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9 Enchanted realms, sceptical perspectives

Salman Rushdie's recent fiction

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Introduction

This chapter explores the Islamic affiliations and affinities mapped by Rushdie's post-9/11 fiction. Focusing on the transnational thriller *Shalimar the Clown* ([2005] 2006), it asks to what extent this novel offers a discursive, imaginative, or empathetic South Asian Muslim perspective on geopolitical events. Rushdie's recent fictions, *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence* ([2008] 2009), have purported to provide international audiences with the reasons behind contemporary Islamic 'terror' and to excavate earlier histories of cosmopolitan Muslim civilization in India. They have featured a range of idiosyncratic affinities felt by Muslim protagonists for individuals from Islamic and other religious backgrounds, dramatized in scenes of harmonious multicultural coexistence and robust interfaith debate. In this sense, they continue partly to reflect the 'mosaic of diverse cultural identifications' experienced by Rushdie as a privileged, cosmopolitan intellectual and cultivated by the hybrid and migrant characters featured in his more diasporic fictions (Nasta 2002: 147). Yet I argue that the specifically Islamic networks or 'affiliations' that these novels also describe have many limitations. In these third-millennium fictions, the pursuit of orthodox Islam or 'fundamental' Muslim connections does not result in a healthy, heterogeneous, and 'anti-essentialist' realization of a multicultural self (Nasta 2002: 149). Rather, this pursuit invariably leads to an aggressive and monomaniacal erasure of any preceding allegiance or identity that may obscure an Islamist's nihilistic understanding of 'truth'.

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Rushdie today: writer and pundit

Salman Rushdie is today an established, if controversial, figure within English literary circles. Over the course of a career that spans almost 40 years, he has won fame and notoriety, not only for his many novels—most notably, *Midnight's Children* (1981), which in 2008 was awarded the 'Best of the Booker', and the inflammatory *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which incurred the Valentine's day fatwa in 1989—but also for his political and cultural punditry, colourful personal life, and seeming institutionalization. Whether volunteered or invited,

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Rushdie's opinions and the actions he has undertaken in the glare of an increasingly global public spotlight never fail to cause a stir, particularly when they relate to 'Muslim' matters. His lampooning of Tony Blair's knighting of the then Muslim Council of Britain's Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie as 'the acceptable face of "moderate" […] Islam' (Rushdie 2005b: 19) and ridicule of the then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams's 'inane' suggestions about the incorporation of shariah into UK law (Ross 2008: n.p.) are just two examples.

During the last decade, Rushdie has perhaps modified the stance he initially took in support of the Bush and Blair governments' responses to the World Trade Centre attacks and subsequent 'War on Terror' (Gurnah 2007: 7), evident in his *New York Times* columns (Rushdie [2002] 2003: 287–403). However, a brief sample of his newspaper interviews and comment would serve to confirm British academic Robert Spencer's (2010: 260–1) opinion that the savage censure Rushdie provides of a fundamentalist Islam in such pieces remains unmatched by his critique of Western universalism and hegemony.

When asked, for example, by Susannah Rustin to offer his opinion on the French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols, Rushdie (2010: n.p.) refused to 'defend' the veil, instead claiming to be championing women's rights. Apparently still seeking to promote a vision of female 'freedom' largely based around the notion that this equates to the unrestricted wearing of 'short skirts' (Rushdie [2002] 2003: 393), he then took the opportunity to accuse 'women in the west who use [veiling] as a badge of identity' of acting in 'false consciousness' (2010: n.p.). His negation of the possibility that such politically conscious women may be something other than misguided says more about the limits of Rushdie's secular-liberal imagination than it does about their ignorance or disingenuousness.

Speaking in relation to the controversial and extensively misreported proposals to build a Muslim Community Centre in Lower Manhattan, two blocks away from Ground Zero, Rushdie also commented: 'I'm not a big fan of mosques, [or] mullahs […] [But] of course people should have a place to be able to observe their religion' (2010: n.p.). This statement seems more conciliatory. Yet its author's primary interest seems not to endorse the centre users' right to express their faith affiliations freely, but to ensure that the entire site can 'go back just to being part of New York', with Muslims departing quietly to pursue their faith-related activities in a space nominally sanctioned by Western liberals, but barely visible to American eyes (Rushdie 2010: n.p.). It is consistent with his view that religion should be confined to the private sphere. The interview was ostensibly convened to discuss Rushdie's new 'novel for teenagers', *Luka and the Fire of Life*, which Rustin (2010: n.p.) proposes is 'hard not to see […] as a rebranding exercise […] a deliberate step […] towards something lighter, slighter and much more personal' than its topical precedents. His latest piece of fiction may appear apolitical, but it seems inevitable with a writer like Rushdie that the conversation that takes place around it will be easily sidetracked onto more controversial and political matters. This was confirmed by the recent publication of Rushdie's memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012), at once an intimate, personal account of the fatwa

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years and a highly political, even bellicose, attack on Rushdie's attackers and those of his fellow writers whom he felt failed sufficiently to support him.

