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Rethinking recognition in Muslim diasporic writing. From an “ethics of responsibility” in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to an “ethics of dispersion” in *The Silent Minaret*

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Abstract: This paper interrogates and complicates the definition of Muslims post-9/11 in terms of prescriptive recognition patterns, by examining two Muslim diasporic novels: South African author Ishtiyak Shukri’s *The Silent Minaret* (2005) and British-Pakistani novelist, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). The “schemes of recognition” of Orientalism and multiculturalism are scrambled in both novels in order to challenge scripts which make Muslims “knowable”. Resistance to the injury of misrecognition after 9/11, framed by the device of the dramatic monologue in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is formulated in terms of a classic writing-back strategy. However, Shukri departs from this defensive posture and binary structure by revisiting post-9/11 Muslim experiences via South African colonial and apartheid narratives of resistance. The inclusion of Muslim experiences emanating from the South and from Africa intrude upon the dominant imaginary of the Muslim diaspora. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the exceptionalism of Muslim experiences is unhinged by tying it to familiar Third-world nationalist struggles, enabling

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In this paper, I compare two novels by South-African author Ishtiyak Shukri’s *The Silent Minaret* (2005) and British-Pakistani novelist, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to provide readings of post-9/11 from the perspectives of the Muslim diaspora. Both writers identify recognition patterns of Orientalism and multiculturalism as confining Muslim lives to scripts easily understood by Western publics. I distinguish between the defensive posture of most Muslim diasporic literature, which is taken up in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in response to experiences of ethno-religious mis-recognition after 9/11, and Shukri’s privileging of uncharted webs of connections grounded in collective experiences of resistance against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Hamid proposes an alternative but sanitized way of destabilizing Muslim particularism through identification with other embattled Third world nations, whereas Shukri is able to scatter religious and political resources from diasporic contexts so that they can empower people in a post-9/11 world and beyond.

reflection on an ethics of responsibility. *The Silent Minaret* proposes a rethinking of diaspora in terms of an “ethics of dispersion” which informs the very structure of the novel, and explores multiple and more lateral promises of “relationality”.

Subjects: Cultural Studies; Race & Ethnicity; Multiculturalism

Keywords: Muslim diasporic writing; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; *The Silent Minaret*; recognition; ethics of responsibility; dispersion

1. Introduction

This paper will show that the recognizability and constitution of “Muslim” diasporic subjects are tied to the deployment of the familiar tropes of Orientalism and multiculturalism in *The Silent Minaret* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, even, while both texts carefully elude a satisfactory conclusion about the protagonists’ ultimate motives and fate. In fact, Changez, the main character in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, proves to be an unreliable narrator whose account often strikes the reader as a possible fabulation, whereas Issa, the main protagonist in *The Silent Minaret*, is absent throughout the narrative. His life is evoked through the fragmented reminiscences of his friends and family which depict him as a most enigmatic character. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* rests on a classic writing-back strategy, challenging the deleterious effects of misrecognition stemming from securitization narratives after 9/11. The dramatic monologue is harnessed as a device which bridles Changez’s American antagonist and enmeshes both in a common precariousness, emphasizing mutuality. However, the humanization of the Muslim rests on the eventuality of alternative forms of visibility anchored in a binary structure, which assures the American and Western readers’ prerogative as the purveyors of recognition. Issa, for his part, reacts to the sense of injury resulting from religious profiling, by choosing instead to become invisible, as a resistance to being boxed and defined corporeally following 9/11. His experience as an anti-apartheid militant of the toxic effects of apartheid visual economy underscores his alienation from embodied racial or religious distinctions determining recognition patterns. *The Silent Minaret* hinges on a resistance to regimes of “knowability” which informs the novel’s polyphonic, hypertextual and fragmented chronotopic structure. I posit that Hamid side-steps the diasporic problematic through displacement, favouring transnational ties of identification, unfolding from Third-world anti-capitalist ideologies, which can be more or less comfortably “recognized” by the liberal metropolitan reader’ (Ahmed, Morey, & Yaqin, 2012, p. 196). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* opts out of exploring lateral forms of class, gendered or racial solidarity within the American context, in relation to Wainwright, Changez’s Underwood Samson West-Indian colleague, for instance. This paper will show that Issa’s story in *The Silent Minaret* is distinctive because it demonstrates that the ethical resources carved by Muslim communities in the crucible of South African history can be “dispersed”, following Butler’s proposition that “dispersion” could be envisaged as an “ethical modality” for diasporic populations (2012, p. 6). Connections between the different characters in the novel are enabled by the dislocation of local experiences from the framework of origins. Critical attention has been devoted to Issa’s eschewing of transcendental identity formations based on exclusive forms of national or racial commonality (Frenkel, 2011; Jayawardene, 2014; Mbao, 2013; Pucherova, 2009). I contend that a perusal of the trajectories of Muslim diasporic lives through the lenses of South African and Indian Ocean history in *The Silent Minaret* sheds light on the “contingency of [the] modes of rationality” (Butler, 2005, p. 112) shaping post-9/11 representations of Muslims in diasporic narratives.

