of an essentialised national or cultural masculinity.

I perceive masculinity not as a fixed phenomenon, but rather a complex, varied and contradictory assemblage of different performative practices, with several different formulations of masculinity able to coexist and compete within the same cultural context and historical moment. To this end, Connell’s concept of ‘multiple masculinities’ has been particularly enlightening for its emphasis on how masculinities are configured through relations between other gendered subjects. At the root of Connell’s theorisation is that masculinity affords men power through what she terms the ‘patriarchal dividend’; however, not all men benefit in the same way. For Connell, the patriarchal dividend refers to a structural composition in most societies whereby men have greater access to institutional power, economic resources, respect, service, sexual pleasure and control over one’s body than women. Connell argues that both men and women can be complicit with these concepts and, through institutions such as the family, seek to mould men into these systems of power.

Whilst the gender relations in the literature and films that I analyse broadly support this view, the male protagonists that I examine are generally marginalised upon racial and ethno-cultural grounds by a normatively white British populace. As such, they clearly do not have access to the patriarchal dividend in the same way as their white peers. To address precisely this discrepancy, Connell formulates a hierarchy of masculinities which is based on relations of power. At the top of this hierarchy is a range

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56 Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 79.
of behaviours, ideas and gender norms that constitute a dominant form of being a man, which Connell labels ‘hegemonic masculinity’. In Connell’s theory, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which ‘embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.’

Connell asserts that this is not a universalising gender identity and thus hegemonic masculinity differs according to historical moment, class positioning and cultural locale. Nevertheless, it is this iteration of masculinity that benefits most comprehensively from the patriarchal dividend.

Hegemonic masculinity, however, relies on positing itself in contradistinction to other forms of masculinity. In that homosexual men engage in sexual activity with other men, which is symbolically associated with femininity, they are an example of what Connell terms a ‘subordinated masculine identity’. By virtue of their racial, ethnic and often underprivileged economic status, migrant men are identified in Connell’s framework as constituting a form of ‘marginalised masculinity’. Her reasoning is that migrants have generally moved from a poorer country to a richer one, are living in an environment in which their native language is not the common language, often have a different religion with differing cultural values and are much more likely to face forms of racial or cultural discrimination.

Furthermore, Connell observes how many men who fall within her conceptualisation of marginalised masculinities tend to perform variations of what she terms ‘protest masculinities’. Specifically, Connell argues that certain groups of men who are materially, socially or economically deprived tend to exaggeratedly perform aspects

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59 Ibid., p. 81.
of hegemonic masculinity in an attempt to project their strength in the face of marginality. Connell notes that for these men, protest masculinities represent ‘a response to powerlessness, a claim to the gendered position of power, a pressured exaggeration of pressured of masculine power’. Protest masculinities, then, can take the form of spectacular displays of strength, emphasising their strength and power in riposte to their disempowering socio-economic conditions in which their claims to the patriarchal dividend are ‘constantly negated’. The sociologists Chris Haywood and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill assert that protest masculinities are often expressed through excessive sexuality, violence or performances of control. However, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill point out these are vulnerable and unstable masculinities that are prone to violent reassertion when they appear threatened, such as an occasion when the emasculating conditions of the male are likely to be revealed. Likewise, Connell, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill all underline the collective aspects of protest masculinity in which marginalised men find solace in forming groups or gangs through which they are able to tackle their shared sense of disempowerment in solidarity and aim to achieve the respect of their fellow gang members.

Indeed, it is into this categorisation of ‘marginalised masculinities’ and practices of ‘protest masculinity’ that most protagonists in my literary and cinematic corpus theoretically fall and there are numerous examples of the aforementioned forms of behaviour throughout my thesis. However, I also argue for a nuancing of Connell’s model here as she overlooks the ways in which these marginalised constructions of masculinity are subject to internalised processes of domination, disruption and transformation. From a contemporary viewpoint, for example, it must be asked whether such a neat categorisation

60 Ibid., p. 111.
61 Ibid., p. 116.
withstands analysis when a public figure such as Sadiq Khan, a British-born man of Pakistani heritage with a well-publicised Islamic faith, serves as Mayor of London. Furthermore, Connell’s view of homosexual men enacting a subordinated form of masculinity is challenged by recent history in which same-sex marriage has been legalised in much of North America and Western Europe leading to an increasing visibility of white, affluent, politically conservative gay men. Both of these examples therefore serve to show how Connell’s classifications needs to be continually adapted and reformulated to accommodate the ways that masculinity (and gender) are in a constant state of flux.

Nevertheless, in this century’s climate of Islamophobia, cases such as Sadiq Khan’s career trajectory are unfortunately a rare phenomenon. Hopkins’ work on the ‘increasing levels of harassment, violence and scrutiny’ that Muslim men have come under since the 9/11 attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon serves to prove this. In this regard, I view my protagonists as existing mostly from a perspective of marginalisation at the hands of a normatively white population. As such, I perceive their masculinities as being constructed and performed within this context of marginalisation but crucially I examine relationalities of masculinity within this broad ‘British Muslim’ demographic. Connell’s theorisation is therefore instructive for my purposes as she highlights how certain performances of masculinity depend on the subordination of others including the existence of culturally exalted forms of ‘doing’ masculinity. In my context, British Muslim men are often depicted as this ‘other’ against which white British masculinities construct, practice and perform their masculinities.

Taking my cue from Judith Butler and Raewyn Connell, then, I ask how literature and film presents men travelling with concepts, ideals and norms of masculine performances and how these are reconstituted into a UK context. My thesis questions to what extent male protagonists renegotiate their hegemonic masculine identifications, practices and sensibilities embedded in their ‘old’ gender relations from their marginalised position and how subsequent generations construct their masculinity in dialogue or in contrast with their migratory background and cultural heritage. The literary and cinematic texts that I analyse shed light on these processes by creatively imagining these negotiation processes and magnifying the heterogeneous nature of British Muslim masculinities.

**Transcultural Masculinities**

Having elaborated upon my understanding of British Muslim identities and masculinities, I will now outline a series of methodological approaches with which I approach my texts. Firstly, however, I want to explicitly state how I approach the concept of migration. As I deploy it, transnational migration refers to ‘the movement of people from one country to another, leading to temporary, and most commonly, permanent resettlement.’\(^6^4\) In a specifically Islamic context, migration, or the *hijra*, holds an important role in the religion’s history as the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers escaped persecution in the city of Mecca by fleeing to the then non-Islamic city of Yathrib, later renamed Medina, in 622 CE.\(^6^5\) From this point onwards, Muslims have migrated to many different places across the world. In the process, Islamic faiths and Muslim cultures have shaped


and been shaped by the different cultures they have encountered during movement and settlement in places previously perceived as ‘abroad’ and ‘foreign’. Although, as Iain Chambers points out, migration is rarely a vocational journey and is generally caused by negative, and sometimes traumatic, political or economic circumstances, it is nevertheless a unique form of cultural encounter through which individuals literally move between places but also between cultures, languages and religions.66

In this sense, migration is a learning process through which people learn about themselves and gain different perspectives on their ‘home’ cultures as well as their new environments. Taking my cue from Homi K. Bhabha, I refer to the process through which migrants from Muslim majority cultures and their British-born children make sense of the experience of migration as ‘translation processes’.67 Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s claim in his essay ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1923) that within linguistic translation there is an element that remains ‘untranslatable’ and therefore impossible to render in another language’s prose, Bhabha suggests that migration (and to a lesser extent travel) exposes a similar pattern of ‘gaps’ and ‘impurities’ between cultures.68 Thus, like linguistic translation, a ‘true copy’ cannot be recreated as cultures are not fixed or stable entities. Transnational migration is, for Bhabha, a translational phenomenon as the migrant’s task must be to negotiate their own identity in dialogue with the other cultures they encounter thereby offering the possibilities for new cultural identities. For him, ‘[migration] is the opposite of historical colonialism, part of whose self-given task was to reproduce an original culture and to map the political, social, ethical, and aesthetic frameworks of that original onto other cultures.’69 Translation then, Bhabha opines, is an apt metaphor as the

migration process is a journey through which power dynamics, complicities and interrelations between cultures are thrown into sharp relief.

Crucially, whilst cultural translation offers opportunities for new cultural identities, it is also fraught with existential difficulties. Therefore, as with linguistic translation unmasking inequalities and power dynamics between ‘global’ and ‘periphery’ languages, migration reveals disparity between cultures. This is especially relevant for the current historical moment in which migrants to Britain are repeatedly demonised by political parties such as United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), are subject to harsh political manoeuvres at the hands of the current Conservative administration, and face increased suspicion from members of the general public and popular press.\textsuperscript{70} The creation of ‘new’ cultural identities is therefore not always informed through positive encounters, as the majority of the literary and filmic texts under analysis show. Indeed, many male characters seek to expunge elements of their identity that they perceive as indicating a Muslim cultural background attempting to exaggeratedly perform traditional British cultural mores. Through these instances, however, the aforementioned ‘gaps’ and ‘impurities’ between cultures are only further magnified.

More specifically, I pursue Frauke Matthes’ contention that gender is a central site through which processes of cultural translation are made visible.\textsuperscript{71} In my context, first generation male protagonists regularly seek to impose their perceptions of masculinity upon their British-born sons and peers. A familiar trope is how these efforts are met with resistance by British-born second generation migrant men who work towards blending practices of masculinity across the different cultures they encounter or erasing any sense of deviation from what they perceive as a normatively British masculinity. My thesis,


\textsuperscript{71} Matthes, \textit{Writing and Muslim Identity}, p. 30.
therefore, unpacks how literature and film reveals the ways that constructions of Muslim masculinity are exposed, revalued and negotiated during encounters with other cultures in the UK.

As indicated by the aforementioned differences between generations, the literary and cinematic texts I analyse draw sharp distinctions between how protagonists who migrated to Britain (such as Parvez in *My Son the Fanatic*, George Khan in *East is East*, Chanu in *Brick Lane* and Nasser in *My Beautiful Laundrette*) negotiate their masculinity and how the subsequent generations perform masculinity. To this end, I distinguish between the protagonists who migrated to Britain within their lifetime as ‘migrants’ and I specify those who were born and raised by migrant parents as ‘postmigrants’. By differentiating between migrants and postmigrants, I am borrowing critical lexis from critics of German Turkish cultural production, such as Azadeh Sharifi, who have sought to describe the ongoing effects of the previous generation’s migration upon subsequent generations of national citizens of non-German heritage.\(^\text{72}\) This is a distinction which I contend is extremely pertinent to the British context and my purposes in this thesis for the same reasons.

Migration, I argue, is not a singular event but continues to shape the lives not only of those who boarded trains, planes or ships to settle in Britain but also their children. By virtue of their migrant parents, postmigrants are individuals who inherit a complex set of cultural allegiances with their country of heritage and their British environment. Factors such as racial appearance, for instance, can serve to ethno-racially mark someone as

\(^\text{72}\) See Azadeh Sharifi, ‘Mapping Intercultural Networks: Postmigration, Theatre and Artists of Color’: Keynote Talk at Europe Now Festival (Amsterdam) (2013) <https://azadehsharifi.wordpress.com/2013/05/17/europe-now-festival-in-amsterdam-my-keynote-speak/>. The only instance of the term ‘postmigrant’ that I have found in Anglophone migrant and diaspora criticism is Blanka Grzegorczyk’s study *Discourses of Postcolonialism in Contemporary British Children’s Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015) where she uses the terminology in the same way that my study does but does not provide an explanation for doing so.
having origins elsewhere yet was born and raised in Britain. British-born people of colour, however, still face instances of racist violence and abuse as well as structural forms of discrimination that serve to alienate them from their British homeland. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks like 9/11 and 7/7, British-born Muslim postmigrants have increasingly been subject to questions about their background and their relationship to Islam all of which strains an individual’s identification with Britain and their Muslim heritage.  

I define the various protagonists in the cultural production that I analyse as ‘migrants’ and ‘postmigrants’ whose ongoing negotiation of cultural allegiances between their heritage and their current environment are enacted in their practices of masculinity. However, I argue that the protagonists do not neatly hybridise the different cultures they translate. As such, I term the literature and film that I analyse ‘transcultural’ literature and film. My decision to do so is to emphasise the asymmetrical movement between the different cultures that the protagonists are positioned within, and how they frequently move between different cultural markers.  

In doing so, I have chosen not to use terms such as ‘intercultural’, ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘multicultural’ as these imply static or binaristic relations between cultures. As Frauke Matthes points out, interculturalism and multiculturalism both imply ‘that any given traditions are to be considered in isolation rather than in interaction; it traditionally understands culture as something separate, thus stressing difference.’ In a specifically British context, Graham Huggan expresses disquiet with understandings of multiculturalism during the Tony Blair-led centre left New Labour administrations in

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74 Matthes, *Writing and Muslim Identity*, p. 35.
1990s and 2000s. This is a period during which the majority of the novels and films that I analyse were written and produced. Huggan remarks how the then-government’s much publicised and celebrated notion of multiculturalism exposed two incompatible discourses: a modernisation one, in which all ethno-racial communities were to be viewed as British, and an integrationist one, in which non-white and faith communities were encouraged to submit to a one-size-fits-all notion of Britishness, that still viewed many Muslims as existing outside of British codes of identity whether through their clothing or everyday practices. Multiculturalism, then, led to virtual communities that gave the impression of counteracting racial discrimination but ultimately reinforced cultural difference and separatism.

Such formulations of cultural diversity are inconsistent with the ways that I believe the protagonists in the literary and filmic fiction under analysis appropriate and negotiate different cultural markers. As such, I refute perceptions that the fictional works under examination, are existing ‘inbetween’ static cultures. Thus, like Leslie A. Adelson in her study on German Turkish writing, I posit that there are no ‘clear and absolute boundaries’ in the writers and film-makers’ perception of identity. Theorists such as Hamid Naficy argue, however, that film-makers with a migratory or exilic background produce ‘accented cinema’ that shows a ‘double consciousness’. My theoretical framework similarly repudiates perceptions that the cultural production under analysis exists between two static or competing cultures and traditions of heritage.

Rather, I understand the corpus of literature and film, and their protagonists as ‘moving between the different cultures, languages, histories available to them.’ In so doing, the work of Wolfgang Welsch and Mary Louise Pratt is particularly inspiring. In his polemic ‘Transculturality: The Puzzling form of Cultures today’, Welsch argues that ‘we are cultural hybrids’, that ‘there is nothing exclusively foreign’ and ‘no longer exclusively “own” either’. Nevertheless, Welsch’s vision is tempered by Graham Huggan’s criticisms of transculturality as conjuring ‘up a far more positive picture of the world than a more historically informed and, particularly a more economically driven argument would allow’. Indeed, with rising Islamophobia and anti-migrant discourses targeting British Muslim men, Welsch’s approach could be seen as, at best, optimistic. Whilst I take issue with some of Welsch’s more utopian tendencies, not least because his conceptualisation does not adequately take into account how travel is not a uniform experience and that it often privileges white and economically affluent subjectivities, Welsch does capture how migrants and postmigrants move between different cultural markers in an uneven and unconscious manner.

Migration and postmigration is therefore imagined as a transcultural process of translation involving what Iain Chambers explains as ‘a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for [...] identities that are constantly subject to mutation.’ Therefore, I view transculturality as affirming Stuart Hall’s much cited view of identity as ‘a matter of becoming as well as being’ and therefore identity is something that is endlessly refashioned with various aspects of this – class, race, gender, sexuality, religious faith, national origins – being emphasised in

78 Matthes, Writing and Muslim Identity, p. 34.
81 Iain Chambers, Migrancy, Culture, Identity, p. 5.
different situations. Azade Seyhan notes that cultural practitioners for whom migration and transcultural outlooks pose a crucial aspect of their identity and work, then, expand our understandings of ‘national culture’ and are writing from a perspective that is ‘outside the nation’. In her context of German Turkish and Hispanic American writers, Seyhan goes as far as to talk about their fiction existing in a ‘third geography’ where translation processes constitute transcultural identities that refuse to be bound by singular conceptions of national culture.

Mary Louise Pratt’s model of ‘transculturation’ builds on these approaches but is more sensitive to power dynamics within transcultural contact. Pratt asserts that transcultural exchange is always structured by ‘highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’ and opines that: ‘While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what the dominant culture visits upon them, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean.’ Pratt’s model of dynamic processes of uneven cultural encounters and exchange is beneficial for my thesis. Indeed, it should be stated here that all of the writers and filmmakers whose work is discussed in this thesis are also to a certain extent ‘postcolonial’ in that their heritage is from countries that were colonised and this history of imperial domination features in the relationships between cultures that the writers and filmmakers move between. Indeed, familiar concepts of postcolonialism, such as the ‘Other’, are part of my analysis in order to understand this complex heritage of colonial subjugation. However, I want to push these conceptions further by stressing the ways that writers and filmmakers go beyond colonialism’s imperative to supplant one culture upon another and the postcolonial author’s duty to ‘write back’ to hegemonic power dynamics.

84 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 7.
The transcultural writer, then, seeks to expose similarities, differences and conflicts between cultures and thereby dismantles cultural hierarchies. Rather than ‘writing back’, then, Sissy Helff contends that transcultural writers often promiscuously mix together various literary reference points and genre forms that have origins in the diverse locations from which authors have attachments. Instead of hybridising national forms of literary aesthetics, transcultural authors evoke a globalised textuality that seeks not only to depict an increasingly interconnected world but also strives to disrupt power dynamics that frequently underpin globalisation. In film too, David MacDougall makes the case for a transcultural cinema that fuses together a complex array of different narrative forms and styles that originate from disparate parts of the globe. MacDougall explains that the nature of film-making contributes to a transcultural perspective as any one film production tends to employ producers, cinematographers and technicians that are from a variety of different places in the world. Moreover, the screening and marketing of cinema at international Film Festivals in places such as London, Berlin, Istanbul, Mumbai and Lahore also ensures that viewings of films are juxtaposed with motion pictures from many varied countries. As such, the average Western filmmaker is increasingly aware and knowledgeable of cinema from across the world.

Nevertheless, transcultural methodologies are not common in Anglophone cultural criticism. As demonstrated by John McLeod’s recent study on transcultural adoption in British cultural production, transcultural approaches are achieving growing recognition in the fields of literary, film and postcolonial studies. However, postcolonial critiques that argue for a multicultural understanding of cultural production from Britain’s diverse

migrant and diaspora populations remain the dominant mode of critical enquiry for a corpus such as mine. By reading my texts as transcultural literature and film, I hope to broaden the remit of ‘postcolonial theory’, by arguing that there are generations of British writers and filmmakers of non-British heritage who are invested in more dynamic forms of cultural enterprise in which the limitations and boundaries of cultures are thrown into question. My corpus is invested in expanding and challenging notions of what it means to be British, Muslim and have postcolonial heritage. Thus, my thesis appropriates the term ‘transcultural’ for thinking through how the literary and cinematic texts under analysis move between and incorporate a variety of different cultural markers of masculinity.

As a way of interpreting how the protagonists perform different cultural practices of masculinity, Jasbir K. Puar’s appropriation of the term ‘assemblage’ in her monograph *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* has been instructive. In her study, Puar puts forward a convincing case for transcending conceptualisations of intersectionality that have generally been used to frame the various interactions between racial and gender marginalisation. The framework of intersectionality was first theorised by Kimberle Crenshaw in her important essay ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color’ in which she observes connections between racism and misogyny as mutually constructing sites of oppression for women of colour.\(^88\) For masculinity studies, too, Crenshaw’s work has been productively used by A.-D. Christensen and S. Qvotrup Jensen to magnify the ways that categories of ‘class, race/ethnicity and sexuality can support the dominant position and male privilege of some men because it strengthens the legitimacy of their masculinity.’\(^89\)

While recognising its past importance, however, Puar suggests that the conditions of


contemporary life in the West necessitate a rethinking of racialised and gender subjectivities as interlaced but also as continually mutating forms of identity.

For Puar, intersectional models of identity ‘presume that components – race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion – are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against the linearity, coherency, and permanency.’⁹⁰ In other words, intersectional approaches ‘demand the knowing, naming and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time’ which Puar repudiates by arguing that identities are slippery, unstable and continuously evolving. For Puar, this means intersectionality is an outmoded framework for understanding identities as it reinforces a rigid, definite and quantifiable approach to selfhood.

In its place, Puar advances the concept of ‘assemblage’ to reassert the asymmetrical nature of contemporary identities. First used by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), assemblages are understood as ‘collections of multiplicities’ that stress the fluidity, exchangeability and multiple functionalities that govern social relations.⁹¹ As opposed to intersectional approaches then, assemblage is ‘a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks’ that ‘draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect, organic and non-organic forces.’⁹² Therefore, Puar proposes that assemblage is more attune to capturing the fluid and inconsistent natures of contemporary identities. Puar’s concept, then, dovetails with my transcultural reading of the protagonists across my thesis. I argue that the protagonists move between multiple practices of masculinity and that my texts imaginatively engage with the effects of varying racial, national and ethno-cultural

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formations upon their identities. It is from this viewpoint that the characters translate between these competing assemblages to forge transcultural ways of being Muslim, being British and being male.

**Scope of the thesis**

My thesis is comprised of four chapters which are best considered as providing four opportunities for critically and comparatively reading a select body of significant literary and cinematic texts which highlight relevant themes to the thesis’s discussion of transcultural British Muslim masculinities. My choices of texts may, at times, appear surprising as certain literary and cinematic works are notably excluded while some are perhaps unexpectedly included. My decision not to incorporate an analysis of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* may be one of these curious omissions. Principally, for my study’s concerns, the cultural responses to Rushdie’s novel have had more resonance to literary and filmic constructions of British Muslim masculinity than an analysis of male gender practices in the novel would allow.

With this in mind, my decision to include three texts by the British Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi may appear puzzling. I have chosen to include two of Kureishi’s screenplays, *My Son the Fanatic* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and one of his novels, *The Black Album*, precisely because I regard his work as exceptionally invested in examining the nexus of gender and transcultural concerns that I probe in my study. Kureishi’s writing, more than any other British writer of Muslim heritage, contours the changes from ‘British Pakistani’ and ‘British Asian’ to ‘British Muslim’ identity assemblages and for
these reasons has unique historical significance.\textsuperscript{93} Kureishi traces these crucial socio-political identity shifts through a hybridisation of literary, cinematic and, although not discussed in this thesis, theatrical forms which include a number of inter-textual references to other forms of cultural production from a variety of different corners of the world. In this respect, I view Kureishi’s oeuvre as offering a number of important considerations for my thesis in its historical stature, its innovative, transcultural approach and its embracement of written and visual forms of cultural expression. For a comparatist approach such as mine, Kureishi’s cultural endeavours are a beneficial body of work with which to engage and examine. However, before outlining how my thesis will proceed with my selected texts, a disclaimer is necessary. I must state that, as perhaps exemplified in my omission of Rushdie’s novel, it is not my intention to provide a coherent or exhaustive account of fictional expressions of British Muslim masculinities within this study. Rather, this thesis dwells on texts that I regard as opening up pivotal perspectives on the transcultural negotiation of British Muslim masculinities through a range of pressing motifs and themes.

In my first chapter, Masculinities on the Move, this takes the form of generational conflict in Ayub Khan-Din’s \textit{East is East} and Hanif Kureishi’s \textit{My Son the Fanatic}. Within this segment, I unpack the ways that fathers seek to inculcate their sons with their ideological visions of masculinity and cultural identity. Each of these fathers demonstrate a binary understanding of cultural and gendered identities, however, with \textit{East is East}’s George Khan attempting to instil his sons with an essentialised Pakistani-Sunni Muslim identity and \textit{My Son the Fanatic}’s Parvez propagating a form of Britishness that excludes

\textsuperscript{93} Bart Moore-Gilbert’s study \textit{Hanif Kureishi} (Machester: Manchester University Press, 2001) outlines Kureishi’s unique stature as having ‘one of the first substantial bodies of cultural work by a British-born descendant of the nation’s minorities of “New Commonwealth” origin’, p. 190. Kureishi’s influence has been attested by a number of writers, filmmakers, playwrights and musicians. The first single of British Asian band Cornershop, for instance, included a B-side entitled ‘The Hanif Kureishi Scene’.
influence from the protagonists’ Muslim cultural backgrounds. In riposte, each son performs variations of protest masculinity that, in *East is East*’s case, reject any aspect of their Pakistani background, or in *My Son the Fanatic*, take the form of exaggerated and defensive articulations of Sunni Islam. In both films, the failure of fathers or sons to adapt or negotiate their own conceptualisations of masculinity into more transcultural ways of being leads to the breakdown of communication and the family unit. In spite of this dispiriting outlook, these two films successfully dismember notions of ‘placed’ masculinities by portraying a fluid and unfixed relationship between location and gender practices. Thus, in their presentation of characters that betray allegiances to geographically distant places through masculine performance, these two films expose the anxieties, inconsistencies and contradictions of hegemonic masculinities when people migrate.

My second chapter, Sacred and Secular Maculinites, focuses mostly on migrant and postmigrant protagonists’ anxieties around displacement and anonymity. In Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus*, a shared sense of disempowerment results in young male postmigrants enacting forms of Islamic fundamentalism. A different kind of Sunni Islam is also found in Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*, in which fears over a ‘loss of identity’ when the community comes into contact with non-Muslim cultures translates into a particularly dogmatic religiosity. However, women also play key roles in these constructions of masculinity through which these reactive Islams or secular atheisms are performatively expressed as repeated bodily and behaviour practices. Thus, this chapter exposes significance of female ‘others’ in practices of masculinity that push men towards their religious or atheist convictions and ultimately reinforce the performativity of identity.
In Chapter 3, British Muslim Masculinities in the Metropolis, I pay particular attention to how the transcultural traffic of city spaces emerge as crucibles for transformative gender and cultural identities in the migrant and postmigrant protagonists that populate Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag*. By reading how interaction with Muslim and non-Muslim cultures in Brick Lane’s London and *Psychoraag*’s Glasgow is experienced by protagonists Chanu, Karim and Zaf, I posit that cities emerge as inevitably pluralising locations that shape cultural practices of masculinity in a range of ambivalent ways. Simultaneously, my dual focus on a novel set within the globally-populated British capital city of London and Scotland’s biggest city, Glasgow, further unpacks the diversity encapsulated within British identities.

My final chapter, Between Men, Desiring Men, examines cinematic portrayals of same-sex sexualities in Hanif Kureishi’s *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Sally El Hosaini’s *My Brother the Devil*. First, using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s conceptualisation of homosociality, I address the manifestations of patriarchal masculinity within the two film’s all-male gangs and collectives. This leads me to probe how lead protagonists Omar and Rash’s homosexuality serves as an alternative form of masculinity that is less aggressive and allows for transcultural forms of hybridised gender practices.

Nevertheless, the utopian function signalled by their same-sex sexuality is undercut by the ways that their homosexual love affairs allow for forms of social mobility that indicate their new found belonging within an economically-driven form of Britishness. The work of Jasbir K. Puar and Lisa Duggan then, enables me to read how Omar and Rash become emblematic of the strategic incorporation of certain affluent, neoliberal gay

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masculinities at the expense of racialised migrant masculinities within the latter half of the twentieth century.

My study, then, aims to complement pre-existing scholarship on the films, novels and authors in this study. However, it addresses a conspicuous lacuna in these studies as very few of these critical analyses have considered masculinity in relation to this literary and cinematic corpus. Notable exceptions include: Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin’s writing on the figure of the ‘Islamic Rage Boy’, an article by Rehana Ahmed in which she examines representations of British Muslim masculinity in Kenny Glennaan and Simon Beaufoy’s film *Yasmin* (2004) and a chapter of Frauke Matthes’ monograph *Writing and Muslim Identity* where she analyses comparative constructions of Muslim postmigrant masculinities in Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and *My Son the Fanatic* with the German Turkish writer Feridun Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak*. 96

Nevertheless, my thesis differs from these studies in valuable ways. In the first instance, Morey and Yaqin’s work on the ‘Islamic Rage Boy’ centres upon the accumulative effects of stereotyping on British and American Muslim men rather than investigating cultural responses to this misrepresentation. Ahmed’s article, meanwhile, focuses on British Muslim masculinity as represented by a white British writer screenwriter (Beaufoy) and a director of the same ethnicity (Glennaan). Matthes’ contribution, on the other hand, is the closest to my purposes as she pursues notions of cultural translation, postmigration and transculturality in relation to masculinity within her selected texts. Even so, Matthes’ examination of masculinity is a constituent part of her broader research into representations of Islam in British and German migrant and travel writing, therefore, her engagement is limited to a chapter rather than being the basis

of a study. Matthes’ astute reading is also constrained by a concentration on the young postmigrant men’s practices of masculinity.

My thesis is therefore the first comprehensive and substantive comparative analysis of British Muslim Masculinities that draws on and imbricates a mix of gender, migrant, postcolonial, transcultural and comparative theoretical frameworks. As such, this thesis contributes both to the aforementioned field of British Muslim cultural studies, as represented by work from Rehana Ahmed, Claire Chambers, Amin Malak, Frauke Matthes, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, Geoffrey Nash and Esra Mirze Santesso, and to studies that explore cultural representations of masculinity in which migrant perspectives are often underexplored. To this end, my thesis is also in conversation with work by Brian Baker, Carole Jones and Berthold Schoene-Harwood, who have examined masculinity in contemporary British cultural production.

For the socio-political reasons expounded at the opening to this introduction, I assert that conflating masculinity studies with research into British Muslim cultural representations is timely and urgent. Thus, my thesis responds to Brian Baker’s call for more critical angles in which ‘an analysis of the dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity helps to reorganise the fields of Gender Studies towards the subject and helps undo (or at least bring into view) problematic male/female, masculine/feminine binaries of earlier discourses on sex and gender.’

97 Ahmed, Writing British Muslims; Chambers, British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers; Malak, Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English; Matthes, Writing and Muslim Identity; Morey and Yaqin, Framing Muslims; Geoffrey Nash, Writing Muslim Identity (London: Continuum, 2012); Esra Mirze Santesso, Disorientation: Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).


and cinematic representations of British Muslim masculinities present a beneficial case study in developing the kinds of perspectives that Baker outlines. Indeed, a thorough critical and comparative reading of the gender practices and processes that constitute British Muslim masculinities provides a valuable insight into how forms of masculinity travel, change, adapt and are disparaged.

The originality of my thesis, however, is most conspicuous in the framework that I have developed for my texts. By viewing my literary and filmic corpus as transcultural literature and film, and by investigating what I term transcultural masculinities, I am arguing for the development of transcultural approaches in the field of comparative British literary and film studies. This thesis, then, takes a differing approach from the dominant mode of multiculturalist analysis that generally frames critical engagement with work by migrant, diaspora and postcolonial British writers and filmmakers.

Multiculturalism, as argued previously, depends on seeing cultures in isolation rather than mutually shaping each other. My thesis argues that the literature and film under analysis represents British Muslim masculinities as continually influenced and forged through cultural exchange and encounter. My emphasis should not be misread as trying to evoke an overly positive or harmonious picture of contemporary Britain. However, in the spirit of Pratt’s model, I argue that in spaces where cultures meet, exchange and conflict, then, power dynamics become the most observable and hence identities are challenged, created and transformed. British Muslim Masculinities are slippery, diverse, heterogeneous identities that comprise of a vast array of different religious perspectives, regional and national allegiances, class positionings and sexualities, a transcultural reading of these identity assemblages is best placed to capture this unique and continually shifting diversity.

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100 See Ahmed’s monograph Writing British Muslims and Chambers’ introduction to British Muslim Fictions for paradigmatic examples.
Masculinities on the Move:
Hanif Kureishi’s *My Son the Fanatic* (dir. Udayan Prassad, 1998) and
Ayub Khan-Din’s *East is East* (dir. Daniel O’Donnell, 1999)

Introduction

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!

Thus opens Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘The Ballad of East and West’ (1889) which
tells of a meeting between a British and an Indian Muslim soldier. The famous, and
often quoted, opening lines propose an irreconcilable cultural binary in which
differences between essentialised ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ cultures are deemed
insurmountable for meaningful connection or exchange and therefore have been
interpreted as a legitimation of Western imperialist ideology. Beyond the familiar
first lines, however, is a regularly overlooked qualification in which cultural
differences are reconciled by the meeting of two hegemonic masculinised men whose
bond can transcend race, ethnicity, religion or cultural background. Ayub Khan-
Din’s *East is East* alludes to the poem’s opening refrain in its title thereby framing
the film’s narrative that charts conflict between a Pakistani father and his British-
born postmigrant children in 1970s England as a symptom of inexorable cultural
divergences. In other words, the film portrays a father from the ‘East’ who remains

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rigidly within a set of immovable cultural norms and practices which cannot be recast within the ‘West’. However, the latter half of the poem’s quatrain is equally significant for the film, as fathers and sons’ competing conceptions of masculinity are where cultural conflicts in the film are most conspicuously played out. The other film in this chapter, *My Son the Fanatic*, traces similar ground in its depiction of cultural conflict and tense familial relations between a vociferously secular Pakistani migrant father and his British postmigrant son who has recently found his religious and political vocation as a member of a local Islamist group. Both of these films explore and examine the meeting of cultures through conflicts between fathers and sons over contrasting conceptions of masculinity.

Within these intimate yet fractious paternal-filial relationships, competing conceptions of masculinity become the arena where British and Muslim cultural identities wrestle and grapple with one another, and undergo tentative transitions and changes. At times colluding with the monolithic images set out by Kipling’s verse and other times revealing a far more complex and ambivalent engagement with gender and cultural identities, the following pages illuminate how generations of migrants and postmigrants translate their masculinities in relation to their heritage and the communities around them. Far from a static set of locality-specific gender behaviours and practices that can be defined as ‘British’ or ‘Muslim’ or ‘Pakistani’, or indeed ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’, this chapter details how each of these films addresses the movement, changing and adaptation of masculinities by migrant and postmigrant generations through transnational migration and settlement.

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Directed by Daniel O’Donnell, *East is East*’s screenplay was written by Ayub Khan-Din who adapted it from his own autobiographical stage play.\(^5\) Having enjoyed popularity in theatres across Britain, the film adaptation was remarkably successful and is ‘commonly seen as the first big mainstream success of Asian British film’.\(^6\) According to Sanjay Sharma, *East is East*’s success is due to a combination of its universal themes of generational conflict and its release during a time where New Labour’s ‘hegemonic project of liberal cultural diversity’ was at its apex. The latter, Sharma argues, is reflected in the film’s tendency to comply with multicultural values that praise cultural diversity but nonetheless represent Asian Muslim communities as rooted in ‘primitivism and religious dogma’ and ‘leave[s] whiteness intact’.\(^7\) Other critics, such as Sarita Malik, contest Sharma’s view by proposing that the film’s wide appeal opened up new avenues for British Asian and Muslim cultural expression and visibility.\(^8\)

Set in 1971, the film’s plot concerns the fraught relationship between George ‘Zahir’ Khan, his British wife Ella, and their seven Salford-born sons and daughters. Of these children, the six recalcitrant sons – Nazir, Abdul, Tariq, Maneer, Saleem and Sajid – take the focal point in the plot with their various insurrections against George’s paternal authority. The rebellious brood refuse their father’s arranged marriages, manage to evade circumcision, dress in contemporary British fashions, or in the case of Saleem, go to art school rather than, as his father believes, pursue a


more lucrative career as an engineer. George and Ella’s only daughter Meenah also revolts against her father through her various ‘tomboy’ characteristics such as enjoying the normatively masculine pursuit of football and preferring trousers over saris. However, it is George’s efforts to expunge the influence of the British environment from his sons and reconstruct the local practices of his homeland by rearing his sons within his interpretation of Pakistani Muslim constructs of masculinity that take centre stage in the film. George’s imperative to inculcate Nazir, Abdul, Tariq, Saleem and Sajid within his perceptions of masculinity – namely gender practices that conform to widely-held conceptions of hegemonic masculinity in the form of heteronormative, financially prosperous husbands but also diverge in the insistence that his sons speak Urdu, maintain an allegiance to Pakistan and uphold their forefathers’ Islamic faith – are coloured by his own anxieties as a migrant to Britain during the 1970s. Whilst heterosexual marriage is a commonly-held marker of internationally normative gender relations, the protagonist George Khan’s efforts to marry his sons are especially tenacious as he seeks to safeguard his children from the allegedly corruptive influence of Britain by pairing them with religiously observant Muslim wives who, preferably, also have Pakistani heritage.

As was elaborated in the thesis introduction, *East is East* intersects with a period of increased sensitivity towards migration and national identities as demonstrated by the film’s multiple references to Enoch Powell. The allusions to Powell, including posters in background shots and the inclusion of his 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech on television in another scene, as well as the more threatening

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10 See introduction, p. 10
presence of Powell-sympathisers who live across the street from the Khan family, form the backdrop to George’s increasingly obsessive attempts to ensure his offspring identify with Sunni Islam and the local traditions of his rural Pakistani homeland from thirty years ago or so. Without the incorporation of Powell’s anti-immigration rhetoric in the film, reviewer Graham Fuller believes East is East would ‘otherwise be no more political on the surface than an average episode of Coronation Street, which O’Donnell ironically evokes with an opening aerial shot of Victorian terraced housing that calls to mind the opening and closing credit sequences of the long-running Salford-based soap.’¹¹ Superficially, Fuller’s castigation may ring true for aspects of East is East as the film clearly includes aspects of situational comedy, but Fuller overlooks some of the ways that generational conflict in the film exposes cultural hierarchies between Pakistani Muslim and British cultures – which my analysis will bring to the fore.

No such claims, however, could be brought against Hanif Kureishi and Udayan Prassad’s film My Son the Fanatic which explores migrant father – postmigrant son conflict within the politically febrile context of the Rushdie Affair. Originally written as a London-set short story by Kureishi in 1994, the author adapted his work for the screen in 1997. In his adaptation, Kureishi chose to move the setting to Bradford so as to more explicitly link the film’s plot with the agitation against Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses which, as my thesis introduction outlined, has been regarded by some Muslims as an offensive and blasphemous text.¹² The West Yorkshire city of Bradford was one of the epicentres of

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¹² See introduction, p. 10.
demonstrations, including an organised book-burning, in 1989. Kureishi has explained that his screenplay was inspired by the protests in Bradford and how the tensions between secularist discourses of liberal multiculturalism and rising religious conservatism were being lived out within families. For Kureishi,

[…] few commentators noticed that the objections to *The Satanic Verses* represented another kind of protest. In Britain, many young Asians were turning to Islam, and some to a particularly extreme form, often called fundamentalism. Most of these young people were from Muslim families, of course, but usually families in which the practice of religion, in a country to which their families had come to make a new life, had fallen into disuse.

In his film adaptation, Kureishi pursues this contradiction and imagines it within a Bradford family. *My Son the Fanatic* traces the volatile relationship between the Pakistani migrant father Parvez, an aficionado of whisky and jazz who proudly talks of the opportunities and ‘freedoms’ that Britain affords him, and his son Farid, who shuns many of these celebrated freedoms. Instead, Farid finds fulfilment with a group of young Muslim men who adhere to ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam that exclude, for example, listening to music.

*My Son the Fanatic* is Kureishi’s only cinematic foray into Islamic fundamentalism within Britain. According to Leslie Udwin, the producer of *East is East*, *My Son the Fanatic* did not achieve the same mainstream popularity or

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15 Both *My Son the Fanatic* and *The Black Album* include book-burnings and what has been widely understood as ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ in a British context; namely Muslim males foregoing alcohol, practicing sexual restraint and espousing literalist and politicised forms of Sunni Islamic faith. It is crucial to note that in both texts, Kureishi’s focus is on ‘fundamentalist’ Islam rather than diverse religious experiences of British practitioners of Islam. For more comprehensive analyses of Islamic fundamentalism, see Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamist Movements* (London: A&C Black, 2010). For Islamic fundamentalism in a British context, see Lewis, *Islamic Britain*. 
commercial success as Ayub Khan-Din and Daniel O’Donnell’s film precisely due to *My Son the Fanatic*’s comparatively heavier subject matter. The film has, nonetheless, gained retrospective critical attention as part of Kureishi’s oeuvre and is often read alongside Kureishi’s literary engagement with Islamic fundamentalism in the novel *The Black Album* (1994), which will be discussed in the thesis’s second chapter. However, the film has a number of unique qualities that are neglected in comparative readings of *The Black Album* and *My Son the Fanatic*. For example, the film’s exploration of generational differences and father and son relationships which are absent from Kureishi’s 1994 novel.

Another intriguing point of comparison which is pertinent to dwell on is the casting of Indian actor Om Puri in both lead roles as father figure George in *East is East* and Parvez in *My Son the Fanatic*. Although these two paternal characters ideologically differ in George’s attachment to Pakistan and Parvez’s fondness for Britain, Puri’s characterisation is markedly similar in his performance of a dominating and sometimes brutish patriarch who castigates his family with thickly-accented and often grammatically-incorrect English. Puri’s presence in the two films is crucial to bear in mind as he had previously been associated with so-called Raj Revival television and films such as the television adaptation of Paul Scott’s novels *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984). Television series like *The Jewel in the Crown*, and films such as Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* (1982) and David Lean’s *A Passage to

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16 See Korte and Sternberg, p. 155.
all cast a generation of Indian actors like Puri and Saeed Jaffrey in films that nostalgically harked back to British colonial dominance over India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Puri, therefore, was instantly recognisable to a British cinema-going audience through his part in nostalgic televisual and cinematic depictions of British imperial dominance and power. His performance in *East in East* and *My Son the Fanatic*, particularly his accent and his retention of errors when speaking English, draws on audience expectations about an unsophisticated non-white ‘other’ which he had performed in *The Jewel in the Crown* but, as will become apparent in this chapter, Puri also challenges these assumptions through his depiction of vulnerability and anxiety in both Parvez and George. When read in terms of masculinity, it is noticeable that Puri is contrasting his past performances as a passive, colonised subject with George and Parvez’s expressions of a volatile and aggressive form of masculinity.

Focussing on the relationships between fathers and sons in this chapter is an instructive starting point for my thesis’s investigation into literary and cinematic representations of British Muslim masculinities because, as Raewyn Connell posits, for most men, fathers are their first male role models from whom practices of masculinity are first observed and absorbed. Although Connell does not focus on fatherhood in relation to her framework for understanding masculinities, Helena

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19 See Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 25. Whilst both of the films analysed in this chapter consist of sons raised within what can be described as nuclear families, a closely organised unit consisting of a female mother and male father united in heterosexual, conjugal union living with their offspring, this is not a universal experience. For example, many men are born without fathers and are raised solely by their mothers or with surrogate parents. Whilst the recent advances in lesbian and gay rights in Western Europe and North America have also raised awareness of men reared by same-sex couples.
Wahlström proposes that fathers be read through a similar lens. Taking her cue from Connell’s assertion that masculinity is a relational construct, with femininity as the counterpoint defining what masculinity is not, Wahlström contends that fatherhood is often constructed in oppositional relation to motherhood. To this end, Wahlström acknowledges conservative writings on parenthood that tend to state, in various different formulations, that the gender stability of boys and young men is dependent on an absolute distancing of fatherhood from motherhood. Indicative of this approach, is the suggestion from many right wing commentators that homosexuality is caused by absent, weak or effeminate fathering despite scientific evidence failing to substantiate such claims. In the interviews conducted for her book *Do Men Mother?* (2006), Andrea Doucet’s interviewees corroborated perceptions of a strict separation between ‘mothering’ and ‘fathering’. Doucet found that men ‘rely profoundly on mothers to define their own fathering’, noting that ‘fathers do not identify themselves as mothers or refer to the work they do as mothering […] Thus, while it is not always clear what the essence of fathering is, what is certain for men is that it is not mothering.’

As Doucet claims, to associate being a father with mothering would mean defining fatherhood by ‘caring work that is typically referred to by most critics as “conventionally feminine”’. This leads Doucet to ask whether ‘fathers’ caregiving disrupts the smooth surface of hegemonic masculinity? Joseph H. Pleck and William Marsiglio shed some light on this line of enquiry, showing how fathers tend

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22 Ibid., p. 217; Doucet’s emphasis.
23 Ibid., p. 38.
24 Ibid., p. 38.
to enforce gender stereotyping more assiduously than mothers. This tendency extends across a number of different activities and domains, including toy preferences, play styles, chores, discipline, interactions and assessments of their personality. Pleck and Marsiglio argue that although both boys and girls receive gender messages from their parents, boys are encouraged to conform to culturally-valued masculine ideals more than girls are encouraged to conform to lower-status feminine ideals. Even so, in examining the relation of fatherhood to the production of hegemonic masculinities, it must be assumed that fatherhood, like masculinity, is relationally constructed. Fatherhood is varied and depends on a variety of different factors, including class positioning and juxtapositions with other identities and practices. In the context of this chapter, the question is how these two films depict paternal efforts to impose culturally specific ideas of hegemonic masculinity upon their sons against the backdrop of transnational movement and subsequent settlement.

A comparative analysis of these two films exposes intriguing similarities and differences between constructions of British Muslim masculinity, in particular, revolving around each paternal protagonists’ diverging relationships with Islam and their ‘home’ and host cultures. Both films, then, are invested in questioning the significance of place, culture and postmigration to practices of masculinity. Indeed, in both films, tensions occur as the two consecutive generations of men have different ideas about how men should behave. These perceptions, expectations and performances of masculinity are tied to specific localities and reveal conflicting

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cultural loyalties between father and son. The first section of my chapter, ‘Like Father? Like Son?’ investigates precisely this nexus by using anthropological frameworks proposed by the theorist Arjun Appadurai to ask what hegemonic masculinity constitutes for the two fictional fathers and how they seek to enforce these scripts upon their sons. The second section, Framing Fathers and Sons, reads each film’s engagement with photography as a means by which paternal figures propagate and archive their visions of the family. While the final section of this chapter, Protesting against the Patriarch, explores the various insurrections against paternal authority and how sons rebel against their father’s monolithic visions of culture and gender by building alternative constructions of masculinity. In *East is East*, this revolves around being closer to British subcultures as configured by the film’s references to Glam Rock, whereas for *My Son the Fanatic* this involves a form of what Raewyn Connell terms masculine protest in which Farid’s father’s refusal to acknowledge their Muslim heritage leads to his son’s espousal of hyper-masculinised and politicised forms of religious faith. Ultimately, the following pages probe what inter-generational conflicts in each film reveal about constructions of masculinity within Muslim migrant families, how masculinities change and adapt through migration, and assesses the role of the father figure in the development of postmigrant masculinities.