Decades after Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced his death sentence, then, it certainly seems that Rushdie remains committed to cultivating the role of 'a political figure and very public writer' in relation to Islam ([2002] 2003: 432). Indeed, his interest in exploring its subcontinental manifestations seems freshly renewed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and communal violence against Muslims in Gujarat sparked by perceived acts of Islamic terror in the months that followed them (Rushdie [2002] 2003: 401). Rushdie may criticize Western and, specifically, American news media for narrowing the parameters of what it is permissible to say in this period (2005a: n.p.). Yet he repeatedly adopts the mantle of pundit. Rushdie uses the 'global' opportunities afforded by his international status to emphasize the Indian Muslim aspect of his identity, as he attempts to legitimize his assertions about how minority Islamic communities should behave in relation to other faiths and cultures.

In 'November 2001: Not About Islam?' ([2002] 2003: 394–7), Rushdie focuses on the spectre of hordes of Muslim men amassed on the 'Pakistan–Afghan border, answering some mullah's call to jihad', in order to emphasize a connection between 'terror' and a 'belief' in Islam. He proceeds to remind readers of the critical perspectives his 1983 novel *Shame* offered of Pakistani Muslims' self-exonerating anti-Americanism and goes on to state: 'I wanted then to ask a question which is no less important now: suppose we say [...] that we are to blame for our own failings?' (Rushdie [2002] 2003: 396) The expatriate author's use of the collective pronoun 'we' points to the kinship he would claim with the Muslims of South Asia. Rushdie foregrounds this affinity, even as he seeks from a Westernized perspective to censor the attitudes of people who hail from the subcontinent's supposedly 'blinkered monoculture' ([2002] 2003: 430).

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It should be noted that critics like Spencer (2010: 262) have distinguished between Rushdie's 'literary' and 'political output', arguing that his controversial early novel *The Satanic Verses* offers, by contrast, 'an attack on a kind of Islam, not Islam per se'. Spencer cites Rushdie's interest in 'heterodox Islamic traditions', such as Sufism, and the emphasis he places on 'doubt, discussion, criticism and interpretation' in the novel as evidence of his commitment to portraying an alternative and more humane Islam in opposition to aggressive Islamisms (2010: 262).

Rushdie's recent novels redirect the reader's attentions towards Muslims in 'native' South Asian (as opposed to migrant, diasporic) contexts and seem to bear witness to a subtle, but arguably significant, shift in critical and literary-fictional focus. This is a shift back in time and geographical location to the civilized, multi-faith, and majority Muslim societies of pre-Partition and Mughal India, recreated from the figures of childhood memory and remnants of historical nostalgia. Yet it is overshadowed by Rushdie's impressions of a closely related but 'utterly alien' Pakistan, visited as a reluctant adolescent ([2002] 2003: 430), and by this nation's Central Asian and Middle Eastern Muslim brothers.

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Rushdie's tendency to satirize, rather than attempt to represent religious 'fundamentalisms', particularly Islamic ones, in the realist mode can be traced to earlier works, such as *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. These entertaining fictions feature apparently devout Muslim characters—a dangerously obsessive local Maulana named Dawood, driven wild by his shoestring necklace of shame; Ayesha, a dainty, saintly, visionary girl on her deadly mission to Mecca—who appear deluded and disorientated in their relationships to the divine (Rushdie [1983] 1984: 43; Rushdie 1988: 219–26). However, it is their controversial 'Muslim' creator's continuance and consolidation of these types in the global fictions he has produced since the launch of the 'War on Terror'—and hence in relation to discourses dominated by popular misconceptions about an Islamic 'axis of evil', clash of civilizations, and meltdown of metropolitan multiculture—which is of greatest relevance to my discussion.

Some critics have lamented Rushdie's recent lack of deeper 'political engagement', pointing to the 'migrant' writer's failure to continue to 'rebuke' and 'challenge' the fundamental (and unequal) values of the society that has sheltered him since the fatwa (Eagleton 2007: n.p.). In Terry Eagleton's opinion, Rushdie has 'moved from being a remorseless satirist of the West [in the 1980s] to cheering on its criminal adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan' in the age of Bush and Blair; his literary output no longer retains the radical perspectives of 'the left' (2007: n.p.). While not overlooking the limitations of Rushdie's recent punditry, other scholars have sought to refocus attention on the dissenting, sceptical perspectives provided in *The Satanic Verses*, which exposes both the apparent bigotry of the 'character' of Muhammed and the inequality of Britain under 'Mrs. Torture'. Such critics argue that the anti-fundamentalist or atheistic position the novelist adopts in relation to any voice of political, cultural, or religious authority remains vital at a time when our world's survival is threatened not only by the proponents of global jihad, but also by global capitalism (Spencer 2010: 251–63).

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Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate (2010: 111), however, suggest that Rushdie's most recent fictions, like those of other British men of letters, including Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, and Philip Pullman, 'too often end up bearing witness to the sheer poverty of our public discourse on religion'. In their opinion, these writers are more likely to 'dramatize [. . .] a return to some pre-rational religious dogmatism' or 'fetishiz[e] [. . .] liberal enlightenment values' than 'attempt to move beyond the Manichean clash of religious and secular fundamentalisms epitomised by 9/11' and offer 'more complex and variegated pictures of the multi-faith world' (Bradley and Tate 2010: 109). Yet Bradley and Tate also emphasize that, in the current climate, the novel may provide an important means by which readers can sensitively and seriously engage with alternative, undogmatic modes of 'religiously-inflected seeing and being' (2010: 109). The creators of such 'post-atheist' literature, they argue, must write despite personal doubt, 'as if [they] believed in the possibility of religious experience as something irreducible to the standard categories available to science and method' (Bradley and Tate 2010: 85).