2. Summary of the novels

The Reluctant Fundamentalist tells the story of Changez, a Pakistani former Princeton graduate, who recalls his life in America to a putative American visitor to Lahore, in the form of a dramatic monologue. He tells him about his gratification in having held a coveted position at one of New York’s top firms, Underwood Samson, as well as his love for a young American woman, Erica. He confides that he had assimilated into American society until after 9/11, when he had begun to resent the dehumanizing aspects of high finance intertwined with an alienation from America, following the

bombing of neighbouring Afghanistan. Erica's love for her dead boyfriend had made her drift into a deep depression and she had shut herself off from Changez, eventually committing suicide. Following a life-changing trip to Chile, Changez had quit his job and had returned to Pakistan. *The Silent Minaret* recounts the tale of a reclusive South African Indian Muslim young man, Issa, who disappears in London where he had been completing his PhD on the history of Muslim settlement in the Cape. The novel flashes back and forth between the past in South Africa and the present, in London, where his brother, Kagiso¹, his friends, Frances² and Katinka³ as well as his mother Vasinthe⁴ piece together his life in their search for him during the war on terror campaign. They believe that he has been deeply affected by the war in Iraq. Issa's anti-apartheid activism has forged his independent mind and radical commitment to justice.

3. Conceptualising the “Muslim diaspora” in “Muslim writing” post-9/11

Selections of post-9/11 literature such as Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2005), Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2006), John Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), and Martin Amis's *The Second Plane: Spetember11: Terror and Boredom* (2009) appear to seek comfort in customary orientalist images of violent and irrational Muslim masculinity and binary us vs. them structures as a way to compensate for the “unspeakability” and “unrepresentability” (Kenniston & Quinn, 2008) of the event. Texts by writers of Muslim heritage which offer different perspectives on the representations of 9/11 (Nash, 2012) have been significantly absent from collections of 9/11 writings such as *Poetry after 9/11* (Johson & Meriams, 2002) or *After 9/11* (The New Yorker, 2011) and have generally received little media consideration. However, the scopic attention given to Muslims and the curiosity in probing their psyche, as several scholars have noted (Ahmed et al., 2012; Chambers, 2011), have brought Muslim diasporic public figures, and writers such as Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid into media glare, as they were called upon to bring insiders' views to the Muslim “problem”, along with the already highly mediatized Salman Rushdie. Ahmed et al. suggest that the experiences explored in the novels of those three writers in particular have “conditioned the possibility of the Muslim diaspora” (p. 9), which Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman (2009, p. 8) define in terms of “internal [configurations]” comprising “ethnicity, nationalism, culture, language, sectarian and class diversities” and “external characteristics” relating to “immigration and settlement, policies, political system, social, economic and cultural development” of the host nations. A phenomenon of “fictionalization of memory” among young diasporic Muslims, marking attachment to an “imagined Islam”, was harnessed after 9/11 (Moghissi, 2006) to attenuate the sense of persecution targeting their group identity. An emerging genre, referred to as “Muslim writing” (Ahmed et al., 2012; Chambers, 2011) has functioned as a powerful and creative platform to “write back” to the systematic demonization of Muslim communities and to chart the diverse, complex and provisional cartographies of Muslim identities. “[Neo] Muslim writing” (Nash, 2012), such as Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) or Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road to Damascus* (2009), attempt to craft positive nuanced images of Muslims as rejoinders to pervasive stereotypes of Muslims as pre-modern fanatics. However, Muslim neo-orientalist “misery” memoirs (Morey, 2011; Nash, 2012), which are writing against the excesses of Muslim patriarchy from the perspective of native informants, such as Azar Naficy's *Reading Lolita in Teheran. A Memoir in Books* (2003) or Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner* (2011), have proved to be most popular with Anglo-American publics (Ahmed et al., 2012). A number of “Muslim themes” (Chambers, 2011, pp. 12–13) recur within the loose rubric of “Muslim writing”, including Ottoman Spain, “djinns” (ibid.), “war on terror, gender, racism, class, language, ... representation” (Ahmed et al., 2012, p. 27) and inter-textual use of the Quran (Malak, 2005). The broader genre of “postcolonial” or “diasporic” writing, within which writers of Muslim backgrounds were subsumed before 9/11, was considered to be too dismissive of religious identity formation (Ahmed et al., 2012; Malak, 2005; Nash, 2012), viewed as a significant critical dimension of contemporary narratives of people of Muslim heritage. A comparison of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret* points to the overlapping issues of recognition and misrecognition in “Muslim writing” but also demonstrates that the significance of Muslim stories originating from the South expand and complicate the cartography of Muslim diasporic lives after 9/11. *The Silent Minaret* departs from reactive “writing back” or “writing against” mechanisms characteristic of the Muslim diasporic works covered in current scholarship as discussed above.