‘Like Father, Like Son’?

*East is East* opens with a photographic image of George mounted upon a living room wall which is accompanied by text explaining that he, ‘a Muslim from Pakistan’,
came to England in 1937 ‘to find work’. Once settled in Salford, George met his wife Ella and the two had a family of seven children. The family’s lifestyle is supported by a fish and chip shop which, although named ‘George’s Fish and Chip Shop’ and functioning on a gendered division of labour in which George is perceived as the manager, is actually owned by Ella due to her status as a naturalised British citizen. From the film’s outset, then, George’s family are contextualised around his financial motivations for migration. Similarly, Parvez in *My Son the Fanatic*, explains that both his decision to relocate with his wife was determined by unfortunate economic conditions. Now living in Bradford as a taxi driver, Parvez justifies his long and demanding working hours as a necessity in order to provide for his family and, especially, for his son Farid’s future. What emerges from each film, then, is a close connection between fatherhood, masculinity and migration. In other words, it is the two characters’ view that, as men, their exceptional responsibility is to be the primary earners of wealth and financial sustenance for a family.

In this sense, Kureishi and Khan-Din’s films mirror many real-life gendered discourses surrounding migration. Jeff Hearn and Richard Howson find, for example, that men are generally “the primary movers” whose desire to relocate is decisive in their families’ emigration because of their major contribution to their families’

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26 The nation of Pakistan did not technically exist until 1947 following the withdrawal of British colonial forces from the South Asian subcontinent. Underlying tensions between the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh populations of South Asia had erupted in violence after the British colonial forces announced their intention to grant India independence. Originally planning to found a pan-Indian secular state from British India, the colonial government oversaw the partition of the sub-continent on religio-cultural grounds. Cyril Radcliffe, a colonial official who had not previously visited the region, was charged with imposing two new countries upon the subcontinent. India was to be the homeland for the region’s Hindus and Sikhs whilst Pakistan and East Pakistan, later to become Bangladesh, were to be united as a single state for Muslims. A traumatic population exchange ensued as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were forced to flee their communities and settle in unfamiliar cities on the other side of the artificially drawn borders. For more information, see Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
livelihoods’. Taking their cue from Raewyn Connell, Hearn and Howson demonstrate a robust connection between internationally-normative conceptions of hegemonic masculinity, which propagate the importance of breadwinning and having a family, to the decision by men to migrate so as to better achieve this hegemonic masculine ideal.

Within the context of the newly-founded nation of Pakistan that George and Parvez migrate from, ‘the male breadwinner migration model was reinforced through a confluence of religious, cultural, national and gender discourses in Pakistan’. As the Islamic Republic was emerging from British colonialism, Pakistan sought to demonstrate its strength against ‘the West’ whilst distinguishing itself against the Hindu-majority secular state of India and creating unity amongst a myriad of ethno-cultural groups with conflicting tribal allegiances. Consequently, Pakistan became a country in which differing schools and doctrines of Islam, as well as diverse ethnic backgrounds and tribal affiliations in the region, were repressed in favour of a politically-defined and enforced Sunni Muslim pan-identity. Amanullah De Sondy points out that the erasure of the population’s disparate ethno-religious and cultural heritage was matched by a reactionary return to literalist Sunni Islamic teachings and interpretations of gender. De Sondy writes, ‘as a country that was defining itself on Islamic lines, religion, gender, sex and sexuality were inevitably linked in the country’s national discourse.’ Thus, many of the men who left Pakistan soon after

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29 Ibid., p. 255.
its independence were imbued with ‘profoundly patriarchal views’. De Sondy elaborates:

> These [patriarchal] views came from a rigid interpretation of religious scripture and were disseminated by the nation state. Within such a climate, strict gender roles and forms were crystallised. The masculine duty to economically provide for families had been galvanised in a national rhetoric that espoused very distinct roles for men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.

As such, Pakistan’s economic situation during and shortly after the partition era meant that it was not the ideal place to be for the country’s poorer classes. The vast majority of Pakistani migrants either left their families and arrived on their own in Britain in order to fulfil their duties as financial providers, or chose to settle abroad in order to evince masculine roles as fathers and breadwinners. Amongst these migrants, there was a feeling that labour migration strengthened their family not only financially but also through an adherence to gender roles by answering the perceived masculine imperative to work, provide and produce families. Most migrant men saw an opportunity in the post-war British demand for manual labourers and the comparatively advantageous wages to be found on the British labour market. Whilst many others, like the fictional counterpart Parvez, also chose to move away from a nation that was taking increasingly tough action on atheists, non-Muslims and political dissidents. Despite their ideological differences, both George and Parvez are imbued with a shared hegemonic masculine ideal that depends upon the features illustrated above: the masculine imperative to earn money and father a family. In each film,

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30 Ibid., p. 255.
31 Ibid., p. 256.
paternal protagonists try to translate these conceptions of breadwinner masculinity within the context of their new British homeland and inculcate their sons within these notions of masculinity but in a manner that accords with their own contrasting affiliations and ties towards Islam, Pakistan and Britain. Marriage, in *East is East* and *My Son the Fanatic*, represents an important way of fathers attempting to engineer their sons into their hegemonic masculine ideal with each paternal figure either interfering or, in George’s case, arranging their sons’ heterosexual unions.

For many migrant families, arranging a marriage with other Muslim families in Britain or abroad was regarded as protection against the ‘corrupting’ influence of British society as well as an opportunity to better their family’s reputation by marrying into other families of a favourable class or caste position. Despite being found in many parts of the world and even within some upper class communities in Britain, most notably amongst the British Royal Family, arranged marriages contracted by immigrant Muslim communities in the UK seem to have attracted the most vociforous objections. Avtar Brah contends that the opprobrium levelled at the practice of forced and arranged marriages amongst British migrant communities is especially unwarranted as arranged marriages happen much less frequently than the British media suggests.\(^{32}\) In spite of these arguments, arranged and forced marriages have, as Sarfraz Manzoor points out, ‘long epitomised to the rest of [British] society all that is alien about Asian culture’.\(^{33}\) Media, television and cinema have played key roles in these perceptions, with the arranged marriages featured in *East is East* serving as a paradigmatic example.

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Indeed, much of the film’s conflict centres upon domineering George’s efforts to marry off the oldest three of his five sons thereby serving as the most conspicuous symbol of ‘cultural difference’ between George Khan and his British-born sons. The theme of forced marriage is introduced at an early stage in the film, as soon after the film’s opening credits, the family are shown preparing for a special family occasion. A number of important visual clues including colourful saris, henna, exquisitely gilded sherwani coats – all of which would become recognisable to a British audience in later mainstream cinematic hits about South Asian weddings such as Monsoon Wedding (dir. Mira Nair, 2001), Bride and Prejudice (dir. Gurinda Chadha, 2004) and Bend It Like Beckham (dir. Gurinda Chadha, 2002) – are suggestive of South Asian marriage ceremonies. Much to their chagrin, the Khan children are forced to don traditional South Asian clothing and meticulous care is taken to ensure that the children fit the exacting appearances that George requires. The wedding preparations also expose the gender dynamics inherent within the Khan household as Ella assumes responsibility for perfecting daughter Meenah and the other four sons’ presentation while the task of assisting the groom, the Khan’s eldest son Nazir, falls to George. This division of labour is revealing in a number of ways: first, as the father takes accountability for preparing the Khan son who most of the wedding guests will be paying attention to, and second, through his care to ensure Nazir looks ‘authentically Pakistani’, George’s own reputation amongst the community is on display. In short, the wedding is less about Nazir’s own happiness and more about George’s own stature as a father of respectable, healthy, young Pakistani-Muslim men.

34 Monsoon Wedding, dir. Mira Nair (FilmFour, 2001), Bride and Prejudice, dir. Gurinder Chadha (Pathe Pictures, 2004) and Bend It Like Beckham, dir. Gurinder Chadha (Lion’s Gate House Entertainment, 2002).
From the outset, there is an undercurrent of foreboding to the wedding preparations as Nazir is depicted gazing forlornly into the mirror. The camera’s positioning behind Nazir further creates a sense in which the viewer is trespassing on an acutely private moment of introspection. From this scene, assumptions can be made from the anxious expression that Nazir is sporting, that he is the one to be married. A combination of Nazir’s demeanour and the melancholy backing soundtrack evoke a sentiment far more serious than pre-marital nerves. The viewer’s supposition is confirmed when George begins to talk about tradition culminating in a tender scene whereby the father declares that ‘today’ his son has made him feel ‘very proud’ whilst the musical backdrop evokes a distinct sense of anxiety. All the while, the camera’s use of shallow focus foregrounds the tense and intimate encounter between father and son.

George is proud of his son as he is conforming to a widely practiced South Asian Muslim custom - his arranged marriage to the daughter of a powerful local family. The wedding ceremony itself, with its clothing, decorations and mise-en-scene all bring to mind associations with South Asian weddings as previously mentioned. In her study of European migrant cinema, Daniela Berghahn compellingly argues that instances of weddings and circumcisions resonate with Arjun Appadurai’s theorisations upon the ‘production of locality’, which I will hence adapt to my readings of masculinity construction through these celebrations.35 For Appadurai, the contemporary climate of globalisation and increased transnational migration has led to a rupture between place, referred to as ‘territory’, and a sense of

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familiarity to this territory, what Appadurai terms ‘locality’. Increased patterns of migration and transnational mobility have therefore disrupted time-honoured relationships between territory and locality, by creating a split between the places people live in and a sense of collective kinship. Appadurai argues, then, that ceremonies such as circumcisions and weddings serve a crucial purpose as ‘complex social structures’ in which locality is inscribed onto bodies and subjects, and, therefore, are ‘ways to embody as well as to locate bodies in socially and spatially defined communities.’

When people move abroad, adherence to cultural practices such as circumcision, wedding rituals, culinary and sartorial traditions all become signifiers of individual and collective allegiances to far-off places and communities. In her analysis of migrant film, Berghahn uses Appadurai’s framework to argue that the inclusion of weddings become performances of protagonists’ familial unity and a display of fidelity to the traditions and conventions of their geographically-distant homelands.

George’s pleasure, then, accords with Appadurai and Berghahn’s interpretation on marriage ceremonies as ‘rites of passage’ in which ‘local subjects’ are produced. George’s fixation with ensuring that his children fit the sartorial requirements is one aspect in which he is able to visually indicate his family’s preservation of gender expectations as well as affective and social obligations from Pakistan in their host country. In other words, to attest to his sons’ continuing loyalty to Pakistani Muslim cultural mores, as well as his powers as a father who can raise ‘localised’ Pakistani-Muslim sons within the context of Northern England.

However, George’s delight soon turns sour as Nazir flees the wedding without consummating the marriage ritual. Nazir’s swift exit first appears as a

westernised young man’s escape from a patriarchal South Asian Muslim tradition, but the film undermines the audience’s expectation when it reveals that Nazir’s real reason for running away from his bride is his homosexuality. He goes to Eccles and becomes ‘Mr. Nigel’, a successful hat designer with a French partner. To his father, he is dead because he has ‘put shame’ on the Khan family and Nazir’s portrait is demonstratively removed from the family photo gallery on the living-room wall – the full significance of which will be discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter.

Nazir’s unsuccessful wedding prefigures the conflicts over arranged marriage that continue throughout the film. Soon after the fateful day, George Khan consults the local imam who advises the father of five that until each of the sons are married to Pakistani Muslim women, they will continue to be a problem for him. The dilemma, the imam states, is that the young men have a British mother and are being raised in a non-Muslim environment. If George wants his sons to grow into respectful and obedient young Muslim men then he must redouble his efforts to impose their cultural heritage upon them and expunge the corrupting influence of British society. Arranged marriages to daughters of prosperous and revered local Muslim families is, the imam advises, the best way to achieve his ends and ensure that his sons are ‘no longer a worry’ for the father. George Khan takes the imam’s recommendations on board and the central familial conflict in the film is structured around the family patriarch’s tenacious efforts to marry his sons.

Despite George’s attempts to produce exemplary Pakistani Muslim sons on British soil, he undermines his own efforts when it emerges that he has forgotten to get his youngest son Sajid circumcised. On break from lessons at the ‘Mosque school’, the youngest of George and Ella’s sons, Sajid, goes to the open air toilet to
relieve himself. At the urinals, his classmates are challenging each other to hit circular targets on the urinal walls by aiming the trajectory of their excretions. Dutifully, Sajid unzips and competes with successful results. In the process of urinating and exposing his penis, the other competitors notice that Sajid has not been circumcised. One of the onlookers alerts the mullah who later informs George of his son’s objectionable foreskin. Once again incited with anger, George is incredulous that he has neglected to have his son’s foreskin removed. Snarling that his son has ‘made a show’ of him and wondering how he can rescue his reputation at the mosque, George surmises that it is his British wife’s fault for the omission. Portioning the blame on Ella prevents George from facing the uncomfortable truth: that he neglected to ensure his son went through an operation that is a religio-culturally coded marker of masculinity, and the ramifications such an oversight has on his self-perception as a father raising Pakistani Muslim sons.

Hastily, George organises a circumcision operation to rectify Sajid’s unruly penis, thus enabling his induction into prescribed notions of Pakistani Muslim manhood. However the situation leads the Khan children to question circumcision as a practice. Working in George’s fish and chip shop, Saleem draws a picture of an uncircumcised penis whilst his siblings gather around him. Meenah and Tariq laugh whilst Maneer looks on disdainfully, commenting that ‘foreskins are dirty’. Maneer’s censoriousness is mocked by his siblings as Saleem retorts that ‘they [foreskins] wouldn’t be there if they were dirty’, giving way to a question from Meenah: ‘why do they cut it off?’ Saleem offers an answer that amounts to little more than crude sexual reasoning, stating that the removal of the foreskin ‘lessens the feeling in your
knob’, thereby demonstrating his own conflation of Muslim religio-cultural practices with sexual restriction.

George’s answer to the debate is in the following scene as he tries to tempt Sajid out of the toilet by telling him that the factious flap of skin belongs not to him but to Allah. George’s answer reveals ignorance about the Muslim practice of circumcision which is not a religious duty but more of a culturally important practice. As Abdelwahab Bouhdiba sets out in his study *Sexuality in Islam*, circumcision is not mentioned in the Koran but is described in the Sunna (the recorded actions and words of the Prophet Muhammad) as a highly recommended act and Muslims generally see it as a ‘socially obligatory’ initiation into manhood and the wider transnational Muslim community or *umma*.\(^{37}\) Put differently, circumcision is a fundamental marker of both Pakistani and transnational Muslim masculinity and locality in Appadurai’s sense of concept. Whilst George is incorrect in explaining the significance of circumcision with religious reasoning, he is dismayed that his son has not had his foreskin removed, which he believes is a prerequisite for Muslim males. Within George’s logic of cultural separatism, Sajid’s retention of the foreskin excludes him from membership to the Khan family and assimilation into codes of Muslim masculinity. For George, Sajid’s uncut foreskin marks him corporally with a British locality and associates him with white British men who generally only undertake circumcision for medical reasons. Moreover, the discovery of Sajid’s residual foreskin within the confines of an Islamic school that George forces his sons to attend in order to ensure observance of their Muslim heritage, both exacerbates their father’s sense of failure to cultivate proper Pakistani Muslim men but, more

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significantly, also threatens his own constructed image as a father who is raising localised male subjects.

In contrast to George Khan’s allegiance to his homeland in East is East, Pakistani taxi driver Parvez, the family patriarch in My Son the Fanatic, feels no such warmth to his country of birth. Parvez speaks disparagingly of Pakistan a number of times throughout the film, characterising the country variously as ‘intolerant’ and ‘backward’. At one point in the film Parvez talks about the lack of religious freedom in the country, recounting that he once asked his religious teacher why his Hindu best friend would go to ‘Kaffir hell’ (hell of the unbelievers), in response to which the young Parvez was beaten. Parvez’s criticisms of Pakistan are often closely followed with praise for the UK which he sees as a place of opportunity as demonstrated in a scene where he collects German businessman Herr Schitz from the airport and drives him to his hotel. Keen to extol the prosperity of his adopted homeland, Parvez points out areas of interest in the city to his passenger. Parvez talks of Britain’s ‘glory’ as he points out mills built during Bradford’s boom during the Industrial Revolution, and as he passes his friend’s restaurant explains: ‘This restaurant, sir, belongs to my friend Fizzy. There, the fattish one. We came together to this country. He had five pounds which he borrowed from me. Look now. And look at me!’ Indeed, Parvez uses his comparative financial success to enjoy a vibrant lifestyle in the UK in which he indulges his voracious appetite for scotch, listens to jazz music and socialises, eventually leading to a romantic affair with a local prostitute named Bettina.

Parvez’s criticisms of Pakistani cultural mores are cosmetic rather than exacting, however. This is most obviously the case in his patriarchal behaviour
towards his wife, Minoo, and son, Farid. As in *East is East*, the initial instigation of familial conflict in *My Son the Fanatic* revolves around the breaking off of a marriage. The engagement between Farid and Madelaine Fingerhut, the daughter of the local (white British) chief of police Inspector Fingerhut, has all the hallmarks of an arranged marriage. To begin with, Parvez boasts about the union at every given opportunity. These boasts revolve around the social and hierarchical implications of his son marrying into a prominent family in the community as opposed to pride for his son’s happiness. For example, in the previously mentioned scene with Herr Schitz, Parvez tells the newly arrived visitor: ‘He [Farid] is marrying Madeleine. Madelaine Fingerhut, the top policeman’s daughter. He impressed her no end.’

When Farid breaks off his engagement with Madelaine, Parvez is mortified and reacts in a manner that exposes his involvement in the union as well as highlighting similarities to *East is East*’s George Khan when confronted with his son Tariq’s refusal of an arranged marriage. Speaking about Farid in *My Son the Fanatic*, Parvez threatens to ‘break open his face until he obeys’. At a later point, Parvez complains: ‘You go to [others] when I have hand-picked Miss Fingerhut!’ Meanwhile in *East is East*, Tariq’s obstinacy is riposted with a punch from his father and a threat to ‘fix him’ until he ‘sees sense’. In each instance, fathers resort to physical violence as a means of trying to enforce their visions of masculinity upon their sons. Furthermore, both fathers draw on language that invokes ‘fixing’ sons which implies that George and Parvez perceive their sons as being in some way ‘broken’ in that they do not conform or follow their model of masculinity. In both films, fathers have sought to translate their visions of hegemonic masculinity upon their sons, but neglected to respect their own sons’ agency or individuality. The
concept of ‘fixing’ then implies fathers believe they can mould or construct their sons through inculcating them within their rigid ideals of hegemonic masculinity that are based on equally static conceptions of ‘British’ and ‘Pakistani’ cultures. Violent and intimidating behaviour, then, become their defensive methods to threaten them into conformity with an unrealisable ideal that does not account for a diversity of different interpretations of masculinity, Britishness or Muslimness nor the possibility of transcultural forms of identity.

Parvez’s violent reaction underscores the superficiality of his criticisms of ‘backward’ and patriarchal nature of Pakistani cultures. Although to convey his family’s successful ‘integration’ within British society rather than demonstrate loyalty to Pakistani cultural obligations, Parvez’s arrangement of Farid’s marriage exposes a vision for his son’s life that is comparable to George Khan’s aspirations. Each father has chosen and approved of their sons’ fiancée in a manner that conforms to principles of arranged marriage. Motivating the matrimonial alliances in both films are paternal figures who contrive to make their sons marry women of a higher class position in families who have respectful standings in either the British ‘mainstream’ or the local Pakistani communities. In this respect, it is germane to reflect on Appadurai’s writing on weddings as a tool in which locality is inscribed upon subjects. As previously argued, George arranges his sons’ marriages in order to demonstrate their affinity with Pakistani cultural and affective obligations. Parvez is managing Farid’s marital arrangements in order to mark out the family’s fidelity to their adopted British homeland. In so doing, Parvez is trying to imprint a British locality upon his son, Farid. Nonetheless, in his organisation of the marriage and fury at its termination, Parvez betrays similarly aggressive parenting methods to George.
Khan. Crucially, both arranged marriages reveal the ways in which each father constructs a filial ideal according to their cultural allegiances to either Pakistan or Britain. Throughout the films these constructions are exposed to be fragile. This is particularly apparent in each film’s engagement with family photography, which I will now discuss in the next section.

**Framing fathers and sons**

As a means of visually expressing each father’s idealised perception of their son and their families, taking photographs of family or the exhibition of family photographs figure prominently in both films. *East is East* and *My Son the Fanatic*’s engagement with the medium suggests acute parallels with a wealth of theoretical writings from cultural theorists like Susan Sontag, Pierre Bourdieu and Marianne Hirsch who have explored the role photography plays in constructing a family mythology that enshrines unity and complicity with social and gender norms.  

Family photography is widely used as an ‘authentic’ record of family harmony. According to Susan Sontag, it became an essential genre and social practice for recording and celebrating family unity during a crucial moment of social upheaval amidst industrialisation and the spread of European colonialism. During this period in nineteenth century Europe, when the extended white family began to disintegrate,

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Photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrial countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery. As that claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family, was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialise, to restate symbolically, imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life. Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family’s photograph album is generally about the extended family – and, often is all that remains of it.\textsuperscript{40}

For Sontag, then, photography serves a performative purpose in which families document and publically advertise their shared harmony. In her words, from the nineteenth century onwards, family photography has become a ‘rite of passage’ that ‘constructs a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness’\textsuperscript{41}. Generally taken at gatherings and occasions such as weddings, marriages or, for most Muslim and Jewish families, celebrations after a boy’s circumcision, photographs work to ‘solemnize [ing] and immortalize [ing] the high points of family life [thereby] reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity.’\textsuperscript{42}  
Pierre Bourdieu argues a similar point of view, asserting that family photographs depict mothers, fathers and their children in very particular ways: families are generally always shown to be happy and at leisure.\textsuperscript{43} As Bourdieu extrapolates, because photography elides the difficult aspects of family life, photography is integral to the creation of a familial mythology; it captures what families aspire to, rather than what they are.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., pp. 8-9. 
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 19. 
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p. 19. 
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p.19.
Corresponding with this interpretation of family photographs as performative constructions, the fathers in *East is East* and *My Son the Fanatic* publicly display images of their sons that conform to their filial ideals. The public exhibiting of these photographs plays a crucial role not only in constructing a mythology around their sons by obviating any signs of inter-familial tension and documenting their sons’ claims to hegemonic masculinity, but is also a means of self-construction on the parts of George and Parvez. These photographs, framed and either mounted on walls or brandished in their workplace, are taken at ‘high points of family life and unity’, such as the engagement celebration between Parvez’s family and the Fingerhuts in *My Son the Fanatic*. In *East is East*, individual photographic portraits of George’s sons are removed from display and used to advertise the positive attributes of the young men when brokering marriage deals.\(^{45}\) In both cases, these photographs are used by the fathers to brag about their parenting skills in that they have raised respectful, obedient and successful sons. In this sense, family photography in the two films becomes not so much about documenting the sons themselves but rather a visual validation of each fathers’ ‘successful’ masculinity.

In *My Son the Fanatic*, the opening fifteen minutes mark an extensive engagement with family photography. The first shot after the opening credits is a close up of the Fingerhut family album which contains pictures of the family’s daughter, Madelaine. The displaying of the photography album immediately gives the viewer an important visual clue as to the main function of the film: the British Fingerhuts and Parvez’s British Pakistani family are celebrating the coming engagement of Farid and Madelaine. There is a clear opposition between the ‘prim,

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 19.
snobbish, middle class’ Mrs. Fingerhut and her visitors, the Pakistani migrant taxi
driver Parvez and his family.\textsuperscript{46} Emphasising this difference in this socio-economic
background, the Fingerhut house is decorated with a number of lavish objects that
disclose their wealth and pretentions. Most obviously, a gold framed painting of a
hunting scene hangs above their fireplace. Amidst these symbols of wealth and
British upper class heritage, Mrs. Fingerhut barely conceals her discomfort with her
visitors, as Parvez is keen to prove his family’s integration within British society. He
does so by making a number of inane boasts about Farid’s cricket abilities and his
son’s promising career as an accountant.

Parvez attempts to convey his integration further by taking photographs of the
occasion. As Laura Copier observes, the photography sequence at the beginning of
\textit{My Son the Fanatic} positions Parvez’s family and the Fingerhut family within the
same frame thereby invoking David Bordwell’s writing on the ‘same frame
heuristic’.\textsuperscript{47} This means that if characters appear in the same frame, they are united.

By positioning characters in one frame, ‘it reintegrates space, reunites the individual
with his group to establish a sense of wholeness’.\textsuperscript{48} The act of photography therefore
cements Parvez’s family’s inclusion in both the Fingerhut family and British society
at large.

The union between Parvez’s family and the Fingerhuts is also visible in the
film’s use of deep focus during a discussion between the two fathers. In this type of

\textsuperscript{46} Hanif Kureishi, \textit{Completed Screenplays 1} (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 281.
\textsuperscript{47} Laura Copier, ‘Radicalism Begins at Home: Fundamentalism and the Family in \textit{My Son the
Fanatic}’, in Patricia Pisters and Wim Staat, \textit{Shooting the Family: Transnational Media and
Intercultural Values} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), pp. 89-103 (p. 92); David
Bordwell, \textit{Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema} (Cambridge,
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 178.
shot emphasis is placed on the dynamic between the foreground and the background. At one point, Parvez and Mr. Fingerhut are shown conversing in the same frame with a deep focus thus demonstrating their unity and status as the head of each family. Whilst in the background, Farid and Madelaine are depicted cavorting with Mr. Fingerhut’s police helmet. The initial appearance of Farid’s fuzzy figure between the two fathers highlights his position as a potential new family head whilst the emergence of Madelaine stresses the couple’s togetherness. Madelaine puts her father’s police hat on her fiancé’s head causing Farid to leave the scene. Soon after, the foregrounding position of Parvez and Mr. Fingerhut has also dispersed. These shots presage the eventual conflict in the film as Farid and Madelaine will not marry on account of her fiancé’s hatred of her father. Likewise, Farid’s movement away from the shot may prefigure his eventual estrangement from his father due to the cancelled engagement.

Besides demonstrating Parvez’s desire for his family to appear integrated within British society and at union with the Fingerhuts, the photography sequence is also an endeavour to show harmony within Parvez’s family. Significantly, the final photograph, in a series of scenes that situate members of each family in a variety of juxtapositions, is taken of Parvez and Farid. The film focuses on this last picture for longer than any of the previous images symbolising the importance of this relationship to the film. The symbolic significance of this photograph is indicated further in the following shot where the viewer sees the picture of father and son proudly pinned to the bonnet of Parvez’s taxi. Parvez’s affection for the image is due to its projection and affirmation of his filial ideals. His son is pictured appearing respectable in a suit poised to marry with the daughter of a rich local family.
Moreover, both father and son are raising glasses of champagne in a celebratory pose. The father and son’s consumption of champagne emphasises not only the jubilance of the engagement but also is a beverage that has a strong association with upper classes thereby underlining Farid’s potential upward mobility. Furthermore, the drinking of champagne is also an obvious rejection of the commonly-held view that Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, and that all Muslims refrain from drinking intoxicants, and, therefore, serves as an assertion of the taxi driver’s anti-religious views. Parvez’s proud display of the snapshot in his place of work is a statement upon his abilities as a father of a successful young British man and his assimilation into British society.

Like *My Son the Fanatic*, *East is East* also uses family photography as an emblem of the Khan family’s union and loyalty. Following the opening credits, the next shot is from within the family home. As previously suggested by the clothing of the characters in the opening scene, the interior shots confirm the temporal setting by depicting a humble home decorated in wallpaper and ornaments redolent of 1970s Britain. Above the fireplace hang a collection of photographs of the family members that simultaneously introduce the viewer to the characters whilst also communicating the implicit hierarchy within the Khan household. At the centre are portraits of the two most prominent members of the family, George Khan and his white British wife Ella, surrounded by individual portraits of their children dressed in their best clothes. At the top is their eldest son Nazir, followed by pictures of Abdul and Tariq that are

49 The Islamic stance on alcohol is a complex one that varies according to individual interpretations and upon differing schools of Islamic faith. Alevi Muslims in Turkey, for example, do not forbid the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Whilst many religious scholars have used certain sections of the Koran to argue that alcohol is forbidden, there are a diverse range of contrasting views that vary from supporting personal choice to advocating alcoholic drinks. For a more detailed overview of these debates, see Mona Siddiqui, *The Good Muslim: Reflections on Classic Islamic Law and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 90-106.
positioned either side of the central photograph. At the lower end are pictures of Maneer and Saleem finishing with daughter Meenah and youngest son Sajid. In this wall display, the age and sex of the children entail the positioning of each photograph thus there is a clear visual ordering of power at work with the eldest son at the top descending to the daughter and youngest son. Tellingly, Meenah is actually older than Saleem but, by virtue of her sex, her picture is at the bottom of the exhibited photographs thereby asseverating the privileged status of males within the family dynamic. The arrangement of these photographs in the family’s sitting room, as a space in which guests are received and entertained, is significant. Their exhibition in this public space ensures a myth of family unity and respectability is projected to the onlooker, which the film’s audience soon learns is far from reality.

Indeed, there is a disparity between the photographic appearances of the Khan sons and their portrayal in the film. This is particularly conspicuous with Tariq whose suited visage in the mounted portrait contrasts with his long hair and his fondness for leather jackets and flamboyant shirts - all of which call to mind the late 1960s and 1970s ‘glam rock’ fashion that will be discussed in the subsequent section. These photographs, which enjoy a prominent position in the household, are therefore not affectionate documentations of fatherly love for his sons but are spuriously exhibited as an expression of George’s own claims to hegemonic masculinity insofar as his upbringing has produced healthy sons that conform to images of respectable, normative masculinity. In other words, the public display of these portraits is not about the people they aim to represent but rather communicate George’s own success as the family breadwinner and raiser of healthy sons that honour his vision of hegemonic masculinity.
George and Parvez openly flaunt pictures of their sons to advertise their own achievements as fathers and construct a public image of themselves. A commonality between these two fathers, for instance, is how both refer the attention of visitors to these assembled photographs, in order to obtain praise. The most dramatic reflection of this is when George Khan takes photographs of Tariq and Abdul with him to Bradford, in order to negotiate their marriages to Mr. Shah’s daughters. In one scene, a large group of Pakistani men from the local area pass around the photographs and effusively comment on Tariq and Abdul’s health, their accomplishments and George’s fortune in raising so many sons. Similarly, when Parvez drives the affluent German businessman Herr Schitz from the airport to a hotel, he elicits compliments from his passenger about Farid who, Parvez is quick to add, is due to marry the daughter of a prosperous local family. Both of these scenes, then, are effective in highlighting the ways that masculinity is according to Michael Kimmel, ‘a homosocial enactment […] we want other men to grant us our manhood’. Thus through George and Parvez’s brandishing of their sons’ photographs, they are simultaneously evincing their own abilities in parenting and producing sons who conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity whilst also having their masculinity conferred upon them by his peers.

Revealingly, the photographic display in the Khan living room is encircled by two decorative plates furnished with Koranic inscriptions. Exhibiting these plates confirms George Khan’s influence within the household, as there are no objet d’art signalling Ella’s cultural background or extended family alongside the portraits and

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plates. The absence of Ella’s heritage is underscored further by two black-and-white photographs of George’s family in Pakistan on the mantel of the fireplace. As well as indicating George’s control within the home, these plates also project how George wants himself and his family to be seen, that is as identifying with and harbouring an allegiance to his Muslim heritage. Therefore, displaying religio-cultural artefacts alongside the family photographs in the living room is a visual articulation for the family’s visitors, and the viewer, as to George’s mindset and his successful obtainment of a Muslim familial ideal, most obviously expressed through his oldest sons. The film’s narrative, however, disproves the impressions these photographs give onlookers and, in the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the extent to which George’s sons rebel against this constructed mythology of familial unity and conformity to hegemonic masculine ideals proposed by these images. In both films, however, the disparity between these framed portraits and the appearance of sons in the films themselves abrogate each father’s conception of hegemonic masculinity as a realistic and achievable gender practice.

**Protesting against the Patriarch**

While sons appear decent and demure in the family photographs, they are represented very differently in their daily lives. Specifically, Tariq’s drooping locks and vibrant clothing in *East is East* and Farid’s white salwar kameez in *My Son the Fanatic* express sharply contrasting constructions of masculinity and worldviews than their father’s ideals as detailed in the portraits. Many of the young men’s sartorial decisions and, as this section will also discuss, consumption of media are
purposely chosen in opposition to their father’s sensibilities. The following paragraphs interrogate the significance of these gendered generational rebellions and what they reveal about how postmigrant protagonists in the film translate their masculinity in dialogue or in antithesis to the inflexible constructions of masculinity encountered in the previous two segments of my chapter.

In *East is East*, the most recognisable difference is between Tariq’s portrayal in the family photographs and how he is depicted in action. Contrasting with his sober attire and tidy hairstyle in the photograph, Tariq dresses in an array of colourful clothes with a mop of carefully groomed long hair. Tariq’s presentation is consonant with the fashion styles propagated in the Glam Rock movement. The film’s temporal setting in 1971 converges with the burgeoning youth subculture in which the questioning of gender norms was central to the popular movement.\(^1\) Purveyors of the Glam Rock project most notably artists such as Marc Bolan, the frontman of the band T-Rex, Suzi Quatro and David Bowie consciously incorporated gender performativity and sexual ambiguity into their acts during this period. Bolan, Bowie and Quatro blurred gender binaries by experimenting with androgyny in their extravagant costumes and cosmetics. In the process, Bolan, Quatro and Bowie all highlighted the socially constructed nature of gender and sexual identities. The drive to disrupt and problematise gender binaries was also integrated within their artistic production, as the music of Bowie, Bolan and Quatro combined musical

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experimention with lyrics that drew on high and popular cultural forms to poke fun at constructions of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 134-135; Paradigmatic examples can be found in David Bowie’s hit single ‘Rebel Rebel’ (1974) in which the lyrics celebrate gender fluidity: ‘Got your mother in a whirl/Because she’s not sure if you’re a boy or a girl’. The accompanying video featured Bowie sporting androgynous clothing and engaging in homoerotic displays of affection with his male lead guitarist, Mick Ronson. Likewise, the lyrics to Bowie’s ‘Boys Keep Swinging’ (1979) critique male privileges whilst the promotional video features the singer adopting a variety of female clothing.}

Iain Chambers explains that such articulations of gender performativity in 1970s Glam Rock were a reaction to the ‘mounting resistance’ to the personal freedoms gained in the hippy and free love movements in the 1960s.\footnote{Ibid., p. 134.} In 1970s Britain, ‘the spaces of social experiments began closing down, earlier boundaries were pulled back and prospects retracted as the solid values of “tradition” closed ranks.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 134.} In Chambers’ view, glam rock turned ‘public attention to the details of sexuality [...] when precisely at that time a new, authoritarian morality was spreading over Britain’s cultural landscapes.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 135.} In so doing, Glam rock offered ‘new possibilities, particularly involving the public construction of sexual roles in youth culture’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 135.} Glam rock, in other words, created opportunities for performers and their fans to defy and interrogate the increasing conservatism of the period by engaging in non-normative performances of gender and sexuality.

The aesthetics of Glam rock clearly appeal to Tariq in the context of his father’s drive to force him into compliance with a fixed interpretation of Pakistani Muslim masculinity. Tariq’s enjoyment of the gender-bending and sexually ambiguous movement serves as a foil to the rigid ideals of George’s masculinity. Indeed, Glam Rock is implicitly and explicitly referenced throughout the film.

\footnote{Ibid., p. 134.}
Musically, a number of tracks from the Glam Rock period are included in the film’s soundtrack. In particular, Tariq sings along with his hairbrush to ‘On a Carousel’ by The Hollies. Most prominently, however, Tariq’s appearance is also in keeping with the fashions of the Glam rock era. Glam rock’s influence on Tariq’s sartorial choices is particularly apparent in a scene where the young man makes a furtive trip to a local nightclub. Dancing to Jimmy Cliff’s ‘Wonderful World, Beautiful People’, Tariq sports a leather jacket, floral patterned shirt, flare jeans and a floppy haircut. His fellow dancers are dressed in a myriad of different colourful garbs, such as platform boots and glitter makeup, all of which bring to mind the aesthetics of Bolan and Bowie. Tariq’s choice of apparel is met with derision and indignation by his father, who orders him to get his haircut as soon as possible as he does not want his son to look like ‘a bastard hippie’. When Tariq resists, his father insists that he will cut his hair himself and so is therefore seeking to ‘fix’ his son into his hegemonic masculine ideal.

Tariq’s appearance is simultaneously a clear indication of his allegiance to British popular culture of the time and a disavowal of his father’s upbringing. Duly, Tariq’s dress sense and hairstyle are in defiance of his father’s wishes for a conservatively dressed and respectable Pakistani son. In this respect, Tariq’s presentation is a rebellion against his father’s wishes to inscribe a Pakistani locality upon his son. Beyond indicating preference for British popular culture, Tariq’s presentation is also an attempt at integration of a different nature – that is integrating within a British youth subculture. Throughout the film, references to racism within the local community are omnipresent and, thus by adopting apparel reminiscent of the Glam Rock movement, Tariq is appealing for acceptance by his peers. As such,
like his father, this expression of an alternative masculinity is similarly binaristic and superficial. Whilst Tariq’s appearance may connote the gender-bending movement, he remains heteronormative in his sexuality, as he pursues female sexual attention as opposed to any evidence of interest in sexual activity with other men, for example. Meanwhile, his adoption of Glam Rock accoutrement also forecloses any expressions of identity that draw on or acknowledge his own transcultural background as British Muslim. Cultural translation, for Tariq, is less about negotiating his Britishness and his Pakistani heritage and more about explicitly rejecting his father’s ideals through the espousal of an aesthetic that is simultaneously shocking to George’s rigid gender ideals and ensures his sense of belonging to a British youth subculture.

Correspondingly, Farid’s adoption of traditional Islamic dress in *My Son the Fanatic* is subject to the same rebellious impulses but in reverse. In the film, Farid discards his usual attire of jeans and jumpers to begin wearing plain white *salwar kameez* and the *topi cap*. The adoption of this style is an ocular expression of his rejection of the British culture and vestiary norms forced upon him by his father and, in the film, signals his transformation into a ‘fanatic’. Simultaneously, it is a rejection of his father’s attempts to make the family appear integrated within British society. Conversely, Farid’s makeover is in harmony with the clothing styles of the men that Farid socialises with towards the end of the film. This is evident in one scene where Parvez interrupts a religious study group meeting in Farid’s bedroom. All of Farid’s companions are dressed in modest-looking shalwar kameez with topi caps connoting their piety. Sartorial representations of masculine Islamic piety are most clearly articulated in the character of the Islamic holy man or *maulvi* who Farid invites from Lahore to speak to his group in Bradford. Like his young devotees, the
**maulvi** dresses in plain coloured Islamic apparel and, akin to some of Farid’s friends, sports a large and unkempt beard.

The appearance of the Islamic holy man and his acolytes is remarkably similar to the stereotyped images of Muslim men examined in Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin’s study, *Framing Muslims*. As was explained in the thesis introduction, Morey and Yaqin note the increasing prevalence of what they term the ‘Islamic Rage Boy’ figure, defined as a ‘mad, marauding Muslim’ man with ‘burning eyes and straggly beard, mouth always open, seemingly in the midst of bellowing some anti-Western curse’[^57^], in British media and cultural production after the 1989 Rushdie Affair. Morey and Yaqin propose that the reproduction of the Islamic Rage Boy stereotype in media and cultural narratives serves as a visual shorthand for perceived unassimilable cultural difference of a Muslim masculine ‘other’ whose Islamic faith is characterised as poised against ‘the West’. In their clothing and facial hair, the *maulvi* and his followers closely resemble the representations of Muslim masculinity that Morey and Yaqin identify and, as such, the group’s visual portrayal casts them firmly within culturally recognised modes of otherised masculinity.

*My Son the Fanatic*’s dramatic climax, where the *maulvi* leads Farid and his group to firebomb a local brothel, is a pertinent example of this stereotyping. In a scene redolent of news footage that audiences would associate with the widely-broadcasted book-burnings in Bradford and protests further afield in places such as Lahore following the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988), incidents described by Morey and Yaqin as moments that triggered the circulation of the ‘Islamic Rage Boy’ stereotype, throngs of infuriated bearded men dressed in

[^57^]: Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims*, p.22.
Exacerbated by the jerking and shaking of a handheld camera, the scene depicts Farid as markedly similar to the popular image of ‘Islamic Rage Boy’. Minus the beard, Farid is shown in the midst of a violent rage yelling offensive chants at the women. The scene is therefore complicit with the stereotyping of ‘Islamic Rage Boy’, drawing on tropes of the angry Muslim man in order for the audience to clearly grasp the threat that Farid’s new associates pose.

Nonetheless, Farid styles his image in dialogue with the maulvi and his teachings. Resultantly, the maulvi and Parvez come to represent competing paternal role models for Farid. These role models also represent the film’s binary between ‘South Asian Muslim patriarchy’ on the one hand or the secularised Western lifestyle represented by Parvez on the other. Ultimately, however, Farid chooses to follow a strict religious lifestyle and models himself upon the maulvi both in appearance as well as ideology. His choice leads to his expulsion from the family home and estrangement between the two generations of men.

In both films, sons also signify contrarian worldviews to their fathers through their consumption of music. The importance of music to identities is apparent in My Son the Fanatic as Parvez’s suspicions that something is awry with his son are first aroused when Farid disposes of his guitar and vinyl records. When he confronts his son about the discarding of the instrument, Farid explains his motives in an obvious double-entendre: ‘You always said there were more important things than “Stairway to Heaven” – you couldn’t have been more right, Papa.’ Farid’s invocation of ‘Stairway to Heaven’, the British rock band Led Zeppelin’s renowned anthem, is

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58 Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, Framing Muslims, p. 23.
both symbolic of Farid’s refutation of British popular culture and a quip on the young man’s newly found religious direction. Unsettled by Farid’s sudden change of behaviour, the following scene depicts Parvez inspecting his son’s bedroom to find empty bookshelves, walls stripped of any colour or decoration and a vinyl copy of Led Zeppelin’s 1969 album *Led Zeppelin II* ready to be discarded. The puritanical redecoration of the room clearly confuses Parvez whose puzzled expressions are matched by an unsettling movement of the camera which oscillates between close ups and long shots.

Contrasting with Farid’s previous fondness for rock music, at a later point in the film Parvez is disturbed by strains of Islamic prayer emanating from his son’s bedroom. In this scene, Parvez watches from a cracked opening in the door as his son prays alongside an instructional recording that teaches him how to perform *salat* or Islamic prayer. Significantly, the scene is shot from Parvez’s perspective thus the viewer is invited to sympathise with the bewildered father’s viewpoint who feels isolated and disquieted by his son’s newly found religious purpose. That Farid’s rejection of British popular music is emblematic of his turn to fundamentalism concords with some ultra-conservative articulations of Islamic thought that regard the musical form as forbidden in the Koran and the Hadith. Such an attitude was famously championed by Abdul Ala Mawdudi, an Islamic philosopher and scholar who is cited with forming the Pakistani Islamist political party, Jamaat e-Islami.\(^59\) The Jamaat e-Islami, under the leadership of Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, guided the country through a regime of ‘Islamisation’, in which ‘Western’ cultural forms were

actively discouraged in a series of prohibitions and the steady implementation of aspects of Shariah law.

Contrary to his son’s rejection of music, Parvez enjoys listening to jazz (especially the African-American musician Louis Armstrong) in his study. Parvez’s appreciation of jazz is revealing of his character for a number of reasons. First, the musical form was popularised by African American musicians in the twentieth century. As such, jazz has its roots in songs sung by slaves as a connection back to the African cultures of their ancestors. To this end, it is a musical form that has connotations with another ethnic minority that were living on the margins of a Western society. Second, in contrast to the more formulaic patterns of Western classical music, jazz music foregrounds artistic improvisation and cross-fertilisation drawing from the music of former slaves as well as European orchestral music. Jazz is also a form of music that depends upon continual reinterpretation from musicians who frequently integrate well-known tunes within their performances and expand on these through improvisation. This asymmetrical mixing together of different musical traditions has meant that many black writers in Euro-American contexts have realised the metaphorical possibilities of drawing upon jazz as a means to expressing cultural hybridisation or transculturality in their literary and filmic production. In particular, prominent African American writers such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, as well as the Scottish Nigerian writer and poet Jackie Kay, and the

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61 Ibid., p. 133.
English film maker of Ghanaian descent John Akomfrah have all employed the aesthetics of jazz in their writing and film.63

Kureishi’s incorporation of jazz in *My Son the Fanatic* has a similar purpose, as evidenced by the writer’s remarks in an essay entitled ‘Sex and Secularity’:

My father, who had similar tastes to the character played by Om Puri [Parvez], never lived in Pakistan. But like a lot of middle-class Indians, he was educated by mullahs and nuns, and developed an aversion to both. He came to love Nat King Cole and Louis Armstrong, the music of black American former slaves. It is this kind of complexity that the fundamentalist has to reject.64

In the context of Kureishi’s essay, Parvez’s appreciation of jazz comes to metaphorically signify a more complex and nuanced approach to cultural identification than those adhered to by his son and the maulvi. Like jazz that is composed through the blending of different cultural forms, Parvez praises contemporary Britain, a place where: ‘Everything is mingling together this way and the other’. In contrast, Farid explains the allure of his new lifestyle as a means of developing ‘clarity and purity’ whilst denigrating the culture of his British homeland as ‘messy’. The two generation’s choice of music, therefore, comes to represent their own conflicting worldviews. Despite the significance of jazz as a musical genre that is suggestive of fluidity through its improvisational form, Parvez never exemplifies the ‘complexity’ that Kureishi refers to. Rather than ‘everything […] mingling together’, then, Parvez’s simultaneous fondness for Britain and disparagement of his Pakistani heritage forestalls any meaningful sense of transcultural exchange which

fuels his son’s rebellion, as Farid expresses his sense of difference through Islamic fundamentalism. In other words, Farid’s development of sociopathic, politicised forms of faith are an exaggerated form of protest influenced by a toxic combination of his father’s resistance to acknowledge the family’s heritage and his own sense of disempowerment at a normatively white society that stereotypes him as ‘other’.