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Rushdie's recent fiction: *Shalimar the Clown*

Shalimar the Clown, which was published in the UK less than two months after the 7/7 bombings, was Rushdie's first work of fiction since his pre-9/11 *Fury* ([2001] 2002). The earlier novel, set in New York, imagined America at the decadent height of a hubristic golden age, troubled by a malaise linked to a growing consciousness of the less privileged and exploited world's oncoming wrath. Like *Fury*, *Shalimar the Clown*'s narrative spans continents—namely, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, and North America—but a single geographical space is located at its heart. In this case, the space is South Asian: the disputed Muslim majority state of Kashmir, whose fate Rushdie claims particularly interests him, because he is 'more than half Kashmiri', has 'loved the place all my life', and listened as 'ordinary Kashmiris' suffer ([2002] 2003: 305). It provides both the idyllic setting for the novel's interfaith romance and, when love fails, becomes the site of Shalimar's terroristic turn.

Shalimar the Clown compresses and selectively embellishes over 50 years of Kashmiri political history, from the moments prior to the cessation of British rule to the ongoing conflicts of the twentieth century, focusing on the incursion of communalism into the idealized space of the predominantly Muslim Valley of Kashmir. When the subcontinent was partitioned and granted independence in 1947, the feudal Hindu ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, was undecided as to whether to join Congress-led India or the new Muslim nation of Pakistan. Eventually, he signed a treaty of accession with India, following an invasion of Pakistani Pashtuns. War broke out between the two nations and ended with a ceasefire overseen by the UN Security Council from 1948 to 1949, which recommended that a plebiscite should be held to decide the question of the state's accession, once hostilities had ceased. But troops were not evacuated, and Kashmir was partitioned for practical purposes between Pakistan, which administered 'Azad' Jammu and Kashmir and the Northern Areas, and India, which controlled the state of Jammu and Kashmir, including the 'prized valley' (Schofield 2000: xiv). War broke out again in 1965, but the 1949 ceasefire line 'remained as the de facto border' (Schofield 2000: xiv). By 1989, a protest movement against the Indian administration among the Valley's Muslim population had gathered momentum. According to Victoria Schofield, this was 'both an armed struggle and a political rejection of […] continuing allegiance to the Indian Union' (2000: xv). But, as she also notes, it lacked 'unanimity of objective' and was resisted by the state's Buddhist, Shia, Sikh, and Hindu inhabitants, while Pakistan's government was 'only too happy' to support the movement 'morally and diplomatically' and unofficially to help with reviving 'the spirit of the 1947 "jihad" ' among the insurgents' (Schofield 2000: 227). The conflict continues into this third millennium, when Pakistan's involvement in fostering terrorism in the region and India's draconian punishment of those it deems to be terrorists still attract relatively little international scrutiny.

At the level of global politics, Rushdie may be understood to use his multiply-located 'world' novel to explore the ties that connect the oppositional and

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archetypal figures of the powerful, covetous American and the embittered Kashmiri jihadi. Yet the link traced between their different worlds in Rushdie's ostensible 'fiction of intrigue' (Siddiqi 2008: 1)[1] appears, on examination, more personal and cultural than religious and political, based as it is on human bonds of love, sex, and 'honour'. *Shalimar the Clown*'s drama revolves around the fallout from a love affair that flares up in the early 1960s between two Kashmiri teenagers, who are born in 1947. Raised in the idyllic multi-faith community of Pachigam, 'Shalimar', son of the village *sarpanch*, falls in love with Boonyi, the pandit's daughter. Their romance is ignited at a time when sectarian differences in the disputed Valley are becoming exaggerated and communal violence is escalating. But when their sexual liaison is exposed, the villagers decide to support the Hindu–Muslim match in the spirit of 'Kashmiriyat' or national, social, and cultural solidarity.[2] Tensions increase in 1965 with the appearance of a foreign mullah, Bulbul Fakh, in neighbouring Shirmal; the locals shelter the firebrand preacher and build him a mosque. He denounces pluralist Pachigam as an enemy to the 'true faith'. But things only truly fall apart when the US Ambassador, Max Ophuls, arrives. He seduces Boonyi, installs her in Delhi, and abandons her, first to gluttony and narcotics, and then to his envious wife's clutches. She abducts the resulting child, 'Kashmira', and raises her in America as 'India'. Broken-hearted, Boonyi returns home to await death; Shalimar, bent on revenge, trains as an Islamic terrorist.

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The Kashmiri tale central to Rushdie's continent-spanning novel unfolds largely in flashback, framed by the story of Max's assassination in Los Angeles in 1991. Max, now America's counterterrorism chief, is knifed to death in the book's opening pages by his Kashmiri driver, 'Shalimar', in an apparent act of Islamic terror. After this, the narrative leaps back to pre-Partition Kashmir to tell the story of Boonyi and Noman's fatal love. It goes on to encompass Nazi-occupied Strasbourg, Islamist training camps in Pakistan, and the California of the migrant elite. It ends in America with India/Kashmira's Manichean struggle against her vengeful stepfather.