4. The problematics of recognition politics

The recognition of Muslims in recent years has increasingly become confined to issues of visibility and authenticity, particularly with regards to women's sartorial choices (Aumeerally, 2016), isolated from more collective platforms on the Left advocating progressive democratic ideas. Dobbernack, Meer, and Modood (2014, p. 8) contend that Muslim involvement in public debate has generally been viewed as standing in for "sectarian interests" rather than enabling "common good", and that it has become a struggle to establish common ground with other minority populations because of the "perceived toxicity of Muslim concerns". Following 9/11, Muslim males were criminalized as a result of intensive religious/racial profiling, exacerbating what Honneth (1995) identifies as the adverse emotional reactions arising from experiences of misrecognition. As discussed earlier, the notion of Muslim diaspora, as an "imagined community" post-9/11 was essentially a defensive mechanism invested in the rehabilitation of Muslims as a group and building networks of solidarity within rather than without, thereby reinforcing the perceptions of Muslim identity as hermetic, associated with a sense of victimhood. Butler (2005) indicates that we are constituted by "schemes of recognition" which mark the boundaries according to which we become legible, and with regards to Muslims, orientalism and multiculturalism may be identified as setting the norms by which individuals become known as Muslims. After 9/11, securitization discourses have come to produce Muslims as violent and threatening, cohabiting with and contradicting earlier patterns of recognition defining them as exotic objects. Fanon (1967) has argued that the hierarchical structure through which recognition is enabled further objectifies minority populations and that in order to secure a degree of agency, recognition has to be claimed and not given. Butler (1990) has written about the ways in which recognition claims are often compliant with established power configurations in relation to gender issues, and in more recent years, she has articulated a critique of recognition by privileging the values of "opacity" and "[partiality]" (2005, p. 59) in our understanding of self and in our engagement with the other. She considers that the will to know and circumscribe both self and other initiates a form of "ethical violence" which hardens moral judgements and promotes delusions of mastery, negating the possibility of a shared humanity based on our "unknowingness" (p. 84) and "provisionality" (p. 59). The surveillance of Muslims post-9/11 has hinged on the implementation of technologies of recognition which make Muslims knowable. Srivastava (2012) points out that the success of books by BME (Black, minority or ethnic) writers, which include a significant number of writers of Muslim heritage in the British context, often depends on the extent to which they echo white understandings of minority cultures. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret* explore the creative ways in which Muslim diasporic writers resist their enrolment in the enforcement of this panoptical economy.

5. Rethinking recognition in alternative ways

Using Butler's discussion of the formation of the subject, I suggest that Hamid and Shukri appear to stage what Foucault refers to as an "interlocutory scene" (Butler, 2005, p. 112) which promises to fulfil the expectations that a "Western" readership as "interlocutor" places upon them, and uncover the truth about the "Muslim" self. The two novels under discussion harness a form of strategic rewriting which not only sets up collective norms of recognition which will be readily decipherable by first-world readers, but also intimate reflection upon "self-constitution" (Butler, 2005, p. 22). In both texts, Orientalist tropes such as Scheherazade and the hookah café as well as recognition patterns of multiculturalism are overextended through the multi-layering of voices, places and meanings which unsettle the visual maps that determine the "readability" of Muslim subjects (Butler, 2005, p. 29). Hamid and Shukri ultimately demonstrate that any endeavours to "[recuperate]" or "[reconstruct]" an authentic self can only be "[fictionalized]" or "[fabulated]". The humanization of the "Muslim" face is further bound by "frames of reference" which condition his or her degree of humanity or denial of it altogether in the context of heightened anxiety and fear about Muslim difference after 9/11 (Butler, 2005, p. 29). It is possible to construe that Changez's conscious sporting of the beard generally signifying Muslim masculinity, is experienced as a form of provocation akin to psychological violence following 9/11, from the perspective of the American public. His beard potentially reinscribes Muslim cultural history and agency in the context of a post-9/11 bifurcated cartography. I suggest that like many writers of Muslim heritage, Hamid remains encumbered by the seduction of writing-back