In *East is East*, George Khan’s sons also consume cultural and media output that displeases their father. Daniela Berghahn points out that whilst George watches Hindi cinema and follows news of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War on his ‘small transistor radio’, his children access contemporary debates over migration on the family’s television set. In one particular scene, where the Khan children eat forbidden pork products such as bacon and sausages in clandestine, which is ‘identified as a form of culinary resistance as the camera zooms in to capture the plateful of forbidden food in a close up’, they watch a ‘televised speech in which Enoch Powell advocates the assisted repatriation and resettlement of immigrants’. One of the Khan sons, Saleem, quips about trying to get his father repatriated which indicates that the younger generation of Khans ‘do not perceive themselves as immigrants and therefore, not as the target of Powell’s racist propaganda’. The Khan children’s knowledge of contemporary news agenda also further indicates their self-recognition as British. In contrast, their father exclusively follows the happenings in his Pakistani homeland. Significantly, another scene shows George pondering the fate of his sons’ marriages alone whilst the family settle around the television set watching the popular 1970s children’s show *The Clangers*, which

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66 Ibid., p. 136.
67 Ibid., p. 136.
Berghahn writes, features ‘a happy family (rather different from the dysfunctional Khans) of alien creatures that look like the result of crossbreeding between mice and anteaters (perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to the racial hybridity of the Khan children), who live in a far-away blue planet’. The intertextual reference to the series not only contextualises the film and suggests the family’s transcultural background, but also, in its extra-terrestrial setting, evokes the family’s contrasting perspectives – that they, at times, literally feel as if they are living on different planets from one another.

Through media and their choice of accoutrement, the two sets of sons protest against their fathers’ worldviews. It is through dissent against paternal will and expectation that the two sets of sons construct their masculinity. In this respect, each son practices forms of gendered rebellion that can be related to Raewyn Connell’s concept of ‘protest masculinities’. As detailed in my thesis introduction, protest masculinities refer to men who lack economic or social access to power and resultantly engage in ‘pressured exaggeration[s] of masculine conventions’, such as violence or sexuality and thereby make ‘a claim to power where there are no real resources for power.’ For the sons in *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East*, their fathers represent figures who try to force them into locality-specific forms of hegemonic masculinity, whether these are identified as ‘Pakistani Muslim’ or ‘British’ ways of masculinity. Against these pressures, each son uses their available resources to construct contradictory forms of masculinity. Tariq, for example, performs a type of masculinity that ensures his acceptance amongst a 1970s British

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68 Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, p. 137.
70 Ibid., p. 111.
youth subculture whereas Farid practices masculine behaviours that ensure the disapproval of his father and mainstream British society more generally. In the process, however, practices of masculinity performed by both generations of men are exposed as fragile.

The frailty of these contradictory masculinities is most clearly apparent in that both films end with the breakdown of families and the end of communication between fathers and sons. This impasse contrasts with the images of unity projected by the family photographs which, in concealing any sign of fracture or deviation from each father’s masculine ideal, serve to further highlight the superficiality of paternal visions and hopes for their sons. Failure at communicating across these generational divides also signifies the inflexibility of each father and son’s worldview and so each film ends with fathers and sons that are unable to compromise or empathise with each other. As such, both films end with a dispiriting conclusion in which respective generations of men are incapable of translating their masculinity beyond a stage of cross-cultural conflict. Rather than the formation of transcultural masculinities that thrive upon the creative and productive entanglements of the ‘there’ and ‘here’, these two films end with male characters who are unable to bridge the gaps between ‘east’ and ‘west’.

**Conclusion**

I opened this chapter by quoting from Kipling’s famous pronouncement of cultural incompatibility in the opening lines of ‘The Ballad of East and West’ (1889). As we have seen over the course of the chapter, both films largely leave Kipling’s binary of
inexorable cultural difference intact. The choice that confronts the younger generations seems to be problematically posed as either adopting a singular definition of a ‘British’ or a ‘Pakistani Muslim’ identity with each of these ontological labels embodied by a father figure. Within the films, this conundrum precludes any tangible sense that there can be dialogue or hybridisation between these cultures nor that these warring identity labels are anything other than static and unable to be translated into a different geographic territory. As opposed to portraying male characters translating their masculinity to produce transcultural forms of gender practice and selfhood, these two films characterise cultural encounters as emphasising difference and leading to conflict.

Each film also exposes a bleak picture of paternal and filial relations insofar as sons serve as a measuring tool for their father’s masculinity. In *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East*, fathers are mostly concerned that their sons conform to an unreachable ideal that matches their own cultural allegiances to either Britain or Pakistan. Sons, therefore, become a means through which fathers can parade and propagate their own successful claims at integration within Britain, as is the case for Parvez, or fidelity to their Pakistani Muslim homeland and traditions, as is George’s ambition. Their sons’ rebellions, then, result in both fathers viewing themselves as failures who are unable to attain the claims to hegemonic masculinity that they crave.

Nevertheless, these two films do succeed in making a powerful case for the necessity of transcultural exchange and transformation. *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East* confirm that gender practices and performances must be continually adapted, changed and renegotiated when subjects travel and settle in foreign lands. Each generation’s inability to see how masculinities must change when they move is
ultimately what leads to the depressing finales of both films. In my subsequent chapters, I will be engaging more with successful and less successful attempts at the transformative opportunities that migration presents to practices of masculinity. This chapter engaged predominantly with migrant protagonists and their struggles with their postmigrant children, my next chapter will focus almost exclusively on postmigrant protagonists and develops the themes of religion and masculinity which have been addressed in the past few pages.
Sacred and Secular Masculinities:  
Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album* (1995),  
Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and  
Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus* (2008)

Introduction

Nadeem Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* opens with an epigraph from the Mexican poet Octavio Paz that signals the importance of self-transformation: ‘A human being is never who he is but the self he seeks’.¹ The versions of migrant and postmigrant masculinities encountered within Aslam’s novel, as well as Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus*, all ambivalently engage with Paz’s message of self-construction.² At the centre of these three novels are migrant and postmigrant protagonists who are on a desperate quest to find a fitting identity and sense of belonging. In each text, practices and performances of masculinity are revalued as sites through which characters express dogmatic forms of Islam and atheism as a means of translating their experiences of migration and postmigration in the Islamophobic climate of post-Rushdie Affair and post-9/11 Britain.

In other words, varieties of intolerant, fanatical Islam and atheism become ways for characters to centre themselves and their communities amidst frequent incidents of racism, religious hatred and marginalisation within the fictional geographies of these three novels. The secular or sacred masculinities they seek, to

paraphrase Paz, illuminate a number of crucial foci for my thesis, namely: what is the significance of Islam to fictive constructions of British Muslim masculinities? How is the interplay between religion and masculinity shaped by migration and postmigration in the texts? How do these texts envision a transcultural form of Islamic religiosity that draws upon diverse Muslim faiths, sects and cultures and how can this be a part of transcultural British Muslim masculinities?

Although these are three fictional narratives, the hostile atmosphere that the novels capture may be depressingly familiar. In my introduction, I set out the socio-political context of my thesis and the cultural production analysed herein. However, in this chapter particularly, the religious dimensions of this context are particularly germane in order to develop a firm grasp of the kinds of difficulties that my protagonists face when identifying with – or being identified as – a practicing believer in Islam in late twentieth century and early twenty-first century Britain. Alongside the events of 1989’s Rushdie Affair, 2001’s 9/11 and 2005’s 7/7 elaborated in my introduction, I want to preface the chapter with a more recent example that conveniently delineates the kind of discourses surrounding migrant and postmigrant British Muslim men who practice Islam.

Following the attacks upon French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo on 7th January 2015, British Conservative Party politician Eric Pickles used his position as then-Secretary of State for Communities to urge Muslim faith leaders to ‘explain and demonstrate’ to young British Muslim men ‘how Islam can be a part of a British identity.’ The implication behind Pickles’ pronouncement was that there is an

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3 See my thesis introduction, p. 10-6
inherent contradiction between practicing an Islamic faith and identifying with Britain, which is most conspicuous in displays of pathological masculinity, such as Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and supposedly exceptional misogyny and homophobia, enacted by a comparatively small number of young postmigrant Muslim men. Pickles’ words, as my introduction expounds, were only the latest in an ongoing, continual bombardment of negative images and monolithic assumptions of British Muslim men which have been fodder for sections of the populist right wing press and politicians throughout the contemporary era. Within this climate, it has arguably never been more crucial to examine cultural production from British Muslim writers and filmmakers for more nuanced representations of the interplay between British forms of Islam and postmigrant masculinities.

*The Black Album*, *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Road From Damascus*, all provide antidotes to the stereotypical perceptions that Pickles outlines, by creatively imagining the socio-economic and political reasons that politicised forms of Islam may appeal to young postmigrant men and communities, as well as evoking a multiplicity of different Islams existing in Britain that are coloured by life in the British Isles. Indeed, the Islams and masculinities encountered in these three novels are indelibly shaped by processes of migration and postmigration in Britain. Living in non-Muslim majority environments and encountering disparate religious and secular worldviews, for example, influence the Islamic and atheist beliefs and practices of the protagonists in these three texts.

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Set during the 1988-89 Rushdie Affair, *The Black Album* traces young college student Shahid Hassan’s identity struggle as he tries to navigate the seemingly contradictory attractions of Islamic fundamentalism and hedonism. These opposing forces are characterised through two sets of characters. On the one hand stands Shahid’s university friends Riaz and his ‘brothers’ who all espouse a politicised form of literalist Sunni Islam, gender essentialism and sexual restraint. On the other lies Shahid’s hedonist lecturer Deedee Osgood, who encourages her student to find himself through Marxism, promiscuous sexuality, literature and pop-culture, and mind-altering drugs. *The Black Album* concludes with Riaz’s group burning a copy of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. This book-burning inspires Shahid’s revulsion and ultimately his decision to side with Deedee Osgood’s vision of sexual and political freedom.

As should be apparent from this summary, *The Black Album* shares many thematic and contextual similarities with Kureishi’s subsequently written and released screenplay *My Son The Fanatic*, which I analysed in the previous chapter. In contrast to the film, however, *The Black Album* centres on a protagonist who actively engages in politicised forms of Islam rather than *My Son the Fanatic*’s predominant concentration on an atheist migrant father and the effects of his father’s conflicting worldviews upon his son’s cultivation of Islamic fundamentalist beliefs. Due to this difference in narrative focus, *The Black Album* is more focused on the question as to why a young British-born postmigrant Muslim man may be seduced by Islamic fundamentalism and it is for these reasons that I chose Kureishi’s novel to investigate the significance of religion to fictional constructions of British Muslim

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masculinities as opposed to *My Son the Fanatic*. Nevertheless, each text offers different and fruitful engagements with politicised forms of Islamic faith in Britain during the last decade of the twentieth century; for instance, just as Kureishi’s film was the first cinematic exploration of Islamic fundamentalism amongst British postmigrant men, then *The Black Album* is also the first novel to explore these questions within a literary context.

Kureishi’s fictional representation of Islamic fundamentalism in *The Black Album* shares the same hallmarks as those rendered in his screenplay of *My Son the Fanatic* – namely young men foregoing alcohol, practicing sexual restraint and espousing literalist and politicised forms of Sunni Islamic faith.6 Also in line with his 1997 film, Kureishi is more interested in the social phenomenon of extreme forms of Islamic religiosity rather than the diverse religious experiences of British practitioners of Islam. Contrasting his novel to Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, for example, he explains that: ‘[Rushdie] wrote a book about religion; mine’s about what people might do in its name. I’m not interested in the spiritual, but in religion as ideology, as a system of authority, a kind of business.’7 Kureishi’s remarks, then, define his novel as an engagement with political forms of religious belonging rather than the transcendental.

The dichotomy between a rigidly repressive form of Islamic faith and a less sutured form of secular identity is also taken up by Nadeem Aslam in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Aslam’s novel takes place in a sequestered Muslim community in Northern

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7 Hanif Kureishi, ‘Sex and Secularity’, in *The Word and the Bomb*, p. 84.
England where people who deviate from the neighbourhood’s interpretation of Islam face the prospect of murder and behaviour is policed according to strict ideals of how Muslim men and women should conduct themselves. *Maps for Lost Lovers* is framed by the honour killing of an effeminate Pakistani migrant called Jugnu and his female lover Chanda who had lived together outside of marriage. The novel follows the after effects of the crime upon the Aks family and their community of religious Muslim migrants. In the meantime, Aslam depicts an abundance of patriarchal crimes that take place in the unnamed town including child sex attacks, forced marriage and female foeticide. Far from partial in its representation of Islam, *Maps for Lost Lovers* portrays a family that is torn apart by their mother’s dogmatic religiosity and her children’s – especially her sons’ – refutation of Islam.

Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus*, on the other hand, takes a far more measured approach insofar as it sketches more complex renditions of different Islamic faiths and concludes with the protagonist’s conversion to an Islamic agnosticism. The text’s narrative focus is the British Syrian protagonist Sami Traifi’s protracted mission to feel comfortable with himself. Sami undergoes a journey of self-discovery which is instigated by the discovery of his atheist Syrian father’s role in the suppression of Islamist dissidents, his wife Muntaha’s newly-found Islamic religiosity and his own floundering doctoral research in Arabic literature. However, Muntaha’s decision to wear the hijab is Sami’s breaking point. Sami interprets his wife’s adoption of the headscarf as an affront to his atheist values and deals with his anguish by abandoning his doctoral thesis, breaking up his marriage and descending into a glut of drug abuse and extramarital sex. Aided by hallucinations of his father that offer a panacea during his moments of crisis, Sami goes on a mission to define
himself by experimenting with a variety of seemingly contradicting identities: becoming involved in left-wing environmentalist movements and working as a salesman in a ruthlessly capitalist organisation, before ultimately accepting an Islamic-inflected agnosticism. His conversion to Islam makes amends in his marital relations to Muntaha and is metaphorically captured in his physical transformation by sculpting his drug-addled physicality into a healthy, muscular male body.

If Kureishi’s novel *The Black Album* marks the first literary attempt to engage with the troubling phenomenon of British Islamic fundamentalism, then both Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* and Robin Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus* are amongst the first literary texts to explore subsequent negative shifts that have framed perceptions of Islam and Muslim men in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7. The Pakistani-born Nadeem Aslam, who identifies as a ‘cultural Muslim’ and has frequently voiced his atheist beliefs, explained that he wanted his novel to explore what he perceives as a culture of silencing internal critique when it comes to certain types of Islam practised by British Muslims.\(^8\) Although the novel is set in 1997, he insists that,

> In a way, the book is about September 11 […] I asked myself whether in my personal life and as a writer I had been rigorous enough to condemn the small scale September 11s that go on everyday […] [the murdered lovers] Jugnu and Chanda are the September 11 of this book.\(^9\)

Aslam, as Dave Gunning puts it, ‘explicitly aligns the fundamentalist violence of the World Trade Centre attacks with the possible justifications for honour killings’

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within ultraconservative British Muslim communities. Indeed, whilst Aslam has recognised the potentially controversial nature of his novel’s themes, he maintains that ‘there is nothing in my novels that isn’t being discussed on a daily basis in the newspapers published in Pakistan and in the rest of the Muslim world.’ Aslam’s own atheism, and his experiences as an exile from General Zia al-Haq’s regime of ‘Islamisation’ in Pakistan, clearly shape his own engagement with Islam in *Maps for Lost Lovers.*

The British Syrian writer Robin Yassin-Kassab, however, offers a substantial departure from visions of Islam found in *The Black Album* and *Maps for Lost Lovers.* Unlike Kureishi and Aslam, the London-born Yassin-Kassab identifies as a practising Muslim, and has also lived in a number of Muslim-majority countries: namely Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Morocco, Turkey and his father’s homeland of Syria. As such, Yassin-Kassab has a wide knowledge of Islamic practices across the Muslim world and brings this into his fiction. This can be seen in the varieties of Islam that *The Road From Damascus* adumbrates over its three hundred and forty-nine pages: Sunni Islam (Sami’s father-in-law), Sunni Islamism (Sami’s brother-in-law), Shi’a Islam (Muntaha’s grandmother), Sufi mysticism and Muntaha’s thoughtful Sunni beliefs that also fuse elements of Shi’ism all receive fictional representation. Furthermore, most of these Islams are forged and moulded in

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11 Ibid., p. 86.
Britain through transcultural encounters with Muslim and non-Muslim cultures. The novel’s evocation of numerous Islams, then, is undoubtedly politically motivated and contests crude representations of a singular Islam that are continually reproduced in public discourses of the post-9/11 era. With this in mind, the novel’s conclusion in which protagonist Sami converts to an Islamic-tinged agnosticism, a ‘trembling and contingent faith’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 347), exposes a more nuanced engagement with Islam than the religion so pervasively misrepresented in newspapers or on television screens.

Over the course of the next few pages, I will be discussing trends and commonalities in attitudes towards religious faith and their affect upon masculinity in the three novels. I begin my critical analysis with a discussion on the dogmatic forms of Islam that appear in the novels and how these impact practices of masculinity. In this part, I compare Islamic fundamentalisms performed by young men in The Black Album and The Road From Damascus, and look at the rigid and prohibitive Islam found in Maps for Lost Lovers to trace how these are products of a resistance to translate cultures and religions fuelled by experiences of marginalisation and racism. These forms of restrictive and aggressive Islam mark retreats into the certainties of gender essentialism and staunch patriarchy as a foil against cultural exchange. In the second part, I discuss the role women in play in encouraging men to adapt religious or atheist gender constructions. The Black Album, The Road From Damascus and Maps for Lost Lovers all sport strong female protagonists who seek to influence and shape men’s gender on ideological grounds: whether towards Islam as in Maps for Lost Lovers, towards a form of contemplative and flexible Islamic agnosticism as in The Road From Damascus, or a questioning of
gender identity and the certainties of religion more broadly, as is the case in *The Black Album*. These three different cases show, in their individual ways, the significance of women as a gendered ‘other’ in constructions of masculinity and, in each women’s interest in sculpting male appearance and practices as a designator of sacred or secular values, the inherent performativity of gender identities.

In the chapter as a whole, bringing these texts together instigates a lively analysis of the divergent Islams, divergent atheisms and divergent masculine practices in British Muslim fiction. However, these texts also commonly address the pressures that British Muslims face when exploring their religious faiths and exposes the performativity underpinned in all expressions of masculinity – whether sacred or secular.

**Islam, Marginality and Masculinities**

In his essay ‘Sex and Secularism’, Hanif Kureishi diagnoses the development of Islamic fundamentalisms in the UK as part of a ‘new Islam [that] is as recent as postmodernism’.15 These forms of politicised Islam, he continues, have ‘flourished […] in a conspicuous age of plenty in the West, and at a time of media expansion’.16 These conditions of the postmodern era have also resulted in the erosion of grand narratives that previously provided a fixed sense of self and belonging, as Kureishi explains:

> Clearly where there is a “crisis of authority”, when, it seems, people aren’t certain of anything because ancient hierarchies have been brought down, the

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16 Ibid., p. 35.
answer is to create a particularly strict authority, where troubling questions cannot be admitted.\textsuperscript{17}

The literalist version of Sunni Islam that his novel \textit{The Black Album} depicts is, as Dave Gunning remarks, precisely a ‘reactive philosophy that offers answers to troubling questions of contemporary identity’.\textsuperscript{18} These troubling questions, however, are exacerbated by the ethno-cultural and racial backgrounds of Kureishi’s protagonists who also face a toxic mix of racism and marginalisation from a normatively white British society.

Beyond Kureishi’s novel, Aslam and Yassin-Kassab’s texts also creatively imagine forms of dogmatic Islam thriving in protagonists and communities who feel disempowered by living within the Islamophobic context of post-9/11 Britain. Characters combat these feelings of isolation and inexorable cultural difference by retreating into the certainties of a rigidly-defined Islamic religiosity with a series of uncompromising and unequivocal gender practices and roles. In all of these texts, there is a vociferous resistance towards cultural exchange or a translation of their Islamic religiosity within Britain. I will argue in the following pages that these forms of Islam are rooted both in the everyday experiences of racial and ethno-cultural exclusion that protagonists face and as expressions of their cultural anxieties about being migrants and postmigrants in a society that solidly stereotypes Muslim cultural communities and individuals as ‘others’.

Beginning with Kureishi’s novel, for example, Shahid had never comprehensively encountered Islam prior to moving to London and its feelings of

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{18} Gunning, \textit{Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature}, p. 70.
disempowerment that lead him to find panacea through Islamic religiosity. Indeed, before his relocation to the British capital, Shahid describes being raised in an areligious setting: ‘At home, Papa liked to say, when asked about his faith, “Yes, I have a belief. It’s called working until my arse aches!” Shahid and [his brother] Chili had been taught little about religion’ (Kureishi BA, p. 92). Whilst Shahid’s deceased father is not depicted as having launched into obstreperous sermons against Islam like Parvez in Kureishi’s *My Son the Fanatic*, he nonetheless imposes a binary in which religion is cast as an obstacle to providing for family in a normatively white, secular nation of predominantly Christian heritage. When meeting religious peers in London, Shahid is not condemning of Islam but nevertheless expresses regret that his upbringing had not included learning about the main religion of his father’s Pakistani homeland. The narrator explains that,

[...] Shahid was afraid his ignorance would place him in a no man’s land. These days everyone was insisting on their identity, [...] Shahid, too, wanted to belong to his people. But first he had to know them, their past and what they hoped for. (Kureishi BA, p. 92).

As explicated in this passage, Islam appeals to Shahid within the context of his own sense of anonymity compared to a majority white population. Shahid evokes a tension between feelings of his own lack of identity compared to his peers and a desire to belong to a community.

Hence when Shahid arrives in his college dormitory, he sets out to meet ‘interesting Asian companions’ (Kureishi BA, p. 15), and is therefore pleased to meet two non-white members of an Islamic group that live in his halls of residence, Riaz
and Chad. Intriguingly, Kureishi’s choice of words imply that religion or meeting people with a shared Muslim religio-cultural heritage is not a significant factor in Shahid’s efforts to forge networks of affiliation. The novel’s opening details a conversation between the three young men wherein Shahid confides his sense of difference and his isolating experiences of racism. Recalling how he faced physical and emotional bullying at school, Shahid describes the sum-total of discrimination as feeling as if ‘there was something [he] lacked’ as ‘everywhere [he] went [he] was the only dark-skinned person’ (Kureishi BA, p. 10). However, Shahid’s experiences of racism are not only reduced to externalised forces but they are also internalised thence creating a profound sense of his otherness. Internalised racism drives Shahid into self-hatred and towards contemplations of violence towards other racial and ethno-cultural minorities, as Shahid flirts with joining the far right national movement, the British National Party (BNP), and confesses that his ‘mind was invaded by killing-nigger fantasies’ (Kureishi BA, p. 11). Amidst this pernicious build-up of hatred, Shahid is comforted by Riaz and Chad’s friendship as he feels as if they ‘were the first people he’d met who were like him’; their shared racial background meaning that Shahid ‘didn’t have to explain anything’ (Kureishi BA, p. 57). The connections that Shahid develops, then, are forged out of his vulnerability as a young man of minoritarian racial and ethno-cultural background.

As the narrative develops, Shahid becomes increasingly close to Riaz and his ‘brothers’, as his all-male group of Islamic fundamentalists are termed. Thus, Shahid’s feelings of otherness find panacea in the group’s extremist version of Islam. Pouncing on Shahid’s anxieties, the group offer him a compensatory identity in which young post-migrant men like him can unite around a rigidly-defined and
literalist interpretation of Sunni Islam. As many critics such as Frauke Matthes and Bart Moore-Gilbert have pointed out, the group’s conception of Sunni Islam is conspicuously naive and underdeveloped.\textsuperscript{19} Their collective beliefs never stray further than abstention from alcohol and sexual intercourse, public displays for oppressed Muslim communities across the world and an insistence upon praying five times a day. Although women appear from time to time within their meetings, the group are also markedly homosocial in that they uphold gender segregation and also take an unyieldingly essentialist approach to gender roles and practices. As Matthes notes, the group enact a form of ‘masculine struggle’ against the disempowering forces of poverty and structural violence.\textsuperscript{20} This is configured by the brothers’ belief that sexual self-restraint strengthens a masculine resolve that stands in opposition to the normatively white British population’s sexual impurity and, therefore, the decay of ‘god-given’ male attributes of strength, power and domination.

Like Shahid, the group are all young post-migrant men who share a cumulative sense of disempowerment. As Mark Stein points out, the best illustration of this pattern is found in the figure of Trevor Buss’s alias Chad.\textsuperscript{21} Born as Trevor Buss and subsequently adopted by a white British couple, Chad is described as a ‘soul [that] got lost in translation’ (Kureishi BA, p.107). Surrounded by white peers who had no need to negotiate or reflect upon their belonging, Trevor struggled to derive a similar sense of belonging to England. ‘Church bells’ and ‘English country cottages and ordinary English people...the whole Orwellian idea of England’ (Kureishi BA, p. 107) ‘signalled exclusion’ to him thereby suggesting that his claims

\textsuperscript{19} Frauke Matthes, \textit{Writing and Muslim Identity}, p. 140; Bart Moore-Gilbert, \textit{Hanif Kureishi}, pp. 135-6.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{21} Mark Stein, \textit{Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation} (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2004), p. 125.
to Englishness are foreclosed by his need to ‘acquire’ an English heritage.\textsuperscript{22} Within this white English milieu, he describes frequently being mistaken for a street robber, thereby evincing the racially pernicious connections that many white English made between people of colour and crime. On the other hand, when asking for salt in a Pakistani restaurant in Southall, he recalls being mocked for his accent when speaking Urdu. In this instance, Chad is reminded that despite his linguistic abilities, he is ‘outside’ of Pakistani codes of behaviour, as his accent marks him as foreign and he therefore, just as with his white peers, needs to ‘acquire’ a Pakistani heritage.

Tellingly, his ‘outsiderness’ becomes apparent when he visits Pakistan and describes feeling even more alienated: ‘But in Pakistan, they looked at him even more strangely. Why should he be able to fit into a Third World theocracy?’ (Kureishi BA, p. 107). Thus, in both contexts, he is prevented from fostering allegiance and is regarded as an ‘other’. Like Shahid, then, Chad feels as if he ‘lacks’ an identity. His failure to find affiliation with any of these place-bound ethno-cultural groups leads Trevor to leave his adopted family, change his name to Chad and pursue a life of crime to express his frustration. It is not until he finds Riaz and succumbs to his Islamic fundamentalism that he finds a coherent sense of self. In other words, it is the homosocial environment of the Islamic brothers that offers some answers to his existential uncertainties and his acute feelings of disorientation and emasculation.

There are some penetrating similarities between the unease felt by many of the young male protagonists in Kureishi’s novel and the character Ammar in \textit{The Road From Damascus}. One of the most striking chapters in \textit{The Road From Damascus} opens with protagonist Sami’s recollections of a concert by the African

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 126.
American Hip-hop group Public Enemy that he attended with his brother-in-law Ammar. When listening to a live version of the group’s ‘Night of the Living Baseheads’, a track which samples a speech by Khalid Abdul Muhammad, a figure in the controversial Nation of Islam movement that has been accused of propagating Black supremacist and anti-Semitic views, Sami remembers how Ammar proclaimed his solidarity with Public Enemy’s expressions of black political struggle in the USA:

‘Join in!’ screeched Ammar. ‘Fight the power!’
No, signalled Sami. And Ammar asked with his face, why not?
And Sami, trying to shrink from the public noise, trying to detach from the common body, attached his lips to Ammar’s ear.
‘It’s a black thing’ he said. ‘It’s a race thing.’
They moved heads so Ammar could reply.
‘Don’t worry about it. It’s our people. We’re black.’
(Yassin-Kassab, p. 206-7).

This memory of Ammar’s self-identification as black is aroused as Sami makes his way to his brother-in-law’s mosque for a prayer meeting. Like Kureishi’s protagonists, Ammar’s agitation is felt on ethno-racial grounds and the need to identify with other people of colour. The ‘blackness’ proposed by Public Enemy, then, fulfils Ammar’s desire to articulate his own sense of ‘outsiderness’ and his need for community.

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Since the Public Enemy concert, the vociferously atheist Sami’s views have been challenged by uncomfortable discoveries about his avowedly secular father’s role in the violent suppression of Islamists in Syria and his wife Muntaha’s conversion to Islam, which I will discuss in due course. Ammar, on the other hand, has developed staunchly Islamist political and religious beliefs which he shares with a group of postmigrant British Muslim men that meet regularly at a local mosque. As anticipated by his fondness for Public Enemy, the disaffected Ammar finds solace in the teachings of the Nation of Islam and, more specifically, in an extremist offshoot of this movement called The Five Percenters. Yusuf Nuruddin writes that the Five Percenters take their name from ‘their belief that they are the chosen five percent of humanity who live a righteous “Islamic” life and thereby have manifested the “true divine nature of the black man as God or Allah”’. Thus, as Nuruddin outlines, Five Percenters unite discourses of race and patriarchal gender relations with religion by preaching how black women represent a reproductive life force whilst black men are believed to be imbued with the Divine, and white men are associated with forces of evil.

This nexus of race and masculinity are intimately linked in Ammar and his cohort’s appropriation of Five Percenter ideology. For example, Ammar decries the negative influence of the supposedly over-sexualised white British upon ‘our women’ and is depicted ‘reading pamphlets about how the mad scientist Yaqoob invented the white devil race by experiment’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 215-16). Identifying racially and spiritually with these African American branches of Islam, then,

provides the young men with a compensatory collective identity that is premised upon transnational solidarity with other marginalised groups but, in reality, has little to do with genuine expressions of transcendental faith. For example, Ammar and his companions exclude non-Muslims and their outward expressions of piety are reduced to wearing t-shirts that declare dogmatic statements such as ‘Islam: The Only True Religion’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 113). This is particularly apparent in the group’s appreciation for Five Percenter doctrines of Islam, through which Ammar’s companions appear to offset their sense of disempowerment by casting themselves as a ‘chosen people’. Sami invokes this interpretation when he describes Ammar’s performative transformation into a follower of the movement:

[…] [Sami] noted the stages of his transformation. The adolescent became a sort of man, which was advertised through his clothing. He matched his sunglasses with unmixed plain clothes (mostly black, and shiny shoes, and a straight-line mouth. He had his hair cut close and disciplined. He no longer gestured provocatively from car windows, emanating now a harsh sobriety which wouldn’t allow it. For those in the know, he was mimicking the Nation of Islam lifestyle, except when it came to spliffs. Then he was much more Five Percenter: ‘Given that the black man’s God, we are all divine. We make our own commandments, So chill, bro. Skin up and pass the dutchie.’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 215)

In this passage, Sami shows how Ammar shapes his body and shifts his values so they accord with the Five Percenter’s racialised religiosity. His change in sartorial style, in particular, is an overt expression of his newly forged religious and racial identity aimed at signalling his Islamic values to all who pass him by. However, this passage also exposes the superficiality of this image and its accompanying beliefs. Indeed, Ammar’s justification for cannabis consumption based on his self-identification as a ‘Black man’ implies a rather skewed and dubious interpretation of Five Percenter doctrines of faith.
Ammar’s association with the Nation of Islam is therefore depicted as a form of ‘sexy identity-assertion’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 218), or as Claire Chambers defines it, the ‘swagger found in identifying with a “posse” or a “crew”’. Sami sees through the veneer of Ammar’s constructed racialised religiosity as a form of protest masculinity when he criticises Ammar’s interpretations of Islam as meaning ‘very little’ and characterises their movement as smelling ‘too much of blood and semen […] it felt too much like rigid Black manhood’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 217). Ammar’s vociferous attachment to the exclusionary and essentialising racialised and gendered discourses of Five Percenter ideology, then, becomes a way of regaining masculinised disempowerment.

By appropriating African American forms of Islam, Ammar and his cohorts are conveniently and strategically ‘naming’ their hardships but simultaneously side-stepping more complicated questions of religio-cultural heritage that are evoked at an earlier point in the novel. Articulating the identity backgrounds of British Muslims, the narrative voice relates,

There was a mutual fascination between the whites and blacks, watching and imitating one another, fighting and fucking each other, while the Muslims tiptoed in the gloomy spaces around the beds and dance floors where the drama was played out. The Muslims got in the way. They ruined the whiteness of the city, and the blackness too […] They had a proletarian role in the economy, and a bourgeois conservatism. Neither sexy nor strong. Badly dressed and poorly educated. Islam’s cobwebs in their eyelashes and its mould on their tongues. (Yassin-Kassab, p. 60-1)

These comments convey more complex networks of racial, religious and ethno-cultural hierarchies than those that Ammar and his cohort problematically interpret as

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‘whites’ against ‘blacks’. The narrative voice sets up Muslim identities, and religious forms of subjectivity, as ignored amongst the ‘mutual fascination’ and popular hybridisation of ‘white’ and ‘black’ British cultures. Metaphorically associating Islam with ‘cobwebs’ and ‘mould’, for example, means that Muslims are portrayed as having been born into a stagnant form of identity which does not move forward nor is able to easily admix with other identity assemblages in the same manner as ‘blackness’ or ‘whiteness’. In this context, Ammar’s association with the racialised religiosity of the Five Percenters emerges as a palpable attempt at belonging amidst a profound sense of marginalisation.

The diverging, but similarly antisocial, forms of Islam that Kureishi and Yassin-Kassab’s young protagonists espouse are all rooted in the characters’ shared desire for belonging. These dogmatic forms of Islam provide young men with identities based on their sense of difference. To this end, both sets of protagonists closely resemble Raewyn Connell’s theorisation of protest masculinities, a concept that was defined in my thesis introduction and discussed in relation to Farid’s conversion to Fundamentalist Islam in My Son the Fanatic but will also be observed when analysing Karim’s ‘Bengal Tigers’ organisation in Brick Lane. To recapitulate this concept briefly, Connell argues that certain groups of men who are materially, socially or economically deprived tend to exaggeratedly perform aspects of hegemonic masculinity in an attempt to project their strength in the face of marginality. Connell notes that for these men, protest masculinities represent ‘a
response to powerlessness, a claim to the gendered position of power, a pressured exaggeration of masculine power’.  

In her study on Jihadist Islamism, Maleeha Aslam interprets the formation of all-male politicised Islamic groups precisely in terms of Connell’s protest masculinities thereby referring to legacies of colonial domination as well as flows of transnational capital and disenfranchisement as contributing factors to the emergence of militant jihadist networks as outlets to achieve masculine self-actualisation. As demonstrated by the experiences of the characters Shahid, Riaz and Chad, Islamic fundamentalism as portrayed in Kureishi’s novel has similar appeal. Riaz’s group affords these disempowered young post-migrant men solidarity and a sense of control that is often expressed in violence, such as their threats to bomb the college and kill atheists. For Ammar in Yassin-Kassab’s novel, a similar pattern is evident as he seeks to avenge his power through displays of strength and, towards the end of the novel, goes as far as to praise the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as ‘something to restore a man’s pride’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 316).

The Black Album’s conclusion, however, exposes the underlying vulnerability behind these constructions of protest masculinity. As will be analysed in the subsequent section of the chapter, Shahid ultimately rejects the group in favour of a less fixed form of identity as proposed by his lecturer Deedee Osgood; however, the final clash of these ideas is represented in a physical fight between Shahid’s brother Chili and Riaz. Angered by Shahid’s decision to leave the group for Deedee’s dissolute lifestyle, Riaz and the brothers track down Shahid and Deedee in order to

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27 Raewyn W. Connell, Masculinities, p. 111.
kill them. However, Shahid’s sexually promiscuous and morally dubious brother saves the pair by immobilising Riaz and holding a knife up to his throat. Pinning Riaz to the wall, he orders him to disrobe. This is a request that has the dual purpose of emasculating the brothers’ leader and enabling Chili to retrieve his own clothes as Shahid donated them to Riaz after a botched attempt to clean his esteemed friend’s laundry. However, this removal of his literal, biological brother’s clothing from Riaz’s corporeality reveals the leader’s ‘wan and skinny body’ (Kureishi BA, p. 268). The frailness and fragility of Riaz’s male body corporally represents his underlying vulnerability and therefore the volatile instability at the centre of the brothers’ collective identity.

The use of religion as a way to forge community amongst marginalised and dislocated people is also taken up the protagonists of Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*. In contrast to Kureishi and Yassin-Kassab’s concentration on postmigrants’ cultivation of Islamic beliefs, Aslam depicts a community in which first-generation immigrants have rallied around a particularly dogmatic articulation of Sunni Islam as a means of unifying their community. However, like Kureishi and Yassin-Kassb’s texts, the form of Sunni Islam in *Maps for Lost Lovers* has been shaped and configured according to the migrant community’s collective sense of disorientation at having moved from Pakistan to a Northern English town. This Sunni Islam, which is built around closed sets of values that precludes any transcultural exchange, is a product of cultural translation as migrants use their religion as a separating device from the non-Muslim majority. Many of the migrant protagonists, then, define themselves in opposition to a normatively white, secular Britain as a reaction against the inevitable pluralising and transformation of cultures that occurs through
migration. Indeed, migration is figured as a wholly negative experience in the novel and religion serves as a foil for a profound sense of alienation that is evoked in the novel’s title *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

In the first few pages, the reader is confronted with a sense of mourning as the lead protagonist Shamas Aks intimates that to leave Pakistan is to lose a season – with Pakistan enjoying five seasons, as opposed to England’s four. Further on in the text’s opening chapter, the narrative voice also explains the plight of Pakistani migrants, who are depicted as ‘[r]oaming the planet looking for solace, they’ve settled in small towns that make them feel smaller still, and in cities that have tall buildings and an even taller loneliness’ (Aslam, p. 9). It is within one of these small towns that the novel is set and the community’s confusion is expressed in their renaming of its streets and landmarks with Urdu appellations. Tellingly, the townsfolk recast their locality as Dasht-e-Tanhaii, meaning ‘Wilderness of Solitude’ or ‘Desert of Loneliness’. While the invention of shared names for the neighbourhood might be interpreted as a means of laying claim to their surroundings and demonstrating a form of postcolonial repossession of land, within the novel it serves to reinforce the inhabitants’ isolation from the majority white populace and their retreat into rigid community structures.

Within the text, Aslam focuses on the Aks family whose senior members Kaukab and her atheist husband Shamas live within the community whilst their now-adult children Ujala, Mah-Jabin and Charag have left for metropolitan centres with more diverse populations such as London. Kaukab, however, is an emblematic example of a Dasht-e-Tanhaii inhabitant who is both deeply religious and consumed by anxieties surrounding the non-Muslim cultures that exist beyond the
neighbourhood’s boundaries. For example, the omniscient narrator describes how Kaukab ‘barely knew what lay beyond the neighbourhood and didn’t know how to deal with strangers: full of apprehension concerning the white race and uncomfortable with people of another Subcontinental religion or grouping’ (Aslam, p. 32). This exclusion means that Kaukab develops a hostility towards the ‘whites’ and affectively associates the non-Muslim majority population with uncleanliness, immorality and vice, and therefore seeks to safeguard her family from their allegedly corruptive influence. A paradigmatic example of this ‘baseness’ is when Kaukab recalls that ‘a bunch of [white] people in suits and ties’ on television had talked about how ‘all mothers secretly want to go to bed with their sons’ (Aslam, p. 293). Kaukab is ‘repulsed’ at the apparent degradation that this episode affords Britain, explaining that ‘these sorts of things were said by vulgar hawkers and fishwives in the bazaars of Pakistan, but here in England educated people said them on television’ (Aslam, p. 293). Kaukab’s suspicion of the non-Muslim populace of the Britain is also initially internalised within her own children, as when her son Charag first attends university, he conveys that: ‘The sense passed on to him during his upbringing was that the differences between the whites and the Pakistanis were too many for interaction to take place’ (Aslam, p. 126).

Some of this distrust, however, is not misplaced. The novel presents incidents of white racism against the inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, including threatening phone calls, racist abuse on buses and, as Dave Gunning remarks, ‘the unconscious racism of the little white boy who struggles to describe a relative of mixed racial background’ by referring to them as ‘half Pakistani and half…er…er…er…human’
These episodes exacerbate the anxieties of protagonists such as Kaukab thereby strengthening their resolve towards an uncompromising form of hard-line Islamic faith which prohibits transcultural interaction or exchange. Gender practices and performances are central sites through which the community express their devotion to their religious faith and, like Kureishi and Yassin-Kassab’s novels, are key to evoking the fictional community’s ‘difference’ from their normatively white, non-Muslim peers.

Alluding to the ‘love’ component of the novel’s title, the central conflict in the novel concerns an unmarried Pakistani migrant couple who are missing but presumed dead. Eventually, it is revealed that Jugnu (Shamas’ brother and Kaukab’s brother-in-law) and Chanda (the Aks family’s neighbour) were victims of an ‘honour killing’ perpetrated by Chanda’s brothers on the grounds that she was living with her unmarried lover. In this case, Kaukab embodies a conflict between her adherence to faith and her fondness for the couple; she goes some way in justifying their murder as living out of wedlock is a sin, and therefore ‘Allah’s law was Allah’s law and nothing could be done’ (Aslam, p. 159), whilst she also mourns their deaths. Nonetheless, her failure to protest the violence and, as will be discussed in the next section of the chapter, her own involvement in inculcating such negative and violent formations of masculinity within her sons renders her complicit in the murder.

Meanwhile, the reasons for Chanda’s death are associated with a virulent form of patriarchal masculinity that is depicted as endemic within the community. For example, Chanda’s brothers Barra and Chotta argue that her murder was justified by their sense of masculinised shame, as they claim, ‘We are men but she reduced us

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to eunuch bystanders by not paying attention to our wishes’ (Aslam, p. 342). In other words, Chanda’s deviation from a rigidly-defined patriarchal gender order leads to a sense of emasculation on the parts of her brothers. Even before her death, the reader learns that Chanda was forced into wearing a full-length body cloak, or *burkha*, against her wishes as ‘The men said they felt awkward and ashamed when they were with their friends on a street corner and she went by’ (Aslam, p. 342) therein professing the significance of female subordination upon their collective constructions of patriarchal masculinity.

The lengths to which the two men will sink in order to avenge their sense of damaged masculinity is tragically encapsulated in the murder of Chanda and Jugnu. Demonstrating a gross hypocrisy, the court case reveals how Chotta had recently discovered his unmarried female lover Kiran in bed with another male. Meanwhile, his accomplice Barra was inspired to commit murder as he ‘was returning from a visit to his wife at the abortion clinic’ where their child’s foetus was terminated on the grounds that they believed she was female. That evening, however, Barra discovered that the unborn child was actually male. Barra responded to the news in a furious rage, crying out ‘I am ruined’, and casts the blame on ‘white doctors’ who are supposedly trying to eradicate the community (Aslam, p. 349). Chanda’s death at the hands of the brothers, then, is intimately tied to their feelings of emasculation which is selectively interpreted as pursuing Islamic law.

Fiona McCulloch quotes Radhika Coomaraswamy’s diagnosis of links between patriarchal masculinity and gender violence, as a vehicle for understanding the relationships between these discourses in Aslam’s novel:
In many societies the ideal of masculinity is underpinned by the notion of ‘honour’ – of an individual man, or a family or a community – and is fundamentally connected to policing female behaviour and sexuality. Honour is generally seen as residing in the bodies of women. Frameworks of ‘honour’, and its corollary ‘shame’, operate to control, direct and regulate women’s sexuality and freedom of movement by male members of the family. Women who fall in love, engage in extramarital relationships, seek a divorce, or choose their own husbands are seen to transgress the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ (that is, socially sanctioned) sexual behaviour.30

Indeed, I join McCulloch in arguing that Aslam imagines precisely these articulations of gender relations within his British Muslim community in Dasht-e-Tanhaii. Outside of the novel’s focal centre upon the Aks family, for example, another religious female character, Suraya, is forced to marry and divorce a man before she can remarry her husband who had previously divorced her while drunk. Amidst her difficult circumstances, Suraya briefly conveys a sense of injustice with this aspect of Islamic law: ‘It is as though Allah forgot there were women in the world when he made some of his laws, thinking only of men’, but swiftly renounces these thoughts as ‘all good Muslims must’ (Aslam, p. 150). In her efforts to seduce a willing male, she proposes to Charag Aks, a man significantly younger than her, justifying her actions with the Prophet Muhammad’s marriage to a forty-year-old woman when he was nineteen. Meanwhile, another female in the town fatally suffers under the strictures of patriarchy as her affair with a ‘secret Hindu lover’ is interpreted as a sign of possession by djinns, and so over the course of a few days, an Imam beats her to death (Aslam, pp. 185-88).