The instances of Islamic connection featured in this complex narrative are largely split between a broadly spiritual and cultural affinity, on the one hand, and more radical religious and political affiliations, on the other.[3] The affinitive connections seem mostly local and benign—a sympathy for a long-revered Sufi saint or favourite figure from Mughal literature. Affiliations appear more dangerous in their persuasion; they are typified by the commitments of the delinquent, deranged, or politically enraged to what Rushdie characterizes as an 'un-Kashmiri and un-Indian'[4] brand of hard-line Islam.[5]

The first of these senses of connection—affinity—is perhaps exemplified by the spontaneous flood of feelings of psychical or spiritual attraction that Shalimar's father, Abdullah, experiences on entering the Mughal pleasure gardens, where his troupe will perform Muslim and Hindu epic dramas for the maharaja (71). Abdullah's emotions are intensified partly as a result of a pre-existing sense of kinship with the gardens' founder, the Emperor Jehangir, whom he deems superior to Kashmir's current Hindu ruler, and partly as a result of his

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imaginative and auto-suggestive abilities as an actor-manager (78–9). For Abdullah, the draw of the gardens is aesthetic and secular. He is entranced by the 'water music' that plays from its 'liquid terraces' and hypnotized by the horticulturalist monarch's 'love-song' to the earth (78).

Such feelings of affinity leads the gentle Muslim headman to fantasize about deposing Hari Singh and reinstating Jehangir in a bid to recapture his glorious past: 'The present maharaja was no Mughal emperor, but Abdullah's imagination could [...] change that [...] [he] closed his eyes and [...] felt himself being transformed into that dead king [...] and the languorous sensuality of power' (78). But for Rushdie's comic character, the impulse towards the Islamic potentate remains benign: readers are given no reason to anticipate that Abdullah's indolent daydream will translate into insurgent action. Yet Rushdie hints that his protagonist's nostalgic imperial connection may nevertheless pose a threat, not to global civilizations or international relations, but to local civilian ones, at a time when Kashmiris—made nervous by rumours that armies of 'looting and raping' *kabailis* have crossed the border from Pakistan—are beginning to wonder: 'maybe we are too different after all' (85–7). The negative implications of Abdullah's wistful pursuit of his affinitive aspirations are registered by his level-headed wife, Firdaus, who interrupts her husband dreaming to return him to the demands of the narrative present:

> [S]he shouted [...]. 'This garden has a big effect on small men. They start believing they are giants. [...] If you want to prepare to play a king [...] think about Zain-ul-abidin in the first play. Think about Lord Ram in the second'.
>
> (79)

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Firdaus may simply wish Abdullah to refocus on the night's coming performance. But her words also seem to betray a fear that his fixation on this Muslim aspect of their syncretic Kashmiri heritage may contribute to tensions within the region's multi-faith community, for which his company has striven to provide a balanced portrayal of Muslims and Hindus alike. In the fractious post-Partition climate that *Shalimar the Clown* describes, sentimental experiences of religio-cultural affinity must be suppressed, in order to lessen the risk of causing cultural offence.

Other benign-seeming Muslim connections charted by *Shalimar the Clown* include a spiritual affinity or feeling of 'fondness' for historic Sufi pirs and living seers. These range from the fourteenth-century saint Hazrat Bulbul Shah to Khwaja Abdul Hakim, a 'doctor and Sufistic philosopher' (82). The doctor momentarily appears in the narrative to preside over the lovers' nativity in the Shalimar gardens. He fails to find a medical remedy from amongst his impressively heterogeneous skill set, which encompasses the practices of both the West and the East, to save Boonyi's mother; she dies in childbirth. Yet the learned physician is able to offer the grieving Pyarelal Kaul some philosophical consolation, drawn from the teachings of Sufi mysticism, but entirely accessible to the

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Hindu pandit in the 'blurred' Kashmiri context (83). The Khwaja's gentle dialogue on the bitterness of his wife's untimely departure—'the question of death [...] proposes itself, does it not [...]. The question of death is also the question of life, panditji'—lulls both parties into a sense of accord, like the Sufi hymns, which, with the Hindu *bhajans*, later soothe the jangling nerves of the guests at Shalimar and Boonyi's carefully orchestrated multi-faith wedding (83–4, 113–14). He is a figure of 'sectarian ambiguity', whose practices may present 'a compendium of everything of which Islamic puritans most disapprove' (Dalrymple [2009] 2010: 114–15); yet the Khwaja also appears to represent, in Rushdie's idyllic, pre-conflict Kashmir, 'everything that was best about the valley [...] its tolerance, its merging faiths', which made a nonsense of 'austere monotheism' (83).

The Sufistic sensibilities that *Shalimar the Clown* dramatizes seem to resemble those of the author's Kashmiri grandfather, also a doctor. Rushdie dedicates the novel to him, remembering him with respect and affection. Rushdie reportedly described his ancestor in an interview with Johann Hari as devout, rational, and enlightened; a 'model of tolerance' happy to engage in conversation, even disputation, when faced with his teasing grandson's religious doubt. Hari (2006: n.p.) emphasizes the distinction Rushdie drew between this elder man's 'mild, mystical' Kashmiri Islam, akin in Rushdie's opinion to that practised today by India's pluralist and 'secular minded' Muslims, and the 'austere' Arab brand of fundamental Arab Islam introduced to the Valley in the 1960s. In Hari's crude terms, 'Salman's grandfather stands for [...] a radically different way of being Muslim to the Khomeinist and Bin Ladenite head-choppers' (2006: n.p.). Rushdie depicts 'Islamic' affinities as largely peaceable (and apolitical) in character at the beginning of *Shalimar the Clown*.[6] But it is the stricter affiliations of precisely such radically 'other' Muslims—Islamist insurgents and fundamentalist fanatics—that he strains to represent as his novel turns from Kashmiri romance to global jihadist thriller.