strategies promising to salvage the Muslim self from the de-humanizing processes of misrecognition encapsulated in securitization discourses. Srivastava (2012, p. 176) suggests that the novel can be read a “first world allegory”, from a “third-world perspective”, through the appropriation of the voice of the “American” which functions as “an ironic reversal of orientalist discourse” (p. 177). The structure of the dramatic monologue operates as a form of writing back to the noxious effects of American univocity after 9/11. The encounter which is set up between Changez and his American counterpart produces a stifling context which ultimately clips the fantasies of greatness which have characterized US rhetoric, unravelling the ways in Muslim and American lives are intertwined in a common vulnerability. Both Issa and Changez subvert the particularism of Muslims by reading their own vulnerability as enmeshed with that of other people across time and space. They become committed to resist the escalation of violence and dispossession fuelling America’s delusion of mastery by rethinking alterity in terms of an “ethics of responsibility” (Darda, 2014; Pucherova, 2009). Changez’s epiphany in Chile about human precariousness eventuates only when he becomes willing to jeopardize his own comfort and certainties, opening himself to a degree of “self-knowledge” (Butler, 2005, 19). It is in the homeland of the insurgent poet, Pablo Neruda that Changez comes to understand the violence inflicted upon his people as intertwined with larger secular anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles.

6. Pluralizing writings from the Muslim diaspora by including South African Muslim narratives

Critical commentary on narratives of the “Muslim diaspora” (Ahmed et al., 2012; Chambers, 2011; Clements, 2016) have focused on its South Asian or Arabo-Persian components and have been framed by East–West, North–South, oppressor–oppressed relations, neglecting the significance of “internal configurations” (Moghissi, 2009) in constituting diasporic Muslim communities. This paper highlights the relevance of acknowledging the “situatedness” of Muslim diasporic experiences and the need to ground the “movement of people or ideas across national spaces” (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 10). Little attention has been given within the category of “Muslim writing” to the perspectives of writers coming from the South whose original experiences of minoritization shed a different light on the maps of contemporary post-9/11 Muslim stories. This paper will show that Issa is able to translate “native and nativist boundaries of ... particular [causes], [anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid in South Africa] ..., into the vernacular grammar of a far more global struggle” (Dabashi, 2009, p. xvi) against post-9/11 technologies of surveillance. The first-hand experience of alterity as emerging from a place of violence, wedged between the temptation to obliterate/absorb the other, or interrupting the “narcissistic circuit” (Levinas, 1969 in Butler, 2004, p. 138), is recorded in a rich and prolific array of South African literary production marginalized in the Euro-American centre Samuelson (2011), Jamal (2010) and (Geertsema, 2007) divide South African literature into three distinct periods (i) the apartheid era-focused on imagining a nation, while the majority was being excluded from it (ii) the transition period-concerned with the challenges of nation-building and (iii) post-transition stage-turned towards the multiple prospects of weaving new connections between the local and the rest of the world. It is possible to suggest that while post-9/11 literature has been characterized by its solipsistic turn, post-apartheid/post-transition writing in South Africa is defined as charting a “[pas-sage] to the world –in ways that are full, mobile and complex” (Geertsema, 2007, p. 26).