Despite these dreadful incidents, many in the community actively encourage the formation of a violent and rigidly constricting patriarchal masculinity. In the next section of the chapter, I will discuss in detail how Kaukab seeks to forcefully construct the masculinity of her sons according to her faith. However, I wish to dwell on an episode where a mother’s threat to her disobedient young daughter unveils the significance of upholding patriarchal masculinity in the community, as she yells,

If you don’t behave, I’ll not only give you away to the whites, I’ll give them your brother too. They’d make sure he doesn’t learn to drive when he grows up and has to sit in the passenger seat while you drive. Do you want a eunuch like that for a brother? Househusbands, if you please! The mind boggles at the craziness of this race. (Aslam, p. 221, Aslam’s emphasis)

The mother’s blackmail packages xenophobia and patriarchal masculinity together into a single act of intimidation. Within her binary, normatively white Britain is associated with effeminacy and an abdication of supposedly anointed gender roles such as being a family’s breadwinner or driving a car, which functions as a potent symbol of control and authority. Conversely, being a passenger to a female driver is understood as relinquishing crucial markers of masculinity by emphasising a man’s reliance and passivity. Her daughter is ‘Visually disturbed’ into submission (Aslam, p. 221) and therefore, as McCulloch points out, her reaction conveys another generation’s inculcation into the violent patriarchal gender order that imprisons Dasht-e-Tanhaii. 31

The novel’s troubling glut of religiously-indoctrinated atrocities certainly gives credence to Amina Yaqin’s criticism that Maps for Lost Lovers reads like an inventory of different Islamophobic headlines woven together through a literary text.

31 McCulloch, Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction, p. 105.
For Yaqin, the ultimate result is a ‘reiteration of many negative stereotypes’ in which Aslam ‘deliberately critiques a conservative Islamic consciousness to underline progressive secular principles and in doing so flattens the complexities of faith based identities.’\(^3^2\) However, before accepting Yaqin’s convincing argument too prematurely, it is crucial to note that Aslam’s novel represents a more egalitarian Islam in the form of Sufism. Indeed, at one point in the novel, the protagonists attend a concert by the famed \textit{qawwali} singer and Sufi mystic Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. A strand of Islamic thought that is localised to different Muslim cultures and communities, Sufism tends to be inward looking and places importance on individual spiritual development rather than enforcing of outward religious convictions. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s practice of the \textit{qawwali} – a devotional Sufi music that originates from South East Asia – becomes a moment of brief trans-Islamic unity within Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The narrative voice tells us that the Sufis are ‘the oppositional party of Islam’ and they give voice to ‘vulnerable women’ through their music (Aslam, p. 191). Indeed, Aslam’s narrator suggests that it is through gender equality towards women and the defeat of patriarchal masculinity that the Sufis believe the poet-saints of Islam expressing their loathing of power and injustice always through female protagonists [...] always always it was the vulnerability of women that was used by the poet-saints to portray the intolerance and oppression of their times: in their verses the women rebel and try bravely to face all opposition. They – more than the men – attempt to make a new world. And, in every poem and every story, they fail. But by striving they become part of the universal story of human hope. (Aslam, pp. 191–2)

Through Sufism and its cultural expressions through music and poetry, Aslam portrays an Islamic movement that is more tolerant and open to gender equality than the literalist Islam practiced by Kaukab and most of the community.

A final point of contention exists in the novel’s formal qualities, as outlined by Dave Gunning when he remarks that

Aslam’s use of free indirect discourse throughout the novel lets him deal closely with questions of agency and freedom, in ways that complicate any notion that the restrictive elements of Islamic practice are simply imposed on women against their will.33

Certainly, Aslam’s use of free indirect discourse alongside an omniscient narrator gives the novel a complex distancing technique. In the character of Suraya, for example, as one who reflects on Islamic law’s supposed injustice and then quickly retracts her thoughts, Aslam is able to show that the strictures of the community’s collective forged Islam are not programmatically accepted by his characters. Despite acknowledging this feature of the novel, it is hard not to agree with Yaqin’s assessment that, at best, Aslam’s novel is an uneven and conflicting representation of Islamic faith.

In each of the three novels, though, these reactive forms of Islam are forged through a resistance towards transcultural exchange in an environment that is characterised by a toxic mix of external racism and the anxieties of difference that occur when individuals migrate and need to translate their identities. In The Black Album and The Road From Damascus, specifically, we encountered male protagonists who construct defensive protest masculinities that take aspects of a literalist and fanatical approach to religion and recapitulate these in bellicose

33 Gunning, Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature, p. 87.
expressions of masculinity. Like Aslam’s characters, these young men face a similarly poisonous mix of disempowerment, marginalisation and racism which translates into their asocial masculinities which take aim at the exclusions they suffer at the hands of a normatively white British society. In the next section of my argument, I pursue this idea of masculinity and religious belief being combined into defensive gendered and cultural identities through a rejection of transcultural exchange, to examine the outside influence of female protagonists upon the constructions of masculinity in each novel.

**Bargaining with Masculinities**

Another crucial factor in the construction of masculinities within these texts is women. More specifically, female protagonists exert a powerful influence in how men perform their masculinities, how they approach Islam and how they express their attitudes towards religion through their gender practices. As I stated in my thesis introduction, Connell argues that, within patriarchal societies, masculinity and femininity are constructed mutually therein forming a binary opposition that limits the possibilities of alternative gender practices emerging and thus appearing as if they are a ‘natural’ gender order which cannot be changed. Connell’s theorisation certainly finds parallels within Islamic traditions, particularly through the story of Adam and Eve. As Amanullah De Sondy writes, ‘what emerges from their creation

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35 The Adam and Eve story exists in all three of the monotheistic religions and, as such, can be argued to be the basis of gender binaries in Christian, Muslim and Jewish cultures. However, my interests here, are solely in the Islamic version of the story. In Islam, Allah created the first man Adam and, soon afterwards, the first woman Eve. This pair were constructed as equal humans and live in a paradise. Living together in harmony, however, comes along with a caveat that the pair must not consume fruit which grows on a tree in their environment. However, Adam and Eve are tempted by a
story is the basic premise that man stood for all humanity until women came into the picture. Woman is the other, the abject, the foil. Islamic feminists such as Asma Barlas have analysed this positioning of women in Islamic theology and Muslim societies further by stating how the Adam and Eve story has ingrained a series of gender binaries through which most Muslim-majority societies, often regardless of sect, are organised.

Of course, as Connell goes on to argue, the lived experiences of people expose these binaries to be fallacious. Islamic feminists too, such as Barlas, Leila Ahmed and Fatema Mernissi, have penned robust critiques of how Koranic scholarship and Islamic theology has tended to selectively interpret religious texts to uphold fixed gender binaries and patriarchal gender relations. In a different sphere, cultural theorists and critics such as Judith/Jack Halberstam have also pointed towards ways that females can enact forms of masculinity. In this chapter’s texts, however, strict binaries between genders are interrogated and complicated by the potent force that women have upon constructions of gender. Far from a dualistic vision in which women are cast as a foil to men, these novels depict women as agents who are actively shaping and forging the gender practices of directionless and

jinn to consume the fruit and so begins their downfall. The two become aware that they are ‘naked’ and so Allah condemns them to live on Earth. An intriguing aspect of the Islamic version of the tale is that Allah does not make Eve from Adam’s rib, as in the Judeo-Christian rendition, however Barlas notes that many Muslims assume that Eve was in fact made from ‘Adam’s spare parts’ due to a number of subsequently written hadiths. See Asma Barlas, Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), pp. 13-6.


Connell, Masculinities, p. 70.


anxious male protagonists. In the following analysis, I unpack how different female characters are instrumental in the functioning of patriarchal masculinity, the construction of more inclusive forms of masculinity, and in pushing the boundaries of male gender roles more broadly.

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for instance, Kaukab is fiercely loyal to Dasht-e-Tanhaii’s illiberal gender relations. Indeed, Kaukab is deeply invested in the forms of patriarchal masculinity that exist in the novel, even more so than her husband who she frequently reprimands for not being ‘masculine’ enough. Kaukab regards Shamas’ professed atheist beliefs and communist politics, especially his posturing on women’s rights, with suspicion. Kaukab argues that Shamas has been too concerned with political welfare and so has neither lived up to the community’s ideals of how fathers should discipline their children nor has he behaved in a manner befitting the ‘head of the household’:

> Oh your father will be angry, oh your father will be upset: Mah-Jabin [Shamas and Kaukab’s daughter] had grown up hearing these sentences, Kaukab trying to obtain legitimacy for her decisions by evoking his name. She wanted him to be angry, she needed him to be angry. She had cast him in the role of head of the household and he had to act accordingly. (Aslam, p. 111)

Owing to his failure to publically perform what she perceives as hegemonic masculine practices, Kaukab holds Shamas accountable for a number of ills that have been brought upon the Aks family. Thus, Kaukab contends that their daughter Mah-Jabin’s ‘chances in life’ were ruined by him as he ‘didn’t want to move to a better neighbourhood and no decent family was ever going to ask for the hand of a girl living in a third-class neighbourhood’ (Aslam, p. 119).
Further to these accusations, Kaukab berates her husband for declining an OBE, for which he was nominated for his work as a community officer, for not allowing their son Ujala to leave school aged fifteen as is the standard pattern of education in their community, and for not providing adequate resources so their son Charag could pursue a career in medicine. Kaukab relates all of these failures solely to her husband’s non-conformative masculinity which, she believes, has been adversely affected through migration from the supposedly religiously and morally ‘pure’ Pakistan to the ‘degenerate’ nation of England. Thus, as I outlined in the previous section, Kaukab idealises Pakistan as a place in which people behave according to supposedly appointed gender behaviours in society, thus she sees ‘nothing wrong with the status of women in Pakistan’ whereas ‘England was like living in one big brothel’ (Aslam, p. 347). In this sense, Kaukab is keen to prevent her children engaging in any form of cultural exchange or translation and these anxieties are most clearly expressed through her assiduous efforts to ensure her sons practice a rigid form of masculinity that takes central themes from her religion and cultural background but exaggerates them due to her own anxieties about living within a non-Muslim environment.

However, I argue that Kaukab’s anxieties about her sons’ masculinity has an additional and more complicated dimension. The sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti’s essay ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’ is instructive for thinking through Kaukab’s investment in religiously-defined gender practices, especially when transposed to the predominantly non-Muslim environment of Northern England. In her article, Kandiyoti sets out a theory named the ‘patriarchal bargain’, which refers to ‘the

existence of a set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both
genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested,
redefined and renegotiated.\textsuperscript{42} Focussing on field work and studies conducted in a
loosely-defined area comprising of Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, the Arab Middle-East,
India and China, then, Kandiyoti notes ‘the implications of the patrilineal-patrilocal
complex for women not only are remarkably uniform but also entail forms of control
and subordination across cultural and religious boundaries, such as Hinduism,
Confucianism, and Islam.’\textsuperscript{43} While these societies commonly experience patriarchy
as male control over women’s lives and bodies, she writes that these cultures also
tend to reveal patterns of women negotiating within these parameters for their own
benefit thereby contesting assumptions of a straight-forward binary of male
dominance-female subordination.

Thus within this system of power, male and female worlds have their own
intricate hierarchical structures. Kandiyoti, for example, writes that whilst a young
bride that marries into a family acquires the lowest position of power, ‘the cyclical
nature of women’s power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the
authority of senior women encourage thorough internalization of this form of
patriarchy by the women themselves.’\textsuperscript{44}

Consequently, subordination to men is offset by the control that older women
attain over younger women. In \textit{Maps for Lost Lovers}, there is a particularly troubling
analogy for this dynamic in which another of the novel’s mother figures discovers
that her newly-married daughter has been refusing to consummate her marriage.

\textsuperscript{42}Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 275.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 279.
Upon learning about her daughter’s apprehension, she instructs her son-in-law to ‘rape her tonight’ (Aslam, p. 88). The shocking exchange conveys the mother’s efforts to ensure that her daughter conforms to the familial structure and so she will eventually assume a role of power within the family.

Kandiyoti summarises that ensuring the ‘life-long loyalty’ of their son is an ‘enduring preoccupation’ for many older women living within the kinds of patriarchal societies that she analyses. These efforts become especially frantic when this order is challenged, she writes:

[...] many women may continue to use all the pressure they can muster to make men live up to their obligations and will not, except under the most extreme pressure, compromise the basis for their claims by stepping out of line and losing their respectability. Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain – protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety.

Kaukab’s profound scrutiny of her sons’ behaviour to ensure they uphold what she perceives as hegemonic masculinity resonates with Kandiyoti’s findings. For example, Kaukab’s anxiety over her son Ujala’s masculinity reaches a crescendo when she plies his food with bromide – a chemical compound that is known to lower one’s libido and make someone more compliant. Kaukab had been given the bromide by a local cleric after she had consulted him over her son’s unruly behaviour. She explains: ‘I asked Allah to help me through that holy man. And it worked thanks to His blessing. After I started putting the sacred salt on your plate, you did become very kind and affectionate, mindful of the respect you owed to your elders’ (Aslam, p. 304). Kaukab’s reasoning is that her son is not respectful to his mother and father,

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46 Ibid., p. 282-83.
a trait that she states is celebrated in the Koran. As Shamas is incapable of imbuing his children with reverence for superiors, Kaukab believes she had to resort to these methods to control Ujala. Whilst his mother is ignorant about the effects of bromide, the incident illustrates the simultaneous importance attached to abiding by religiously-defined norms of gender behaviour and the lengths that Kaukab will take in order to secure Ujala’s submission.

Although these are religiously-defined gender behaviours, Kaukab’s own investment in patriarchal masculinity is not entirely rooted within genuine expressions of religiosity. By reading her tenacious efforts to ensure her sons’ compliance as constituents of a bargain with patriarchy, Kaukab’s motives are exposed as her own negotiation of power according to a Pakistani-based system of gender relations that are transposed to the novel’s British locality. Kaukab is thus more deeply attached to Islam than the other male members of her family – or her daughter – but rather as a means of upholding the gender taxonomy of her homeland.

Islam is similarly more important for female characters than males in *The Road From Damascus*. The focal conflict in the novel is central protagonist Sami’s struggling to adapt to his wife Muntaha’s developing Islamic religiosity. At the start of the novel, the narrative voice explains that Sami has gone to his parents’ homeland of Syria to obtain research materials for his floundering doctorate on Arabic literature and to have time to reflect upon Muntaha’s newly-found Islamic faith. However, this time only cements his disdain for public expressions of Islam: ‘Just about all the women Sami could see were wearing the hijab, many more than on his last visit. He didn’t like it. He didn’t like supernaturalism, nor backwardness in general’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 2). As demonstrated by his characterisation of Islam as
‘backward’ and his fixation on outward declarations of female piety, atheism has been an essential part of Sami’s character, his masculinity and his gendered worldview.

In particular, his deceased father Mustafa Traifi, who is depicted as a respected academic that spent his life researching secularist and atheist worldviews in Arabic poetry, wields an unshakeable influence on Sami. While in Damascus, for example, Sami laments that the ‘determinedly Muslim population’ represent ‘the very end of the world he’d [Mustafa] hoped for’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 2). Owing to a plan that his father concocted ‘all before the boy’s sixteenth birthday’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 10), Sami has followed his father’s path to pursue a career in academia and takes every opportunity to praise his dead father’s continuing influence upon his atheist values. When his father was alive, for instance, Sami refused to trust any analysis on British or Middle Eastern politics other than ‘Mustafa’s official version’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 334). Mustafa’s weltanschauung was one in which secularist and atheist beliefs were implicitly masculinised in opposition to ‘womanly superstition’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 10). Unsurprisingly, then, Mustafa’s obstinately-held views also led to marital conflict, as Sami’s parents’ relationship frosted over following his mother Nur’s conversion to Islam. This proves to be another similarity between the two generations of Traifi men. By the time Sami arrives back in London, he is already shaken by ‘news of the wrong sort’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 9) as it emerges that his father reported Sami’s maternal uncle for torture at the hands of government authorities. His Uncle Farris’s detention was due to his role in the Sunni Islamist organisation Muslim Brotherhood and hence political insurgency against the
secularist, pan-Arab Ba’athist Party in 1982. The incident makes the extent of his father’s distaste for religion and religious individuals unpleasantly apparent.

When Sami steps into his London marital home after arriving from Damascus, his views are further challenged as Muntaha announces that she now wears the head-covering hijab. Sami’s response to his wife’s headscarf reveals a significant amount about his masculinity, his atheist worldviews and the interplay between these. Sami reacts in a tempest of fierce and impulsive anger towards Muntaha and her Islamic beliefs that focuses, like his complaints in Damascus, upon the outwardly performed aspects of female Islamic religiosity.

At first he cloaks his contestations under the false pretence of feminist political concerns, bellowing that ‘women shouldn’t have their dress code dictated to them’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 100). His complaints are ironically undercut by the fact that it is Muntaha’s own decision to wear the hijab. In his protestations, however, Sami conveys his feelings of emasculation at her individual decision to practice Islam and assume a public appearance that denotes her beliefs. In his fury, Sami’s supposedly feminist discomfort with the hijab are unmasked as expressions of anxiety over his power and control over Muntaha. Thus, he frets about his own external image as a secular, modern husband: ‘What will people think of me? They’ll think I made you wear it’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 100). Sami’s grievances bring to light the extent to which Sami’s constructions of masculinity depend upon and are dictated by Muntaha and her public image as a harmonious and doting wife who shares her husband’s atheist viewpoints. Muntaha intimates precisely this, when she responds ‘please listen to yourself […] you are not a man, you are a contradiction’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 101).

Muntaha’s comments unpack the instability underpinning Sami’s masculinity as she is such a crucial determinant of his identity and his perception of his own gendered self. Sami, then, is emasculated by her standpoint and her view of Islam which diverges so sharply from his own, and so leads to the temporary breakdown of their marriage as well as Sami’s own mental health.

As Claire Chambers notes, the politics of Muntaha’s veil in the novel resonates with the anthropologist Emma Tarlo’s work on the significance of veiling. Quite the opposite of being a symbol of ‘passivity and oppression’, Tarlo explains that many women wear this ‘highly conspicuous symbol of Islamic religiosity’ to assert their own agency against the pressures of male relatives or an increasingly Islamophobic British society. With this in mind, Muntaha’s own adoption of the hijab becomes a mark of rebellion against Sami’s masculinised view of their marriage and Islam. Whilst Sami’s initial approach to the hijab also demonstrates what Tarlo diagnoses as a common hypocrisy as a man invokes liberal feminist discourse to control how a woman dresses or behaves. Sami’s views in the novel, however, intone far more about his fragile masculinity than Muntaha’s own personal values and freedom. Yassin-Kassab’s novel, then, powerfully transforms this stereotyped image of female subordination into an object of female power over patriarchy.

Sami deals with this situation by overindulging in alcohol and drug consumption which precipitates extra-marital sexual intercourse with another woman. Muntaha’s discovery of her husband’s infidelity results in their marital

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Consumed with regret and guilt, Sami resorts to alcohol once more and this time is taken into custody by the police for disorderly behaviour. His brief spell in prison, however, instigates a spiritual epiphany that liberates him from ‘those sensations that he usually employed as a hijab to drape around things-as-they-are’ and so, in the isolation of the cell, he ‘felt he was on the verge of something. The lifting of a veil’ (Yassin-Kassab, p.181). Yassin-Kassab’s metaphorical use of the hijab is telling as this symbolically-charged piece of material comes to signify Sami’s realisation of his own faults. Just as the novel employs the hijab as a potent symbol of female liberation, then, the hijab comes to represent Sami coming to terms with his existential disquiet and his development of a more peaceable and inclusive form of masculinity. Referring to the novel’s formal qualities, C.E. Rashid notes that Yassin-Kassab’s veil imagery alludes to a common metaphor used in Sufi poetry – that of kashf or unveiling: ‘For the Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, the dunya or corporeal world is the “veil”, preventing us from reading the “magnificent volume” of our soul which would lead to a true understanding of God’.\footnote{49 C. E. Rashid, ‘British Islam and the Novel of Transformation: Robin Yassin-Kassab’s The Road from Damascus’, Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 48.1 (2012), 92–103 (p. 97).} In Yassin-Kassab’s text, the veil has a similar function insofar as Sami becomes abruptly aware of his own errors, contradictions and, by extension, becomes cognisant of a disconcerting ‘abyss’ that he confronts by forging his own Islamic religiosity (Yassin-Kassab, p. 183). Thus, the hijab comes to symbolise his self-recognition and awareness of his inner consciousness.

Following his epiphanic experience in prison, Sami’s atheism dissipates and he is encouraged to explore Islam. However, the Islams that Yassin-Kassab engages with are contrasting and contradictory. He visits his brother-in-law Ammar’s Islamic
fundamentalists that I analysed in the previous section and also attends prayer meetings and talks at a variety of different mosques. Yassin-Kassab explains that his presentation of heterogeneous forms of Islam was a response to ‘Islamophobia and Orientalist myths, directly or indirectly. I wanted first to give a sense of the complexity of Muslims, Islam and the Muslim world.’\textsuperscript{50} He achieves this by writing about the cultural diversity of London mosques in the novel in which Arabs from the Arabian peninsula and North Africa pray alongside Turks, Pakistanis, Sudanese and British-born converts. This transcultural Islam, then, draws on influence from Muslims across a number of diverse and distinct geographies. Even in an academic sphere, Sami realises this when taking notes from a public lecture, he was:

Scribbling about the spicy mix that was Islamic Spain. About the Greco-Judaic-Indo-Persian masala of medieval Baghdad. About Qur’anic allusions to Alexander the Great. About syncretism and Sufi visions and Muslim travelogues. (Yassin-Kassab, p. 200)

This passage not only countervails stereotypes of Islam as a monolithic religion that is resistant to cultural exchange, but implies that the origins of the religion were forged through transcultural encounter and entanglement. Thus, the novel opens up a fictional space for representations of Islam as a multiform religion that is shaped by a multitude of different cultures, including Britain itself.

Even more significantly, while Sami’s conversion to Islam gives him solace and a sense of identity, this selfhood is not fixed. Far from it, Sami continues to be ‘cramped by self-doubt’ and when opposing Ammar’s Islamic fundamentalism, he explains: ‘I’m not an expert. I’m not…a conventional believer […] but I expect

\textsuperscript{50} C.E. Rashid, ‘British Islam and the Novel of Transformation: Robin Yassin-Kassab’s \textit{The Road from Damascus}, p. 97.
Islam is something you find in yourself rather than in any specific country’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 97). Dislocating his Islam from a fixed sense of place and a fixed set of ideas, Sami cultivates ‘a trembling and contingent faith’ that is not ignorant of Islam’s faults but also portrayed as a set of slippery beliefs that are in constant state of flux and open to interpretation and interrogation. Thus Sami centres his identity but, crucially, this is not a fixed sense of self that rejects outside influences.

Even so, reunion with Muntaha is the driving force behind his development of an Islamic faith thereby maintaining the significance she has over his identity. Following his conversion, he undertakes a bodily transformation through which he performatively expresses his new ideology and masculinity. In the demonstratively titled chapter ‘Fast’, the narrative voice describes Sami’s scrupulous metamorphosis from an ‘empirically verifiable humiliation’ into a bearded, clean-living man with an Islamic faith (Yassin-Kassab, p. 253). His body, then, becomes a site through which he tries to regain control and visually construct an image of himself in which he feels that he is ‘becoming more manly’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 258). This points again to Sami’s concern with outward appearances thereby indicating the significance of public judgement to his masculinity. As such, Sami wishes to show – or even embody – his new Islamic religiosity by growing facial hair, avoiding meat and processed foods and even upholding more intimate practices such as the Islamically-sanctioned act of washing after defecation. Sami believes this change in his bodily appearance and practices will affect an internal change as ‘The body, he reasoned – and the self is what he meant – was a monster that could be weakened through lack of sustenance. A bit of self-applied Sufism’ (Yassin-Kassab, p. 255). Sami’s restructuring of his body and his continual reiteration of hygiene habits are
performative actions that endeavour to express a Sufi-styled Islamic masculinity which, as I addressed in relation to Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*, also signifies a particularly progressive approach to gender relations. Throughout this performative transformation, however, Sami mourns his loss of Muntaha and how ‘if she closed her doors on him’ then he would contemplate suicide (Yassin-Kassab, p. 259). His creation of an Islamic masculinity, then, is also somewhat undercut by his desperation to be with Muntaha again and, even in her absence, she is crucial to his own self-construction.

The altering of Sami’s appearance, however, coincides with the attacks on New York’s World Trade Center that occurs towards the novel’s final pages. Sami’s new image, however, leads to unintended consequences within a post-9/11 British context. When leaving a mosque, he is taken into custody by police primarily due to his newly-grown beard. Sami’s brief detention resonates with Jasbir K. Puar’s work on racialised profiling that, she argues, is an increasing part of contemporary racial politics amidst Euro-America’s fears of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.\(^5\)

Owing to the facial hair sported by terrorists, such as Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, beards have come to symbolise ‘a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population [...] who refuse to assimilate’ and, therefore, supposedly represent a threat to the West’s safety and security.\(^5\) Puar notes how cultural texts have been complicit in this pernicious stereotyping and how these racialised discourses have legitimised the surveillance of non-white men with facial hair. In Yassin-Kassab’s novel, Sami’s transformed bodily image casts him within this stereotype of the Muslim male ‘other’ which is especially ironic as the

protagonist is now rooted within a community of diverse British Muslims through which he feels a sense of belonging and, resultantly, has started to behave in a far more tolerant and harmonious manner than in his atheist incarnation.

Sami’s detention, based on his appearance, also strikingly relates to the protagonist’s own preoccupations with bodily and sartorial image and ideological beliefs. This incident, therefore, is a powerful articulation of the arbitrary nature of connecting perceptions of identity with outward image. Nevertheless, while the British political system has stereotyped Sami as a threat in the novel, Muntaha’s upset is assuaged by her husband’s transformations. Not long after his detention, the couple reunite and escape the city to the Scottish Highlands. Feeling liberated from their concerns about rising Islamophobia after 9/11, the novel finishes with the redemptive image of the pair praying together on a hillside. Through this sojourn into the countryside, the couple enjoy the anonymity that being in the sparsely populated area affords them. Consequently, they feel more at ease to practice a pluralised form of Islamic identity and assume a religiously-codified appearance outside of the confines of post-9/11 London. This final part of the text only further reinstates the novel’s exploration of tensions between how people are perceived and how they appear. However, Sami’s metamorphosis into an agnostic Muslim convert with a less antagonistic masculinity is also an aspect of this, even though his change only further demonstrates the influence and importance of Muntaha upon his identity.

As should be apparent by now, female characters in Maps for Lost Lovers and The Road From Damascus play a central role in the formation of these fictional masculinities. In Aslam’s novel, the character of Kaukab inculcates her sons into a rigid construction of masculinity that uses a dogmatic form of Islam to counter her
anxieties about cultural exchange and unmasks her personal commitment in
upholding patriarchal gender hierarchies. While in Yassin-Kassab’s text, Sami’s
‘weak’ masculinity is dependent upon Muntaha who manages to steer her husband
towards constructions of a pluralistic masculinity that embraces transcultural forms
of conditional and inclusive Islamic religiosity. Kureishi’s novel, however, provides
a third perspective which throws all previously discussed constructions of
masculinity into sharp relief. Whereas Yassin-Kassab’s novel pushes towards a less
rigidly-defined masculinity that includes contingent forms of Islamic faith, The Black
Album charts Shahid’s journey from the certainties proposed by a compensatory,
fixed masculinity based around Islamic fundamentalism to forms of behaviour that
question and challenge all conceptions of gender and cultural identity. As I will now
explain, the female character Deedee Osgood is the primary influence behind
Shahid’s development of a more fluid and less brittle conception of gender practices.

Indeed, when away from Riaz and his ‘brothers’ who I analysed in the
previous section, Shahid spends much of his time blaspheming against the group’s
stringent gender practices. The brothers’ ‘masculine struggle’ is offset by Shahid’s
connection with his white British lecturer Deedee Osgood. Deedee is an arresting
character whose unorthodox pedagogy includes dismantling cultural hierarchies by
delivering lectures on the history of funk music alongside lessons on the writer Ivan
Turgenev, enlightening her students about their position in society through
expounding Marxist, Feminist and Postcolonialist perspectives, and, in the case of
Shahid, transcending the boundaries of the classroom through introductions to sex
and drugs. Deedee, then, symbolises the novel’s alternative to the forms of belonging
proposed by the compensatory protest masculinity of Riaz and the gang. Sarah Ilott observes how the possibilities that Osgood represents are inscribed within her name:

D. Osgood: do is good. Deedee’s ‘dos’ (encouraging him to partake in new experiences, be they gastronomic, hallucinogenic or sexual) rival his religious friends’ ‘do nots’ (not partaking in sexual activities, not being friendly with white women and not taking mind-altering substances).\footnote{Sarah Illott, \textit{New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 36.}

Under her auspices, Shahid’s eyes are opened to more fluid and indefinite gender constructions that stress experimentation, playfulness and performativity. In stark contrast to Riaz and the brothers’ abstention from sex so as to pour libidinal energies into politicised religiosity, Deedee and Shahid enjoy a frenetic sexual relationship that often overturns or pokes fun at male dominance over women.

Gender, racial and ethno-cultural power relations are most clearly subverted or challenged in Deedee and Shahid’s sexual encounters with one another. For instance, Deedee is depicted as instructing her younger male lover about the mechanics of different sexual positions and often assumes the dominant position during intercourse. Throughout the novel, Deedee controls the sexual intercourse they share, consuming Shahid ‘as if [he was] a piece of cake’ \textparens{Kureishi BA, p. 117}. Drawing on the common English idiom ‘as easy as a piece of cake’, which implies a task which is very easy to do, this simile indicates Shahid’s weakness and therefore someone who is easy for Deedee to dominate. Even when she performs fellatio on him, she is in control of her lover’s pleasure as, ‘He’d never experienced lips that could make you feel that you could inhale your soul through the end of your dick’
Dave Gunning remarks that this description of oral sex suggests not only dominance over Shahid, but also implies his submission to Deedee’s sexual energy and her ideology of hedonism. Bart Moore-Gilbert, meanwhile, draws attention to Deedee’s exoticisation of the British Pakistani Shahid and his ‘cafe-au-lait’ skin (Kureishi BA, p. 210). Moore-Gilbert argues that Kureishi ‘rearranges the terms of the colonial trope without disturbing the racialized power relations that underpin it’. Building on Moore-Gilbert’s observation, the text’s references to Shahid’s skin resembling a consumable coffee drink also suggests Deedee’s sensual pleasure in the authority she brandishes over her student as an older, white woman with more sexual experience. In other words, Deedee buttresses her personal worth and sexuality through her domination over the directionless young postmigrant man.

Deedee also encourages Shahid to experiment with his gender identity by applying makeup cosmetics. Prior to a boisterous bout of intercourse, she paints her lover’s face with eyeliner, lipstick and blusher, all completed whilst listening to the singer Madonna’s track ‘Vogue’. Generally perceived as products that enhance female beauty, the application of cosmetics on Shahid’s face by Deedee both reasserts her control over him and liberates him from the stranglehold of a fixed, determined masculinity, as ‘[...] he liked the feel of his new female face. He could be demure, flirtatious, teasing, a star; a burden went, a certain responsibility had been removed’ (Kureishi BA, p. 117). Moreover, once his face has been altered by makeup, he wonders ‘what it might be like to go out as a woman, to be looked at differently’ (Kureishi BA, p. 118) thereby abdicating his male identity entirely. This

interest in gender-bending marks a sharp contrast to the inflexible masculinity of Riaz’s Islamic fundamentalists and the enjoyment that Shahid derives from this experimentation inspires his abandonment of his peers in favour of Deedee’s hedonistic lifestyle. Through his dalliances with Deedee, Shahid’s interest in Islam dissipates entirely therefore exposing his superficial adoption of the group’s Islamic fundamentalism as merely a way to ‘belong’. In his sexual adventures with Deedee, Kureishi establishes sexuality as a corrective to the marginalisation that Shahid previously felt.

The pair’s shared love of the bi-racial musician Prince also comes into play here. References to Prince and his oeuvre ‘permeate The Black Album from its title to the last scene, which shows Shahid and his lover Deedee on their way to a Prince concert’. Tellingly, the novel takes its title from Prince’s tenth studio album ‘The Black Album’, which was recalled from distribution shortly after its release. Released in 1987, Prince’s lyrics on the album share a number of thematic concerns with Kureishi’s novel: tracks such as ‘The Grind’ and ‘Superfunkacalafragasexy’ both examine sexual intercourse from a female perspective, and ‘Bob George’ explores hypermasculine gender constructions within African American communities. Kureishi’s intertextual references to the album have further significance as Prince withdrew all copies of the album following ‘a dark night of the soul [...] He [Prince] won’t get specific, saying only that he saw the word God.’ Like Prince’s album of the same name then, tensions between religion, gender and sexuality are inscribed within Kureishi’s novel.

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Prince’s music and persona are crucially important for Deedee and Shahid. Prince’s music, which draws on an admixture of different genres ranging from funk, soul, blues, rock and hip-hop, serves as a rejection of the fundamentalists’ drive for ‘purity’ and their assertion that music is ‘forbidden’ (Kureishi BA, p. 130).

Additionally, Prince’s lyrics, which often explicitly extol the virtues of sexuality, female beauty and homoeroticism, all give voice to Deedee’s promiscuous lifestyle. In his concerts and appearances, Prince also contrived an androgynous image that involved his use of cosmetics and the adoption of normatively female dress. Indeed, Deedee remarks on Prince that, ‘He’s half-black and half-white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too’. To which Shahid responds ‘he can play soul and funk and rock and rap’ (Kureishi BA, p. 21). Moore-Gilbert summarises that

Kureishi most graphically represents pop at the crossroads not only of different cultural influences but as a site in which the plurality of identity – whether at the level of ethnicity, class, gender or sexuality – is celebrated. As such Prince’s music symbolizes those trends in the contemporary world which Kureishi most prizes.

The invocation of Prince within the narrative, then, allows Kureishi to align his protagonist with Prince’s subversion of the narrow prisms of gender, sexual, ethnic and racial identities.

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57 Examples include the lyrics to Prince’s track ‘I Would Die 4 U’ from his 1984 album with The Revolution entitled ‘Purple Rain’, in which he sings: ‘I'm not a woman/I'm not a man/I am something that you'll never understand’, or in his ‘Controversy’ which features the lines: ‘Am I black or white?/Am I straight or gay? [...] People call me rude/ I wish we were all nude/ I wish there was no black and white/ I wish there were no rules/ Do I believe in God/? Do I believe in me?/ Some people wanna die/ So they can be free’, from the 1981 album ‘Controversy’.

58 Bart Moore-Gilbert, pp. 117-18.

59 Bart Moore-Gilbert also notes that, ‘Prince rescinded the entire concept of identity mid-way through his career, instead choosing to be identified by an unpronounceable symbol that led many to refer to the singer as ‘The Artist Formerly Known as Prince’’, see Bart Moore-Gilbert, pp. 117-18.
Beyond what Prince represents as a challenger of normative racial and gender identities, Prince also embodied a perceptive awareness of what Judith Butler has termed the ‘performativity’ of identity. Princ’s donning of female clothes, his application of makeup, his homoeroticism, his mischievous approach to sexuality and his use of aliases became potent symbols of the socially constructed nature of identities. The application of make-up by Prince and the fictional protagonist Shahid, then, resonates with Butler’s conceptualisation of drag acts as exposing differences between anatomical sex and socially constructed gender. In their ostentatious performances of femininity, drag impersonators make clear the differences between the anatomical sex of the performer, the gender of the performer and the exaggerated form of gender that the performer chooses to enact. In the case of Prince and Kureishi’s protagonist, both supplant the masculinity they are supposed to perform with imitations of femininity thereby both expanding definitions of masculinity and also exposing gender as performative.

However, to think on Shahid’s gender performances a little further, Kureishi also presents Shahid’s expressions of religiosity in a similar frame of performative semiotics. Moore-Gilbert perceptively notes that Shahid’s application of cosmetics mirrors his donning of the shalwar-kameez to pray. Furthermore, when Shahid puts on the shalwar-kameez, he similarly describes a revelatory feeling of belonging to Islam (Kureishi BA, p. 131). The whole experience of praying and religious meetings with his peers is figured as a performative action, as Shahid likens being with them to watching a film at the cinema. For Shahid, leaving Riaz, Chad and Hat was ‘like someone leaving the cinema’, where absorption in a fictional filmic narrative comes

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60 See introduction, p. 22-4 for more detailed explanation of Butler’s concept.
to end and he returns to a reality which is ‘more complex and inexplicable’ (Kureishi BA, p. 133). The juxtaposition of these performances of identity, where Shahid is enacting a ‘gender-bending’ persona interchangeably with an Islamic religious identity, ultimately suggests the instability and fluidity of all forms of identity. Riaz and his followers, however, are not cognizant of their own identity performances and believe that their religious faith provides clarity thereby enabling them to ‘swim in a clear sea’ and ‘see by a clear light’ (Kureishi BA, p. 79). For Shahid, however, through his sexual encounters with Deedee and their mutual passion for Prince’s music, the fissures and cleavages that govern identity construction are most apparent and the existential certainties that Riaz and his brothers espouse are exposed as precarious.

Conclusively, all of these three novels, in their individual ways, reveal masculinity as a pattern of contingent and performative gender acts. Female characters in The Black Album, Maps for Lost Lovers and The Road From Damascus all manipulate men into conforming to secular and sacred constructions of masculinity – or gender more broadly – by sculpting men’s bodies and influencing their sartorial appearances to reflect religious or atheist values. These three texts, then, all combine to show the crucial function of an ‘other’, whether it be women or religion, in the construction of masculinities, with The Black Album powerfully troubling conceptions of a gender binary altogether.

Conclusion

When read and analysed together, The Black Album, Maps for Lost Lovers and The Road From Damascus all expose a multiplicity of different Islamic faiths and a
variety of different viewpoints on Islam that have nevertheless been shaped by life and settlement in Britain. In Kureishi’s novel, Riaz’s Islamic fundamentalists are presented as young, directionless post-migrant men whose migrant families have cast off their religious heritage. Yet, for this younger generation, a particularly rigid articulation of religion is embraced as a compensatory stance against a collective sense of disempowerment at the hands of a normatively white British society.

Aslam’s text, meanwhile, depicts an alienated community of migrants who construct a zealous form of Sunni Islam as a means to combat their disorientation and buttress subsequent generations from the corruptive influence of non-Muslim British cultures. Yassin-Kassab’s novel *The Road From Damascus*, however, reverses these patterns by tracing an intransigent atheist’s development towards an Islamic form of agnosticism. In the process of his conversion, Yassin-Kassab’s protagonist encounters a number of different articulations of Islam all existing within Britain thereby reinstating a more complex version of Islam than the generally negative religion found in Kureishi and Aslam’s texts. Notably, Yassin-Kassab’s novel also affords religious individuals much more agency than the other two novels; as protagonists such as Sami and Muntaha intellectually engage with Islam and carve out a personal, subjective but also conditional and inclusive form of Islamic religiosity. Such a construction of religion is in marked contrast to Kureishi and Aslam’s characters who are blindly induced into faith or have their critical faculties disabled by a dogmatic Islamic belief system that refuses to permit free thinking.

Just as these novels contest a singular interpretation of the Islamic religion, they also represent a multitude of different ways of performing masculinity. The notion of performance is singled out in these texts as respective protagonists Shahid,
Sami and the sons Ujala and Charag are guided and inculcated into transforming and enacting forms of gendered behaviour by women that either give space to or reject Islam as a legitimate system of belief. In the process, each novel only magnifies the performativity inherent in identity as men seek to ‘do’ Islamic masculinities or ‘do’ atheist masculinities in the changing of their body, dress, lifestyle choices, their artistic endeavours or even sexual activity. The common thread between all of these novels, however, is that it is the female characters Kaukab, Deedee and Muntaha who all seek to engineer male protagonists to these forms of masculinity and expose the performative nature of practices of masculinity.

Within this chapter, I have emphasised the multiplicity of Islams and masculinities that come out of comparative analysis of different novels that engage with similar foci. This has served to contrast the more fixed forms of masculinity construction that were encountered within *East is East* and *My Son the Fanatic* which featured fathers forcing particular gender ideals upon their sons which were resisted by similarly rigid notions of gender behaviour and national identity. However, a hitherto unexplored difference between the novels was their different locational settings: *The Black Album* and *The Road From Damascus* all take place within the British capital whereas *Maps for Lost Lovers* focuses on a community in Northern England. What emerges from Kureishi and Yassin-Kassab’s texts is the characterisation of London as an urban space in which people with a variety of different geographical trajectories influence concepts of British Islam and masculinity. It is this topic that I turn to now in my next chapter that analyses the significance of urban environments in the formation of British Muslim masculinities.
British Muslim Masculinities in the Metropolis:


Introduction

Cities can be spaces of encounter, exchange and movement where people from an array of different places and cultures live and work in close proximity. Hence as Doreen Massey evokes in an essay entitled ‘A Global Sense of Place’, cities are spaces where the complex melange of peoples with different migratory trajectories leads to an inevitable pluralising of identities.¹ Even so, Massey is quick to remind us that an individual’s ethno-cultural background, race, gender or sexual orientation colours their access and relationship to the urban locale. Women, homosexuals, people of colour or trans individuals may tailor their movement around cities owing to perceptions that they face exceptional threats of verbal or physical assault based on their ‘difference’ within spaces which are generally coded as normatively white and masculine. Indeed, it is heterosexual men, and often those who are white, who enjoy the most secure and seamless movement through urban environments.

Peter E. Hopkins’ research on British Muslim men in Glasgow following the events of 9/11, however, casts men with a stereotyped ‘Muslim’ appearance bearded, dark skinned and sporting markers of cultural difference such as shalwar kameez - as particularly conspicuous targets of racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic discourses and profiling by social and state apparatus thereby altering this section of British society’s experience of life, work and movement in the city.² Taking Massey and Hopkins’ work as a springboard, this chapter investigates the significance of

cities for constructions of transcultural British Muslim masculinity in two urban-based novels: Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag.*

Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* focuses on the lives of Bangladeshi inhabitants of a sequestered East London housing estate. The text is told through the perspective of a female protagonist named Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman from Sylhet who comes to London as a result of an arranged marriage to Chanu, himself a Bangladeshi migrant to Britain in the 1970s. Nazneen’s gradual adaptation to life in the UK also foments her self-realisation as she comes-to-terms with the death of her baby son, rejects the prescribed housewife role imposed upon her by becoming a home-based garment worker, and eventually embarks on an extra-marital affair with a vociferous and disaffected young British man of Bangladeshi heritage named Karim which she manages to conceal from her husband. Nazneen’s progressive self-fulfilment is contradicted by the novel’s male protagonists. Her husband Chanu suffers from a series of career setbacks that results in his return to Bangladesh without Nazneen, who chooses to remain in London. For the younger Karim, the novel also concludes with his troubling trajectory into Islamist extremism. Ali’s novel, then, presents London as an ambivalent space in which being in the city is a liberating experience for Nazneen. However, the city only emphasises her husband Chanu and her lover Karim’s sense of marginalisation and disenfranchisement.

Ali’s novel was released to critical acclaim from corners of the academic and journalistic press, culminating in *Brick Lane*’s shortlisted nomination for 2003’s Man Booker Prize, the Guardian First Book Award, the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize and the US National Book Award. Ali herself was also listed as one of the decade’s twenty most promising literary talents by the literary magazine *Granta,*

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which also published an excerpt from the novel before it went to press. The novel also received popular and commercial success; *Brick Lane* won the WH Smith People’s Choice Award and the popular television show hosts Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan chose the novel as part of their Book Club initiative to boost readership levels amongst their viewers in 2004. Rehana Ahmed summarises the book’s appeal, ‘it was [...] the first novel by a British writer of Muslim heritage to engage closely’ with working-class British Muslim immigrant life ‘subsequent to and in the context of events, including the 2001 race riots and the 9/11 terror attacks, that have cast a spotlight on Britain’s Muslim population’. Consequently, ‘the level of interest it generated in a media and reading public eager for a greater “understanding” for British Muslims is perhaps unsurprising’.

The reception that *Brick Lane* received was not entirely positive, however. In December 2003, a few months after the novel’s publication, the Greater Sylhet Development and Welfare Council, ‘a nation-wide voluntary organisation that cites the welfare of Sylheti Bangladeshis in Britain as its primary concern’, penned a comprehensive letter protesting what they felt was a ‘shameful’ representation of Sylheti Bangladeshis as ‘backward, uneducated and unsophisticated’. The novel’s subsequent adaptation to the cinema by director Sarah Gavron, released only a few months after the 7/7 London bombings (as described in my thesis introduction), provoked further protest amongst the area’s large Bangladeshi immigrant community. In the words of Abdus Salique, the owner of a sweet-shop on the novel’s eponymous street and later Mayor of Tower Hamlets, the novel and film

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3 Ibid., p. 125.  
6 Ibid., p. 125.  
7 Ibid., p. 125.  
8 Ibid., p. 125.
were ‘racist and insulting’. Unsurprisingly, then, the novel, and its incarnation on the screen, remain oft-quoted in discussions of representations of British Muslims in contemporary culture.

One of the central points of controversy has been the writer’s own background. Ali was born in modern-day Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) but fled with her East Pakistani father and English mother during the country’s bitter War of Independence from Pakistan. Upon arrival in the UK, the Ali family settled in Bolton, Lancashire and Monica Ali went on to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Wadham College, University of Oxford. As such, Ali has a markedly more privileged background and experience as a migrant than her fictional creations who live in one of the most economically deprived areas of Britain. Tower Hamlets, the area that the novel is set in, has seen the ‘most sustained pattern of migration within London’ and, according to the 2011 Census, is home to 81,000 Bangladeshi migrants and postmigrants. The Bangladeshi communities have made an indelible mark upon the area which has become a tourist attraction in London for its South Asian cuisine and even for its use of multilingual road signs which are often used as superficial evidence for London’s multiculturalism.

Undercutting these renderings, however, is Altab Ali Park, positioned at the foot of Brick Lane and upon the main thoroughfare of Whitechapel Road. The park memorialises Altab Ali who in 1978, and at the age of twenty-five, was murdered in a racially-motivated attack. Altab Ali Park has since become a unique space that pays tribute to Tower Hamlets’ Bangladeshi communities featuring an arch that

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9 Ibid., p. 125.
10 See Ahmed, Writing British Muslims, pp. 125-6.