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In the narrative, the residents of Pachigam retain their 'fond' attitude towards—or affinity for—the centuries-old saints and scholars associated with Sufi mysticism, even as the foreign-leaning Islamic preachers who enter the Valley threaten to drive them into extinction (87, 115). Rushdie portrays the inquisitive native Kashmiri community's openness toward such Sufistic figures as harmless in itself. Yet *Shalimar the Clown* illustrates the potential of such intense, instinctive emotions to lead the villagers into more sinister realms, particularly if exploited. The 'iron mullah', whom, it is rumoured, was miraculously born of abandoned Indian 'war metals' and poses on arrival as the reincarnation of the Bulbul Shah, ostensibly stays in Shirmal at its populace's behest: 'many ears' are curious to hear his message (115–16). When articulated in his harsh, alien tones, the familiar *azaan* is transformed into a 'call to arms', a means of drawing enthralled, obedient, and opportunistic Kashmiris into pan-Islamic insurgent networks (123). It is to the sectarian cause of 'resistance and revenge', preached from the Maulana's pulpit, that several of the Valley's unsatisfied youths, Shalimar included, subsequently affiliate (115).

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In his unyielding, metallic quality, the iron mullah resembles other militant religious ‘fanatics’ portrayed in Rushdie’s fiction, such as the hard-line Hindu nationalist Sammy Hazaré (aka the ‘Tin-man’), who appears in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995: 301). However, Sammy, a Christian Maharashtrian convert, is to some extent humanized. We learn that he joins Fielding’s fundamentalist ‘crew’ for ‘regionalist rather than religious reasons’, yet has become ‘half-man, half-can’ more on account of his obsession with bomb-making than of a radical political commitment (Rushdie 1995: 311–12). Rushdie uses the scrap-metal legend in his critical Kashmiri narrative to emphasize a causal link between aggressive Indian military intervention in the region and the rise of a radical new brand of Islamic preacher, which is born out of and fostered in opposition to it. The foreignness of Fakh’s ideology and bearing are repeatedly emphasized; the occupying Indian Army Colonel, Hammirdev Kachhwaha, for example, suspects him to be ‘a pro-Pak communalist’ (120). This patriotic Hindu deems the Muslim infiltrator a hypocrite ‘who dare[s] preach about [Indian] enemies within the state’, when, having sown the seeds of communal discord, he is the ‘incarnation of that foe’ (120). Yet the motivation and affiliation of the much-mocked but impassive mullah, mute in relation to his ‘seminary’ and ‘origins’, remain unknown, the faceless Fakh all the more disquieting as a result (117).

Later, it is confirmed that the Maulana takes his cue and culture from hard-line Islamic ‘fanatics’, whose ideological commitment to an aggressive form of the faith is motivated by the religiously rooted but political ‘desire to crush the infidel’ (262–5). His ‘seductive tongue’ gains potency from emotive allusions to the ‘immorality’ and ‘evil’ of godless, idolatrous ‘kafirs’ (125). This belligerent, moralistic, and ideological discourse clashes with the tolerant language deployed by Hindu and Muslim Kashmiri villagers, yet resonates with that popularly associated with an absolute, Saudi Arabian and Wahhabi-inflected Islam and its global jihadist proponents (116–25, 264). In addition to Shalimar, the novel is populated by youthful affiliates turned Islamic militants, including Anees, his depressive brother, the delinquent Gergoo boys, and Abdulrajak, a diminutive ‘Filipino revolutionary’, who befriends Shalimar at a training camp. All are associated with Fakh’s fearsome new interpretation of the faith, yet differ slightly in their affliliative motivations. Anees, who is abducted one night by the local liberation front commander and ‘asked if he would like to learn to make bombs’, is a morbid and melancholic character; he assents because he finds cheering the promise that this way ‘life was likely to be short’ (106). The Gegroos are more maliciously self-seeking, while the seemingly orderly Abdulrajak ‘shine[s] with some sort of crazy internal light’, fuelled by a religio-political fervour that borders on insanity (268).

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Rushdie’s lack of patience with ‘superstitious madmen’ seems particularly evident where the Filipino is concerned (Hari 2006). The more rational arguments Abdulrajak might articulate for joining radical Saudi- and Pakistani-funded organizations for national liberation are undermined by his broken Hindi; his dialogue amounts to unenlightening expressions of allegiance and action: ‘Man of God inspire. Man of war do’ (269). The ‘factual’ information the

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omniscient narrator supplies to contextualize Abdulrajak's impassioned speech offers only a textbook-style explanation for the impoverished and persecuted Filipino's route to radicalization: 'The luminous little man [. . .] accepted U.S. arms and backing but loathed the United States because American soldiers had historically backed the settlement of Catholics [. . .]. Christians controlled the economy and the Muslims were kept poor' (269). When Rushdie's Southeast Asian Islamic revolutionary is permitted to speak, it is in stumbling syllables and for comic, if chilling, effect. The character cannot convey in any sophisticated fashion what sparks his fanatical zeal, nor what personal and political circumstances have driven him to make the absolute commitment to kill a hated American and so link his 'story' to Shalimar's (269).