7. Reading the Muslim diaspora in terms of an “ethics of dispersion” in *The Silent Minaret*

South Africa’s connectivity to South Asia and the Arabic Peninsula is examined in Post-transition novels such Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup* (2001), Shukri’s *The Silent Minaret* (2005) and Imraan Coovadia’s *Green-Eyed Thieves* (2011), marked by the “intimate, sticky and prolonged relations” (Ho, 2006, p. xxi) characterizing Muslim communities in the Indian Ocean. Both Coovadia and Shukri read the racialization processes and disenfranchisement of Muslim migrants in the USA and the UK post-9/11 in the light of the tyranny of categorization enforced by the apartheid system, and “provincialize” Europe and America through the crisscrossing identifications they establish between different people and places from Peshawar to Johannesburg and Palestine (Baderoon, 2001). Baderoon (2001) notes that writers of Muslim South African heritage explore “transgressive affiliations across

race and religion” (p. 138). She further postulates that articulations of Muslim identity in South African literature do not operate as manifestations of identity politics but instead buttress a quest for social and political justice which takes shape by embracing dissidence in different ways (pp. 133–152). Butler, in *Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012, p. 6), revisits the concept of “dispersion” as a central element of diaspora in terms of an “ethical modality”, distancing herself from its familiar signification as geographical displacement, with reference to the Jewish experience. She suggests that the significance of “relationality” has to be reactivated at the expense of “ontology” (p. 5). “Dispersion” entails a mobilization of the specific dimensions of the painful history of struggle and exile defining Jewish people, and enable a re-thinking of “terms [such] as *equality or justice*” (ibid). In the light of Butler’s recapitulation of the possibilities of reconfiguring diasporic experience beyond the foundational structures of identity and homeland/hostland, I suggest that the prospect of un-mooring religion in *The Silent Minaret* is not envisioned with respect to its obsolescence but rather as a means of relocating hospitality as one of its central tenets, as per Derrida (2000), of going back to earlier traditions which conceived of the stranger and strangeness as spurring virtues of compassion, reminding us of our inherent destituteness as human beings. Frances and Issa’s complicity emerge out of their hospitable understanding of their respective religious traditions, in their willingness to unlearn dogmatic patterns and welcome uncharted engagement with each other. Much of the critical scholarship which exists on Shukri’s novel has focused on the transnational aspect of his writing (Frenkel, 2011; Pucherova, 2009; Steiner, 2012), but this paper will demonstrate the ways in which Issa’s experiences infringe upon and de-centre dominant representations of Muslim diasporic writing.

8. Subverting pre-9/11 “schemes of recognition” of orientalism and multiculturalism

Recognition of Muslim subjects in *The Silent Minaret* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is enabled by recalling “readable” aesthetic and moral landscapes, such as the Oriental café or through the Scheherazade trope. More importantly, Changez and Issa’s “self-crafting (Butler, 2005, p. 22) is apparently delimited from the outset with respect to these norms, relieved of the burden of translation. A chapter is expressly entitled “Baghdad café” in *The Silent Minaret* rehearsing orientalist allusions summoned by the name and the setting of the scene: “ornate ceiling ... mashrabeya”, the “delicate [fragrances] ... [of] jessamine, violet, rose ...”(p. 7), Arabic vernacular and Kagiso’s vision of *The Thousand and One Nights*. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a particular décor and ambiance through the bustling sounds of the bazaar, Urdu language, the synaesthetic evocation of food and architecture, “the kebab of mutton, the tikka of chicken ... and the Shalimar Gardens” (pp. 101–102) allow Changez to weave his tale, stringing together the different episodes of his life. Like Scheherazade, he masters the art of story-telling and erudition and is able to keep the American protagonist and the reader absorbed in his narration delaying the impending violent conclusion that she, too, keeps at bay. Both works explore “schemes of recognition” (Butler, 2005) in the context of pre-9/11 by signalling excesses of representation and the tyranny of will to knowledge. Changez immediately feels at home in New York before 9/11 travelling in his intricately designed kurta in the subway among the mosaic of colourful faces, as he notes that, “[it] was a testament to the open-mindedness and that overused word– *cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire” (p. 48). In *The Silent Minaret*, Kagiso expatiates about the apparent convergence between London and Durban, as models of multicultural entente, “[here] was a London you won’t find in the postcard shops. Like the time I accompanied Issa on his illicit trip to Durban. It was as though we had arrived, not in Zululand, but somewhere on the sub-continent. In Brick Lane, where Katinka took me to eat dhal, even the street signs are in another language” (*The Silent Minaret*, p. 35). Changez and Issa’s identities are defined by the pre-9/11 normative frames of recognition of orientalism and multiculturalism which have established a pre-determined ontology for them, as Muslims whose alterity can be articulated within delimited boundaries. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret* question whether any rewriting of Muslim identity inevitably has to compose with orientalism and multiculturalism, as the regimes of truth which set out the norms through which a “Muslim” can come into being, by deploying forms of strategic rewriting. Orientalist decors such as the café prove to be an empty signifier through Katinka and Kagiso’s citation of the movie,