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contains fragments of a poem by the Nobel Prize-winning Bangladeshi poet Rabindranath Tagore and a miniature replica of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka’s Shaheed Minar sculpture.\textsuperscript{12} The emergence of this space, however, is as much about visually marking Bangladeshi community’s particular contribution to London as it is a memorial of the hardships that British Bangladeshis have faced. For some, the novel was perceived as additional fuel for attacks on an ‘already beleaguered community […] at a time of particular vulnerability and scrutiny’ by a writer whose background meant that she could comfortably claim an intimacy with a community she barely knew.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Brick Lane}’s depiction of an ‘enclosed’ working-class Bangladeshi community contrasts with the representations of Glasgow as a site of intercultural encounter and transcultural possibility that appear in Suhayl Saadi’s 2004 novel \textit{Psychoraag}. Taking place over the space of a six hour night radio broadcast, \textit{Psychoraag} centres on a young Pakistani-Scot named Zaf, as he records his final show on a pirate radio station that was set up by fellow Glaswegian Asians. Emphasising a dynamic coming together of cultures within the Scottish city, \textit{Psychoraag} is narrated by a variety of different narrative voices such as the omniscient narrator’s, which is written in Standard English, and Zaf’s internal monologues and stream of consciousness which are expressed in a demotic, vernacular Glaswegian Scots, peppered with his parents’ mother tongue Urdu. Zaf’s radio playlist also adds to this transcultural polyphony as it includes music such as The Beatles and The Kinks, Scottish folk and Sufi devotional music. \textit{Psychoraag}’s


\textsuperscript{13} Ahmed, \textit{Writing British Muslims}, p. 125.
juxtaposition of different languages, dialects and music defies cultural hierarchies, with the novel shifting between a diverse array of cultural markers and associations.

Like Ali, Saadi was not born in his novel’s setting but in the small town of Beverley in Yorkshire before moving with his Pakistani migrant parents to Glasgow at a young age. Like Hanif Kureishi, he began his writing career penning pornographic and erotic literature under the pseudonym Melanie Desmoulins. His 1997 novel *The Snake* is allegedly the first novel to be written by a non-white Scot.\(^{14}\) Saadi’s writing career has unfortunately taken a different direction to Ali’s; financial considerations have unfortunately compelled him to leave writing in order to pursue another profession. In 2013, he explained that he now works exclusively as a Dentist in Glasgow.\(^{15}\) Nevertheless, both writers’ divergent transcultural backgrounds and attachments to their home cities play formative parts in each of their novels.

Superficially, *Psychoraag* and *Brick Lane* present antithetical renderings of cities for young British Muslim men: Glasgow as a space of inclusion and London as a site of exclusion. This is reflected in each novel’s formal qualities; *Psychoraag*’s transcultural aesthetics are markedly different from *Brick Lane*’s more conventional realism that has been convincingly described by Michael Perfect as a ‘multicultural bildungsroman’.\(^{16}\) This dynamic extends to representations of migrant and post-migrant communities in the novels more broadly, as the Glaswegian Muslims of *Psychoraag* are depicted as associating more freely with other communities, whilst the Bangladeshi Londoners of *Brick Lane* are portrayed as less open to cultural exchange. However, over the course of the chapter, this initial supposition will be disputed. The comparatively more positive portrayal of Glasgow and more negative

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\(^{15}\) Information obtained through my correspondence with the author.

evocation of London offers some sharp insights into similarities and differences
between migrant and post-migrant Muslim subjectivities within Britain that will be
unpacked in due course.

Indeed, bringing together a text set in Glasgow and a text set in London is
especially productive. Just as identity assemblages such as ‘Muslim’ and ‘man’
should not be regarded as homogenous, nor should British identities. The 2014
Scottish Independence Referendum, for example, has highlighted that the
relationship between the four nations that make up the United Kingdom is at times
discordant. Glasgow, in particular, had 53.49 percent of its electorate voting in
favour of cessation from the United Kingdom.¹⁷ As Scotland’s largest city, Glasgow
has a distinct cultural identity both within Scotland and the United Kingdom at large.
Assuming the title of ‘Second City of the British Empire’ during the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries owing to its vital role in the shipbuilding, steel, commerce and,
until its abolition in 1833, slave trades that cemented Britain’s colonial dominance,
Glasgow has been associated with many formative British political, cultural and
artistic movements.¹⁸ These include the city’s affiliation with the economist Adam
Smith whose work The Wealth of Nations (1776) theorised Free Market economics,
as well as the Art Deco architecture and visual art of Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Glasgow suffered an economic downturn in the 1980s, however, with the
closure of industry at the hands of the Margaret Thatcher administration’s stringent
neo-liberal social and economic policy. Socio-economic depression was mirrored in
the city’s cultural production and, thus, the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to a new
distinctive new literary voice that was often penned in vernacular Scots and focused

on questions of class. Key examples include Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* (1981) and the works of James Kelman.¹⁹ Willy Maley notes that this literary development stemmed from the city’s movement from Second city of Empire to ‘post-industrial heritage museum’.²⁰ Such literary and cultural redefinitions of Glasgow have only become more pronounced amidst Scotland’s greater political autonomy. Following a referendum in 1997, Scotland was afforded a devolutionary parliament in 1999 allowing the country more power over health, education and tax. After successive victories for the Scottish National Party (SNP) in devolved elections, Scotland held the aforementioned 2014 Independence Referendum only to ultimately remain within the United Kingdom but with the process exposing a number of differences within the nation, such as Glasgow’s overwhelming distaste for the British political status quo. *Psychoraag*’s conception and publication occurred between these historical shifts. Carla Rodríguez González, therefore, claims that the novel was born out of Scotland’s post-devolution confidence and is therefore invested in reframing Glasgow as a city of diverse transcultural exchange and co-existence.²¹

My analysis will show how such positive images are complicated in the novel but also the real-life situation of Muslim communities in Glasgow frustrate a simplistic image of a cheerfully multicultural city. Pakistani communities and peoples in Glasgow mark the largest migrant and post-migrant communities in Scotland with most settling in the districts of Pollokshields, Pollokshaws, Govanhill,

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Newton Mearns, Bearsden, East Kilbride and Woodlands. This population came closer to the forefront of Britain’s attention on 30th June 2007 when a car filled with explosives was driven into the glass frontage of Glasgow International Airport. The drivers, Bilal Abdulla and Kafeel Ahmed, were both Glaswegian-born men of Pakistani heritage who explained their terrorism on the grounds of British foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sara Upstone points out that the attack signalled that Abdulla and Ahmed identified ‘a Scottish airport as a legitimate target of protest against the “British” establishment’, therefore asserting Scotland’s part in the larger United Kingdom. Consequent to the attacks, Muslim communities in Scotland – and specifically in Glasgow - reported heightened acts of Islamophobia and racism in a similar manner to those experienced south of the border.

In 2016, Muslim communities in Glasgow became again the object of media attention, following the murder of Asad Shah, an Ahmadi Muslim shopkeeper in the city’s Shawlands district. Asad Shah’s murder was perpetrated by a Sunni Muslim Glaswegian in an act of religiously-motivated hatred towards different interpretations of Islam. The murder, therefore, was a grim incident that nonetheless exposed the diversity of Islamic faiths within the most populated Scottish city.

London, however, is more well-known as a place that has been shaped by diverging migratory trajectories because it occupies a different national and international significance as both the capital of the United Kingdom and England’s largest city. Home to approximately eight million people, the city’s dominance in

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24 Ibid., p. 97.
British cultural and socio-political discourses is frequently invoked as a sign of
Anglocentrism, and more specifically, bias towards the UK’s most affluent citizens
in the South East of England. As such, attention on London is often charged with
overshadowing other regions of the United Kingdom. Such remonstrations, however,
tend to overlook the sharp divides within London’s socio-economic fabric. The so-
called ‘City of London’, as a distinct area within London’s greater metropolis, is a
concentrated pocket of transnational wealth which boasts globally-influential banks,
offices and businesses. This economically privileged workforce has settled mostly in
areas of North and West London, as well as various commuter towns in the counties
of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hertfordshire that make up the boundaries of the city.
Conversely, sections of South and East London, such as the boroughs of Lewisham
and Brick Lane’s setting of Tower Hamlets feature some of the highest levels of
social deprivation and poverty within Great Britain and Northern Ireland. According
to the UK-based poverty monitoring group, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the
negative aspects of this socio-economic disparity disproportionately affects
London’s substantial non-white population, with minority ethnic and racial groups in
London suffering from unemployment and discrimination in the workplace at a

What should be apparent from these details, however, is that contemporary
London’s global outreach is a defining feature of the city. At one end of the spectrum
this is manifested in the Chinese, Malaysian and German banks in Canary Warf and,
at the other end, it is demonstrated by the vast array of Afro-Caribbean, Latin
American, Turkish, Arab and South Asian markets that line New Cross Road,
Deptford High Street, Electric Avenue in Brixton, Harringay Green Lanes or Brick
Lane in Tower Hamlets. At the current juncture, London is a transcultural metropolis whose influence extends beyond solely the United Kingdom. Transnational movement and migration has shaped and benefitted the city thereby changing both the urban and human geography of the metropolis with, as John McLeod, points out particular areas of the city coming to be associated with distinct populations. McLeod rightly notes, however, that such a tidy mapping of London ignores ‘a number of different cultural constituencies whose members move through the city and interact with others’, thereby further expressing the complex meshing of different cultures within contemporary London. London, then, in the twenty-first century is a globalised metropolis in which an estimated 300 different languages are spoken. It was therefore, appropriate, when Sadiq Khan, a London-born politician of Pakistani heritage, was elected as London Mayor on 6th May 2016 thereby making him the first Muslim mayor of a major global city. In the following pages, I examine how two novels by British writers of Muslim heritage address urban spaces and their influence upon British Muslim male protagonists. Taking the aforementioned context as a springboard, this chapter interrogates how fictional narratives address how both urban iterations of Islamophobic discourses and the transcultural milieu of these two cities shape literary representations of British Muslim masculinity. The chapter will explore these

28 Ibid., p. 4.
29 Ibid., p. 4.
30 Emphasising the embedded nature of Islamophobic discourses, however, 2016’s London Mayoral Elections saw the Conservative Party’s candidate Zac Goldsmith use Islamophobic tactics to besmirch Khan. Goldsmith notoriously penned an inflammatory article about Khan’s Islamic faith which included images of the 7/7 bombings. The Goldsmith campaign also sought to make connections between Khan’s faith, his background and Islamist terror. Despite this sustained Islamophobic attack by the Conservative Party, Sadiq Khan, himself born in the South London area of Tooting to a Pakistani migrant bus driver and a Pakistani migrant seamstress, was elected as Mayor of London on 6th May 2016. For more information, see ‘How Zac Goldsmith Imported Donald Trump’s Politics into Britain’, *Middle East Eye* <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/london-mayor-race-conservatives-game-religious-and-racial-divisions-538083247> [accessed 2 May 2016].
questions in three sections. First, in ‘Writing the City, Writing Masculinities’, I delve deeper into experiences of the city by male protagonists. Second, in ‘Embodying Urban Masculinities’, I address how the urban environments of London and Glasgow impact on masculinised bodies in the texts. Third and finally, in ‘Music, Literature and Urban Masculinities’, I unpack the myriad of musical and literary references in each text and how these shape protagonists’ sense of belonging to the city. In all of these sections, I will be exploring how encounters and contact with the different Muslim and non-Muslim British cultures within cities, influences how fictional migrant and post-migrant male protagonists negotiate and translate their identities. Practices of masculinity are sites in which these transcultural encounters are particularly conspicuous as the ways male protagonists perform their gender differ according to the environs they are in, the people they are associating with and by extension, the cultures they are encountering. The forging of transcultural masculinities in cities, then, poses a case study for Sherry Simon’s assertion that cities are sites of circulation. She explains:

What moves? Peoples, ideas, money, traffic, waste through sewage systems, underground rivers, gossip and rumour. All these different kinds of objects and commodities circulate in complex patterns of overlay, some random, some following pre-established pathways. 31

This chapter argues that ‘masculinities’ should be added to Sherry’s list, as British Muslim male gender practices are subject to the same complex patterns described above: challenged, reformulated and reasserted in ways that offer substantial import in understanding complexes of transcultural belonging, gender practices, cultural translation and urban marginality.

Writing the City, Writing Masculinities

For Raewyn Connell, the relative ease of movement that men enjoy within cities is a vital factor in the construction of hegemonic masculinities, as it brings men into contact with other men from whom practices and performances of masculinity are observed, learned and reformulated. Prior to her gender transition, Connell wrote about the process of walking through the city for hegemonic masculinised bodies:

To be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world. Walking down the street, I square my shoulders and covertly measure myself against other men. Walking past a couple of punk youths late at night, I wonder if I look formidable enough. At a demonstration I size up the policemen and wonder if I am bigger and stronger than them if it comes to the crunch – a ludicrous consideration, given the techniques of mass action and crowd control, but an automatic reaction nonetheless.  

Connell’s piece delineates how urban public space is gendered and how the seemingly egalitarian and innocuous process of walking down a street is informed by practices of gender. Cities, then, are important sites of cultural and gendered translation in which men learn about different forms of masculinity as they encounter people from a variety of different cultures. This segment opens the chapter’s interrogation of the role urban environments play in the constructions of British Muslim masculinities, by posing a question of how central male characters engage with their surroundings and the people they meet within their neighbourhoods.

In *Brick Lane*, the protagonists live within a sequestered tower block in the London borough of Tower Hamlets in which they spend much of their time longing

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for a home that is ‘situated elsewhere and belongs to the past’\textsuperscript{33}. Frauke Matthes observes that this feeling of loss causes the majority of Ali’s characters to ‘re-create a home, a Bangladeshi diaspora, in East London.’\textsuperscript{34} Matthes bases her contention on Douglas Robinson’s definition of diaspora as:

\begin{quote}
[...] a way of imagining border culture on a global scale, groups and individuals dealing with cultural differences on a daily basis, in the communities, where they live and work, intermarrying, mixing cultures and races, growing up bilingual and trilingual and resisting (or succumbing to) pressures to become (or pretend to become) monolingual. A diasporic culture is a global culture that is forever displaced, in exile, living among strangers that become the familiar characters of our homes and places of work.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Robinson’s description resonates with the displacement that many of the novel’s protagonists feel. London, and more specifically Tower Hamlets, is an alien space in which characters such as the loquacious moneylender Mrs. Islam – and initially Nazneen – cocoon themselves from the non-Muslim cultures outside the estate’s boundaries thereby exposing their anxieties regarding cross-cultural exchange and encounter. The cohabitation of a small number of white, working-class populations within the tower block, however, leads the immigrant residents to be acutely conscious of their cultural difference. Consequently, a vast number of inhabitants refashion their home in a manner that echoes Nadeem Aslam’s communities in Maps for Lost Lovers, and so construct a distinctly Bangladeshi ‘ethnoscape’ in which the culinary, sartorial and cultural norms of their homeland are recreated abroad. Like Aslam’s protagonists, many of the house-bound wives that feature in Ali’s novel also unite around Islam as a means of maintaining a connection with their homelands and

\textsuperscript{33} Frauke Matthes, \textit{Writing and Muslim Identity}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 55.
providing ‘stability […] in a confusing world’. 36 Although, as Dave Gunning mentions, Islam is sometimes depicted as a ‘malignant presence’ in the novel, most notably through the demonstratively-named Mrs. Islam who polices the estate through her gossiping and makes immoral economic demands upon Nazneen after her husband secretly borrows money from her. 37 Mrs. Islam’s name, then, suggests that religion can signify a malevolent force upon the personal and economic freedoms of the estate’s devout inhabitants.

Furthermore, as Matthes points out, Robinson’s conceptualisation also speaks to the community’s monolingualism as most of the novel’s characters speak only Bengali. By only knowing Bengali, the immigrant inhabitants segregate themselves within the housing estate’s diaspora thereby ‘open[ing] a gap between “inside”, the tower blocks as home, and “outside”, Brick Lane as part of the “larger outside” London.’ 38 This separation ensures a limited worldview in which attachments to a spatially and temporally distant homeland thrive and opportunities for cultural exchange are foreclosed.

Speaking to this simultaneous sense of dislocation and belonging to elsewhere, many of the novel’s characters are portrayed as suffering from a ‘disease’ called ‘going home syndrome’, described as following:

‘This is another disease that afflicts us,’ said the doctor. ‘I call it Going Home Syndrome. Do you know what that means?’ He addressed himself to Nazneen. She felt a heat on the back of her neck and formed words that did not leave her mouth. ‘It is natural’ said Chanu. ‘These people are basically peasants and they miss the land. The pull of the land is stronger even than the pull of blood.’ (Ali, p. 32)

36 Matthes, Writing and Muslim Identity, p. 57.
37 Dave Gunning, Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature, p. 103.
38 Dave Gunning, Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature, p. 56.
Crucially, however, the conditions that cause ‘going home syndrome’ overwhelmingly affect the novel’s female protagonists. Within the text, it is women who are sequestered in the tower block whilst their dual-lingual husbands traverse the city for work, and bilingual children attend local schools. This dialectic leads to a conservative gender construction in which females are expected to stay in the ‘inside’ sphere where they fulfil household duties such as preparing meals and cleaning, and their husbands have greater independence and freedom to access the ‘outside’ spheres of the city.

In the context of Ali’s central characters Nazneen and Chanu, Chanu is especially enthusiastic for Nazneen to stay at home, to refrain from learning English and to perform a housewife role. When Nazneen challenges her husband over his insistence that she stay at home, he justifies his position:

‘Why should you go out?’ said Chanu. ‘If you go out, ten people will say, “I saw her walking on the street.” And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don’t mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant. What can you do? [...] I am westernised now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck.’ (Ali, p. 45)

Although keen to assert that he does not agree with the dominant gender constructions or religious beliefs of the diaspora community, Chanu still recreates these problematic practices by refusing Nazneen’s wishes to leave the home or pay for English language classes. The reasoning is nonetheless rooted in his masculinity, and how other residents view his authority as husband and head of a household. From Chanu’s perspective, it is not Nazneen’s incursions into public space that are a cause of anxiety, but specifically that she may be seen outside of the home and therefore appear to be neglecting her domestic duties. Such an observation would encourage negative judgements on his inter-familial authority and the control he
exerts over his wife amongst the milieu that he derides. Chanu’s rationale parallels claims by scholars of masculinity such as Raewyn Connell, Michael Kimmel and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who have exposed how masculinity is afforded to men by other men. In other words, it is other men’s perceptions of men that justifies their claims to hegemonic masculinity.

Lingering on the quotation longer – it is also significant that Chanu makes a distinction between what he perceives as a ‘Westernised’ masculinity which is characterised by education, secularism and a more egalitarian approach to women’s rights with the supposedly backward, rigidly pious and patriarchal masculinity of the diaspora community. Contrasting with other inhabitants of the estate and his wife, for example, Islam does not play a big part in Chanu’s life. At one point in the novel, Nazneen complains that Chanu built a high shelf for the family’s Koran ‘under duress’ (Ali, p. 19), implying his indifference towards Islam. Nazneen’s conflicting attachment to Islam is demonstrated by her wish for the Islamic Holy Book to be sanctified above the mundanity of Chanu’s Dickens novels and Shakespeare plays. This difference in priorities further resonates with Chanu’s claims to hegemonic masculinity.

Indeed, having migrated to London from Bangladesh for economic reasons, the corpulent Chanu’s life is marked by his desperate attempts to evince gender practices and roles typically associated with hegemonic masculinity. In this instance, being the principal breadwinner for his family is a very strong part of Chanu’s sense of self. As such, Chanu’s distinctive habit of boasting about his education through references to his framed certificates that are demonstratively displayed in the family

living room (Ali, p. 42), and his persistent quoting from classic English literature such as George Eliot, William Thackeray, or Geoffrey Chaucer is significant. These performative expressions of knowledge and educational achievement are targeted at other men who he views as successful such as his white British boss, Mr. Dalloway. Mr. Dalloway, for example, is described as being a rich and prosperous man who is the key provider for a family household. Chanu’s choice of writers is especially telling, then, as if Connell’s assertion that a man’s claim to hegemonic masculinity privileges those from a nation’s dominant racial or ethnic makeup, then Chanu’s references to canonical English writers are also his attempts to prove his own claims to hegemonic masculinity within his London context.  

Chanu’s method for staking his claims to hegemonic masculinity are reminiscent of Sara Ahmed’s trenchant analysis of how migrants achieve conditional acceptance into the body of the nation on the grounds that they ‘play the national game’. Ahmed’s example stems from the British Indian director Gurinder Chadha’s film Bend It Like Beckham, a 2002 box-office hit in which a British Indian woman disobeys her parents’ wishes for her to pursue their perception of a gender normative lifestyle and becomes a successful footballer instead. The film’s subtitle succinctly expresses this gendered and cultural clash of generations with the phrase, ‘anyone can cook Alo Gobi, but who can bend it like Beckham?’ For Ahmed, the film’s commercial success is due to an elision of socio-political inequalities that blight migrant and post-migrant communities within Britain. Such uncomfortable questions are supplanted by stereotypes of a supposedly exceptional misogyny in non-white British households. ‘The national game’, a widely-used phrase to describe Britain’s fondness for football, comes to resemble a movement away from the

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42 Ibid., p. 134.
regressive gender dynamics and lifestyle of her family, and the main character’s embracing of a supposedly inclusive and tolerant Britishness.

If Ahmed’s concept is unfastened from its association with football and broadened to other contexts, ‘the national game’ can be read productively as the tentative national inclusion of marginalised ‘others’ on the justification that they performatively express a penchant for time-honoured and culturally resonant British pursuits. This reformulation provides a fruitful template for thinking through Chanu’s fondness for canonical English literature. Indeed, the term ‘English literature’ is particularly appropriate in this instance as Chanu’s predilection is for conventional and uncontroversial classic writers and works. In summary, Chanu references William Shakespeare, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Geoffrey Chaucer within the novel. All of these writers are rather uncomplicatedly English – as opposed to Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish – and their positions within the canon of English literary culture is undisputed. Furthermore, each of these writers, particularly Shakespeare, are often selectively invoked in conservative national imaginaries as being supposedly representative of a quintessential Englishness. Excerpts from the sixteenth century playwright’s dramatic corpus, most notably the jingoistic speech by John of Gaunt in Shakespeare’s 1597 play *Richard II*, are regularly revived during moments of national sporting competition or political turbulence to foster nationalist sentiment.43

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This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall.
Referring to this culturally significant body of writing, then, works on an affective level as Chanu seeks to associate himself within unequivocal definitions of Englishness.

While the writers that Chanu lists are quintessentially English, many are also transnational figures whose literature has been translated into countless other languages and, moreover, has been imposed upon the education systems of colonised and formerly colonised nations as part of the British imperial project. In the first sense, recent celebrations over the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth revealed the global reach of England’s most venerated author and how the playwright’s publications have been continually adapted in a number of different cultural locales thereby questioning his status as the sole property of England.

In the second case, however, work by writers such as Shakespeare, the Brontë Sisters and Thackeray ‘played a key role’ in the ‘mental colonisation’ of colonised subjects by ‘naturalizing British values’ through colonial education systems in nations such as Bangladesh, India or Pakistan.

Chanu’s reproduction of these writers and their works does not evoke the transnational appropriation of figures, such as Shakespeare; rather, he takes part in unreconstructed recitations of names, titles of books and occasionally quotations, thereby not passing any critical judgement or engagement with this literature and its accompanying national status. As a result, Chanu simply parrots these key paradigms of a decidedly English culture with its colonial implications intact. Just as football ingratiates Chadha’s female protagonist in *Bend It Like Beckham* into a popular recreational support enjoyed by British

44 See, for example, Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann, *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Commemoration, Celebration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

citizens from across regional and class divides, Chanu’s performative quoting places him firmly within specific, colonial renderings of Englishness.

Ironically, Chanu’s persistent referencing of English literary and cultural heritage does not bestow him with the markers of hegemonic masculinity that he hopes it will. Instead, it is Chanu’s white British-born colleague Wilkie who receives the coveted senior position in Chanu’s workplace despite the protagonist’s remonstrations that he only ‘has one or two O-Levels’, drinks alcohol on lunch breaks and returns to the office late, and cannot quote from Chaucer or Thackeray (Ali, p. 37). Such is Chanu’s disenchantment following Wilkie’s success that he decides to resign from his job and finds alternative employment as a taxi driver.

Chanu’s change in occupation status has symbolic ramifications with his relationship to London. Chanu previously worked as a clerk in the local council and, therefore, had direct involvement with the city, its inhabitants and how it was managed. Chanu’s failure to achieve a promotion, therefore, also figuratively ensures his removal from the city’s management. His consecutive job as a taxi driver, however, involves travelling around the metropolis often for long, unsociable hours during the night. The emblematic significance of this evening driving means that he moves from his direct involvement in the city’s functioning to literally driving around the city’s periphery in darkness.

Chanu is a man whose racial and ethno-cultural background ensures that he is marginalised but seeks acceptance throughout the novel and his failure to do so leads to his relocation to Bangladesh. In contrast, the London born-and-bred protagonist Karim is acutely aware of his marginalisation. When first encountered in the text, Karim is a timid and apprehensive figure whose speech is stammered and who makes fidgeting movements when he stands. Much of this diffidence is attributed to
his experiences of racism during his teenage years in London. Karim describes being ‘beaten up the whole time’ and ‘chased home every day’ by his white peers (Ali, p.260).

Karim’s meetings with Nazneen present him with a therapeutic opportunity to address these feelings of marginalisation and exclusion. As previously mentioned, the two eventually embark on an affair which Nazneen is able to keep secret from her self-absorbed husband. The affair, and its relevance to Karim’s masculinity and Nazneen’s constructions of masculinity, I will address in the following section of the chapter; however, it is significant that Karim’s affair with Nazneen is simultaneous with the character’s increasing involvement with Islamic fundamentalist frameworks in the housing estate. After commencing the affair, he becomes involved with an organisation called The Bengal Tigers that seeks to galvanise religious and political fervour amongst other British Bangladeshi men on the estate. Karim quickly rises within the ranks of the Bengal Tigers on the back of powerful speeches that take aim against a local racist, anti-migrant group called the Lion Hearts, and against white mainstream British society that ‘oppresses’ their local communities and other Muslim-majority societies internationally such as Palestine and Chechnya. In particular, following the events of 9/11, Karim is also quick to explain how the bombing of the Twin Towers was part of a Western conspiracy ‘against our Muslim brothers’ (Ali, p. 286). By the novel’s conclusion, Karim also begins to advocate violent rebellion against Britain.

Karim’s political activism and religiosity is largely ‘contrived in response to his feelings of personal disempowerment’. As Gunning remarks, Nazneen’s realisation that when Karim uses the word ‘radical’ he generally means ‘right’

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46 Dave Gunning, Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature, p. 102.
highlights the ‘lack of meaningful political foundations behind his beliefs’. Gunning adds that his religious faith is similarly ‘bogus’ as ‘he is able to read a Hadith concerning the wrongs of adultery with the same interest as articles on “The Islamic Way of Eating”, or “Sleeping the Islamic Way” without connecting these to his affair with a married woman.’ His political and religious viewpoints are, like Kureishi’s protagonists in My Son the Fanatic and The Black Album and the character of Ammar in The Road From Damascus, ostensibly a quest for a definitive identity that he feels has been denied to him:

‘When I was a little kid…’ He sat up and put his feet on the coffee table. It was as if he were taking possession of the room, marking each item as his own. ‘If you wanted to be cool you had to be something else – a bit white, a bit black, a bit something. Even when it all took off, bhangra and all that, it was Punjabi, Pakistani, giving it all the attitude. It weren’t us, was it? If you wanted to be cool, you couldn’t just be yourself. Bangladeshi. Know what I’m saying?’ (Ali, p. 263)

Tellingly, despite the group’s desire to appeal to Muslim communities across London, the group is configured as a group for young British Bangladeshi men, reinforced by the group’s choice of moniker: The Bengal Tigers. Thus, the feeble grounding of the movement is apparent to Chanu and eventually to Nazneen in the novel. Chanu remarks on The Bengal Tigers that ‘It could be about Islam, but I don’t think so. I don’t think it is’ (Ali, p. 464). Further belying the naïve intellectual justification for The Bengal Tigers, Nazneen compares the different effects that knowledge has on Chanu and her lover Karim: for Chanu, ‘the more he knew, the more baffled he seemed’ whereas Karim ‘grew confident the more he knew’ (Ali, p. 448). Likewise, in the riot scene upon the eponymous Brick Lane by the group, Nazneen realises that ‘there were no white people at all. These boys were fighting

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48 Ibid, p. 102.
themselves’ (Ali, p. 474). As their political and religious movement is born out of the need for self-assertion, then, it is also prone to self-destruction.

Nevertheless, involvement in The Bengal Tigers endows Karim with a more robust sense of confidence, in a manner that resonates with Raewyn Connell’s writing on ‘protest masculinities’.49 As was explained in my introduction and discussed in Chapters one and two, Connell defines protest masculinities as exaggerated performances of compensatory hyper-masculinity, such as violence, crime or anti-social behaviour, that manifest when marginalised men experience social injury due to their lack of access to materials needed to construct a hegemonic form of masculinity. Karim’s sense of victimisation, then, is combatted through his senior role within The Bengal Tigers. Tellingly, one of the principal aims of the group is to ‘take the streets’ as a means of visibly asserting themselves against marginalisation (Ali, p. 400). In Claire Alexander’s work on young British Muslim men in London, she highlights how ownership of public space, referred to as ‘the street’, becomes a powerful site of identity contestation and challenge.50 Thus, as Sara Upstone adroitly observes, when Karim and the Bengal Tigers instigate public demonstrations upon Brick Lane, Ali’s characters are also making claims to ownership of London and the nation as a whole, in riposte to their teenage experiences of racism and continuing sense of marginalisation. The latter, I would argue, takes on a particularly pointed significance when the geographical positioning of Brick Lane is considered, as the street lies in the glare of the skyscrapers and high rises of London’s Central Business District.

In contrast, Zaf, the central protagonist in Saadi’s Psychoraag, has an altogether more fulfilling engagement with his home city of Glasgow. Rather than

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49 Connell, Masculinities, p. 112.
being situated in a segregated diaspora community that seeks to rekindle a sense of belonging to elsewhere as with Ali’s Bangladeshi Londoners, the Asian Glaswegians of Psychoraag mix with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. When Zaf imagines his audience, he captures this eclectic mix:

It wasn’t just Zaf who wis on multiple wavelengths, the whole bloody population of Glasgow wis tunin in on totally different levels - each person wis listenin to a different Zaf, a separate show...Sometimes Zaf would try to picture his audience: ex-gangstas; hot blades; young women on the brink; minicab drivers who in another zameen, had been government ministers; doctors; nurses; lovers; members of wacky religious sects; madrasah junkies; off-duty, multiculturally-inclined strippers; curry-lovin polis; mothers whose babies wouldn’t go down; city biviis with kisaan-heid hubbies; mitai-makers; mult-balti millionnaires; tramps; migrants; clerks; parkin wardens; aficiandos of cross-over; kebab-shop runners; and internet-crazed insomniacs. (Saadi, p. 19)

Zaf’s diverse listenership is matched by the disparate backgrounds of his colleagues at the radio station. The other DJs at his station, Radio Chaandani, also all hail from Glasgow but with parents who migrated to the Scottish city from a number of different places in South Asia, with varying Muslim, Hindu and Christian heritages. Moreover, the Asian community radio station emphasises this bricolage of different cultures, as they broadcast from a deconsecrated church. Alongside the multicultural makeup of the radio station disk-jockeys and audience, the staff of the radio station are also open to non-heteronormative gender constructions and behaviours. This is demonstrated by the Radio Station manager Harry who is described as homosexual and of whom the radio DJs are very supportive.

The radio station is an embodiment of a hybrid, rather than exclusionary, multiculturalism, which fits with visions of Scotland as a supposedly more inclusive nation than its English neighbour. In point of fact, Saadi’s novel draws attention to the superficiality of the ‘Asian cool’ rhetoric that was embraced by writers in
England, most notably Hanif Kureishi, and argues for new conceptualisations of identity that incorporate new forms of Britishness as well as pay attention to Muslim identities:

Until recently, Latino had been hip but Paki hadn’t…Indian had always been hip but only if you were a guru, a communist or a sitar player. All that had changed in the last few years and now it wis cool – that was the word – cool to be connected some way, to the land which lay somewhere to the east of the Middle East. For some odd reason, however, Pakistan was seen differently. In fact, most of the time, it wasn’t seen at all…Pakistanis had remained inaudible. They had no music, no voice, no breath. (Saadi, p. 73-74)

The redundancy of such labels is supplanted by the protagonist Zaf’s attachment to Scotland – rather than Britain – and even more specifically to Glasgow. Highlighted by the quotation’s reference to music, the novel uses music as a metaphor for addressing the asymmetrical and palimpsestic nature of transcultural identity assemblage and formation. Thus, Zaf describes himself as ‘a sample of Pakistan, thrown in at random to Scotland, into its myths. And, in Lahore, he had felt like a sample of Glasgow in the ancient city of conquerors’ (Saadi, p. 227). This is a sample that harmonises with Glasgow, a city in which music is inscribed on its architecture as ‘iviry block, iviry stane wis carved in equality. Iviry block wis cut wi a soang’ (Saadi, p. 348). Indeed, it is in the specifics of Glasgow’s concrete jungle that heterogeneous music – and identity assemblages – emerge:

These peripheral estates consisted of great borin blocks of fast-food housing where nuthin ever happened. The inevitable video shops, the corporate pubs, the off licences filled with cheap toxic wine. Yet, from these post-war afterthoughts with their ration-sized rooms, there had arisen this amazing band of Riviera joy, of Californian harmonies and Rajasthani rock. (Saadi, p. 193)
In contrast to London’s Tower Hamlets, then, Glasgow is the setting for a dynamic transcultural Scottishness in which inhabitants are able to move between, draw on, and create new forms of cultural attachment.

Such an unambiguously positive image, however, is challenged by Saadi towards the novel’s denouement. Having programmed a long track to play, Zaf briefly leaves the cubicle to socialise at a party held for the end of the radio station in another part of the building. However, it transpires that his wine has been spiked with a hallucinogenic substance. Thus, whilst he plays a mixture of Celtic folk music and South Asian raag, his subconscious goes on an imagined foray into Glasgow. The imaginative flâneurie that Zaf’s sub-consciousness engages in calls to mind Michel de Certeau’s conceptualisation of urban perambulations in his essay ‘Walking the City’. In the essay, de Certeau juxtaposes the ‘Concept-city’ of ‘officious discourse, where all is rational, planned and official’ and a ‘metaphorical city’ which is absent of the ‘univocity or stability’ of the former type of city. The ‘metaphorical city’, therefore, is a ‘location of migration, mobility and instability’ that disrupts the concrete and regulated impression that governments and councils may wish to project about their urban centres. John McLeod writes, summarising de Certeau, that

If the map is the defining representation of the Concept-city which colonizes space in order to produce a static depiction of the city as place, then the wanderings of those who tour the city write new scripts of city-space in the delinquent narratives of their passage.

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34 Ibid., p. 9.
Emphasising ‘what the map cuts up, the story cuts across’, Zaf’s dreamlike wanderings counter the more positive images of the city by exposing rigid power dynamics between ghettoised cultures that were effaced in the previous articulations of a happy, multicultural Glasgow within the novel’s opening chapters. By utilising this trancelike state in his character, Saadi is able to disturb literal embodiments of the city and expose the continuing insidious traces of cultural conflict that have been inscribed upon the city since Glasgow’s status as the ‘Second City of the British Empire’.

When visiting Glasgow’s nineteenth-century Botanic Gardens, for example, Zaf remarks on the city’s links to the British Empire, as ‘giant plant specimens which had been uprooted from far-off countries and which, like caged aliens, contorted and seeped their way across the insides of the windows’ (Saadi, p. 342). Colonial power-relations are also re-inscribed within the city as Zaf notes when he wanders to Pollokshields, one of the most economically deprived quarters of the city with a large Pakistani migrant population. In this part of the city, where Zaf was born, he reflects on his father’s experiences of discrimination when he first arrived in the city, exposing the psychological effects of poverty and racism upon its population: ‘The Shiels was a ghetto of sorts, a mental ghetto, and yet, there was succour and a certain type of strength in that. In returning to the burning arc of its arms. To his maa. In the seed lieth redemption’ (Saadi, p. 383). The strength that Zaf refers to has presented itself in aggressive male gangs enacting protest masculinities. However, the protest masculinities encountered within Saadi’s novel are uniquely shaped by the Glaswegian city landscape and therefore my own reading of how these complex practices of bellicose masculinity are performed should be read as revising
and lending Connell’s model of protest masculinities more contextual and transcultural nuance.

Indeed, within the novel, protest masculinities are enacted in contrast to the previous generation of hard-working migrants:

These were the sons and grandsons of the kisaan who had powered the buses, the underground trains, the machines of the sweatshop underwear-manufacturers. […] With bare soles had they trodden out new, hard paths along the Clyde and they had clothed the lily-white bodies of whole generations of Scots and then, later, they had filled their stomachs too. You eat what you are. If that was the case, then Glasgae wis Faislabad a hundred times over. But their sons and daughters had gone in the opposite direction and had become Scots. Right down to their gangs and their dancing and their chip-bhatti sahib footba tops, they had sipped of the waters of the Clyde and had become cold killers. (Saadi, p. 242-243)

This generation of post-migrant young men, therefore, create uniquely transcultural forms of protest masculinity that is in opposition to the previous generation and to socio-political alienation and exclusion. Nevertheless, emphasising the transcultural aspects of this protest masculinity, Zaf describes the gang behaviour as ‘Kind of Al Pacino in a shalvar kamise’ (Saadi, p. 104) thereby drawing on influences from Hollywood cinema and globally-influential gangster films.

Such representations accord with the aggressive forms of masculinity identified by the sociologist Peter E. Hopkins in his study of young Muslim men in Glasgow. Hopkins explains that for many of his working-class, male Muslim interviewees, the collective identities proposed by gangs become attractive options for those who feel misunderstood by the cultural isolationism of migrant families alongside their experiences of racism and, after 9/11, Islamophobia from the normatively white mainstream.55 Psychoraag tallies with Hopkins’ findings when

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Zaf passingly remarks upon how some of the young Muslims in Pollokshields have resorted to gang membership or, in some cases, were finding panacea in ‘an artificial version of Islam’ which is described as Islamic fundamentalism (Saadi, p. 381). Much like *The Black Album, My Son the Fanatic* or *Brick Lane*, then, these young men find a compensatory, collective identity in aggressive forms of Islam as expressions of protest masculinity.

In his study, Hopkins also contends that ‘the complexity of local gang frameworks may […] work to exclude and segregate young men and lead them to use alternative spaces and times in order to negotiate greater freedom and personal choice.’ In this sense, as Carla Rodríguez Gonzalez observes, Radio Chandani represents one of these more positive alternative spaces in which young men are able to explore their complex attachments to their environments and their transcultural heritage. Indeed, Zaf explains that in his radio cubicle, he feels ‘safe from gangs and girlfriends, past and future, safe from sticks and stones and from those he loved’ (Saadi, p.8). The closure of this radio station poses questions over the future of such positive spaces to combat many young working-class Muslim men’s feelings of disenfranchisement.

It will be clear by now that each novel engages with the city in markedly different ways. Whilst for Chanu and Karim, this is a space that only emphasises masculine failure and calls their integrity into question, for Zaf this is a city that is praised for its transcultural possibility; however, the novel’s ending casts doubt over this previously optimistic image. In the following section, I will interrogate this further by examining how interaction with different men and women in the city

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changes their interactions with the body, and how sexuality and physicality is shaped by female and male bodies encountered within the city.

**Embodying Urban Masculinities**

Cities are, Judith Butler reminds us, spaces of assembly where bodies of different sexes, sizes, races and sexual orientations meet and function within the same spaces.\(^{58}\) To this end, Ali and Saadi both adumbrate how London and Glasgow are formative influences upon the masculinised bodies and sexualities of their male protagonists. In *Brick Lane*, Karim’s involvement in Islamism comes alongside a physical transformation that parallels the figure of the ‘Muslim male folk devil’ of the post-9/11 era,\(^{59}\) whilst Chanu’s desperate attempts to be a successful migrant are countered by his overweight and dysfunctional body. Meanwhile, Zaf in *Psychoraag* displays anxiety over his raced corporeality which manifests itself in turbulent love affairs with a fellow Pakistani Scottish woman named Zilla and a white Scottish woman named Babs. The following pages tease out these aspects and argue that the urban settings of Glasgow and London play a formative role in shaping how male protagonists experience and relate to their bodies. Underpinning this argument, I contend that bodily experience is central to how male protagonists conceive themselves, construct their masculinity, and project their gendered identities for their male and female peers in their urban locales.

The introduction of this thesis outlined the complex and mutually constructive interactions between the body and masculinity.\(^{60}\) As Raewyn Connell

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60 See thesis introduction, p. 21.
details, the male body is a crucial reference point of masculinity. Essentialist arguments, she explains, conceive masculinity as somehow ‘inherent in a male body or [...] express something about a male body’.\footnote{Raewyn Connell, Masculinities, p. 45.} That is, that ‘either the male body drives and directs action (e.g., rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men do not naturally take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority).’\footnote{Ibid., p. 45.} Connell astutely refutes these claims on the grounds that it ignores the pluralities of masculinity and ascribes a fixed set of generally negative and misogynistic characteristics to male bodies. Nevertheless, she also repudiates social constructionist perspectives that tend to view the body as ‘a more or less neutral landscape on which a social symbolism is imprinted.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 46.} Building on an interview with a middle-aged man who discovered his preference for same-sex sexual acts after his female sexual partner’s stimulation of his perineum, Connell concludes that

\[...\] bodies are both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory. This pattern might be termed body-reflexive practice.\footnote{Ibid., p. 61.}

In other words, Connell contends that male bodies are simultaneously constructed by and constructing masculinities. This perspective is particularly beneficial for thinking of the slippery relations between bodies and masculinity in Brick Lane and Psychoraag.

Crucially, Connell’s concept of body-reflexive practice also has significant relevance when analysing male bodies in the city. As previously elaborated, cities are dynamic spaces of exchange and interaction in which identity assemblages are
challenged, restructured and reformed according to the multiplicity of different peoples and cultures encountered. Elizabeth Grosz claims that these urban experiences have significant implications on corporeality. Grosz takes issue with humanist perspectives that regard the city as developed according to human needs and patterns of settlement as it privileges mind over the body. She also posits that isomorphic approaches that view cities and bodies as reflecting each other are flawed as they favour a ‘pervasive and unacknowledged use of the male and the masculine [body] to represent the human.’\(^{65}\) Rather, Grosz proposes that there is a [... ] two way linkage which could be described as an interface, perhaps as a co-building. What I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities which sees them, not as megalithic total entities, distinct identities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or microgroupings.\(^{66}\)

Just as bodies and masculinities are constantly in flux and construct each other, then, Grosz argues for a similar mutually constructive relationship between bodies and cities. Bringing together Grosz and Connell’s model is particularly germane for thinking through how the male protagonists in each text experience the urban environment on a physical level, and the effects of corporeal experience upon urban masculinities, as I will now demonstrate.

Karim in *Brick Lane* offers a fruitful example of this relationality. Over the course of the novel, Karim undergoes a concurrent physical transformation alongside his political and religious involvement with The Bengal Tigers. When he is introduced to the reader, the narrative describes him as ‘sure of himself’; however, this delineation is betrayed by his jittery movements, his speech impediment and his

\(^{66}\) Ibid., p. 388.
excessive perspiration (Ali, p. 210). As was previously mentioned, much of his awkwardness owes to his sense of marginalisation. However, his meetings with Nazneen allow him a space to air his grievances and, on the back of his sexual relations with Nazneen, to atone for this disempowerment and gain confidence in his masculinity. His relationship with Nazneen is initially professional, as Karim works as a deliveryman for his uncle’s clothing factory in which Nazneen finds employment as a garment worker. However, Karim and Nazneen soon realise their mutual attraction for each other, and embark on an affair.

For Karim, this affair is couched in exoticised terms; thus he tells Nazneen that he is infatuated with her as ‘you are the real thing…the girl from the village’ (Ali, p. 310). Nazneen’s supposedly ‘authentic’ Bangladeshi identity is contrasted with British-born Muslim women who are pejoratively stereotyped into what he refers to as ‘two types’: ‘There’s your westernized girl, wears what she likes, all the make-up going on, short skirts and that soon as she’s out of her father’s sight…Then there’s your religious girl, wears the scarf or even the burkha. You’d think, right, they’d be good wife material. But they ain’t. Because all they want to do is argue. And they always think they know best because they’ve been off to all these summer camps for Muslim sisters’ (Ali, p. 384). Underpinning Karim’s perspective are a number of masculinist factors. Sexual access to Nazneen’s body allows him to physicalize a connection with his own Bangladeshi heritage that he feels both isolated from and persecuted by. Furthermore, unlike the British-born Muslim women who are engaged in some degree of patriarchal rebellion, Nazneen is characterised as being inculcated within a gender order that upholds male superiority – and, by extension, his own power.
Karim’s sexual power over Nazneen corresponds with his graduation from member to leader of the all-male Bengal Tigers. As Karim advances within the group, he also undergoes a physical transformation that mirrors the image of the Muslim male archetype as identified by Jasbir K. Puar. Puar notes how in the years following 9/11, a stereotyped image of the Muslim male, generally characterised through racial features and clothing, has come to feature increasingly in Euro-American cultural production as the secular West’s fundamentalist Other. Features such as beards and shalwar-kameez when worn by men of colour have become signifiers of a series of axiomatic values that oppose those values of individualism and freedom said to define Western nations. Puar explains the presence of the Muslim and Muslim look-a-like male body in the Western city is a cause of existential paranoia and has led to the dissemination of forms of domestic terror such as increased profiling and surveillance targeting men whose appearance meets these prescriptions. Karim’s adoption of facial hair and his new-found fondness for ‘panjabi-pyjamas’ as opposed to his usual t-shirt and denim jeans physically mark him within this paradigm (Ali, p. 320). This is an association that Karim would nonetheless seek to encourage as he leads talks and diatribes against what he perceives is a permissive and decadent British society.