Abdulrajak and the iron mullah's self-alignment with a partial, pro-Muslim God may be understood as insanely devout and politically strategic (264–5). The 'Islamic' opinions of the brothers Gegroo, 'a trio of disaffected layabout[s]', are, however, simply cynical and self-serving (126). Their 1965 'turn' to Fakh is precipitated purely by their anticipation of a father's rightful wrath over their rape of his daughter; the hellfire preacher's exclusively male mosque is the only Shirmali space that will grant them asylum (119). Similarly, their attempt, on returning to Shirmal in 1988, to impose 'Islamic decencies' promoted by their 'holy' employer, the 'Lashkar-e-Pak', is attributable to no higher cause than their desire to avenge themselves on the father of the girl they defiled and the compatriots whose principles they violated in the process (126–9, 286–7).

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Rushdie's characterization of the misogynistic brothers seems partly consistent with his assertion that:

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> For a vast number of 'believing' Muslim men, 'Islam' stands, in a [. . .] half-examined way [. . .] for a cluster of customs, opinion and prejudices that include [. . .] the sequestration [. . .] of women, the sermons delivered by their mullah of choice, [and] a loathing of modern society.
>
> ([2002] 2003: 395)

Yet it is also inconsistent. In the quoted column 'Not About Islam', Rushdie firmly links the majority of Muslims males' apparently illiberal and anti-modern behaviour to a superstitious commitment to some 'mulch of "belief"' exploited by the political proponents of an Islamist ideology ([2002] 2003: 395). But in *Shalimar the Clown*, the Gegroos, thuggish although not stupid, cleverly exploit the insurgency for their own venal ends. Their aggressive and stereotypically 'Islamist' behaviour—torching the village's television tent, terrifying unveiled women—is *not* so much 'about Islam' (285–7). Rather, it is about the dangerous egotism of three self-styled cowboys and their need to demonstrate publicly that no one can insult them and escape censure, thus perhaps adhering to a bloody code of 'honour', which, though popularly associated with Muslim culture, is not, as Tillion demonstrates, an 'aberration specific to Islam' ([1966] 2007: back cover).

Like the Gegroos, Rushdie's 'terrorist' central protagonist, Shalimar, burns with a desire to avenge his 'honour', which drives him toward political Islam

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(258). Turned, comic-book fashion, toward the dark side by Boonyi's betrayal, this suddenly sinister clown affiliates to the Kashmiri liberation front, and thence the 'worldwide Islamist-jihadist' movement, in order to exploit the Ummah's military education, arsenal, and global networks for his own sadistic gain (264). As he informs a local militia leader: 'I need to learn a new trade […] I'll kill anyone you want to […] but […] I want the American ambassador at my mercy' (252). Realigning himself with the separatists, the former beneficiary of Kashmiri pluralism describes Pakistan, whose weapons fuel the insurgency, as an ally; he talks of national 'freedom' gained through trust in a 'common God' and of a 'higher allegiance' (259). As an affiliate to the cause of global jihad, Shalimar submits his body to the rigours of training at an Inter-Services Intelligence-backed camp (264–8). Under the tutelage of the iron mullah, he surrenders his mind for reprogramming with an international religio-martial 'ideology', for which the 'permitted' textbooks are 'training manuals' and 'the Holy Qur'an' (265). Yet despite Shalimar's protestations to the contrary, he remains driven not by a desire to turn into 'some kind of fire-eater for God', but by a jealous husband's urge to destroy the man who stole his love (259). In this sense, his commitment differs from that of the devout and fanatical Islamists whom Rushdie portrays here and elsewhere as devotees of a 'holy' war, which they wage against Western, Jewish, and non-Islamist 'infidels' for solely sacred or political ends ([2002] 2003: 395).

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Rushdie's portrayal of his eponymous protagonist's ultimately disingenuous affiliation is not lacking in complexity. The absolutist Shalimar, turned from love to hate, is certainly attracted by radical Islam for its own sake. In the training camp, he half listens to the preacher's uncompromising lessons about 'God's work' and 'truth', the latter of which is presented to new recruits as a replacement parent, sibling, or life-partner:

> Everything they thought they knew about the nature of reality […] was wrong, the iron mullah said. That was the first thing for the true warrior to understand.—*Yes, Shalimar* […] *thought, everything I thought I knew was a mistake* […]. There was no room for weakness, argument, or half-measures. […] Only the truth can be your father now, but through the truth you will be the fathers of history.—*Only the truth can be my father*.
>
> (265–6 [emphasis in original])

Shalimar willingly accepts the iron mullah's liturgy as a substitute for the Kashmiri lore about man's governing nature ('Only man, knowing good, can do evil'), laid open to him in youth by his pandit father-in-law (91–2). He hopes that by subscribing to the mullah's more exacting dictates, he may sever his ties to his shameful past, yet also that the hard-line Islamic affiliation he cultivates may provide the means to fulfil a violent need for vengeance. So when Shalimar rises and tears off his garments, crying: 'I cleanse myself of everything except the struggle [to expel 'the infidel']!', he does so with a cheating heart and double tongue (267–8). He may 'almost believe […] [in] his own performance',

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thinking that he is transformed 'and could leave the past behind', but Rushdie's sceptical clown remains conscious of his inability, given his overriding 'urge' to pursue his vendetta, to commit himself disinterestedly to this new cause (268).