“Baghdad Café”, situated in the American South-west, wherein any deep meaningfulness of the café as an emblematic location might be viewed as overdetermined. The scaffolding of images prefaces the disjuncture between the hookah café as a timeless signifier of the exotic, erotic Oriental dream world of Western imagination, and the flow of images from the Iraq invasion streaming from the television in the café. The “strange overlap of the visual and the real” (Redfield, 2007, p. 64) disrupts the imaginative geography of the Orient, as brought out in Issa’s incredulous reaction, “[have] you ever seen a real war projected live onto a screen the size of a fucking Picadilly Circus billboard?” (p. 193). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the recourse to citation in relation to the evocation of the arch-oriental incarnation, Scheherazade, may be read as deceptive, as much else in the novel, as brought out by Morey (2011). The hardly veiled references to the potential affabulatory nature of Changez’s tale as in, “I am after all, telling you a history and in history, as I suspect you – an American – will agree, it is the thrust of one’s narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one’s details”. (p. 118) or “[there] is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you” (p. 152) make any understanding of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as an authentication of Muslim society as misplaced. Orientalism and multiculturalism operated as frames of reference which conditioned the social recognition of Muslim subjects as “ghostly [presences]” (Göle, 2012, p. 674) confined to a chronotopic dimension distinct from Euro-American time-space matrix before 9/11. However, different modes of writing structure *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret*, framing distinct engagement with the problematic of recognition as a result of the different diasporic contexts from which they unfold.

9. The intrusive visibility of Changez’s beard as a resistance to misrecognition after 9/11

Changez’s staged encounter with the American which entraps them both in a face-to-face situation, demands an ethical response from his antagonist and from the readers to the murkiness and complexity of his humanity (Papastergiadis, 2012), as a way to reverse the deleterious effects of misrecognition and lulls him into having a sense of agency. The overarching structure of the dramatic monologue writes back to the exclusion of dissent in the dominant American discourses of 9/11 but also creates the context for the necessary recognition of the complex dynamics of Pakistani-Muslim society. Muslim sociality in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* materializes through Pakistani modernity and the sanitization of Muslim culture which the American is confronted with, as Changez enthuses about the dynamic urban design of new Lahore, whereby “Old Anarkali ... [is transformed] into a pedestrian only piazza” (p. 32). The use of the dramatic monologue which is grounded in a binary frame makes such claiming of recognition a fraught process because the humanization of the Muslim and of Muslim culture is enabled solely through the acknowledgement of the American/American readership. Changez’s trip from New York to the Phillipines allows him to imagine himself as an object of desire enhanced by the trappings of Underwood Samson employment, “I was in my own eyes a veritable James Bond” (p. 63). However, the flight back returns him to his elemental foreign self and what began as a pleasurable activity is transformed into a degrading experience whereby the literal act of stripping reflects the ways in which his identity is reduced to his brown Muslim body exposed to public disgrace. Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher (2015, p. 150) throw light on the ways in which the policing of identity at airports with its accompanying threats of misrecognition challenge the sense of security that coming home might otherwise grant, as brought out by Changez’s utter sense of humiliation, “[at] the airport, [he] was escorted by armed guards in a room where [he] was made to strip down to [his] boxer shorts – and ... was as a consequence the last person to board our aircraft ... [he] flew to New York, uncomfortable in [his] own face (p. 74). His threatening presence is signalled at the outset by the signification of the beard as embodying Muslim deviance, as he immediately attempts to assuage the American, “[Do not be frightened by my beard ...? (p. 1). He comes to be interpellated as Muslim through the symbolic violence which the beard enacts post-9/11 on the Americans he encounters; he confides grudgingly to the American that he was instantly transformed from an “exotic acquaintance” (p. 17) blending effortlessly “to [someone who] was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers” (p. 130). The obsessive reference to the beard recapitulates “Muslimness” in terms of an intrusive visibility which Changez reclaims as a “form of protest” and “a symbol of [his] identity” (p. 130). It is cast as a means of “writing back”,

enabling glimmers of agency attached to the “materiality of culture” (Göle, 2003), as evidenced by him “walking the streets, flaunting [his] beard as a provocation, craving conflict with anyone foolhardy enough to antagonize me’...” (p. 167). His deliberate reconfiguration as a “Muslim” cannot be dissociated from his pedigree as a member of Pakistani bourgeoisie and is inextricably woven into the narrative of his American success story, compelling the American interlocutor/reader to confront the “face” of the Muslim (Levinas, 1969).