Indeed, his constructed image corresponds with the changes in how he practices masculinity. His embracement of a narrow, jejune and unsophisticated view of Islam paired with his naive political posturing are rooted in rebellious opposition to a white hegemonic British masculinity. Equally, Karim is also constructing himself antithetically to his father who represents a weak and ineffective masculinity. Much like Hussein in Hanif Kureishi’s My Beautiful Laundrette,

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67 Jasbir K. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, see pp. 166-203.
Karim’s father is described as a passive and enervated figure who is physically beaten down by his experiences of racially-motivated discrimination. Although never appearing in the narrative, Karim’s father is depicted as a reclusive widower whose incursions into the novel are often telephone calls to his son with demands for food, supplies or expressing anxieties about Karim’s whereabouts. Interrupting a rendezvous with Nazneen, Karim sees an array of frenetic array of messages from his father, and remarks: ‘Nerves and worrying [...] the man is a worrier’ (Ali, p. 362). Nazneen’s mental image of her lover’s father vindicates this impression. Thus, when viewing a group of men described as having ‘white beards tinged with nicotine, skullcaps and missing teeth. Dark, polished faces and watchful eyes [...] They came with plastic Iceland bags and moved along like hospital patients’, Nazneen wonders ‘if Karim’s father were amongst them’ (Ali, p. 462). Karim’s masculinity is practiced in riposte to his feelings of disempowerment and also his father’s resignation to these adverse socio-political factors.

Karim’s body becomes the battleground of these conflicts and, evincing the influence of his urban surroundings on his corporeality, he manufactures himself to embody negatively stereotyped and racialised male corporealties. It is not coincidental, then, that Karim’s last appearance in the novel is also the first and only time that he is seen outside of the Brick Lane and Tower Hamlets locality. Indeed, to break off the affair, Nazneen also displays a newly-found confidence by traveling through the London Underground system to see him in the Central London neighbourhood of Covent Garden. There, amongst the throngs of tourists, he stands in a shalwar-kameez and a long, facially-disfiguring beard. His physical transformation and his geographical incursion into Central London capture his newly-found confidence and the commencement of new forms of masculine practice.
While Karim’s body displays radical shifts and changes within the novel, Chanu’s physicality is static. More specifically, physical descriptions of Chanu remain fixated on his corpulence. After overhearing Chanu’s misogynistic description of her own body as ‘Not tall. Not short. Around five foot two. Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children [...] Perhaps when she gets older she’ll grow a beard on her chin but now she is only eighteen’ (Ali, p.23), Nazneen responds:

Narrow hips! You could wish for such a fault, Nazneen said to herself, thinking of the rolls of fat that hung low from Chanu’s stomach. It would be possible to tuck all your hundred pens and pencils under those rolls and keep them safe and tight. You could stuff a book or two up there as well. If your spindle legs could carry the weight. (Ali, p. 303)

Nazneen’s description, which occurs at an early point in the novel, pinpoints the physical paradigms that shape Chanu’s body throughout the text. In a moment of petulance, even Chanu and Nazneen’s daughter Shahana asks whether her mother had ‘ever been in love’ with her father and ponders ‘maybe before he got so fat?’ (Ali, p. 303; her emphasis). Chanu’s overweight body comes to dominate his character which is similarly depicted as awkward, blundering and ultimately tragic. His cumbersome body, therefore, can be seen as a metaphor for his own struggles to evince the types of hegemonic masculinity described in the previous section of this chapter.

Indeed, Chanu’s physicality is in stark contrast to the corporeal features that Connell identifies as being the hegemonic masculinised body. Emphasising that ‘masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex’, Connell defines a hegemonic masculine ideal as self-contained taught,
muscular corporealities which emanate discipline and self-control.\textsuperscript{68} Deborah Lupton explains that the overweight male body, then, is constructed in opposition:

Male fat bodies are portrayed as soft, flabby, lacking the muscularity and strength of the ‘normal’ idealized male body. They are therefore considered as far closer to the stereotypical feminine body in their softness, roundness and fleshiness. [...] Fat men are viewed as effeminate rather than masculine in their soft roundness and lack of apparent virility. They lack the phallic hardness of the idealized male body, and thus the fat man is expected to lack sexual desire and be less attractive to women.\textsuperscript{69}

Consonant with Lupton’s analysis, Jerry Mosher notes that dominant cultural representations of fat men constantly link their weight to childlike qualities and therefore lack the authority and power that are central to constructions of hegemonic masculinity.\textsuperscript{70} Chanu’s qualities accord with Connell, Lupton and Mosher’s interpretations of the overweight male body in representing a subordinated masculinity. Chanu’s inability to achieve a promotion and his difficulty in providing money for the family, then, have resonances in his physique. Literally, his difficulty in moving and walking in the city both due to his hefty corpus and through the painful corns he develops on his feet, metaphorically relates to his own stagnant positionality and difficulty in evincing the hegemonic masculine ideals that he so ardently desires.

It is also crucial to note, however, that the aforementioned representations of fatness are focussed on Western societies. \textit{The Atlas of World Hunger} points out that in Bangladesh, as with many non-Western societies, being overweight is often linked

\textsuperscript{68} Connell, \textit{Masculinities}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{69} Deborah Lupton, \textit{Fat} (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 63.
to signs of prosperity and wealth. Consequently, many men will try to present themselves as larger so as to performatively indicate their affluence thereby exposing links between overweight body types and hegemonic masculinity. Ali’s novel offers space for such a reading, in particular when Nazneen first arrives in London, she observes an overweight, tattooed woman who lives in the opposite tower block: ‘This woman was poor and fat. To Nazneen it was unfathomable. In Bangladesh it was no more possible to be poor and fat than to be rich and starving’ (Ali, p. 53). Chanu’s body, then, can be seen as a performative expression of wealth and his claims towards hegemonic masculine ideals.

Ultimately, the reader is encouraged to view Chanu’s physicality as a sign of weakness within the text. Beyond his graceless appearance, his body is also portrayed as dilapidated in other ways. One of Nazneen’s most unenviable tasks, for example, is to tend to the corns in Chanu’s feet and to cut his nails. These are jobs which ‘had previously disgusted her, this flaking and scraping, but now it was nothing’ (Ali, p. 182). Nazneen’s service to Chanu’s body, then, whether through intercourse or podiatry, affirms a misogynistic hierarchy through which his sense of masculine self-worth is derived. It is only within the walls of the family household that he is able to maintain such a power dynamic since the outer, public sphere of the city only exacerbates his sense of worthlessness by offering successive career defeat and concluding with his nocturnal relays around the city as a taxi driver. Further signalling the ways that Chanu’s body becomes a physicalised canvas for his sense of disempowerment, he is diagnosed with a stomach ulcer mid-way through the novel and his pain means that he must stay at home.

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Where Chanu can be seen to have his marginalisation expressed through his body and Karim reacts against his disempowerment by physical performance, the masculine insecurities that plague *Psychoraag*’s Zaf are evoked in exceptional ways. Similar to the protagonist Karim, however, Zaf is sensitive to his racial appearance and this is particularly discernible through his negotiation of sexuality and his romantic relationships with women. Zaf’s anxieties about his background and his identity are mapped onto his frenetic love life with two women who, as Rodríguez González points out, come to symbolise two distinct but dominant communities within Glasgow.72 At the start of the novel, Zaf discloses his emotional fragility following his recently terminated partnership with the white, middle-class Babs, who represents the city’s Irish-Scottish Catholics. As the novel unfolds, however, Zaf’s previous girlfriend, the drug-addicted, Pakistani Scot Zilla comes to the fore. Zaf’s inability to move beyond these two relationships, and the geographic and cultural poles they signify, partially expresses the inherent complexities of transcultural heritage and belonging the novel is invested in examining.

Indeed, in both relationships Zaf is in different hierarchical positions. With Babs, Zaf is ostensibly portrayed as being dependent on his lover. For the most part, this is captured in Babs’s relative ease in navigating the city and its environs by motorbike as opposed to Zaf’s need to walk or use public transport. Tellingly, it is only when the pair are outside of Glasgow on a trip to the Scottish Highlands that power dynamics dissolve as ‘out ae the city, it wis jis him an her an he liked it that way’ (Saadi, p.316). On returning to Glasgow, however, Zaf explains ‘the illusion of unity would evaporate mair quickly than dew aff ae granite’ thereby articulating the role that the city plays in forging their relationship and its inherent inequalities.

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(Saadi, p. 318). For example, Zaf divulges that: ‘she needed his brown-ness just as he needed her white. They were both conquering territories’ (Saadi, p. 27). Whilst he admits that his feelings may owe to her symbolic significance as white: ‘He wondered just how much of his love for Babs wis merely love for her as an icon’ (Saadi, p. 198). Zaf’s partnership with Babs, then, is depicted as recapitulating the racialised and cultural power dynamics and divisions of Glasgow’s urban fabric.

This relationality was also produced in Zaf’s previous relationship to Zilla. In contrast to the safety and security that Babs represents for Zaf, Zilla is described as his ‘dark alter-ego’ (Saadi, p. 47). There is an element of irony in this evocation as it is precisely Babs’s ‘whiteness’ that ensures Zaf’s movement into the comparatively more affluent area of Glasgow’s North, Kelvinside, and his departure from the ‘East-End slums’ that he grew up in and lived in with Zilla. As the novel elaborates:

The auld East End that had gone from dirt-poor bothies to dirt-poor tenements and where, once, the city fathers had turned a country house into a loony bin – Garngad asylum. The asylum wis long gone but it seemed as though the inmates had hung around […] As though, somewhere along the bus route, they had been taken backward in time and now were half-runnin, not through Glasgow, City of Architecture, City of Culture, City of Kak, but alang the roads of something from Dickens’s time but without the corny consciousness. (Saadi, pp. 176-7)

Beyond Zilla’s association with less affluent areas of Glasgow, she also transforms into a progressively more sinister and ominous presence in Zaf’s imagination. After imbibing the hallucinogenic-spiked alcoholic beverage, he visualises her breaking into the radio cubicle and attacking him physically and sexually molesting him. This hallucination exposes Zaf’s simultaneously intimate, fractious and self-hating relationship towards the ethno-cultural background that he shares with Zilla. Described variously as ‘black’ and ‘brown’, Zilla rips up Zaf’s radio playlist and
forces her body upon his. The experience is bewildering and distressing as with her ‘calloused’ hands she ‘grabbed his cock an began tae pull the skin up an doon like she wis haulin him fae the grave’ (Saadi, p. 387). By the end of their frenetic sexual encounter, the metaphorical significance of Zilla is clear as she was ‘a wimmin nae longer, sumthin else physical entirely’ (Saadi, p. 388) thereby marking her as an intangible threatening force that reminds him of his conflicted relationship to his own roots. Strikingly, she threatens Zaf that she will never leave his consciousness and declares, ‘Ah’m yer shaddae. Ah’m yer soul’ (Saadi, p. 184).

Sexuality, and more specifically this disturbing sexual encounter with Zilla, therefore map Zaf’s own complicated claims to national and cultural identity upon his physicalized body. Additionally, there is an irony in the racial and cultural binaries that the women represent. Babs works as a nurse, and therefore, is associated with a stereotypically ‘feminine’ job that involves healing or alleviating the body. Metaphorically, then, she comes to symbolise a redemptive force that can ‘cure’ his marginalisation and administer his admission into the normatively white, non-Muslim Scottish nation. Even her name, Babs, brings to mind the blond-haired and buxom British film and television star, Barbara ‘Babs’ Windsor who is well-known for playing an overtly sexualised and flirtatious nurse in the 1967 film *Carry On Doctor*. Zilla, on the other hand, is depicted as being addicted to drugs and, therefore, her body is in a state of physical and emotional dependency. While Babs represents redemption, then, Zilla is associated with the city’s ‘underground life’ of drink and drugs. Zaf’s male body vacillates between these two female bodies for his sexual satisfaction, and ultimately is unable to find fulfilment with either. Zaf’s

sexuality, therefore, emerges as a complex site of transcultural negotiation between belongings to different urban identities that remain unresolved and in flux.

For both sets of male protagonists, bodies and sexualities become sites through which constructions of masculinities are projected, contested and formulated. Urban environments play an essential role in these masculine corporeal formulations whether by wearing down male bodies into physical discomforts such as ulcers, captured metaphorically through corpulence, leading men to sexually construct themselves into dominant ethnicities, or causing them to rebel against these patterns of dominance by fashioning themselves into this century’s ‘folk devil’. The last section of this chapter will build on such representations by examining how each text’s engagement with literary and musical output further shapes complexes of urban belonging, nationality, cultural identities and masculinities.

Music, Literature and Urban Masculinities

A common particularity in *Psychoraag* and *Brick Lane* is the dense interweaving of references to British music and literature that are frequently made by male protagonists. As acknowledged previously, Chanu in Ali’s novel regularly punctuates his interactions with quotations and allusions to canonical English literature such as Thomas Hardy or Emily Brontë. These references serve a performative function for the character, as they are voiced around his white male colleagues to demonstrate his integration, or when surrounded by more successful migrants such as Dr. Azad or with his family to display both his difference from the diaspora community within which he lives and his masculine dominance over women. To different ends, Zaf in Saadi’s novel mediates his identity and his
attachments to Glasgow through music. Rather than Chanu’s public acting-out of familiarity with conventional emblems of British/English national culture, Zaf uses music to make the case for a more dynamic and hybrid national belonging.

Music and literature are an effective tool used by Ali and Saadi’s male protagonists to demonstrate belonging and subscription to assemblages of national belonging and gender practices. Specifically, the overt propagation of fondness for particular types of music and literature serves to associate oneself with a prescribed view of what constitutes hegemonic masculinity in Britain, or to propose more inclusive gender constructions that draw upon a range of cultural affiliations. In the subsequent pages, I will analyse these intertexts and what they reveal about the male characters’ relationships to their urban environments. It is my contention that music and literature respectively enable the figures of Chanu in *Brick Lane* and Zaf in *Psychoraag* to make sense of their surroundings and translate their identities into subjectivities that either attempt to combine their backgrounds into a transcultural form of British Muslim masculinity or reject heir migratory heritage entirely.

To begin with the character of Chanu, I will return to Ahmed’s concept of the ‘national game’ that I explored in the first segment of my chapter. Perhaps the most ostentatious example of Chanu’s participation in the ‘national game’ occurs when he decides to take his family on a trip around Central London’s tourist sites. Despite ‘thirty or so years’ living in London, Chanu explains that he had been unable to visit some of the city’s most celebrated landmarks, such as the Houses of Parliament, St. Paul’s Cathedral and Buckingham Palace, due to his work commitments, which left him ‘struggling and struggling’, and so with little ‘time to lift my head and look around’ (Ali, p. 289). His emphasis on work not only reiterates his investment in the hegemonic masculine ideal of family provider but also
highlights how different sections of society experience the city. For tourists, London may present itself through its famous buildings, bridges, museums and river. Whilst for inhabitants, these are parts of the cityscape that one may view in passing from a bus or stroll past on the way to somewhere else. For the protagonist Chanu and his family, however, it is imbued with significance as they travel into the central zone of London on what they call a ‘holiday’ thereby exhibiting a form of veneration for the socio-historical resonances of London’s most celebrated buildings. Simultaneously, it is also an opportunity for Chanu to demonstrate his ‘superiority’ over his all-female family because he knows London much better than his wife and daughters and therefore he is able to ‘teach’ them about the city. Evincing his involvement in the ‘national game’, Chanu obstreperously recounts the chronological history of Buckingham Palace for his family and all passers-by to hear. Significantly, Chanu’s knowledge of British history is focussed on the fates and lives of the royal family therefore parroting a conservative and nationalistic vision of Britishness which he vociferously expresses his respect for. In so doing, Chanu is demonstrating his alignment with a time-honoured and culturally conservative British institution thereby showing his own integration within Britain.

Crucially, the audience for Chanu’s referencing of English literature and history is his family, composed entirely of females as it is his wife and two daughters, and generally other men like the local general practitioner, Dr. Azad, and his colleagues at the city council. Dr. Azad is a singularly important figure for Chanu. From Chanu’s perspective, Dr. Azad is educated, successful and well-connected thus his invitation to the family flat is treated with special care. In addition, Azad’s success is attractive to Chanu as he is a fellow Bangladeshi migrant and Muslim. When he first visits Chanu and Nazneen’s home, Chanu orders
Nazneen to cut large pieces of meat in the various dishes she prepares so as to signal the family’s wealth in affording premier quality food. Chanu’s certificates from diploma courses in literature, history, sociology and philosophy, all of which are demonstratively hung in the living room, are also gestured towards during the meal. Besides Chanu’s desire to associate with Dr. Azad as he is a ‘fellow intellectual’ and prosperous immigrant, he also wants closer affiliation with him due to the doctor’s supposed connection with his boss, Mr. Dalloway (Ali, p. 35). As mentioned previously, Mr. Dalloway is Chanu’s manager at the city council and, during the first part of the novel, Chanu is keen to achieve a coveted promotion. However, this assumed relation between Dr. Azad and Mr. Dalloway is incorrect and results in an awkward dialogue whereby Chanu’s desperation to succeed is palpable:

‘The thing is, with the promotion coming up, things are beginning to go well for me now. If I just get the promotion confirmed then many things are possible.’

[...] ‘I’m sure you have a good chance.’

‘Did Mr. Dalloway tell you that?’

‘Who’s that?’

‘Mr. Dalloway.’

The doctor shrugged his neat shoulders.

‘My superior. Mr. Dalloway. He told you I have a good chance?’

‘No.’

‘He said I didn’t have a good chance?’

‘He didn’t say anything at all. I don’t know the gentleman in question.’

‘He’s one of your patients. His secretary made an appointment for him to see you about his shoulder sprain. He’s a squash player. Very active man. Average build, I’d say. Wears contact lenses - perhaps you test his eyes as well.’ (Ali, p. 33)

This uncomfortable exchange unmasks the strength of personal meaning that Chanu attaches to the possibility of promotion, and substantiates his frequent performances of knowledge and success. These exhibitions of achievement – whether through knowledge, ability to quote from canonical literature, or brandishing his certificates
– are points in which he is playing the ‘national game’ by showing reverence for English culture, his integration within it, and his own claims to a specifically English imagining of hegemonic masculinity. As described in the section on constructions of the city and masculinity at an earlier point in the chapter, however, Chanu does not manage to receive this promotion, despite the ‘ignorance’ of his rival who is unable to quote from Chaucer, Dickens or Hardy. For Chanu, this failure has crushing personal consequences as he leaves his job thereby demonstrating how a career setback comes to symbolise his loss in the ‘national game’ and reinforces his marginalised masculinity.

Yet Ali’s novel also exposes the insubstantiality of dominant and univocal approaches to complexes of gender, cultural and national belonging. Chanu’s perceptions on Dr. Azad, as well as related expectations of hegemonic masculinity and national identity, are shattered when Chanu visits the doctor’s home. Feeling affronted at not having received a reciprocal invitation to Dr. Azad’s home, Chanu locates the general practitioner’s house and visits there with Nazneen. Emphasising the division of cities along class lines, Dr. Azad lives in a house, as opposed to a flat, in a relatively affluent area of East London which is geographically close to Chanu and Nazneen’s home but symbolically distant, as Chanu remarks to his wife: ‘[This is] a substantial property [...] This area is very respectable. None of your Sylhetis here. If you see a brown face, you can guarantee it’s not from Sylhet’ (Ali, p. 107). Dr. Azad’s geographical positioning outside of the diaspora community reinforces Chanu’s prejudices that the tower block inhabitants are uncivilised and uneducated, a jaundiced outlook that fails to recognise the socio-economic structural factors ensuring the diaspora community’s lack of access to educational opportunities or means of social betterment. Chanu’s expectations are swiftly rebutted, however, as a
woman in ‘Westernised’ appearance in the form of a short purple skirt and close-to-the-scalp cropped hair opens the door. It soon transpires that Dr. Azad is married to an atheist Bangladeshi woman who drinks alcohol and enthusiastically praises what she perceives to be the comparative freedoms that she and her daughter experience, evidenced by their wearing of different types of clothing and moving more openly through the city.

The meeting with Dr. Azad at his home emphasises that the doctor’s claims to be a moral guardian who berates young men of the diaspora community for ‘copying what they see here, going to the pub, to nightclubs’ is a façade (Ali, p. 31). Mrs. Azad and her daughter are both described as drinking alcohol and, whilst at their home, Nazneen and Chanu are also offered beer. Chanu accepts the alcoholic beverage but with some reluctance, as the narrative describes it was ‘as if he were proposing to lend her a kidney’ (Ali, p. 110). Indeed, his acceptance of the drink is also intended to prove his similarity to the doctor whom he holds in high esteem. Nonetheless, judging by Chanu’s uncharacteristic quiet demeanour when in the Azad household, the protagonist is challenged by Dr. Azad’s lifestyle which he expected would meet his perceptions of hegemonic masculinity. For Chanu, these assumptions consisted of being a highly successful man that led a heteronormative lifestyle with obedient children and the trappings of wealth and respect. Ali’s inclusion of the Azad family, then, brings to light the illusory nature of hegemonic masculine scripts and the futility of Chanu’s own attempts to perform these.

Where Chanu attempts to demonstrate his allegiance to Britain, and more specifically his London locale, through performances of what he perceives as markers of a national hegemonic masculinity, *Psychoraag*’s protagonist Zaf asserts that he finds his sense of place and selfhood through music. As has been referred to
through the chapter, there is an underlying tension in the representation of music and
the city in *Psychoraag*. Zaf feels affection for his Scottish home city as an idealised
place in which transcultural and hybridised forms of identity are incubated and
celebrated. Nevertheless, music is Zaf’s primary source of identification, as the
narrative acknowledges: ‘music defined him. His identity lay not in a flag or in a
particular concretisation of a transcendent Supreme Being but in a chord, a bar, a
vocal reaching beyond itself. A harmony wheelin out there, beyond the beyond’
(Saadi, p. 210-211). Zaf’s identity, then, is portrayed as transcending national
affiliation, as well as religious or ideological belief and, instead, is located in music
which is characterised as defying localisation, as it reaches ‘beyond itself’. This
utopian vision is undermined throughout the novel as Zaf’s relationship to music is
constantly mediated through Glasgow, a city which, as demonstrated in the first
section of this chapter, is suffused with music and whose city quarters are depicted
as emanating with their own beats, vibes and melodies.

Christin Hoene interprets the protagonist’s identification with music as a
‘deliberate step, albeit reluctantly taken, as Zaf’s instinct is to map his identity onto
very concrete locations.’

74 Indeed, Zaf does try to locate a sense of belonging to Pakistan, where his parents come from, and Scotland, the country of his birth. Eventually, he concedes that he belongs to neither. For example, when looking at a photograph of a young man demonstratively named Zafar in Pakistan, he laments: ‘In reality, he knew nuthin about the boy in the gao in Pakistan—before-it-wis-Pakistan – before the land had suddenly become pure, before it had been purged of somethin impure. He knew nuthin of the Scotland before. It wis a complete mystery to him and would remain so always’ (Saadi, p. 210-211). Zaf shares a sense of

estrangement from his parent’s place of origin and from Scotland where he feels ‘otherised’ on the grounds of racial and cultural difference. Zaf attempts to reclaim those places of potential belonging through the people he knows: stories of his parents’ past lives in Pakistan and their journey to Scotland are interwoven with more recent memories of turbulent love affairs with Zilla and Babs which, as the previous section argued, are used as attempts to foster localised attachment.

Zaf turns to music to root himself and, in so doing, develops a model for transcultural forms of belonging. Being a disk-jockey is especially appealing to him as ‘on the radio, everythin he did felt real. It wis the only place where he felt human – when he wis alone with just his voice’ (Saadi, p. 3). Working as a DJ attracts Zaf as it enables him to take control over the various assemblages of his identity, consciously manipulated by him in an authorial sense, as ‘he would interject before the end of a track or just as another wis beginnin. It was the mark of a DJ to do that - to overarch the artists, to butt in, to play God’ (Saadi, p.3) From this vantage point, he is able to use music to explore his transcultural positionality as he plays music from the cultures that he feels allegiances towards and, in the process, examines the similarities and differences between these cultures. The chaotic arrangement of songs on Zaf’s radio show, which juxtaposes music from a range of disparate places and, owing to his amateur DJ skills, often end up playing at different speeds or overlapping each other – expresses the frenzied and asymmetrical nature of transcultural identity construction – proposed by Stuart Hall as ‘constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference’. 75 Music, then, poses a form of cultural translation in which his feelings of cultural difference

towards Pakistan and Scotland can be redressed and analysed whilst new
transcultural perspectives and forms of belonging to these places can be forged.

Although he confesses to not having visited a *masjid* for a ‘long’ time, Zaf also uses music as a vehicle to access and express Islamic forms of spirituality. Thus, he is moved to recite the Shahada, or the statement that declares the oneness of Allah and the acceptance of Muhammad as Allah’s prophet, whilst he is listening to music to comfort himself. Music prompts him to ‘Thank the Lord’, even though he does not know who the ‘Lord’ is (Saadi, p. 207), as ‘Talkin to God was a symphonic affair and Zaf hadn’t even grabbed the melody’ (Saadi, p. 278). Conspicuously evident in this last quotation is how Saadi’s protagonist does not foreclose the existence of a higher being nor the validity of religious worldviews, but rather evokes a fluid and conditional version of Islamic faith that recalls my discussion of Sami’s conversion in Yassin-Kassab’s *The Road From Damascus* in the previous chapter. Elsewhere in the text, Zaf encourages such a reading through his fondness for Sufi musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who also appeared in Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* and his referencing to Persian Sufi poetry such as *The Secret Rose Garden*. These articulations of an inclusive and inquisitive Islamic religiosity are a constituent part of his unstable identity that translates and negotiates across geographic poles and cultures into a more transcultural way of being.

Music is an ideal conduit for the processes of cultural translation that Zaf undertakes precisely because, as Hoene points out, ‘it is an art form that happens in time rather than being tied to place’. As such, Hoene explains that music is ‘constantly in flux, is constantly created and recreated, and therefore always

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dependent on its respective context of performance, of coming-into-being.  

In this sense, the novel also uses the creative potential of music as a way of expressing the asymmetrical and fluid nature of transcultural identity construction that is forged upon the comparisons, entanglements and exchanges that take place when cultures come into contact. Zaf’s radio playlist is a clear example of this as it subverts cultural hierarchies by bringing together different genres, styles and types of music from all over the world. Musical pieces as diverse as Indian classical raga, the American country and folk-rock band The Byrds, and the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky’s ‘The Rite of Spring’ are thus ‘uprooted from their cultural contexts, their places of origin’ and broadcasted in juxtaposition on Zaf’s radio show. Zaf has a particular tendency towards musicians who fuse different genres, styles, and cultures within their output, such as the British Indian band Cornershop, the British Asian electronica collective Asian Dub Foundation, and even the inclusion of Indian raga-inspired music by The Beatles. The latter is particularly significant owing to The Beatles significance as the most nationally and internationally celebrated British popular music band. By playing their track ‘Within You Without You’ from their 1967 album ‘Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band’, a song which is noted for its use of Indian instrumentation such as sitar, dilruba and tabla and featured a collaboration with the London-based organisation the Asian Music Circle, Zaf is highlighting transcultural perspectives within some of the most prominent figures of British culture. In this sense, Zaf can be seen to resist the kinds of ‘national game’ that Sara Ahmed proposes, and Brick Lane’s protagonist Chanu engages in, and produces a form of transcultural belonging through music.

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78 Hoene, Music and Identity in Postcolonial British South-Asian Literature, p. 76. 
79 Ibid., p. 76.
The novel’s formal qualities match this transcultural outlook. Hoene highlights that music is ‘a structuring agent in the novel that organises plot advancement’ whilst also offering insight into Zaf and the cultures that he lives and moves within. More specifically, the novel’s title includes the term ‘raag’ which is a form of improvisational South Asian music that draws on a variety of musical themes, genres and styles. Crucially, no performance of a raag is ever the same, it involves the participation of any number of different people who play an array of disparate instruments in a cyclical, temporally prolonged structure. Hoene quotes Martin Clayton’s definition of the musical style as something that ‘needs to be understood as an ongoing process of performance, interpretation and interaction.’

As such, the novel’s fusion of Scots and Urdu phrases alongside its erratic temporal shifts across places and times and its blending of diverse musical styles offers a globalised textual interpretation of raag. Hoene comes to the same conclusion but understands this as a form of postcolonial ‘writing back’ to ‘linear narratives of imperial history writing.’ This perspective, however, overlooks Zaf’s relative distance from the postcolonial politics of his parents’ homeland and underplays the importance he attaches to fusion, meshing and creating forms of belonging that draw on the disparate geographical locations and cultures he is connected to. Ziauddin Sardar adds that the ‘style of the novel […] propel[s] the reader to a state of rasa, the ecstatic experience in which Sufis seek to attain a higher state of knowledge. The reader becomes a rasiq, the lover, of Sufi parlance.’ Thus, the novel is, I argue,

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80 Ibid., p. 67.
engaging in more transformative and educative process than a ‘writing back’ paradigm.

It should be apparent by now, however, that this quest for belonging in music is a highly individualised and personal one. The music that Zaf plays is chosen as it closely links to his own personal history, ranging from songs that remind him of his parents’ migration from Pakistan to Scotland to songs that remind him of his tempestuous love affairs. As he tells his audience: ‘ye’ll huv noticed that the music’s swung aroon fae hard asian dub - city music, ye might say - tae airy-fairy Scoa’ish stuff. Weel, Ah don’t know aboot you but that’s whit maist ae us are livin, folks [...] This is today’s music - it knows nae boundaries’ (Saadi, p. 30). A case in point is that Zaf’s most frequently played tracks are by Scottish musical collectives, such as The Colour of Memory whose tracks are often sang in Scots Gaelic and are inspired by Scottish musical traditions, British Asian bands, and music from Pakistan such as Mohammad Rafi. Hoene notes that exactly half of the titles played by Zaf are pieces by British bands, while the other are South Asian bands. In particular, the first four songs Zaf plays are two songs by The Colour of Money and the Asian Dub Foundation, thereby asserting his own identity complexes from the start. This cultural bias can be pinched further, however, as whilst it does identify the geographical poles in which Zaf’s oscillates, it also reveals some flaws in the utopic vision that he offers his listeners.

Firstly, Zaf’s attractive vision for a placeless belonging in which music can foster attachment is undermined by his focus on musical production from places that have a personal resonance for him. In other words, music from places outside of South Asia or Britain are rarely played in his radio show. To this end, Igor Stravinsky and The Byrds are noticeable departures from the musical makeup of
Zaf’s broadcast; however, the position of both of these artists in the Western musical cannon is a firm one. The Byrds, for instance, are a popular band that are a frequent linchpin for mainstream radio stations. Stravinsky, on the other hand, is a more complex case as he is a transnational musician who left his Russian homeland to settle in France, Switzerland and the USA. He is, nonetheless, very much identified as a composer who has contributed to a Euro-American musical tradition and is therefore associated with a highbrow European culture. Consequently, Zaf’s cavalier attitude to borders comes a little unstuck as it is primarily focussed on his own personal situation.

Secondly, and perhaps most conclusively, by the denouement Zaf feels even more displaced that at the novel’s start. Fuelled by the hallucinogenic-laced drink he imbibes, Zaf’s show and his playlist falls into decay at the novel’s finale. Zaf spills a drink over the paper on which he has written his playlist which consequently disintegrates. Meanwhile, he loses control of the music system with songs repeating or playing over each other. This descent into chaos, mirrored by his hallucinations of Babs, Zilla and his father, disavow the more positive representations of multiculturalism that were previously encountered in the novel. At the novel’s end, and by extension the radio show’s conclusion, Zaf is left in a state of physical and emotional disquiet and instability. This conclusion, whilst arguably articulating the prospect that there is no absolute meaning in identity and attempts to define meaning are bound to result in chaos, also dispels the allegation that music can offer a robust form of belonging. On the contrary, music seems to exacerbate Zaf’s feeling of discomfort and unease; a discombobulating collection of feelings that were perhaps

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anticipated by the radio show’s title, the Junnune Show, which translates in English to ‘madness; a trance-like state’ (Saadi, p. 425).

Finally, Zaf’s celebration of transcultural possibility and attachment through music elides the more difficult and complex questions of cultural encounters and engagement. For all his philosophising behind the meshing of music from diverse cultural locales, they nonetheless do not address the issues of cultural prejudice which remain resolutely intact. As was addressed in a previous section of the chapter, his music is deeply associated with his home city of Glasgow, and when he conducts his imaginary walk through the city, the social divisions of the city are tangible. The radio station is a front that briefly overshadows these more complicated questions and allows characters like Zaf to productively explore their transcultural identities. By playing music, however, he leaves cultural hierarchies in place and ultimately unchallenged.

Reading Zaf’s celebration of music in Psychoraag alongside Chanu’s championing of English literature and history in Brick Lane, then, both protagonists only ever engage with their respective choice of cultural production on a superficial level. Their enjoyment of music and literature fundamentally maintains and upholds power dynamics between the cultures they straddle and steers clear of any comprehensive cultural exchange and transcultural transformation.

**Conclusion**

Both Psychoraag and Brick Lane offer demonstrative points of similarity and departure from each other in their exploration of British Muslim masculinities and their relations to the city. Brick Lane depicts much of this conflict as rooted in the
protagonists’ investment in conceptions of a singular, fixed homeland. Rather than working to blend the different cultures they are positioned within, Chanu seeks to mimic his narrow understandings of English hegemonic masculinity by performatively asserting his reverence for London’s historical past and England’s literary heritage. His efforts are met with failure which is metaphorically captured in his cumbersome body which struggles through the British capital and is resigned to circulating its urban periphery as a nocturnal taxi driver. At the novel’s close, Chanu’s repeated setbacks lead to his own departure from the city and back to Bangladesh. Karim, on the other hand, faces his social disempowerment by embarking on an affair with a Bangladeshi migrant woman and transforming himself into a figure resembling this century’s stereotyped ‘urban folk devil’, the Islamic fundamentalist. Like Chanu, his sense of disillusion and disenfranchisement within their urban locale inspire these expressions of masculinity.

On the surface, Psychoraag offers a more positive engagement with the city. Zaf thrives in the transcultural environment of the Glasgow radio station from which his music and his vocal register admixes the cultures he lives within. The fertility and dynamism of this picture of transcultural Glasgow, however, elides questions of hierarchy and inequality between these cultures. This is expressed both through his highly subjective music choice which propagates a superficially positive view of transcultural encounter and in his turbulent love-life which is left unresolved and reinforces racial privileges in the city. The concluding images from Psychoraag, then, are of a man who is fragmented and disintegrating. Even the radio station, which serves as a space of transcultural cohesion, is set to close by the novel’s end.

Fundamentally, though, both of these novels show how cities are spaces of potent and forceful cultural encounter, exchange and transformation. Neither London
nor Glasgow are idealised spaces that are cheerfully hybrid but are persistently restless and require an inevitable pluralising of identities. Masculinities, in both texts, are where these transformations meet the most resistance and the most complexity.

Building on the discussions of sexuality and the body in the second segment of this chapter, my final chapter scrutinises how two films explore the significance of non-normative sexualities in the construction of British Muslim masculinities. Up until this point, all of the masculinities that have been analysed in this thesis have rested upon heterosexuality and so in my last chapter, I turn my attention to how same-sex desire inflects and modulates practices of transcultural British Muslim masculinity.
Between Men, Desiring Men:

Hanif Kureishi’s *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985) and
Sally El Hosaini’s *My Brother the Devil* (dir. Sally El Hosaini, 2012)

**Introduction**

On 16th November 1985, attendees to the London premiere of Hanif Kureishi’s *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985)\(^1\) witnessed what was ‘almost certainly’ the first cross-racial kiss between two men in British film.\(^2\) Not only was *My Beautiful Laundrette* the first screen depiction of sexual intimacy between two British men of different racial backgrounds to reach a mainstream audience, but it was also the first UK film to portray homosexuality within British Muslim communities. Twenty-seven years later in 2012, the Welsh Egyptian filmmaker Sally El Hosaini also took same-sex desire within Britain’s Muslim migrant and post-migrant population as a narrative basis for her film *My Brother the Devil* (dir. Sally El Hosaini, 2012)\(^3\) prompting a series of comparisons in the popular press with Kureishi’s pioneering film and exposing the infrequency with which non-heteronormative British Muslim identities are represented in cultural production.\(^4\)

Until this chapter, my literary and cinematic corpus has focused on heterosexuality as a key constituent to constructions of British Muslim masculinity. Although there are exceptions, such as Zaf’s friendship with openly gay station

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\(^1\) *My Beautiful Laundrette*, dir. Stephen Frears (Mainline Pictures, 1985).
\(^3\) *My Brother the Devil*, dir. Sally El Hosaini (Verve Pictures, 2012).
\(^4\) See, for example, ‘My Brother the Devil – Review | Film | The Guardian’ [https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/nov/08/my-brother-the-devil-review] [accessed 3 May 2015].
manager Harry in *Psychoraag*, most of the male protagonists in this thesis have routinely castigated homosexuality and those who identify as gay. In *My Son the Fanatic*, for example, Parvez expresses anxieties that his son could turn ‘homo’ thereby implying that same-sex sexuality is objectionable. Riaz and his ‘brothers’ in the *Black Album* go further by launching into a spiteful glut of vituperation against homosexuals, stating that ‘homosexuals should be beheaded, though first they should be offered the option of marriage’ (Kureishi BA, p. 119). Meanwhile, Nazir in *East is East* flees his arranged marriage to live peacefully with a male partner away from the glare of his father. All of these examples show how crucial heterosexual sexualities are to male protagonists in these texts but, simultaneously, how vital homosexuality is an ‘other’ against which masculinities are constructed. This chapter, therefore, probes this dynamic by exploring how homosexual desires and subjectivities are represented in these two films and how non-normative desires complicate processes of cultural translation and the formation of transcultural British Muslim masculinities. In so doing, my critical analysis of these two films brings to light a broader diversity of British Muslim masculinities that do not, for example, rest upon what Adrienne Rich refers to as ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ – that is, as Sarah Salih summarises, the ‘dominant order in which men and women are required or even forced to be heterosexual’. Rather, this chapter follows Judith Butler’s line that gender identities that do not conform to ‘compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality’ unmask how ‘gender norms are socially instituted and maintained’.

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Set in 1980s London, *My Beautiful Laundrette* traces the British Pakistani protagonist Omar’s transformation from an impoverished college applicant, who spends his days caring for his alcoholic migrant father, Hussein, into an enterprising young businessman. Mourning the loss of his white British wife’s suicide the previous year, Hussein has taken to his bed from which he consumes copious amounts of alcohol, harangues the current state of Britain and lectures Omar on how he should attend College. As the film develops, however, Omar goes against his father’s wishes by discarding plans for a university education and ingratiates himself with his entrepreneurial extended family. Headed by Hussein’s prosperous brother Nasser, Omar’s relations have formed a business conglomerate consisting of many Pakistani migrant men who, owing to a series of advantageous tax laws aimed at developing business ushered in by the Margaret Thatcher-led Conservative administration of 1979-1990, have established a myriad of profitable businesses.\(^7\)

In this instance, the film presents a hitherto overlooked portion of British Pakistani communities, showing many Pakistani migrants in positions of power such as landlords and proprietors of business. The cinematic representation of a privileged class of Pakistani migrants and post-migrants thriving under the neoliberalism of Thatcher’s Britain is contrasted with a disadvantaged majority white population who are depicted as unemployed and materially deprived.\(^8\) As Rehana Ahmed explains, a

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\(^8\) My understanding of the term ‘neoliberalism’ is in line with David Harvey who states, ‘Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and
unique and contradictory feature of Thatcherism was how it ‘combined an exclusionary, racialised British nationalism with an economic neoliberalism […]

British citizens could be individualised and equalised, regardless of their racial or cultural affiliation, while their structural position in society, shaped partially by their racial or cultural affiliation, could be occluded.\(^9\) To capture the powerfully subversive nature of My Beautiful Laundrette, then, we should be read it within its historical context, as the Thatcher government pursued ‘a purist, Powellite vision of Britain’, as exemplified by:

\[\text{\textit{My Beautiful Laundrette} deviates from narrative norms that focus on working-class Muslim migrant and postmigrant communities suffering at the hands of structural racism and Islamophobia, such as \textit{East is East} or \textit{Brick Lane}, and depicts a section of}\]

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\(^9\) Rehana Ahmed, \textit{Writing British Muslims}, p. 95.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 94-5.
the British Muslim migrant and postmigrant population that are actually complicit with dominant political and market forces.

Throughout the film, Omar is seduced by the nouveau riche lifestyle of Nasser and his business associates. He emulates Nasser’s rise to wealth by working in his uncle’s garage and eventually managing his accounts. Quickly, Omar gains Nasser’s respect and is promoted to take charge of the family’s floundering laundrette. Whilst taking ownership of the laundry service, Omar employs his childhood friend, a white working-class man named Johnny as an assistant. Living on the streets and sleeping anywhere with available shelter, Johnny is an unconventional choice as partner by virtue of his impoverished socio-economic standing and his white British background. Even more significantly, since his childhood friendship with Omar, Johnny has developed hostility towards the comparatively affluent Pakistani communities personified by Nasser. Johnny’s animosity has since mutated into reactionary far-right political views built upon feelings of displacement when viewing his and his white peers’ impecunity contrasted with the rich and extravagant Nasser and his migrant business associates. Begrudgingly, Johnny accepts the work out of desperation, leading Omar and Johnny to forge a successful partnership. The narrative twist, however, is that this business partnership soon blossoms into a love affair between the two men.

In terms of Kureishi’s treatment of homosexuality, *My Beautiful Laundrette* was written and released at a time when then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was advocating a return to ‘Victorian Values’ as a means to harking back to a bygone era
of colonialism where ‘our country had been great’ for its moral. As Peter Jenkins summarises, ‘her agenda could have been written on a sampler. The individual owed responsibility to self, family, firm, community, country, God in that order. Economic regeneration and moral regeneration [would] go hand-in-hand.’ Resultantly, Thatcher had set upon creating a society of eager, enterprising individuals with strong, white, nuclear, patriotic heterosexual families at its core. Symptomatic of this direction, Section 28 – legislation that aimed to prevent the ‘promotion of homosexual lifestyles’ – was passed in 1988. The implementation of Section 28 ensured that homosexuality was deemed inappropriate as a subject of the arts or as a topic of discussion in schools. The passing of this law had a detrimental effect on lesbian and gay rights in Britain by driving lesbian and gay visibility into further marginalisation and buttressing perceptions that homosexuality was ‘not a viable family alternative’ to nuclear heterosexual families. It is in this context of increased homophobia and a return to ‘Victorian-era’ morals that My Beautiful Laundrette was written, filmed and released. Indeed, the film’s director Stephen Frears remarked that ‘if Laundrette had been made even two years later then they don’t think it could’ve been released.’ It would be mere speculation as to whether Frears’ claims are substantiated. However, what is clear is that in view of the broader socio-political changes in regard to homosexuality and immigration, the extent of My Beautiful Laundrette’s subversion becomes apparent.

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13 Torrey-Barber, in Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism, p. 213.
14 Ibid., p. 236.
The second film under analysis, *My Brother the Devil*, takes place in a more contemporary incarnation of London, but shares *My Beautiful Laundrette*’s ‘gritty’ focus on underprivileged quarters of the British capital as well as thematic preoccupations with complexes of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Set in a run-down housing estate on the outskirts of East London, the film’s setting is a ‘site of social struggle and […] an emblematic space of marginality’ in which ‘young, disenfranchised men form gangs, roam the streets, playgrounds and stairways’ of the apartment blocks.\textsuperscript{16} Whilst Rash, Mo and their peers take to the streets, the brother’s parents are confined to domestic spaces where they demonstrate their allegiance to their Egyptian homeland by speaking Arabic and cooking Egyptian cuisine. The young men’s father works long-hour shifts as a bus-driver for which he receives modest earnings and urges his sons to follow suit, bemoaning Rash’s resistance to seek work at the job centre. Within the sons’ logic, their father embodies their sense of marginalisation and emasculation as his field of employment is one that is historically associated with immigrant communities and results in a humble salary.

The father’s unfavourable working conditions and social marginalisation is compensated initially by Rash and later on by Mo’s membership of an exclusively-male gang demonstratively named Drugs, Money, Guns (DMG). Compared to their father, DMG members earn substantially more money selling drugs to other families on the estate and around the surrounding area. In part, DMG ensure lucrative sales through territorial fights with other gangs in the area to ensure their market dominance. Crucially, however, the young men in DMG forge a collective identity that supersedes their racial, ethno-cultural and class marginality by ensuring financial income and asserting a compensatory hyper-masculinity with guns, violence and

\textsuperscript{16} Daniela Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, p. 122.
heterosexual sexual conquest as their defining features. This gang identity is, therefore, a consensual riposte to a system that provides post-migrant youth with comparatively fewer opportunities for work, and excludes them from mainstream political or social representation.

The turning point in the narrative is the death of Izzy, a member of the gang and a close friend of Rash’s, during a ‘turf war’ with members of a rival gang. Following Izzy’s murder, Rash has an existential struggle with his gangster lifestyle and consoles himself through his friendship with the sophisticated, urbane and more moneyed Sayid. Living in an upscale studio flat that is on the periphery of the estate, Sayid, who had previously been a costumer for the gang’s drug dealing business, helps Rash through his trauma and also employs him as an assistant in his photography firm. However, it transpires that Sayid has romantic designs upon Rash and makes an alcohol-fuelled attempt to seduce him. At first Rash appears revolted by Sayid’s sexual attention; however, Rash eventually reciprocates his employer’s romantic advancements and the two embark on a love affair.