Despite such attempts to furnish them with greater texture, Rushdie's representations of the connections and motivations of Kashmir's fictional Islamists are crude in comparison to, say, those pertaining to the strict Muslim reformists and insurgents described in *Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer's first-hand account of the Kashmiri conflict. Peer ascribes the attractiveness of a stricter form of Islam introduced in the late 1980s to educated individuals from amongst his village's lower-middle classes not to locals' awe and curiosity about 'blood-and-thunder preachers' (2011: 115), but rather to their interest in its focus on social reform:

> They [the Salafist group] revolted against the way Islam had been practised over centuries in Kashmir […]. They wanted to shear the local traditions […] saving the peasants from the mumbo-jumbo and exploitation of the priestly class—the *moulvis* and the *pirs*, the Muslim Brahmans.
>
> (Peer 2011: 167)

In Peer's account, young men join the anti-Indian liberation movements partly out of boyish envy for the glamorous insurgent's Pakistan-gifted Kalashnikov, 'green military uniform', and 'badge […] that said: JKLF!' (2011: 23–4) and partly because they find themselves caught in the tide of 'death, fear and anger' that swept through the Valley as the conflict escalated, but not for the venal reasons Rushdie attributes to his bad-boy villains. As 'wild men, fanatics and aliens' (Rushdie 1995: 130), *Shalimar the Clown*'s fundamentalist affiliates ultimately reinforce, rather than expand, the range of the now-familiar type of the mad, 'bad', dangerous Muslim (Mamdani 2004: 15–18). In his earlier novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie characterized Hindu nationalists as being driven by 'engines […] stranger' and fed by 'darker', more personal 'fuel' than that of '*the nation, the god*' (1995: 312 [emphasis in original]). In his hands, the post-9/11 'world' fiction becomes a vehicle largely for stripping the cold-blooded 'Islamic' assassin-antagonist not only of any real religious and ideological motivation, but also of any political one.

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Further, it becomes a means, instead of dressing the wronged, embittered, Muslim subject's anti-American behaviour in the primitive garb of misogynistic 'honour' (258). The result is the deflection of responsibility for contemporary acts of religious extremism—in this instance, 'Islamic' terror—onto the aggrieved and aggressive Muslim male, whose rage may be concurrent with a turbulent era, but whose propensity for evil seems inherently his own. Responsibility is perhaps also partly deflected onto the patriarchal culture from which Shalimar hails, which permits the pursuit of his bid for vengeance.

Robert Eaglestone (2010: 366–7) suggests that *Shalimar the Clown* lacks a 'sense of the world of the Islamist' and points to its author's inability to 'get to grips' with 'the Islamist "truth"' to which his protagonist ostensibly converts.

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Indeed, Rushdie's 'sulfurous' Maulana's railing disquisition against the materialistic and self-interested 'infidel', which immediately precedes Shalimar's dramatic 'revision' of his 'screwed up' 'worldview' and supposed avowal of hard-line Islamist principles, is comprised predominantly of nihilist platitudes (264–7). Fakh asserts:

> The infidel holds that [his] picture of the world [...] is [one] we must all recognize. We say that [it] means nothing to us [...]. The infidel speaks of universal truth. We know that the universe is an illusion [...]. The infidel believes the world is his. But we shall [...] cast him into darkness and live in Paradise.
>
> (267)

Shalimar 'scream[s] in assent': 'without the struggle I am nothing' (268). Yet what the Mullah's 'struggle' is—save a bloody-minded rejection of generic Western capitalist attitudes and values—remains, like the preacher's identity, almost entirely obscure (268). The complexities not only of this particular type of radical and political Muslim affiliation ('Islamism'), about which the West continues to be anxious, but also of other, more profound experiences of spiritual connection seem to be relegated in Rushdie's elliptic world fiction to a space firmly 'outside their [author's] world-view' (Eaglestone 2010: 367), equating, in the novelist's own terms, to the realms of 'spiritual fakery and mumbo-jumbo charlatanism' (48).

Despite the fact that it discriminates to some extent between different forms, expressions, and uses of the faith—Sufi vs. Salafi, religious vs. secular, private vs. political—*Shalimar the Clown* could be considered part of a wave of 'New Atheist' fiction, in which 'Islam [and particularly Islamic extremism] comes to embody the irrationality, immorality and violence of religion in general' (Bradley and Tate 2010: 5). It is interesting, then, that several of its characters attempt to disconnect themselves altogether from the influences of what Rushdie might term the God-like 'shadow planets' of (religious) ideology, tradition, and superstition (48). Such heavenly bodies, diabolical and divine, are exemplified in *Shalimar the Clown* by the Hindu 'dragon planets': Rahu, the 'intensifier', and Ketu, the 'suppressor' of human instincts (48). These spiritual entities, like other addictive secular gods (narcotics, stimulants), control man's understanding of his morality and ability to think for himself, whether for good or for ill. Rushdie's suspicion of them is well documented.[7] In *Shalimar the Clown*, his Kashmiri characters, from the opium-addicted Boonyi, to the disaffected 'Islamist' Shalimar, try to break with these dangerous and seductive influences, in order to regain control of their destinies and realize their desires—the woman for her husband's earthly love, the man for retribution following his wife's infidelity.