10. Bio-political control after 9/11 echoing apartheid surveillance regimes

Like Changez, Issa, too, is branded as Muslim after 9/11 when he is singled out and searched by security staff at the airport. However, unlike Changez, whose Muslim body had been merely an exotic accessory prior to 9/11, Issa is profoundly aware of the ways in which bio-political control is the foundation of a politics of racial purity. The concept of homeland security post-9/11 echoes “the cynical use of the term *homeland* by the South African regime in 1969” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 88. Emphasis in original), with reference to the “Bantu Homelands Citizenship Bill ... that relegated blacks to their supposed sites of tribal origins, [as] the apartheid government sought to keep them out of the cities and the white South African nation” (ibid.). The name Issa enunciates a fixed religious identity, rooting Issa to his origins and inscribing his racialized body in terms of an undifferentiated hostile Muslim otherness, effacing all other markers such as class or education, as demonstrated by the following lines

I was at immigration. Despite my student visa, perhaps because of it, I was stopped. My luggage was searched Even sealed packages were opened. ... I am suspect. I am being observed. I am being described. I am being investigated...Now let me out... before I start reciting my thesis Bits of it have to do with islands of interrogation, a little like this one ... I feel violated. I feel sick ... Yes, it’s me. I’m Salahuddin. (italics in original) (pp. 160–161)

He is reminded by one detainee at immigration that “[in] here, we all have such names” (p. 151. Italics in original), bringing attention to the ways in which Muslim names after 9/11, following Butler (1997), utter and constitute the bearer as a pariah, robbing Issa of his national and personal credentials. However, in responding to the injurious effect of speech by summoning a timeless nostalgic Muslim geography, as he renames himself “Salahuddin”⁵, Issa becomes imprisoned into an amorphous Muslim collective, re-asserting to some extent the rigours of scopic regimes and the enforcement of prescriptive taxonomies. His racially composite family⁶, his anti-apartheid militancy and his affective connections, as further supported by the argument of his thesis castigating, “the sanitized invention of ‘man’s most dangerous myth: the fallacy of race’, and the synthetic fabrication of inviolate national identity” (p. 64) point to Issa’s ambivalent situation after 9/11. According to Mbaou, “Issa’s body, political and corporeal, is a bearer of meanings he has no control over” (2013, p. 208), capturing his dilemma, as he becomes caught up between an obtrusive ontology and his inherently dispersed self. Shukri attempts to erode post-9/11 hype around the radical nature of Muslim alterity by rethinking identity as constituted by “the enigmatic traces of others” (Butler, 2004, p. 46). He assimilates the hedge planted by the Dutch settlers at the Cape in the seventeenth century to mark European sanctity, contemporary British immigration control and West Bank barriers as signifying common border mindsets seeking to avert contamination (Mbaou, 2013, p. 194).

11. Harnessing disappearance as a form of resistance to panoptical tyranny

Butler (2005) has argued that notions of social and political recognition fail in cases where people are cast outside the “human” and in being identified as a potential terrorist, Issa is haunted by the ways in which anti-apartheid militants “had been disappeared”, by being deprived of their political and civil rights (Mbaou, 2013, p. 190) by the South African authorities. Invisibility is configured as a desperate form of resistance to the omnipotent surveillance tactics of apartheid police for even as child, Issa was initiated into survival tactics by his mother’s improvising to protect Kagiso and Ma Gloria from being snatched away, while preserving the children from the sinister powers of apartheid. The poignant incantation of the names of the disappeared in extracts from the *Truth and Reconciliation* resonate in the novel as an ineffective ritual which does not efface traumatic absence, “Steve Biko, Matthew Goniwe, Hector Pieterse, Olier Tambo, Gowan Mbeki” (p. 47). Issa’s

anti-apartheid activism has made him particularly attuned to the realm of the invisible as he rewrites the cosmopolitan hospitality of the city of London in his diary into a hostile landscape where various outcasts are compelled into ghostliness in order to evade the panoptical immigration regime, “[they] roam the city, the unwanted ones, with vacant, distant stares. Absent and preoccupied, here only in unwanted, despised, brutalized, foreign body; Europe’s untouchables” (p. 121). This in-between state of presence-absence marks bodies deemed foreign, such as Katinka’s Palestinian boyfriend, whom we encounter as someone compelled to live in the shadows, “Karim. Whom she does not want to share ... About whom she speaks to no one. ... Her secret ... Now behind the wall” (p. 36). The tyranny of surveillance mechanisms intent on knowing the other is twisted by Issa’s disappearance as he wills himself to remain within a realm in which he cannot be “known”, even as the tentacles of the war on terror proliferate, delineating a new “version of recognition [which] would be based less on knowledge than on apprehension of its limits”, as envisioned by Butler (2005, p. 28), for Issa remains relentlessly spectral, “a haunting absence ... the missing link ...[a] cavity” (p. 34).