In both *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *My Brother the Devil* the central male protagonists Omar and Rash subvert the gender expectations of their family and peers by engaging in romantic relationships with other men. To this end, I describe much of the behaviour and cultural bias amongst the films’ protagonists as ‘heteronormative’. I am referring here to Michael Warner’s use of the term to describe the positioning of heterosexuality as the ‘elemental form of human association, as the very model for inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t
exist.’ Accordingly, assumptions that most people favour a heterosexual lifestyle underpins the majority of social and political thought as well as most everyday exchanges. In illustrating the accumulative effects of heteronormative thinking, Warner draws on Monique Wittig’s description of the ‘social contract of heterosexuality’, Wittig writes that: ‘To live in society is to live in heterosexuality [...] Heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories. It has sneaked into dialectic thought (or thought of differences) as its main category.’

Heteronormativity, then, refers to how dominant social, political and cultural discourses presuppose and propagate a paradigmatically heterosexual viewpoint.

With reference to practices of masculinity, Raewyn Connell identifies how hegemonic masculinities are dependent upon heteronormativity. As all hegemonic identity formations necessarily require other subjectivities to subordinate in order to attain dominance, Connell argues that homosexual masculinities are afforded the lowest position in gender hierarchies amongst men. She observes that: ‘Gayness in patriarchal ideology is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure.’ Indeed, what Connell goes on to argue is that homosexuality not only refers to sexual behaviour between men but is also a catch-all term for a range of practices deemed effeminate and therefore demonstratively excluded from most definitions of hegemonic masculinity. Substantiating this claim, Connell shows how some men exaggeratedly perform behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity to ensure they are not labelled homosexual. Most common

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19 Raewyn Connell, Masculinities, p. 75.
amongst these, Connell claims, is derision and threats of violence against men that are perceived to behave in a manner suggesting their effeminacy and, by extension, their homosexuality. Connell explains that there is a ‘rich vocabulary of abuse’ that blurs both physical acts of sexual intimacy between men and femininity.^20^ Hegemonic masculinities are therefore not only heteronormative in that they require and propagate sexual attraction to females, but they also depend upon homosexuality as a foil against which culturally dominant models of masculinity can be defined against.

Sally El Hosaini, the writer and director of *My Brother the Devil*, echoes Connell’s reading of homosexuality when she explains her inspiration for the film was because she wanted ‘to explore the importance of masculinity’ from the perspective of ‘outsiders and outcasts’.^21^ She adds that, although *My Brother the Devil* is focussed on male homosexuality, her interest in individuals who traverse gender and sexual norms in British Arab Muslim migrant and postmigrant communities was also the motivation behind her previous cinematic effort, her 2009 short-film entitled *Henna Night* which focussed on two British Egyptian women in a lesbian relationship.^22^ Both of these films, she argues, were made as part of her investigation into her own British Arab Muslim background and come from a keen sense that cinema should have social responsibility as film-makers are ‘responsible for what [they’re] putting out into the world.’^23^ For Hanif Kureishi, however, his presentation of same-sex love in *My Beautiful Laundrette* represents a more oblique

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^20^ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 79.


^22^ *Henna Night*, dir. Sally El Hosaini (Yalla Film Company, 2009)

form of self-expression, as he claims ‘the two boys are really the two sides of me: a Pakistani boy and an English boy, because I’m half Pakistani and half English. I got the two parts of myself together…kissing.’ Although in stark contrast to El Hosaini’s intentions, Kureishi also flippantly shirked off any moral responsibilities regarding the film by stating ‘if it gives one person an erection and makes one person laugh then that’s good enough for me’. Kureishi’s provocations, however, belie the film’s importance as a cultural product that, as previously mentioned, was the first to explore complexes of homosexuality, postmigration and British Muslim masculinities.

Indeed, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is particularly celebrated as an innovative film for its refusal to adhere to what Stuart Hall calls ‘the innocent notion of the essential black subject’. Using ‘black’ as an expression of politicised cross-racial solidarity, Hall praises Kureishi’s film for exposing how ‘the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity’ and thereby showing how the ‘black experience’ is shaped by movement and transcultural exchange. As Hall puts it, the film emphasises ‘processes of mixing, of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and “cut-and-mix”’ both on a thematic and formal level. Cultural difference is, therefore, evoked as ‘a positional, conditional and conjunctural’ conceptualisation in the film whereby a ‘heterogeneity of interests and identities’ are evinced. As such, issues of racial identity in the film are ‘constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of

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24 Q’td in Ibid., p. 24.
25 Q’td in Ibid., p. 25.
26 Q’td in Ibid., p. 25.
gender and ethnicity’. In this sense, Kureishi’s film presages many of the explorations into cultural translation and transcultural identities that have been interrogated throughout my thesis.

It is vital to note here, however, how the term ‘Muslim’ does not appear in these then-contemporary responses to the film. Unlike the other texts by Kureishi in this thesis, neither Muslim cultures nor Islamic faiths are conspicuously discussed in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Released before the Rushdie Affair and 9/11, *My Beautiful Laundrette* precedes many of the global and local events that have mobilised the writers and filmmakers in this thesis to examine the interplay of British and Muslim cultures – including Hanif Kureishi himself in his novel *The Black Album* and film *My Son the Fanatic*. However, in bringing Kureishi’s film together with *My Brother the Devil* for comparative analysis, I argue that it can be beneficial to consider *My Beautiful Laundrette* as foreshadowing key representational paradigms that underpin depictions of British Muslims in relation to homosexuality.

Specifically, I am referring to how *My Beautiful Laundrette* presupposes aspects of what Lisa Duggan was to theorise as homonormativity and Jasbir K. Puar was later to refer to as homonationalism. In reference to the latter term, Puar argues that, in the US, 9/11 marks a watershed moment for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) mainstream and cultural representation as lesbians, gays and queers were strategically embraced by the nation at a time of increased fear of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism from a racialized ‘other’. Puar writes:

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30 Q’td in Ibid., p. 25.
even as patriotism immediately after September 11 was inextricably tied to a reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality was championed as a hallmark of U.S. modernity. For despite this retrenchment of heteronormativity, the United States was also portrayed as “feminist” in relation to the Taliban’s treatment of Afghani women (a concern that had been previously of no interest to U.S. foreign policy) and gay-safe in comparison to the Middle East.  

Drawing on Lisa Duggan’s writing on homonormativity, which refers to the absorption of heteronormative ideals and constructs into homosexual culture and identities, Puar contends that the post-9/11 era heralded a shift whereby the heteronormative ideologies that underpin the American nation-state were ‘now accompanied by homonormative ideologies that replicate the narrow racial, class, gender and national ideals’. To this end, normatively white, middle-class lesbians, gay men, and queers have been incorporated within imaginings of the nation due to their potential as economic contributors, consumers, and reproducers through the legalization of same-sex marriage and reproductive kinship. Homonationalist discourses, then, distinguish homonormative gay, lesbian, and queer identities as admitted within the body politic from ‘a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population [...] who refuse to assimilate’. Thus, the accelerant narrative of progress for some LGBT subjectivities is contradicted by the internal suppression and increased profiling and surveillance of non-white and immigrant communities associated with illiberal viewpoints and terrorism. Such ideological formulations preclude, for example, someone identifying as both Muslim and as lesbian, gay or queer at the same time. However, Puar argues that the non-white gay or queer

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33 Ibid., *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. xxv.
34 Ibid., p. 20.
35 Puar’s analysis details how the view that Islam and Muslim cultures are uncomplicatedly and exceptionally homophobic is a historically contingent one. As it comes at a time when nations such as
subject can negotiate their belonging within the nation through adherence to neoliberal economic structures.

In this sense, I argue that Puar’s model for conditional acceptance of non-white gay individual into the body of the nation has significant implications for the complex of race, ethno-cultural, gender and sexual identities in Kureishi’s film. Crudely put, for the protagonist Omar, his same-sex sexuality becomes a way that he can negotiate his belonging within Britain at the expense of his ethno-cultural and racial disempowerment. El Hosaini’s film, on the other hand, takes this negotiation of national belonging on sexuality grounds further by imagining a British Muslim protagonist whose love affair with an openly gay, affluent, religiously-observant British Muslim man leads to his social advancement out of financially unfavourable

the UK, Germany and USA are implementing laws to enshrine equality for their own non-conformist gender and sexual populations. As such, the increased focus on the plight of LGBT Muslims in Muslim-majority nations enables the West to construct itself as enlightened, progressive and modern in contrast to the Muslim World’s alleged backwardness. These discourses are, however, economical with the truth. Analogous with traditionalist models of Christianity and Judaism, most doctrines of Islam regard homosexuality as prohibited because the Koran considers sexual activity outside of marriage as haram (prohibited). However, there are no explicit references to same-sex sexuality. The parable of Lut is generally used as justification for the prohibition of homosexuality. As the Islamic Holy Book records it, Lut was commissioned as Allah’s messenger to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to preach monotheism and put an end to the citizens’ lustful and violent acts. Such was the degree of Sodom and Gomorrah’s unpleasantness, the twin cities’ inhabitants had taken to sexually violating their guests. For most devout readers of the Koran, Samar Habib writes, the people’s sexual misconducts were understood to be symptomatic of the citizens’ sins. Lut tried to convince the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah to abandon their wanton sexuality; however, this was to no avail. Heeding Lut’s prayers, Allah sent two angels in the disguise of handsome young men to aid his prophet. However, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah overpowered Lut and sought to satisfy their sexual desires upon the two men. These men revealed their true identities as angels and, consequently, destroyed the cities and all inhabitants in punishment. In recent years, academics and some progressive imams, including Scott al-Haj Kugle and Amanullah De Sondy have penned trenchant theological refutations of the story’s supposed opposition to same-sex sexuality. Whilst all three warn against imposing fourteenth-century interpretations of human behaviour on the present day, De Sondy also argues that it is the forced rape of males rather than the sexual practices that incurred divine retribution. A number of studies explore Islam’s relationship to homosexuality, such as Samar Habib, ‘Introduction’, in Islam and Homosexuality: Volume 2, ed. by Samar Habib (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims (Oxford: OneWorld Books, 2010), Amanullah De Sondy, The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and, particularly useful is Momin Rahman’s Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) for its dual focus on socio-cultural factors and religion and the distinction between these.
conditions and into a prosperous and aspirational social class. Despite the film’s accomplished exploration of economic and structural inequalities that affect the gang, as well as its laudable inclusion of a homosexual Muslim character with an Islamic faith, I posit that *My Brother the Devil* still falls back on homonationalist binaries. By analysing the film, I contend that what Puar refers to as a ‘Muslim or gay binary’ should be considered in a British context to examine how certain ‘liberal’ Muslim subjectivities are incorporated within imaginings of Britishness, at the exclusion of Muslim subjectivities that do not fit these prescriptions.\(^{36}\) These are conceptions of British Muslim identities and masculinities that, my chapter aims to show, *My Beautiful Laundrette* first explored.

I will come to this conclusion through two particular strands of argument. In the first section, Homosocial Gangs, I employ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theorisations of homosocial desire and homosexual panic to explore how the all-male collectives in each film construct their masculinities based around intimate bonds through which males maintain practices of heteronormative masculinity. These performances of masculinity are competitively enacted against their sense of disempowerment at the hands of a normatively white, non-Muslim majority society. In the second segment, Homonationalist Sexualities, I will show how homosexuality represents a liberating alternative to these forms of highly-pressured, patriarchal masculinity but, using the work of Duggan and Puar, expose how same-sex sexuality ultimately entrenches socio-economic inequalities though Omar and Rash’s

negotiation of an economically-driven Britishness that forecloses transcultural exchange.

Homosocial Gangs

Perhaps one of the most striking gendered images in *My Beautiful Laundrette* is Omar’s cousin, Tania, standing at the window of Nasser’s bedroom, bearing her breasts in disdain and derision at the all-male party inside. As Susan E. Lorsch relates, Tania looks squarely into the ‘film audience’ – and then into Omar – in ‘the hope that he is still unformed and malleable enough to resist initiation’ into the patriarchal world symbolised by Nasser’s bedchamber.\(^\text{37}\) Indeed, when the camera pans round the room, the viewer observes a gathering of men from a variety of different racial and ethno-cultural backgrounds who have joined together to discuss business deals, boast about their financial success, lambast other men for failing to earn enough money, make prurient jokes about women and consume excessive amounts of expensive alcohol which they offer up as toasts to the political status quo. Tania’s display, then, is a deeply ‘subversive gesture’ that both makes clear and undercuts the close male bonds that underpin hegemonic masculinities within the film.\(^\text{38}\) In the visual logic of the scene, women are reduced to the ‘outside’ of rooms where male-bonded success is celebrated and upheld. However, as Lorsch argues, the positioning of the camera allows Tania to ‘own the gaze’ so she flaunts herself directly at the audience and Omar thereby signalling the film’s ‘ideological


\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 69.
independence’ and its interrogative stance towards the kinds of patriarchal, masculinist bias that are encountered within Nasser’s bedroom.\textsuperscript{39}

I open my discussion with this scene as it eloquently conveys the significance that other men have upon gender relations and constructions within Kureishi’s film. In \textit{My Beautiful Laundrette}, then, much of the film’s focal point centres upon a group of mostly Pakistani migrant businessmen who regularly throw lavish parties through which they express their claims to hegemonic masculinity by flaunting their extravagant wealth and achievements. Although, as I will argue in the following pages, these performances of hegemonic masculinity are exaggerated forms of protest masculinity fuelled by a common sense of inferiority due to their minority ethno-cultural background in a normatively white Britain. Similar patterns of protest masculinity are enacted by a clique of young men with migratory backgrounds in \textit{My Brother the Devil}. These men, however, have significantly less access to power and wealth than the businessmen in \textit{My Beautiful Laundrette}. In contrast to Nasser and his middle-aged associates, all of whom represent a business elite who gain their status and affluence by taking every advantage of generous Thatcherite tax reforms,\textsuperscript{40} characters such as Rash and Mo in El Hosaini’s film are much younger, British-born postmigrants who do not have access to similar methods of moneymaking. Yet, the gang in \textit{My Brother the Devil} (DMG) still competitively enact many hegemonic masculine characteristics in riposte to their collective sense of marginalisation.

Likewise, this sense of exclusion is felt partly on a racial and cultural level as the

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 69.
\textsuperscript{40} As Susan Torrey Barber puts it, ‘In her first budget, Thatcher reduced top bracket taxes of 83 percent on earned income and 98 percent on unearned income to a uniform 60 percent. Further her corporate tax reform dropped the rate for businesses from 52 percent to 35 percent. All these cuts enabled businessmen such as Nassar and Salim to increase their net profit dramatically from gross earnings’, Susan Torrey Barber, in ‘Insurmountable Difficulties and Moments of Ecstasy: Crossing Class, Ethnic and Sexual Barriers in the Films of Stephen Frears’, in \textit{Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism}, p. 224.
men are ostracised from a ‘white’ British mainstream due to their postmigrant backgrounds. Moreover, as this segment of my chapter will explore, both of these collective groups – or gangs – depend upon the exclusion of women and competitive displays of success, bravery and prosperity through which practices of masculinity are constructed and organised.

The above patterns call to mind Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theorisations on ‘homosociality’. As Sedgwick deploys it, the term ‘homosocial desire’ refers to forms of solidarity forged between men, through friendships and intimate collaborations with other males that maintain and defend patriarchal gender orders. Homosocial bonds, then, are one of the central ways through which norms of patriarchal masculinity are performed in the public sphere. Crucially, however, Sedgwick describes homosocial affiliation as a form of male-male desire thereby evoking an affective or social bond between men that can be manifested in many different ways such as rivalry, hostility or admiration. By interpreting these bonds of male-male affiliation in the language of desire, it enables Sedgwick ‘to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.’ Thus, Sedgwick proposes that homosocial bonds are accompanied by an acute sense of anxiety – or ‘homosexual panic’ – that male-male connections may give way to same-sex sexual or romantic desire.

Homosexual panic, Sedgwick opines, often takes the form of homophobic and chauvinistic language that focusses on sexual achievements with women as a means for men to defensively assert their heterosexuality amongst other men.

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42 Ibid., p. 2.
43 Ibid., p. 1.
Moreover, the figurative power of declaring someone homosexual also affords men a ‘mechanism of domination’ through which to blackmail and malign male rivals.⁴⁴

Although homosocial networks uphold male superiority in patriarchal gender systems, they are also acutely contradictory phenomena built upon both identification, competition and fear of other men. Homosexual panic, therefore, reveals the foundational anxiety underlying constructions of patriarchal masculinity in homosocial networks.

Ostensibly, Sedgwick contends that the dual forces of homosocial desire and homosexual panic are inextricably linked within constructions of masculinity.⁴⁵ Sedgwick’s argument that men’s practices of gender are highly organised by relations between men and, therefore, their performances of masculinity are enacted for the benefit of other men who have the power to grant men their hegemonic masculinity is particularly illuminating for how I interpret collectively-forged masculinities in Kureishi and El Hosaini’s films.⁴⁶ According to Sedgwick, males seek the approval of other males in attempting to improve their position in social hierarchies, using markers of hegemonic masculinity such as occupational achievement, wealth, power and status, physical prowess, and sexual conquest. Thus, in this section of my argument, I will show how these theorisations of masculinity resonate with each respective groups’ enthusiastic embrace of hegemonic masculine practices, how these practices are collectively and competitively performed, and the ways in which the central protagonists Omar and Rash seek acceptance within these groups by emulating each collective’s behaviour and practice.

⁴⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men, p. 87.
⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 3.
⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 3.
To return to *My Beautiful Laundrette*’s scene in Nasser’s bedroom, for example, it is not only women who are excluded from the bedroom but also men who they deem to have a ‘weak’ masculinity. A case in point is Omar’s father, Hussein, who is not invited and is singled out for mockery as he is unemployed and has had a limited number of female sexual partners. Unlike Nasser, who is married to a Pakistani migrant wife but maintains a white British female lover named Rachel, Hussein is scorned for his faithful marriage to a white British woman named Mary with whom he enjoyed a sexual escapade in his youth. Hussein, therefore, flouts the hegemonic gender order by not marrying a Pakistani woman and refusing to see white British women as a sexual object through which one’s masculinity can be measured. Alongside his alleged lack of sexual prowess, Hussein is also mocked for being beaten down by his experiences of racism which have left him as a passive and enervated figure that languishes in bed. Nasser, on the other hand, is described as circumventing the structural racism of Britain in order to have a highly successful career thereby evoking his masculine strength in the face of adversity.

To this end, Rachel has crucial significance for Nasser’s masculinity. Although married to a middle-aged Pakistani woman named Bilquis, Nasser spends most of his time (and money) upon the much younger and more glamorous British woman Rachel. Indeed, the attention he devotes to his English lover reveals a scarcely-hidden preference for Rachel over his long suffering wife. For instance, the sari-clad Bilquis is never seen outside of a domestic setting from where she prepares food that professes an allegiance to her Pakistani homeland. In contrast, Rachel is treated by Nasser to luxurious London restaurants and cocktail bars. By inviting Rachel to public events with other businessmen, Nasser enables a form of peer
judgement upon himself in which he is seen to be commercially, professionally and sexually successful. Throughout the film, Rachel is dehumanised and becomes a sexualised and aestheticised ‘trophy’ of Nasser’s achievements. From her first appearance in the film, Rachel is established as a sexual being as Omar overhears her enthusiastic love-making with Nasser. While in the rest of the film, she is depicted as wearing extravagantly fashionable clothes and jewellery, all of which have been bought for her by Nasser.

Rachel’s race is also a pivotal aspect of Nasser’s self-construction amidst his avaricious companions. The fact that Rachel is white enables Nasser to ‘show off’ his ability not only to succeed in a society that marginalises migrants and people of colour but also inverts colonial relations through masculinised sexuality. In other words, Nasser, the non-white migrant transgresses power hierarchies by sexually seducing and dominating a white women from the former colonising power. Rachel, therefore, serves as a symbol of Nasser’s own hegemonic masculine successes who is paraded for all the other migrant, postmigrant and normatively white businessmen to observe.

Further indicative of women as markers of hegemonic masculinity, Nasser demonstrates the centrality of heterosexuality to his relationship to Britain when he tells Omar: ‘In this damn country that we hate and love, you can get anything you want. It’s all spread out and available. That’s why I believe in England. You just need to know how to squeeze the tits of the system.' In this analogy, Nasser casts professional success in Britain as resembling the sexual domination of a woman. Tellingly, this metaphor does not depend on a mutual exchange of sexual pleasure but instead rests on a negative and forceful imagining of a male imposing himself
upon a woman to fulfil his desires. Sexual and economic exploitation are therefore linked in a revealing analogy that reverses the stereotypical representation of the colonised as feminised.\textsuperscript{47} Nasser’s success in England, then, contests his marginalisation and emasculation as a formerly colonised subject who has settled in the old imperial centre.

Whilst England is depicted as a woman who needs to be sexually controlled in order to succeed, Nasser later summarises the complex socio-political ailments that drove his family to migrate overseas in a similarly sexualised fashion. For Nasser, Pakistan ‘has been sodomised by religion. It’s beginning to interfere with the making of money.’ In this analogy, the comparatively more difficult ways to make money and therefore evince a vital component in hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan renders men as submissive, passive and emasculated. This is in stark contrast to the position of men in England who, if they learn to ‘squeeze the tits of the system’, are portrayed as being empowered. In this regard, Nasser’s sexualised imagery resonates with Leo Bersani’s contention that ‘heterosexual cultural fantasy promotes an analogy between passive anal sex, which represents a breakdown of bodily boundaries, and shattering of the male self that is equal to death.’\textsuperscript{48} Thus Bersani writes that, in heteronormative understandings of masculinity, the active role in sexual intercourse is always afforded to the male. The anus, therefore, is mapped as a site that is demonstratively not penetrated. In turn, this means that receptive anal pleasure results in a loss — or in Bersani’s terms death — of the masculine self as it

subverts heteronormative bodily boundaries that categorically ensure that males are always sexually dominant. Working in Pakistan, then, is associated with a figurative loss of a masculine self as it results in less money and prestige within Nasser’s rigidly heterosexual masculine worldview.

For Nasser and his business associates, the UK is, in their words, ‘a little heaven’ as the Thatcher administration’s neo-liberalisation of the economy ensured that men normally disadvantaged due to their minoritarian racial or ethno-cultural background can succeed providing they follow the basic rules of capitalist investment. Nasser and his migrant companions use a combination of their business acumen and the economic climate of Thatcher’s Britain to translate their hegemonic masculine requirements of being a breadwinner and earning money into the environment of the UK. This is most clearly articulated in a revealing toast of champagne offered by Nasser to Omar and Johnny’s business:

NASSER: And we’ll drink to Thatcher and your beautiful laundrette.
JOHNNY: Do they go together?
NASSER: Like dall and chipatis

Indeed, as Chris Ogden points out, Thatcher’s tax reforms which enabled many to ‘increase their net profit dramatically from gross earnings’ were enthusiastically embraced by many migrants who were in turn encouraged by Thatcher’s praise of Indian and Asian shopkeepers as Britain’s new ‘meritocrats’. The character of Nasser is no exception to this rising class of prosperous migrants; at one point in the film Nasser proudly states that ‘there is no question of race in the new enterprise

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50 Ogden, q’td in Torey Barber, p. 223.
culture’. Hence, Nasser and his community of migrant businessmen are fictional incarnations of a Thatcherite archetype that used the neo-liberalisation of Britain’s economy to reverse colonial hierarchies and succeed in 1980s Britain.

Emblematic of the congregated men’s support for the Thatcher regime’s economic reforms, the bedroom scene is accompanied by a particularly 1980s synthesised version of the nationalist anthem ‘Rule, Britannia!’ as the men disparage Hussein for his unpatriotic, socialist beliefs and offer a champagne toast to Margaret Thatcher. The entrepreneurs ridicule Omar’s father for embracing an ideology which, in their mind, ensures limited access to markers of hegemonic masculinity and financial success. Towards the end of the scene, the men make plans for Omar to join their ranks by integrating him within their business plans therefore saving him from the emasculating influence of his father. The discussion of Omar’s future is markedly inflected with masculinist language, as Salim declares that they will ‘make him a man’ thereby divulging an implicit link between professional and financial success and masculinity.

Indeed, association with the group is a way for Omar to combat his feelings of emasculation at home. The relationship between Omar and Hussein resembles a reversal of expected parent-child roles in which son Omar cares for his father by washing his clothes, cooking his dinner, doing household chores and even helps him go to the toilet. These are all tasks which in particularly patriarchal paradigms of hegemonic masculinity are symbolically excluded as ‘feminine’ and not befitting

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51 ‘Rule, Britannia!’ is a British patriotic song that originates from a poem of the same name by James Thomson and was put to music by Thomas Arne in 1704. The song is generally performed at national state occasions and the lyrics refer to historical British naval victories as well as celebrate colonial dominance. For more information, see: ‘Rule Britannia, Britannia Rule the Waves’ <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Rule-Britannia/> [accessed 6 December 2016].
men. Tellingly, Omar and Hussein’s first scene together includes a close-up focus on a photograph of Mary besides Hussein’s bed. Eventually, it transpires that Mary had committed suicide the previous year to escape her husband’s abuse. Hussein’s violence, the audience learns, was a physical compensation for his feelings of disempowerment outside of the home. Put differently, he hit his wife as an expression of masculine power otherwise denied to him through his unemployment and the racial discrimination that he faced in his previous workplace. Therefore, on the grounds of his filial status, Omar is expected to fulfil the caring role of his deceased mother. At one point in the film, Omar’s attitude towards his father’s languid state becomes apparent when he describes hypothetically squeezing Hussein’s body only to be left with ‘two bottles of vodka and a flap of skin a bit like a French letter’. The ‘French letter’ that Omar refers to, is a popular euphemism for a condom thereby implying impotence, passivity and emasculation on the part of his father.

Nasser’s business group, therefore, offers Omar an alternative vision of masculinity where he can atone for his own feelings of diminishment. Unlike his father, then, Omar’s Uncle Nasser is an entrepreneur who presides over a number of lucrative business ventures — car garages, property ownership and laundry services. Nasser’s success has led him to cultivate a flamboyant lifestyle in which he visits expensive cocktail bars, wears sharply-tailored suits, keeps an English mistress and earns the admiration of a group of fellow businessmen with whom he meets regularly. A culmination of financial, professional and sexual success, combined with respect from his male peers, renders Nasser a contrarian figure to the apathetic
Hussein. Consequently, Nasser becomes an attractive model of masculinity – and a substitute father figure – to the impressionable and vulnerable Omar.

Nasser’s power, and the homosocial underpinning of this authority, is most conspicuous in the bedroom scene which I opened this section of my analysis with. In the centre of the shot, Nasser is sat cross-legged on his bed whilst seated beside him are his most trusted associates: Zaki and his business heir Salim. According to the setup of the scene, each man’s status in the group’s hierarchy is determined according to proximity to the most dominant male, Nasser. The majority of the men in the room, and especially those sat closest to Nasser, are rich and successful Pakistani migrants. Meanwhile, a British-born character named Dick O’Donnell and a nameless associate referred to in the script as ‘The Englishman’ are seated in subordinate positions around the bed implying their own inferiority. Thus, the way the men are arranged in orbit around Nasser marks him as the epicentre of the conversation and natural focus of attention. In conveying Nasser’s sovereignty amongst the men, the shot draws on familiar Orientalist imagery of robbed Sultans sat on beds with gathered male advisers assembled around.52 Further emphasising this visual referencing, Nasser is notably dressed in traditional South Asian attire contrasting him with the besuited male crowd around him. This sequence, therefore, shows that it is these men that afford Nasser much of his power and status.

Turning to the characters of Rash and Mo in My Brother the Devil, then, a number of intriguing similarities emerge. In the first place, Rash and Mo are attracted to the gang for comparatively similar reasons that Nasser’s group appeals to Omar. Like Kureishi’s young protagonist, Rash and Mo share a passive and enervated father

52 See, for example, ‘The Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus’, painted anonymously between c.1513-1516.
who embodies their sense of marginalisation and emasculation. Unlike Hussein, however, Rash and Mo’s father works long-hour shifts as a bus-driver for which he receives modest earnings and urges his sons to follow suit, bemoaning Rash’s resistance to seek work at the job centre. Emphasising a generational and cultural divide, Rash and Mo’s parents are confined to domestic spaces within Hackney, where they recreate their Egyptian heritage by speaking Arabic and cooking Egyptian cuisine.

Therefore, their parents’ – and specifically their father’s – status is compensated by the perceived glamour of gang life and Rash and Mo’s hyper-macho posturing. Rash and Mo seek alternative masculine role models and reject their parents’ determination to preserve their Egyptian heritage. To this end, the gang’s appreciation of hip-hop ‘with its distinctive music (rap, reggae, DJing, human beat box), break-dancing, slang, fashion and graphics (graffiti and tagging)’, provides a riposte to their parents’ cultural allegiances to a geographically distant homeland and exclusion from a normatively white British culture.\(^\text{53}\) Thus hip hop ‘signifies cultural and generational rebellion and […] serves as an important strategy of cultural hybridisation’.\(^\text{54}\) Contrasting with their parents’ desire to recreate ‘home’ whilst living ‘abroad’, then, Rash and Mo embrace transcultural lifestyles and reference points that are rooted in African American subcultures but have become increasingly referenced by young European second-generation immigrant communities, such as hip hop. In a similar vein, the aggression, physical prowess and hyper-masculinity of American cultural icons from a racial or ethnic minority, such as the character of

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 123.
Tony Montana in *Scarface* and the boxing champion Muhammad Ali, are referenced by the two brothers and their cohorts, serving as ‘emblematic embodiments of marginalized masculinity’ that compensate for their ‘lacking access to material goods’.

The formation of the male gang in a marginalized, multi-racial community such as that in *My Brother the Devil* is the result of a collective awareness that the socio-economic possibilities afforded to white, middle-class men seem unattainable. Thus, the gang become a form of ‘protest masculinity’ much like Riaz’s group in *The Black Album* or the Bengal Tigers in *Brick Lane*. Connell’s theorisation speaks to the young men in *My Brother the Devil*, who are defined negatively by the sum total of their possibilities and so construct a compensatory hyper-masculine identity that overlooks their diverse but marginalized ethno-cultural differences whilst foregrounding their masculinity as both a solution to disadvantage and a means of reasserting themselves. For the men who join the gang, violence, (hetero)sexual conquest, and crime become an opportunity to transcend the limited opportunities afforded by their class, race, and cultural background as well as an important resource for re-affirming their claims to (masculine) power. Appropriately, the gang inscribe their veneration of illegal activity as a means of asserting their marginalized subjectivity through their name, ‘Drugs, Money, Guns’ (DMG).

However, the film’s gang formation also closely resembles Sedgwick’s theorisation of homosocial networks as the bonds forged between the men in DMG are especially intimate. The terms used to communicate with each other emphasize

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55 *Scarface*, dir. Brian de Palma (Universal Pictures, 1983).
56 Barbara Mennel, ‘Bruce Lee in Kreuzberg and Scarface in Altona: Transnational auteurism and ghettocentricism in Thomas Arslan’s *Brothers and Sisters* and Fatih Akin’s *Short Sharp Shock*’, *New German Critique*, 87 (2002) (pp. 133-56); q’td in Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, p. 213.
their fraternal affiliation, thus fellow gang members are called ‘cuz’, an abbreviation of ‘cousin’, ‘fam’, alluding to ‘family’, and ‘bredren’, referring to ‘brethren’ or ‘brothers’. At one point in the film Mo explains that the gang are his ‘fam out here’, thereby demonstrating the close-knit nature of the gang. Notions of honour and loyalty are also deeply engrained in the psyche of the gang. Consequently, violent acts of reprisal are threatened or committed in revenge for misdeeds against their members, such as a plot to enact a reciprocal murder following the murder of a DMG gangster at the hands of a rival group. Affiliative connections are also physically demarcated with tattoos that imprint the gang’s initials, DMG, on their bodies. These tattoos act as ‘badges of honour’, decipherable only by other gang members, that visually distinguish them from other men and engrave a sense of belonging to the collective onto their bodies. The inclusive and exclusive power of these tattoos is significant — by marking their bodies with the tattoo, the gang members are simultaneously marking their belonging to a social group and excluding other men from the estate. The tattoo, then, works as a talisman that symbolizes dedication to the gang community and their values, as well as signifying a riposte to a normatively white Britain that rigidly casts them into the margins of mainstream society.

However, the young men depend on their peers not only as a source of kinship but also because male gang members grant one another status and prestige within their community. Rash’s sexual success with women and his physical strength, for instance, results in a comparatively high position within the DMG ranks. Within this logic, women, although vital for the construction of DMG’s heterosexual masculinity, function as tools through which men can exhibit and validate their masculinity for the benefit of other men. With the exception of the protagonist Aisha,
who will be discussed in the next section, women are complicit with the hyper-masculine gender constructions performed by DMG gang members. This is illustrated by Rash’s mother Hanan who accepts her son’s financial subsidies despite knowing the immoral methods through which his money is earned. Meanwhile, young women on the estate with similar backgrounds to the DMG gang members, like Vanessa and Sonya, allow themselves to be manipulated for house-keeping or sexual services to the gang.

Internalised hierarchical dynamics within DMG are strikingly similar to those found in Nasser’s group and reveal an abundance of correlations in homosocial constructions of masculinity. At the top of the hierarchy in DMG is the largely-absent leader Lenny who commands the drug dealing from a deluxe apartment outside of the housing estate. In spite of his absence, Lenny’s home contains a wall of televisions that link to surveillance cameras thereby making his flat a panopticon space that records and polices the functioning of the gang and the estate’s inhabitants. To this end, Lenny is always cognisant of the happenings within the gang and his observation ensures that gang members are always kept in line. Just as Lenny has authority in a similar manner to Nasser in My Beautiful Laundrette, Lenny’s home is also filled with signs of prosperity such as widescreen televisions, state-of-the-art technology and two extravagant antique scimitars. These props all serve to communicate the lucrative revenue that Lenny obtains from his gang’s drug dealing and are extravagant signs of his own dominance. Particularly significant among these are two swords as they express both wealth and a reverence for violence and strength.
Like the struggle for admiration from Nasser in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, a rivalry for the position of Lenny’s deputy is also apparent in *My Brother the Devil*. Subordinate to Lenny is a power struggle between two young British men of Arab descent — Rash and another gang member named Repo. For Lenny, the shrewd Rash is his ‘smart guy’ who is best suited to managing the gang’s drug trading and navigating their way around rival gangs in the vicinity. Repo, on the other hand, is more physically intimidating and is therefore described as a ‘hype mother-fucker’ who can coerce other gang members due to his threatening demeanour.

Indicative of the inter-gang antagonism between Rash and Repo and the performative nature of this competitive hyper-masculinity are their differing responses to the murder of DMG stalwart Izzy. The stabbing of DMG member Izzy by an opposing gang led by the pugnaciously-named Demon is a turning point in the film’s narrative that leads Rash to reflect upon the morality of his lifestyle and his peers’ irreverent attitudes towards death. Rash’s disquiet is exacerbated as his DMG cohorts decide that Izzy’s life should be avenged through a reciprocal murder upon Demon’s gang and that Rash should undertake the murderous revenge.

Consequently, Rash is depicted struggling with grief for his deceased companion and with the proposed murder. In one of the film’s most powerful scenes, Rash is seen preparing for the murder in the bathroom of his parents’ flat. Set against an ominous soundtrack of foreboding ambient sounds that echo an accelerated heartbeat, the sequence vacillates between extreme close-ups of the gun as Rash fumbles in his attempts to load it, medium close-ups that record the reflection of his anguish in the bathroom mirror, and long-shots that emphasise his isolation in the private space of the bathroom. Given the cramped conditions of the family’s flat and
the highly populated housing estate, the bathroom is a rare space of intimacy and privacy in which Rash is able to discard the machismo posturing enforced by the DMG gang. Correspondingly, as Rash endeavours to load the gun but consistently fails, he is shown wearing only his underwear and sporting pained facial expressions therefore evoking the protagonist’s vulnerability. Once the weapon is loaded, however, Rash’s DMG tattoo comes into shot and the camera completes a 360 degree turn in which Rash is transformed into his more usual ‘urban gangster’ appearance with a hooded jumper, t-shirt and keffiyeh scarf. Just as his body is now clothed, signs of his vulnerability are also erased from view and the camera is once more showing a stable long-shot. In a further metaphorical turn, Rash points the weapon at his reflection in the mirror thus enacting a symbolic act of aggression against his own perceived weakness. The accumulative effect of this sequence is the exposure of the performative — and therefore repressed anxiety — behind the gang’s collectively forged hyper-masculinity.

As suggested by this sequence, Rash is unable to kill Demon, as he later remarks ‘death is real...once you dead you ain’t coming back — halas (done)’. Rash’s more sensitive reactions are derided by Repo as a sign of weakness and he goads him by unleashing strings of humiliating comments all centred on questioning his masculinity and his loyalty to the gang. Repo berates Rash for ‘not being a man’ and behaving like a ‘pussy’, the latter being a term referring to female genitalia and implying, in the masculinist sexual economy of language in the gang, that one is passive. Repo uses Rash’s inability to avenge Izzy’s killer as a tool for obtaining more influence within DMG through slandering his fellow gang member and by attempting to carry out the murder himself. In effect, Repo constructs a binary
through which Rash is presented as effeminate and impotent whilst Repo embodies many of the masculinist tropes of bravado that the gang hold dear.

The two groups of men in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *My Brother the Devil*, therefore, collectively construct a form of masculinity that depends on competitive displays of material wealth, power, strength and heterosexual sexual conquest. It is through this competition to prove oneself as the strongest that the mechanisms of submission and domination operate amongst these groups of men. Thus, within these gangs, notions of power, strength, command, defiance, aggression, audacity, nerve and determination are ultimately exalted and those who fail to meet these exacting standards are maligned. In this respect, the two groups forge their collective masculinity firmly in a manner that resonates with Sedgwick’s concept of homosociality but also calls to mind Connell’s theorisation of protest masculinities.57 Indeed, like Connell’s perception of protest masculinities as being formed when men do not have access to normative markers of hegemonic masculinity due to non-normative racial, ethno-cultural or class positioning, these two groups exaggeratedly perform defensive manoeuvres in order to facilitate the restoration of (lost) honour. For Nasser and his Pakistani migrants, this is to combat their sense of emasculation as men of colour who hail from a country that was colonised by Britain. While for the DMG gang, this is a toxic mix of being born to migrant parents whose lifestyles and behaviours betray an allegiance to places elsewhere alongside racial marginalisation and socio-economic disempowerment. Their collective responses are to shore up their claims to hegemonic masculinity by forming gangs of men that foreground their access to physical and economic strength and performatively express their access to material wealth.

Indeed, in both films, there is an acute sense that through money they can overcome their marginalisation. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the character of Salim, for example, tells Omar that ‘without money, we’re nothing in this country’ and so therefore justifies the existence of their homosocial gang as a riposte to national and social exclusion due to their non-white backgrounds. Repo, in *My Brother the Devil* educes similar logic when he asserts ‘Drugs, Money, Guns! What the fuck else is there for us out here, cuz?’ Each group’s collectively forged aggression and competition then becomes a collective answer to feelings of marginalisation which in turn is seductive to the central protagonists Rash and Omar, both of whom also feel marginalised on the grounds of their impoverished backgrounds. These homosocial gangs become the central way through which men combat their feelings of emasculation and construct a compensatory masculinity.

In the next section of my argument, I will explore how homosexuality disrupts these aggressive homosocial formations by serving a utopian function that crosses across class, race and ethno-cultural barriers thereby signalling the existence of more transcultural forms of British identity that draw on different, pluralistic expressions of masculinity. Despite the gender-sexual utopianism that this same-sex sexuality represents, however, I will expose how homosexuality only further ingrains forms of socio-economic inequality within each film.

**Homonationalist Sexualities**

One of the most memorable scenes in *My Beautiful Laundrette* is Omar and Johnny’s love-making at the back of the laundrette. Away from the prying eyes of onlookers,
Johnny embraces Omar only for his lover to pull away and recall Johnny’s betrayal of his friendship by participating in the infamous 1977 anti-immigration demonstration organised by the National Front.\textsuperscript{58} As the lighting casts patches of light and darkness upon the lovers thereby demonstrating their conflicting loyalties, Omar remembers: ‘It was bricks and bottles and Union Jacks. It was immigrants out. It was kill us. People we knew. And it was you! He [Hussein] saw you marching and you saw his face, watching you.’ In this moment of intimacy, Omar implicates Johnny in the racism-induced depression his family has suffered to which his lover apologises and the two make love as a gesture of ‘racial reconciliation’.\textsuperscript{59} The next shot, then, is one of the film’s defining images with Omar’s head falling back onto his lover’s chest and succumbing to his caress before they make love.

This scene neatly illustrates the ways that same-sex sexuality serves as a utopian function in the film insofar as it provides an alternative to the patriarchal homosocial masculinities of Nasser’s group and introduces a more pluralistic, transcultural form of British national and gendered identity. My Brother the Devil works on conspicuously similar lines as Rash’s love affair with the urbane character of Sayid initiates his upward mobility from marginalised subjectivity within the homosocial gang to a lifestyle of comparative wealth and opportunities as assistant to Sayid’s fashionable photography business. Both couples, then, are romantic and business partners whose homosexuality subverts the homosocial and patriarchal masculinities previously encountered and interrogates racial, class and ethno-cultural

\textsuperscript{58} See Satnam Virdee, Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 135-44. Virdee explains that the National Front (NF), a far-right British political party organised a march on 17\textsuperscript{th} August 1977 in the London district of Lewisham due to the area’s comparatively large migrant and non-white population. The event was opposed by a large number of people and led to a clash on the streets of Lewisham and New Cross in South London.

divides. In doing so, each film seeks not only to normalise male-male sexualities, as I will address in due course, but also to praise the potential of same-sex unions as an agent with which to frustrate or challenge ‘power relations determined by race, class, gender and sexuality’. However, I argue that these positive renderings of homosexual love are undermined by the ways that their same-sex relationships simultaneously signal the central protagonists’ transformation into docile neoliberal subjects whose economic ideologies entrench patriarchal and racial inequalities. Thus, the utopian possibilities suggested by each romantic relationship comes unstuck by both couple’s inculcation within capitalist worldviews in a manner which Jasbir K. Puar’s concept of homonationalism will help me to uncover.

Before coming to this conclusion and expanding on Puar’s thoughts, however, I will address the ways that My Beautiful Laundrette and My Brother the Devil render homosexuality as a positive form of sexual practice and identification. Further surmounting the ‘act of racial reconciliation’ that Omar and Johnny engage in through their love-making, then, another scene in My Beautiful Laundrette depicts Omar and Johnny facing each other on either sides of a one-way mirror. Looking into each other, this shot momentarily superimposes the two’s faces upon each other. Eva Reuschmann states that this is ‘the most striking visual image of Kureishi’s and Frears’s filmic construction of a new British identity, one neither traditionally Pakistani nor exclusively white British but both, altered and transformed by the changes each character has wrought in each other.’ This frame is a powerful visual

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expression of the transcultural potential of the relationship as a conduit for mutual exchange and transformation between two constantly shifting cultural backgrounds thus, in this shot, hierarchies between the two different backgrounds that the men represent are visually destabilised. In this sense, this shot reiterates how same-sex desire is depicted as having a utopian function in the film that heals ethno-cultural divisions and heralds a more pluralistic and inclusive form of national and gendered identity.

In *My Brother the Devil*, the love affair between Rash and Sayid has a similar vocabulary although the film centres more upon issues of class rather than race. In *My Brother the Devil*, same-sex desire is introduced to the film’s narrative as Rash forms a strong emotional and eventually sexual bond with the mysterious figure of Sayid following the murder of Rash’s close friend Izzy by a rival gang. Rash’s meetings with Sayid take on a therapeutic function for Rash who is struggling with grief and straining under peer pressure to carry out a reciprocal murder for Izzy. Obtaining Sayid as a cannabis customer, then, is a fortunate move for Rash who is able to confide in his client as he is suitably removed from the rest of the gang and his family.

Tellingly, Sayid lives outside of the homophobic confines of the estate. Sayid’s living arrangements position him as an ‘outsider’ figure geographically, as well as being different from the DMG gang in his French Moroccan nationality, his class positioning, his sexuality, his physical appearance and his cosmopolitan outlook. A combination of these factors not only differentiates him from the gang, but also highlights Sayid’s respectability and affluence compared to those who live on the estate. Unlike the gang’s preference for hooded jumpers and tracksuit trousers,
Sayid cultivates a suave image by wearing freshly-ironed shirts, a leather jacket and glasses. Specifically, his use of spectacles draws on well-established connotations of eyewear with intellect and effeminacy. Corresponding with tropes that associate glasses with acumen, Sayid is well-read and encourages Rash to read about his heritage, namely about Islam and the political situation in his parents’ native Egypt.

Contrasting with the cramped flats that the gang members and their family call home, Sayid lives in a spacious two-floor apartment with a variety of modern contraptions and comforts. These brash signs of wealth and affluence are immediately attractive to Rash as it shows Sayid fitting firmly within his ideas of hegemonic masculine achievement but in a much less threatening way than Lenny’s immoral path to hegemonic masculinity. In other words, Sayid signifies a male that has many emblems of wealth, success and power but offers a much less confrontational version of masculinity than the gang. Taken out of the parameters of the estate and its parochial worldview, Rash is introduced by Sayid to an inclusive side of Islam through discussions about the Sufi poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi and his support for peace during discussions about the pressures of gang life. Thus, Sayid inspires Rash to investigate his own heritage which is normally suppressed by the gang’s prioritising of a collectively forged homosocial identity over each gang member’s individual background.