For Shalimar, the process of 'letting go' in order to achieve self-determination entails the severance of the contradictory vows that he makes to Ketu and Rahu: to let his adulterous wife live and to annihilate Boonyi and her American lover (226, 237). He must rescind the first in order to realize the second, but

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disassociate himself from both if he is to forge, on the basis of self-abnegation, the new Islamist ties he will later use to access the fundamentalist networks he exploits and then betrays (267–71). In the end, the selfish Shalimar jettisons the 'holy' cause for a secular satisfaction more sublime—a husband's bloody, brutal revenge for his wife's unfaithfulness, masked in the guise of jihadi terrorism. It is this individual motivation, not his lawyer's captivating 'Manchurian' defence (that Shalimar's 'free will was subverted' and he was 'programmed to kill' at Hamas-style 'brainwashing centres'), which the Los Angeles court that sentences him recognizes (383–4). The realization of individual desires, and hence the attainment of selfhood, seems in Rushdie's sceptical fiction to preclude the possibility of a pure or total commitment to any external governing authority. Bradley and Tate (2010: 99) refer to Rushdie as perhaps 'the most intensely theological of contemporary British novelists'. The theme of 'the quarrel [with and] over God'—of the individual's desire to disaffiliate from a supernatural being and organized religion—is something Rushdie continues to pursue, alongside aesthetic and 'enchanted' experiences of South Asian spiritual affinity in *The Enchantress of Florence* ([2008] 2009: 440).

Areas left unmapped

In an apparently secular age, world literary works by writers of Muslim background may describe deeply felt spiritual connections and attachments that have popularly been trivialized as superstitious or irrational, yet remain central to their characters' sense of selfhood. By expressing in their fiction 'Islamic subjectivities and cultural epistemologies', which the reader may incorporate into their understanding of a 'world of equal differences' (Majid 2000: vii), these authors may contribute to a process of 'demystifying and de-alienating Islam and Muslims' (Malak [2004] 2005: 11). This is something that remains of central importance today, when the word 'Islam' and the mention of Muslims continues, in Kamila Shamsie's words, 'to exert a magnetic field [...] pulling in a host of words of which the most thickly clustered is "Terror" and, hard on its heels [...] Offence' (2009b: 1).

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Rushdie attempts to explore a variety of types, both of Islam and of faith, in *Shalimar the Clown*. Yet the result is not only that Muslim stereotypes such as those propagated by writers like Martin Amis are reinforced, it is also that Rushdie largely leaves unmapped those more complex, nebulous, and potentially controversial spiritual convictions, political commitments, and historical-cultural connections that may underlie contemporary South Asian experiences[8] of Islamic affiliation and affinity.

Notes

1 That is, fiction which 'foregrounds a threat to the [Western hegemonic] social and political order' (Siddiqi 2008: 1).
2 Kashmiriyat was always a fictional notion. As Victoria Schofield observes, Jammu and Kashmir

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> was [in Sir Owen Dixon's words] 'not really a unit geographically, demographically or economically' but 'an agglomeration of territories brought under the political power of One Maharaja.' [. . .] As [. . .] Sumantra Bose, has recognised, the challenge was always to find a middle ground between 'communal compartmentalism and the chimera of non-existent oneness'.
>
> (2000: xii–xiii)

3 This idea of affinity and affiliation chimes with Edward W. Said's idea of filiative and affiliative identities (1983: 16–24). Whereas Said sees filiation as something elemental, and affiliation as constructed through lived experience, I use the term 'affinity' to indicate chosen spiritual connections and 'affiliation' to denote more intransigent and primordial links.

4 See Rushdie ([2005] 2006: 122). Subsequent references are to this edition of *Shalimar the Clown* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the main text.

5 This seems in tune with the broadly binary reading of Islam in Kashmir expressed in Rushdie's *New York Times* columns (see, for example, [2002] 2003: 306). Historians like Schofield agree 'that what began as a more secular movement in the valley for greater political liberty became one with "Islamist" overtones arose directly from the changes occurring within Pakistani society and influences from Afghanistan' (2000: xiii–xv). Yet she, and others (Rai 2011; Peer 2011), would illuminate the diversity of Kashmiri political and moral positions in relation to 'Islamism', which the novelist's satirical reconstruction of post-Second World War history strategically obfuscates.

6 There is no room in Rushdie's terroristic tale for a realistic portrayal of politically committed Kashmiris like those that Peer describes (2010: 81), whose retention of a link to Sufi religious tradition may lend gravitas to their leadership of contemporary resistance movements.

7 For example, in his lecture on human values, 'Step Across This Line', which begins by focusing on Sufi poet Fariduddin Attar's epic *The Conference of the Birds* (Rushdie [2002] 2003: 407–10). The poem's creatures expand the possibilities of what they can be by transgressing prescribed limits, eventually becoming their own gods. Rushdie sees this as a vital step toward 'advanced civilisation', founded on 'individualisms [. . .] merged into a collectivity' ([2002] 2003: 409).

8 Rushdie is perhaps more likely to occlude those South Asian Islamic affiliations that are Pakistani as opposed to Indian.

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