The new perspectives offered by Sayid are metaphorically captured in a scene where Sayid drives Rash outside of Hackney and to the shores of the River Thames. Here, Rash remarks that despite spending the entirety of his life in the East London borough, he had never visited the river banks. In this new setting, Sayid mollifies Rash’s existential discomfort with the gang’s amoral ethics by offering him a paid
job as his assistant. As Ed Guerrero writes on African American ‘hood cinema’, the restriction of filmic setting to housing estates acts as a spatial analogy for the lack of opportunities faced by immigrant working-class communities.\(^\text{63}\) Therefore, Sayid and Rash’s trip outside of Hackney implies widened horizons as well as new opportunities and experiences away from the limiting confines of gang mentality.

Through a combination of these factors — as well as his sympathetic ear — Sayid is a personally attractive figure for Rash. Sayid becomes even more alluring to the embattled Rash following his humiliation at a job interview in which Rash is turned away for not possessing the requisite qualifications. Following this negative encounter, Rash feels negative about his future, aware that he faces a future of passivity and emasculation like his father if he chooses to pursue legal means of work. The answer to his worries, however, is Sayid offering him paid work as an assistant in his photography business. In summary, then, Sayid not only represents a desirable form of masculinity in his material wealth and affluence, but also in the opportunities that he affords the impoverished and downtrodden Rash.

In a surprising twist given the lack of suggestion beforehand, Rash’s admiration for Sayid’s achievement transposes into sexual desire. However, Rash does not instigate the relationship, instead Sayid kissing Rash when the two are drinking at his flat. Immediately following the homoerotic contact, the depth of Rash’s homophobia becomes apparent as he explodes in a fit of anger. Much of this anger is concentrated on masculinity — a sense that Sayid has overstepped not only boundaries of friendship but also normative masculine behaviour. Hence, after the

kiss, Rash erupts in a fit of questions about whether Sayid is homosexual and whether he thought that he was.

Rash takes particular offence to Sayid’s assertion that he believed that their friendship was a courtship thereby evoking Sedgwick’s conception of homosexual panic. Sedgwick elaborates that the potential for male-male bonds to evolve into sexual relationships is a source of acute anxiety for many men in homosocial, patriarchal environments. Perceiving same-sex sexuality as a threat to their masculinity, Sedgwick notes how the suggestion of homosexuality leads protagonists in her corpus of nineteenth-century literature to show signs of a ‘sometimes agonized sexual anathesia that was damaging to both its male subjects and its female non-objects’. 64 Sayid’s insinuation that he believed Rash harboured sexual feelings for other men leads a similar reaction from Rash who engages in a series of exaggeratedly performed masculine activities aimed at evincing his own machismo to himself and any onlookers. Leaving Sayid’s apartment, then, the camera shows Rash walking down a bustling London street in a particularly confident and aggressive gait. Whilst his walking pattern aims to convey a form of cool indifference in its slow but meditated steps, this constructed sense of confidence is undermined by erratic handheld camera shots that disorient the audience’s perception of the scene. Uneven camera movements are matched with a visually distorting background in which the London street backdrop is blurred, and an aurally discordant soundtrack in which the chatter of pedestrians and ambulance sirens merge with a dissonant ambient sound. The collective effect of these visual and aural patterns is to evoke a sense of foreboding and disquiet that subverts the image of control and confidence that Rash seeks to present.

64 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, p. 188.
Rash’s disquiet is even more apparent in the following scenes in which he takes a shower. Like the street walking sequence, the camera maintains its close up focus on Rash’s face whilst he showers. This spotlight upon Rash’s face enables the viewer to see that he is crying. Significantly, it is in the bathroom that Rash has a moment of emotional vulnerability. Like the scene in which he prepares his gun and is able to use the intimate space of the bathroom as a safe locale for the outpouring emotions, Rash chooses the bathroom as it is private and the water of the shower itself manages to obscure his own tears thereby also silencing his displays of vulnerability. A more aggressive attempt to regain his masculinity follows as Rash forces himself upon Vanessa — a girl from the estate that he has been ‘linking up’ or having casual sexual intercourse with. This is one of the film’s most uncomfortable scenes as Rash is depicted foisting himself upon an unwilling Vanessa who pleads him to cease. This desperate display of sexuality, then, is a performative act through which Rash seeks to dispel his feelings for Sayid and regain his sense of lost masculinity following the homosexual sexual advance from his employer and friend. Rash’s rape of Vanessa also resonates with Sedgwick’s framework of homosexual panic as leading to troubling cases of misogynistic language and violence as a means to demonstrate one’s heterosexuality.65

Conversely, Omar and Johnny in My Beautiful Laundrette do not have any process through which they dwell upon the subversive potential of their feelings for each other nor their attitudes towards their sexual orientation. The first moment in which the erotic nature of Omar and Johnny’s friendship and business partnership becomes apparent is when the two kiss abruptly in a car. In this respect, the incursion

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of homosexual desire upon the film’s narrative is, for some viewers at least, perhaps as unexpected as in *My Brother the Devil*. Unlike Rash in *My Brother the Devil* though, Omar does not try to make sense of his homosexual desire nor does he have any form of existential reflection upon his attraction to Johnny.

This is particularly significant given the comparatively less commonplace visibility of non-heterosexual characters and storylines in cinema at the time. Bart Moore-Gilbert attributes this lack of a ‘coming out narrative’ as Kureishi wanting to normalise homosexuality within the context of Thatcherite Britain. As was explained in my introduction, the New Right’s support for what they perceived as ‘family values’ took the manifestation of an ‘assault’ upon homosexuals through the aforementioned Section 28 legislation, ‘the refusal [...] to bring the homosexual age of consent into line with its heterosexual equivalent’ and the government’s ‘complicity in the representation of AIDS as a predominately “gay” plague’.66 In contemporary cinema and theatre, too, *My Beautiful Laundrette* was released only a few years following an infamous court case in which Christian morality campaigner Mary Whitehouse sought legal action against representations of penetrative male-male sexual intercourse in Howard Brenton’s 1981 play *Romans in Britain*.67 As such, Moore-Gilbert opines that by not including a coming out story, homosexuality is never challenged and therefore is never represented as anything other than ‘normal’.68 This, Moore-Gilbert adds, is a radical act in an age where homosexuality

was demonised through a confluence of contemporary political and cultural discourses.

Furthermore, this absence of a coming out narrative can be attributed to Kureishi’s broader claims on the fluidity of identity assemblages, an aspect he explored more comprehensively in his novel *The Black Album* which I analysed in my second chapter. Indeed, coming out is an enunciative act in which an individual defines themselves or associates with a fixed sexual identity. In avoiding any form of coming out story, Kureishi is rejecting fixed forms of sexual selfhood and arguing for more fluid articulations of gender and sexuality.

Indicative of this, the film’s persistent referencing of water and fluidity is significant. As Daniela Berghahn points out, the ‘sound of bubbling and gurgling water accompanies the title sequence and several subsequent scenes, especially those set at the Powders laundrette’. Likewise, Omar’s first appearance in the film is also a shot of him washing his hands in a sink whilst the film’s final sequence depicts Omar and Johnny splashing each other in the laundrette’s backroom sink. Water is also inscribed within the laundrette itself as the walls are ‘decorated in pastel shades with stylised images of giant blue waves’ and the sound of Johann Strauss’s musical tribute to the Central and Eastern European River Danube, the ‘Blue Danube’ waltz, sounds out across the room. All of these factors, Berghahn proposes, serve to show how the laundrette is a ‘utopian space’ in which divisions of race, class and sexuality ‘dissolve’.

However, such freedoms are also repeatedly complicated in the film. The inter-racial love affair between Omar and Johnny, for example, is contoured by racial

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69 Daniela Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, p. 112.
70 Daniela Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, p. 112.
71 Ibid., p. 112.
hierarchies. Thus, while the mirror scene reflects the transcultural potential of a new British identity, this comes apart in the reality of their relationship which Moore-Gilbert argues inverts imperialist power relations:

Johnny’s dependence on Omar plays off the colonialist trope of ‘the faithful servant’; and in providing Johnny with work, Omar contributes to his friend’s moral regeneration in a way that parodically recalls the colonialist project of ‘civilising’ the brutal natives. Instead of the white colonial male enjoying the native female [...] the non-white Omar enjoys the native British man. 72

At one point in the film, Omar vocalises such power hierarchies during a fight with his lover. He shouts, ‘when we were at school, you and your lot kicked me all round the place. And what are you doing now? Washing my floor. That’s how I like it!’ In this sense, Omar’s relationship with Johnny reflects Nasser’s relationship with Rachel insofar as sexuality enables him to upset hegemonic racially-determined systems of power by sexually ‘possessing’ Johnny.

Nevertheless, there is a more troubling subversion of contemporary political discourses on race and sexuality in how Omar’s interracial homosexual relationship with Johnny enables both men to financially succeed and, therefore, meet standards of both Thatcherite neoliberal and Nasser’s hegemonic masculine definitions of success. Omar initially connects with Johnny as he needs an assistant to help him with the management of the floundering laundrette that Nasser gives him as part of a business challenge. Omar and Johnny had previously been close childhood friends; however, this had changed in subsequent years following Omar’s mother’s death and his father’s gradual decline. Within those years, Johnny had been a fictional incarnation of a generation of men who suffered in Britain’s sharp economic

72 Bart Moore-Gilbert, Hanif Kureishi, p. 73.
downturn during the late 1970s. An economic downturn that the Thatcher-led government sought to redress through funding competitive business and a return to Victorian-era morals.73

In this respect, there is a deep irony at work in how Omar and Johnny use the New Right’s free market economics to succeed despite their non-normative business and romantic partnership. Both are young working-class men who through thoughtful investment and hard work build a successful local business and, at the end of the film, look set to expand this business empire. Nonetheless, this success would not have been possible without the support and help of each other. This is ironically referred to when, at a family soiree where he first introduces Johnny as his business, though not romantic partner, Omar audaciously remarks that ‘much good can come from fucking’. Quite literally, then, Omar’s business triumphs as well as both his and Johnny’s upwardly mobile ascension out of a working class social status and into the realms of a hegemonic masculine perception of success due to the romantic and sexual relationship that the two have forged.

These utopian elements of same-sex desire in the film are, of course, complicated by Omar and Johnny’s embrace of the New Right’s ideology of possessive individualism.74 As they achieve business and financial success with their laundrette, Omar looks to takeover over rival laundrettes and, in his tastes for suits, comes to ‘increasingly resemble that peculiarly 1980s figure, the self-centred and


74 By ‘possessive individualism’, I am referring to C.B. Macpherson’s theory in which in which an individual is believed to be the sole proprietor of his or her skills and consequently owes nothing to the society that they live within. This conception of society was embraced by Margaret Thatcher’s administration and most conspicuously expressed in her statement that ‘there is no such thing as society’, see Iain Chambers, Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014 [1990]), p. 126.
consumption-driven yuppie."75 Even Tania’s intensifying dislike for Omar is due to her ‘perception that Omar is getting as greedy as her father.’76 As Moore-Gilbert writes, the film concludes with Omar and Johnny mirroring an archetypal Thatcherite success story albeit with an inter-racial, homosexual relationship that counteracts the New Right’s discourses on race, gender and sexuality.77 Thus, when Nasser praised the political status quo as a source of social mobility for British people of colour, then, Kureishi’s film seems to suggest that sexuality can be added within this rubric. Berghahn’s aforementioned comments on the ‘utopian space’ of the laundrette come undone here, as while the laundrette does indeed give people marginalised by a sum total of their race, ethno-cultural background and sexual orientation opportunities to thrive, these business ventures are conducted within a neoliberal system that ultimately entrenches socio-economic inequalities. Indeed, the laundrette itself sits as a flamboyant and ostentatious symbol of neoliberalism within a street of broken-down, dilapidated migrant businesses and shops whose impoverished owners are the victims of Thatcher’s free enterprise economy.

In their complicity with the Thatcherite neoliberal narrative that business enterprise provides socio-economic mobility regardless of racial, gender or sexual background, then, Omar and Johnny’s relationship presupposes Lisa Duggan’s work on homonormativity and aspects of Jasbir K. Puar’s conceptualisation of homonationalism. As was set out in the introduction to this chapter, Duggan coined the term ‘homonormativity’ to refer to the increasing number of ‘affluent lesbians

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75 Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi*, p. 103.  
76 Ibid., p. 103.  
77 Ibid., p. 103.
and gays asserting nationalist, ruling class political ideologies." In point of fact, the free market economics ushered in by the Thatcher administration have been noted by sociologists as a turning point in the emergence of British homonormativities as the then-government’s advocacy of private enterprise and aspirational lifestyles often encouraged all to set up businesses. This was provided that those with non-normative identities were prepared to be silent about their sexuality and prioritise what David Harvey terms ‘freedom of enterprise’ over ‘individual freedoms’.

Thus, Omar’s insistence that he wants to ‘make big money’ when he takes over Zaki’s laundrette as a new business project with Johnny, embodies Duggan’s diagnosis of a new form of gay subjectivity that conforms to capitalist ethics whereby ‘you can get anything you want’ as long as you know how to ‘squeeze the tits of the system’. Despite Omar and Johnny’s ethno-cultural and racial differences, as well as their non-normative sexuality, the unnamed English business associate of Nasser tellingly remarks that ‘England needs more young men like Omar and Johnny’ underlying further how these two men’s complicity with neoliberal discourses marks them as ideal national citizens and therefore, within their 1980s neoliberal milieu, resembling many features of hegemonic masculinity.

Omar’s financial success despite his non-normative sexuality, as well as his racial and ethno-cultural background, also mean he anticipates much of Jasbir K. Puar’s conceptualisation of homonationalism. Although writing from a post-9/11 perspective, Puar develops the framework of homonationalism to describe patterns in which the homonormative subject is increasingly incorporated within popular

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79 David Harvey, A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism, p. 64.
cultural, media or political discourses at the expense of a racialised ‘Muslim’ other whose visage is stereotyped and associated with terrorism. Nevertheless, Puar argues that the neoliberal economic policies of Ronald Reagan in the USA and Thatcher in the UK mobilised the homonormative model thereby enabling the post-9/11 climate of Islamophobia to embrace homonormative subjectivities within the body of the nation due to their potential as economic contributors and consumers, whilst demonising the ‘Muslim look-alike’ population for their supposed refusal to assimilate. To this end, Omar certainly fits with Puar’s contention that non-white, affluent gay men and lesbians are crucial to the functioning of this homonationalism as she explains,

> For the ethnic, heteronormativity is negotiable through the market, that is conspicuous consumption and high-skilled labor; for the homonormative, whiteness is mandated by the state but negotiable through the market, again both for labor and consumption. The figure of the queer or homonormative ethnic is crucial for the appearance of diversity in homonormative communities (arriving as the difference of culture rather than as simulacra of capital) and tolerance in ethnic and racialized immigrant communities (marked as an entrance of alternative lifestyle rather than through the commonalities of capital).^{80}

Omar’s lucrative job, accumulative wealth and faithful consumption closely align his character with the homonormative model outlined by Puar.

Puar’s work, however, has even more plangency with the depiction of homosexuality in El Hosaini’s film. Indeed, the gang closely align with Puar’s writing on the racial and sartorial profiling of a Muslim ‘other’ in the post-9/11 era. Specifically, DMG gang members sport hooded jumpers, a garment which when worn by a non-white male body has long been constructed as a symbol of inherent

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criminality. Such associations reached their apex in media reportage of the 2011 London riots that coincided with *My Brother the Devil*’s filming. Correspondingly, the housing estate and its inhabitants are kept under close observation by patrolling police forces or CCTV cameras, which are frequently within the film’s background or foreground shots. Surveillance cameras are particularly prominent during a sequence of photographs that accompany the film’s opening credits. These snapshots, which replicate the black-and-white colour scheme of CCTV recorded images, introduce the locale and thematic backdrop of the film. One image shows a group of young non-white men dressed in hooded jumpers pointing their middle fingers in a sign of defiance at CCTV cameras positioned at the edge of an urban housing estate. The prevalence of surveillance forces within the film accords with Puar’s observations on the marking out of those who appear Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim: ‘identifiable as actual and potential terrorists, the members of this group are “dis-identified” as citizens’. Many non-white communities, as Puar adds, have been admitted into the familiar stereotyped identity category of the ‘Arab terrorist’, denoting them in a differential, threatening relation to the (white) nation. Due to their racial-cultural backgrounds, clothing and appearance, the gang are clearly inscribed within such post-9/11 archetypes of the British Muslim male.

*My Brother the Devil* replicates this discourse by including a fictional terrorist subplot within the film. Unable to vocalize that the reason behind his brother’s suspicious desertion from the estate is due to a love affair with photographer Sayid, Mo reports that Rash is involved in “terrorist shit”. As the news spreads, the young men react with a mixture of admiration and bafflement at Rash’s alleged terrorist

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82 Ibid., p. 78.
connections. One group of men praise him as being “fucking gangster” and ask Mo whether his brother would be able to obtain weapons for them. These words, when coming from hoodie-clad working-class non-white men, offer further evidence of what Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin label a ‘post-Huntington stereotype’. Drawing on a section of political theorist Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilisations* (1996) where the writer opines that the mass appeal of transnational cultural forms mean that terrorists are no longer detectable through Islamic dress or outward declarations of piety, Morey and Yaqin note the increasingly prominent figure of the ‘Westernised’ Muslim posing a ‘menacing threat’ from within’ in recent cultural production. The conferral of hyper-masculine kudos onto Rash for his supposed involvement in terrorism as well as the young men’s desire to procure firearms offer cultural legitimation to notions that the terrorist threat to Britain exists in non-white, Westernised and materially deprived working-class communities. In the process, *My Brother the Devil’s* terrorist subplot inadvertently justifies discourses of surveillance upon multi-ethnic working-class communities in European suburbs.

The film’s discrete parcelling up of terrorism and homosexuality also reaffirms the mutually exclusive subject positionings of Muslim and homosexual identities. This is made conspicuous when Rash traces rumours of his involvement in ‘al-Qaeda shit’ to his brother Mo, and Mo responds by declaring: ‘I’d rather have a brother who was a bomber than a homo’. Likewise, when the gang discover that the reason behind Rash’s atypical behaviour is due to his homosexual love affair with

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84 Ibid., p. 115.
85 It can be argued that El Hosaini is ironically engaging with stereotypical associations between the British Muslim male and terrorism as the audience is never encouraged to believe that Rash is involved with terrorist activity. The protagonist Mo therefore exploits his peers’ fascination with violence in order to protect his brother. Nevertheless, I argue that the film upholds homonationalist binaries as the majority of the estate’s non-white inhabitants are still represented both as uncritically supporting Rash’s supposed terrorist links and as being violently homophobic.
Sayid, they respond by hatching plans to kill him. Their hatred stems from gender constructions which depend upon sexual encounters with women to express their masculinity and, consequently, their power within the community. Specifically, the language used by Repo and AJ to describe Rash evokes a rigid connection between sexuality and power, as Rash is labelled a ‘batty boy’, implying that he derives pleasure from being anally penetrated. Underpinning their use of the pejorative term is a view that the male’s role in sexual intercourse is exclusively penetrative. By potentially allowing himself to be penetrated by Sayid, Rash has rescinded this supposed sexual dominance and, by extension, permitted himself to be emasculated therefore demonstrating a similar view of sexuality as Nasser’s when he equates masculine powerlessness with anal penetration in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. As Bersani argues, then, the male perineum is mapped as a site in which, if penetrated, a man abdicates his masculinity. In this sense, the murder of Rash would also strengthen their masculinity in a manner that accords with Connell’s contention that the homosexual male is always the negative ‘other’ against which heteronormative hegemonic masculinities uphold their dominance.

Aside from these more violent instances of homophobia, Rash’s parents are also uncomfortable with their son’s sexuality, choosing to eject him from the family home. These incidents in the film’s plot have all the markings of what Puar describes as a ‘discourse attached to immigrant populations and communities of color about a more overt disapproval of homosexuality and a deeply entrenched homophobia’. The projection of an exceptional anti-LGBT prejudice onto immigrant communities, then, passes over crucial socio-economic questions of why certain portions of society

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87 Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 79.
are more homophobic than others, and ignores the way that debates on same-sex marriage, for example, reassert white privileges. In many respects, My Brother the Devil duplicates the discursive production of ‘Muslim migrant homophobia’ through the anti-gay prejudices tied to the pathologically violent gang and Rash’s underprivileged immigrant family. Thus, the multi-racial, working-class neighbourhood of the Hackney housing estate is clearly presented as a space of virulent and visceral homophobia.

Whilst it certainly depicts most of its characters as homophobic, the film does root much of the gang’s prejudices in the young men’s shared disenfranchisement. Links between the men’s deprivation and their subscription to a compensatory hyper-masculinity that rests upon aggressive heterosexuality and criminality are transparent when Rash tries to end his association with the gang. It is at this point in the film that Repo, one of the most pugnacious gang members, accusatively points at his tattoo and, as I mentioned at the end of the previous section, barks: ‘Drugs, Money, Guns! What the fuck else is there for us out here, cuz?’ Repo’s statement implies that there are no opportunities for a man such as Rash without the fraternal bonds forged within the group and the gang’s communal allegiance to criminality and violence. In the latter sense, drugs and guns provide the men with money and material goods as well as a platform from which to compensate for their marginalization. Within this construction of a bellicose hyper-masculinity, there is no space for alternative masculine identities that, for example, include same-sex sexuality.

Likewise, Mo’s friend and love interest Aisha is also a figure that complicates the uncritical accordance of homophobic views to Muslim immigrants. The hijab-wearing Aisha presses Mo to communicate with his brother despite his discomfort
with Rash’s sexuality. Even so, there is little evidence to suggest that Aisha’s advice is driven by a liberal approach to sexual politics. Aisha is one of a handful of female characters, all of whom are peripheral and not as developed as their male counterparts. As such, her open-minded attitude towards Rash is also underdeveloped. Rather, Aisha’s comparatively more tolerant viewpoint fits with her principled outlook as she, for example, resists peer pressure to consume alcohol. In this sense, she encourages Mo to connect with his brother in order that he become closer to his family instead of developing his connections with the gang’s criminal lifestyle. Frustratingly, however, her perspective, much like the other female characters’ in the film, is left unexamined.

Despite these caveats, the film still invokes homonationalist discourses, particularly through the character of Rash’s lover Sayid. More broadly, Sayid initiates Rash’s shift from affiliation with the DMG gang towards alternative forms of belonging. Rather than moving towards an inclusive gay or queer community, however, Rash’s trajectory is located within socio-economic terms, since the most significant aspect of Sayid’s characterization is his privileged access to financial and material wealth. In essence, Sayid’s depiction accords with the identity politics described by Puar in her concept of homonationalism. As previously outlined, one of the tenets of homonationalist discourse is that upwardly mobile homosexuals and queers are tenuously incorporated within articulations of nationhood due to their potential import as economic contributors and consumers. LGBT inclusion within the national narrative is at the simultaneous exclusion of the non-white immigrant subject, who is regarded with suspicion and essentialized as having regressive gender-sexual politics. Viewing Sayid’s portrayal alongside the gang and the other
communities on the estate, then, the homonationalist binaries that underpin *My Brother the Devil’s* plot become apparent. Sayid’s sophistication is poised against the brutal and primitive gang, signalling what Puar terms a ‘Muslim or gay binary’. Whilst Puar writes that this reductive approach to cultural representations of Muslim and homosexual identities generally dictates the gay subject as normatively white, Sayid’s cultural heritage and racial background conforms to a negotiation of homonormativity based on neoliberal economic structures, much like *My Beautiful Laundrette*’s Omar. Moreover, Puar’s comment on the necessity of the non-white subject to support homonormative ideologies as a symbol of diversity whose comparative affluence remains unremarked upon, is especially relevant for examining the schematic depiction of Sayid’s religious faith.

As delineated above, the portrayal of a homosexual Muslim of faith is certainly a rarity amidst an increasing viewpoint that to be Muslim is, self-evidently, to be heterosexual and homophobic. Despite El Hosaini’s admirable representation of a religious Muslim character with a non-normative sexuality, Sayid’s religiosity is merely sketched and is too often conflated with Orientalised discourses of spirituality. Specifically, Sayid lends Rash a copy of the Lebanese writer Khalil Gibran’s book, *The Prophet* (1923), hoping that it can educate Rash about his religio-cultural heritage and offer him support at a time of vulnerability. However, Gibran’s book is wrongly represented in the film as a biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather, *The Prophet* is a selection of prose poems penned by Gibran, a writer of Christian heritage, which takes teachings of the three major monotheistic religions and reimagines them as the words of a fictional figure.

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Gibran’s work, which has had a wide readership in the West as the most popular literary text translated from Arabic in the USA, is a puzzling choice to demonstrate Sayid’s faith given its tangential relation to Islam. The book’s familiarity to Western audiences suggests a convenient packaging of Sayid within recognizable and legitimized modes of Islamic belief, therefore endorsing a homonationalist analysis of the film.

*My Brother the Devil*’s denouement buttresses homonationalist discourse in a scene where Rash’s father forces him to choose between different lifestyles. His father’s ultimatum is either to live with Sayid and incur familial exclusion or to abandon both lover and career but re-join his family. The proposal pits Rash’s continued inclusion within the aggregate national, class, religious, ethnic, and racial identities encompassed in the profiled ‘Muslim population or the “terrorist look-alike” population’ against incorporation within an unmonitored homonationalist grouping. His father’s threat to expel Rash only further entrenches perceptions that British working-class non-white communities are irrevocably homophobic and therefore legitimates their exclusion from discourses of national belonging. Consequently, Rash’s decision to move in with Sayid signifies the championing of homonationalist identity politics within the film. Whilst the film’s final shots, which consist of Mo telling Rash that he supports and respects his lifestyle, offer some suggestion of reconciliation and tolerance, this is undercut by the family’s father in the previous scene. The father’s authority upholds homonationalist metonymy in the form of an unwavering patriarch with regressive gender and sexual politics who

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banishes his son from the family and prevents his wife from seeing her son, on the grounds that he is homosexual. The sequence depicts Rash’s choice in a manner that further engrains homonationalist patterns of class and sexuality as Rash’s downcast parents are pictured walking away towards a cluster of housing estates whilst Rash moves in the opposite direction, clutching a motorbike helmet for Sayid’s vehicle. Sayid’s motorbike is symbolically representative of his economic and material wealth as well as his ascendant status within society. Despite seeming to challenge Puar’s binary, the film fortifies perceptions of the homophobic Muslim ‘other’ and champions the homonormative through the characters of Sayid and, eventually, Rash.

Conclusively, each film represents an ambivalent engagement with homosexuality. On the one hand, same-sex desires signal Omar and Rash’s graduation out of the homosocial patriarchy of their gang networks, but on the other hand, each filmmaker shows how homosexuality can be complicit with forces that oppress marginal racial and ethno-cultural groupings. In El Hosaini’s film, this is a more surreptitious binary between ‘backward’ values, as personified in the murderous gang and Rash’s family, contrasted with Rash’s personal happiness with the affluent, affable and intellectual Sayid. Whereas, in comparison, Kureishi’s film is a more complex assessment of conflicting identities that are never resolved. Nevertheless, homosexuality leads both characters to embrace an economically-driven conception of Britishness which enables them to evince forms of hegemonic masculinity that are identical to the aspirations of their heterosexual peers, that is the desire for power, wealth and prestige.

**Conclusion**
Despite their non-normative sexualities, Rash and Omar end each film as the protagonists who are the closest to realising hegemonic masculine ideals as well-off young men who are likely to financially succeed within their respective milieu.

In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Omar and Johnny’s loving relationship and lucrative laundrette — along with the promise of other laundry ventures — is contrasted with Nasser’s family breakdown following his daughter’s departure and Hussein’s bedridden alcoholism. Even the film’s last scene is a testament to the unity of Omar and Johnny in the face of heterosexual family disintegration as the two enjoy a moment of intimacy over the laundrette’s toilet sink. Nonetheless, this final scene of shared romantic joy is then ended by a closing of the door upon the couple, thus symbolically reinforcing that this is a secret love affair that is hidden from the other protagonists’ view. For whilst Omar and Johnny are undoubtedly the most happy and successful couple (and men) — their gay desire having been pivotal to achieving this status thus dethroning the axiomatic link between heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity — it is still a relationship that is cloaked in privacy.

Therefore, while Kureishi questions constructions of hegemonic masculinity in the film by portraying two members of the all-male collective as engaging in a same-sex love affair and enacting a form of economic dominance, their sexual desires never actively disrupts or challenges the masculine status quo of the film as no character is forced to confront Omar and Johnny’s homosexuality. In fact, Omar, in particular, gradually becomes more complicit with many of the more enterprising features of the hegemonic masculinity by becoming more ruthless in his hunger for wealth and power whilst simultaneously maintaining a love interest that subverts traditional
British and Pakistani Sunni Muslim constructions of masculinity. In so doing, Kureishi signals the formation of homonormative hegemonic masculinities.

Similarly, *My Brother the Devil* finishes with Rash’s liberation from the brutal DMG gang and his poor immigrant family to pursue a more prosperous and promising lifestyle with his lover Sayid. When viewed against his enervated father and the gang’s hyper-masculine, the film ends with Rash and Sayid as the wealthiest men with the most promising futures. Perhaps the only exception to this judgement is Rash’s brother Mo who, after initially being extremely prejudiced and homophobic towards his brother’s sexuality, cultivates a more tolerant attitude by displaying his acceptance of Rash’s same-sex desire. There is an implicit suggestion, then, that Rash’s homosexuality will enable Mo to overcome the more aggressive practices of masculinity he had previously encountered and develop a more inclusive worldview. As well as the opportunities in shifting Mo towards more open-minded and pluralistic forms of thinking and identity, Rash’s same-sex desire also provides the basis for Rash’s way out of poverty albeit in a homonationalist sense that fortifies socio-economic inequalities and the policing of the communities in which he was born and raised. Nonetheless, whilst the nature of Omar’s relationship to Johnny remains literally behind doors, the exposure of Rash’s sexuality results in an abrupt breaking off of connections to family and his roots. As such, the sexual and romantic as well as financial and professional success of Rash comes at the price of familial alienation and exclusion from his peers.

Conclusively, both films problematise constructions of hegemonic masculinity implicitly in their narratives by showing gay male characters having comparatively easier access to resources with which to construct hegemonic
masculinity than their heterosexual peers. Simultaneously, these forms of homosexuality necessarily involve an embracement of an economically-driven national identity that disregards any sense of transcultural exchange which the relationship between Omar and Johnny, especially, could have resulted in. As such, both Kureishi and El Hosaini question the heteronormative impulses behind hegemonic masculinity and open up new imaginings for British Muslim constructions of masculinity. Nonetheless, it remains that whilst this gay desire positively changes and improves both Omar and Rash’s lives, opportunities and viewpoints, both films rest upon lead protagonists either keeping their same-sex sexuality silent or being excluded from their Muslim migrant families and communities.
Conclusion: ‘Migration is a one way trip’

The classic questions which every migrant faces are twofold: “Why are you here?” and “When are you going home?” No migrant ever knows the answer to the second question until asked. Only then does she or he know that, really, in the deep sense, she/he’s never going back. Migration is a one way trip. There’s no “home” to go back to. There never was.¹

Stuart Hall’s reflections on his migration from Jamaica to Britain capture the predicament of the various protagonists that have populated this study’s interrogation into literary and cinematic portrayals of British Muslim masculinities. Transnational migration sets in motion a process of dislocation alongside encounter and exchange with new cultural landscapes. Over time, migrants’ attitudes to their places of birth, their cultural affiliations and their previous taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations in phenomena as varied as culinary and sartorial norms to gendered behaviour and performance, change. Subsequent generations of postmigrants also acquire a unique perspective, as they inherit allegiances to the cultures in which they live and from which they have heritage. It is this from this vantage point that fallacious notions of national culture are challenged and new forms of transcultural belonging that draw across different cultural identities come to the fore. In the corpus of literature and film I have analysed, the focus has been on how this situation is lived out and manifested in performances and practices of masculinity. All of the novels and films in this thesis have, in their contrasting and comparative ways, shown that migration is a one way trip from which masculine subjectivities are renegotiated and permanently transformed.

Overall, my comparison demonstrated that some of the literary and cinematic texts that I have engaged with creatively assessed the transcultural positionality of British Muslim masculinities in more successful ways than other texts. Indeed, the most cogent displays of transcultural masculinity were observed in Suhayl Saadi’s novel *Psychoraag*. Conveyed through the Asian pirate radio station that he works at, the protagonist Zaf uses music to express his shifting and asymmetrical allegiances to the cultures that he was born within and lives across. Music, in the novel, becomes a thematic and textual vehicle for embracing transculturality and becomes associated with various places and people who have exerted influence upon his selfhood. This optimistic picture of a transcultural British Muslim masculinity, however, is nonetheless not wholly successful. For example, Zaf’s romantic liaisons, in which a Pakistani Scottish woman named Zilla is played off against Babs, a white Scottish woman, weaken the novel’s transculturality. In particular, Zaf’s relationship with Babs impairs the novel’s transcultural message, as Babs’ allure is predicated upon her whiteness, which Zaf seeks to sexually conquest and capture.

Furthermore, Saadi’s image of a transcultural Scottish Muslim identity is hamstrung by the seductions of Scottish nationalism. Zaf’s belief in an exceptionally tolerant Scotland passes over instances of poverty, disempowerment and even Islamic fundamentalism amongst Muslim migrant and postmigrant communities within Glasgow. Insofar as Zaf’s radio station allows young postmigrants to express their transculturality, Radio Chaandani’s imminent closure is also a powerful symbol for the precarious status of transcultural ways of being. Nevertheless, for the reasons adumbrated in the previous paragraph, Saadi’s novel presents us with the most
satisfying representation of a transcultural British Muslim masculine self and a literary image of what it may look like.

Crucially, historical ruptures over the twenty-seven year period in which these novels and films were written, released and published play a determining factor in the literary and cinematic constructions of transcultural British Muslim masculinities. In terms of chronology, the first cultural text in this thesis, My Beautiful Laundrette (1985), is notable for its relatively limited focus on Islam and Muslim cultural identities. Rather, the film’s migrant and postmigrant protagonists identify mostly with Pakistan and use the label British Asian. ‘British Asian’ is a signifier that was prominent in the years prior to the Rushdie affair and the attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. All of these three events, then, brought Islam and Muslim identifications to the fore of scholarly and public attention. The texts in this thesis demonstrate that these turning points resulted in more British Muslim writers and filmmakers identifying as ‘British Muslims’ and using their work to explore Islam and British Muslim identities, often as counter narratives to negative and homogenising representations in public discourse. Indeed, Hanif Kureishi’s work, more than any other writer included in this thesis, traces this trajectory from My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) through to his later novel The Black Album (1994) and his screenplay My Son the Fanatic (1997). These latter two works mark the first literary and cinematic engagements with the figure of the Islamic fundamentalist, which I have argued in this study, Kureishi imagines as forms of masculine protest.

According to a chronological pattern, the consecutive text in my corpus is East is East (1999), which does not directly engage with the contemporary political atmosphere. The film’s temporal setting, however, does address the enduring feelings
of exclusion and cultural otherness that migrants and postmigrants experience in Britain. However, when read as a ‘historical’ film released in 1999, *East is East*’s incorporation of racism suffered by the Khan children does insinuate parallels with the hostility directed towards British Muslims in the post-Rushdie Affair atmosphere. Even the film’s forestalling of transcultural belonging can be read as invoking the cultural tensions between Britain and its Muslim communities in the years following *The Satanic Verses* controversy.

Nevertheless, the biggest shift in representation occurs after the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001. *Brick Lane* (2004) and *The Road From Damascus* (2008) both include the event in their narratives and depict it as a point of irrevocable change from which the lives of Muslims in Britain come under new and arduous hardships that thwart transculturality. Each of these novels update Kureishi’s renditions of Islamic fundamentalism within a more contemporary atmosphere, portraying young men who deal with their acute feelings of disempowerment through politicised and violent expressions of Islamic faith. Meanwhile, each of these texts emphasise Islam as a religion that comprises of a variety of lifestyles and viewpoints. *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), is an intriguing comparison with Ali and Yassin-Kassab’s efforts, as Aslam’s novel does not deal with the events of 9/11 explicitly. Yet the novel has been charged with inflaming post-9/11 Islamophobia insofar as Aslam delineates an enclosed Muslim community who are unable to speak English and harbour resentment towards their host nation. In this respect, I join Amina Yaqin in viewing *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2008) as an uncomfortably uneven text that, at
times, colludes with representations of British Muslims as a ‘fifth column’ in the UK.²

Saadi’s *Psychoraag* (2004) is an anomaly in this pattern as it does not mention the negative events that have contoured British Muslim identities in the early twenty-first century. The novel’s engagement with Scottish Muslim identities is primarily constructed through ‘Scottish Asians’ who include those with Muslim, Hindu and Sikh cultural backgrounds and as such are more open to cultural exchange than their peers that live south of the border. However, I posit in Chapter Three, that it is a strategic representation on the part of Saadi, which encourages a Scottish exceptionalist reading of ethno-cultural minority identities at a time shortly after the opening of a Scottish devolved government. The more positive experiences of Saadi’s (Muslim) postmigrants is contrasted with the comparatively more negative experiences of post-9/11 Islamophobia faced by the English Muslim men in other novels and texts in this thesis. Even so, *Psychoraag* does include references to Islamic fundamentalism although, unlike Kureishi, Ali or Yassin-Kassab, politicised and violent forms of Islam are addressed solely in relation to poverty.

The most recent text in the thesis, *My Brother the Devil* (2012), invokes moral panics about terrorism and gang crime amongst young British Muslim men, as well as the increased visibility of homosexuality in recent UK media and cultural output, to probe connections between masculinity, sexuality, race and class. However, in Chapter Four, I argued that the film inadvertently upholds what Jasbir K. Puar has described as homonationalist binaries that ascribe irrefutably homophobic views to Muslim migrant communities which are then used as fodder to

exclude them from the purportedly ‘enlightened’ West. By analysing the film, I proposed that Puar’s ‘Muslim or gay binary’ should be considered in a British context to address how certain ‘liberal’ Muslim subjectivities are incorporated within imaginings of Britishness, at the exclusion of Muslim subjectivities that do not fit these prescriptions. This relationality is most conspicuous in relation to attitudes towards gender and homosexuality. Puar’s work particularly focuses on the post-9/11 context where Muslims have come under increased scrutiny following the terror attacks of 2001 and 2005 upon New York, Washington and London. Whilst Muslim migrant and postmigrant subjects have been held objects of suspicion, the period has also seen greater national acceptance and integration of lesbian and gay subjectivities across many Western nations. Although my deployment of homonationalism in regards to My Beautiful Laundrette pushes for a consideration of these issues prior to the 2001 watershed, I view My Brother the Devil as unintentionally colluding with contemporary articulations of homonationalism in a British context. As such, My Brother the Devil is a film which is very much the product of contemporary attitudes to Muslim migrant communities, homosexuality and gender.

It is vital to note, however, that Puar’s argument of homonationalism rests upon a racialized ‘other’ that is not necessarily Muslim but embodies a series of racial, masculine and sartorial appearances that externally marks their body as a threat and a potential subject for profiling. Bodily characteristics such as dark skin, beards and the wearing of shalwar kameez, for instance, become visual shorthand for someone who is axiomatically homophobic and therefore does not share Britain’s projected liberal views. This study has only engaged with these ideas in relation to cultural production from British Muslim filmmakers, but a comparative analysis on
how profiling and homonationalism is manifested in relation to cultural production from British writers and filmmakers with other minoritarian ethno-cultural backgrounds could expand contemporary understandings of race, ethnicity, masculinity and sexuality.

In literature, novels such as Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2006) and Sunjeev Sahota’s *Ours Are The Streets* (2011) and *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) would be potentially fruitful comparative texts for thinking through this nexus. Written in a demotic vernacular, *Londonstani* traces a young postmigrant male of Sikh heritage who falls in love with a young Muslim postmigrant woman and his friend’s and family’s reactions to this originally unwelcome love affair. From a British Sikh perspective, the novel addresses issues of masculinity, postmigration and transculturality all within a narrative style that shares a similar transcultural aesthetic to Saadi’s novel *Psychoraag*. Sahota’s fictional output is also a fecund site for thinking through comparative transculturalities, postmigrant identities and masculinities. His first novel *Ours Are The Streets* sensitively explored a young British Pakistani man who becomes a suicide bomber in an experimental form that included passages of stream of consciousness, emails, text messages and references to music. Sahota’s incorporation of differing narrative techniques succeeds at evoking the confluence of different globalised media that simultaneously marginalise yet also influence his protagonist to take up arms against his country of birth. Sahota’s second novel *The Year of the Runaways*, which received a nomination on the Man Booker Prize shortlist, focused on a group of British Indian men who work

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illegally in Sheffield and have differing cultural backgrounds, namely Sikh and Hindu. The characters nonetheless come across Muslim migrant and postmigrants protagonists, too, and the novel offers intriguing insights into the negotiation of migrant British identities by men and how transcultural exchanges influence his protagonists’ selfhood.

Writers and filmmakers with a white British heritage have also taken up British Muslim masculinities as an issue for cultural exploration. Their efforts could also enrich a future study that explores British Muslim masculinities and transculturality. To this end, Martin Amis’ collection of essays and short stories *The Second Plane* (2008)⁶ were written exclusively about Islamic fundamentalism in Britain and received strong criticism from British Muslim commentators such as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and the literary critic Terry Eagleton on the grounds of alleged Islamophobia. While it is beyond my purposes here to engage in a discussion for Amis’ work, his stories would nevertheless be suited for a study on constructions and portrayals of British Muslim masculinities from non-British Muslim authors. Likewise, the British filmmaker and comedian Chris Morris co-wrote and directed a popular satire on extremism amongst British Muslim communities in Bradford entitled *Four Lions* that mocked many of the misrepresentations aimed at British Muslim men by media discourses.⁷ Most beneficial for examining transculturality and British Muslim masculinities, however, is the comic writer David Baddiel and director Josh Appignanesi’s 2010 film *The Infidel* that explored a British Muslim

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⁷ Christopher Morris, *Four Lions*, (Optimum Releasing, 2010).
man’s discovery of Jewish genealogy and as such probed tensions and exchanges between British Muslim and British Jewish communities.  

Other potential directions that could expand my thesis could be a focused study on female British Muslim writers and their engagement with masculinities, such as work by the writer Leila Aboulela. Aboulela’s novels have favoured female narrative trajectories hence their omission from my study. However, her fictional output is distinctive in its emphasis on religious forms of British Muslim identities. Whilst ostensibly concerned with the trials and travails of her female character Najwa, Aboulela’s novel Minaret (2004) nevertheless addresses her protagonist’s struggles to find a male love interest who will respect her religious convictions and in so doing tentatively and briefly explores masculinity and religious faith. However, other prominent female British Muslim writers such as Tahmima Anam, Ahdaf Souief and Kamila Shamsie have set their fiction in the lands of heritage namely Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan respectively.

A more fruitful direction for future study, however, would be examining literary and cinematic constructions of migrant and postmigrant Muslim masculinities from writers and filmmakers in other European and North American countries. Indeed, countries such as Canada, France, Germany and the USA are also home to substantial Muslim migrant and postmigrant populations with writers and filmmakers who are penning increasingly confident fictional output. Many of the topics and issues discussed by the texts in this thesis are not necessarily unique to the

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8 Josh Appignanesi, *The Infidel* (Revolver Entertainment, 2010).
United Kingdom. Therefore, comparative analyses of cultural production from writers and filmmakers based in other European and North American nations could reveal different and similar practices and representations by authors and filmmakers within a period that sees greater international transmission of literature and film.

The most intriguing point of development, however, comes from a commonality between most of the texts within this study. Throughout this thesis, there has been a tendency for writers and filmmakers to use music to express transcultural allegiances as well as specific constructions of masculinity. For example, Tariq embraced the gender-bending of the glam rock movement as a foil to his father’s insistence upon conforming to a masculine ideal in *East is East*. Meanwhile, the genre-defying music and gender non-conformist lyrics of African American musician Prince’s oeuvre embodied many of Shahid’s attitudes to performative identities in *The Black Album*. In *My Son the Fanatic*, jazz served as a metaphor for Parvez’s emphasis on hybridity. Whilst, the Sufi devotional music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was referenced in *Maps for Lost Lovers* as an indicator of less rigid articulations of Islam. Hip-hop was incorporated within *My Brother the Devil* as an expression of a collective hyper-masculinity and, in *Road From Damascus*, the genre was attached to Ammar’s Islamist posturing. Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag*, discussed in the fourth chapter, was the most comprehensive engagement with music where he used an eclectic musical soundtrack to his radio show to destabilise and critique his own identification with Britain and Pakistan. This also extended to the novel’s formal qualities as the structure of the text is constructed around the hours of the radio show.
Music, then, has allowed writers and filmmakers to voice asymmetrical cultural exchanges and entanglements on a structural, narrative and extra-textual level. In so doing, guiding the reader or viewer’s understandings of how they perform gender or navigate their cultural backgrounds. The unique quality of music as a hybrid, fluid and malleable cultural form which can be improvised, reshaped and performed is, therefore, a powerful symbol for transgressing fixed notions of national, cultural and gender identity. A further study that traces connections between music, gender and transculturality would be beneficial for unpacking and analysing this nexus more rigorously.

The current climate shows that interest in issues of gender within British Muslim communities show no signs of petering out. Accordingly, there has never been greater need for thoughtful and perceptive narratives that explore the complex transcultural formations of British Muslim masculinities. The literary and cinematic production in this thesis works precisely at this aim, dismantling and assessing essentialised notions of national, cultural and gendered identities. With this in mind, I close my thesis with words from Hanif Kureishi who in an interview conducted in 1985, stressed that:

[…] it is the British who have to make these adjustments. It is they who have to learn that being British isn’t what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices that it faces: and a new way of seeing Britain after all this time.\textsuperscript{11}

In their diverse ways, all of the texts in this thesis contribute to new ways of seeing Britain and creatively imagine new forms of national, cultural and gender subjectivities. My thesis sheds light on these contributions and aims to further

conversations on how gender, cultural and national plurality can be engendered within literature and film.
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