12. Weaving the economy of invisibility into the structure of *The Silent Minaret*

The Silent Minaret hinges on the “economy of the invisible” (Mbao, 2013, p. 215) and of opacity marking the “encounter between the text and the reader ... [as] one of undecidability, of provisionality” (ibid.), through the use of a non-linear and multi-layered form juxtaposing prose, poetry, pop culture references as well as extracts from the *Truth and Reconciliation* hearings, together with the free indirect speech of Issa’s friends. Structured as a hypertext, the novel charts unusual connections, as indicated by the eclecticism of some of the chapter headings, from “Homelands” referring to South Africa’s townships, “Imaginary Homelands” in homage to Rushdie’s work, Prince’s “Purple Rain” as a hymn to pop culture, “jim, ayn, kaf, mim, ha” a transliteration of Arabic letters and “[a] roadmap into our past” Bishop Tutu’s citation from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Reading emerges as a subversive activity providing a platform to articulate dissent particularly in contexts in which censorship operated forcefully during the apartheid period when books were banned, as post-9/11, when voices have equally been muzzled⁷. In Butler’s words, (2004, p. xix), “the speaking subject [is threatened] with uninhabitable identification ... through a series of shaming tactics ... producing what will and will not count as a viable speaking subject ... within the public domain”. It is in the light of the suppression of dissenting voices that *The Silent Minaret* privileges multivocality, which, according to Bakhtin (1984 in Landow, 1992, p. 11), enables the “interaction of several consciousnesses” and thus impels the reader to engage with the novel by following a combination of experiences, as opposed to Hamid’s choice of dramatic monologue which rests on a binary construction. However, the concentration of information that we are exposed to only serves to occasion a muddled sense of Issa’s story, driving relentlessly to create presence out of a searing sense of loss. Shukri’s experimentation with form prefigures the novel’s overarching drive towards the “[possibility] of encounters ... [as creating] the conditions for exchange” citing Daney (1994) (as cited in Bourriaud, 2009, p. 10). He makes use of intertextuality and multiple linguistic registers to weave together diverse imaginaries of dispossession and precariousness; Katinka’s assertion that “we are all arabs now” (p. 224), Rastogi (2011, p. 220) avers, echoes Christian I’s “solidarity” with the Jewish people during the Second World War and elsewhere the novel refers to Michael Ondaatje’s recapitulation of ethnic strife in Sri Lanka in *Anil’s Ghost*. However, in the end, the novel’s shiftiness forecloses a neat outcome and a full grasp of the definitive implications of Issa’s absence and the significance of his journey, marking the partiality of knowledge systems and the loss of control that engagement with alterity imposes.

13. The different trajectories of ethics of responsibility in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret*

Both *The Silent Minaret* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explore possible reconfigurations of Muslim identity away from ethno-religious boundedness, by charting ethical trajectories which may be dissociated from, supplement or exceed religious background. Changez has a life-changing moment in Valparaiso by recognizing himself as a “janissary”, a turncoat, beguiled by the “sublimity of destruction”, that his boss, Jim had painted as inexorable, when Juan Bautista, the book editor whose business he was about to dissolve, reminds him of the tradition he comes from a family of poets, of book lovers (p. 142), who privilege “mutual generosity over mathematical precision”.

Agency in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* comes through the recognition of the faces of the anonymous employees Changez barely noticed in Manila and New Jersey, as he becomes exposed to and involved in the vulnerability of others. However, the humanity of those left outside of the maps of global capitalism is revealed to him by substituting one epistemological frame, capitalism, for another, Third-world nationalism, as he contemplates that “he [had] always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; [its] constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East and now Afghanistan ... that finance was a primary means by which American empire exercised its power”... (p. 156). He chooses to frame his fleeting affiliations in a social and political idiom already known to a metropolitan readership, embedding self and other within the oft-rehearsed domain of anti-capitalist ideology. Changez’s Third-world sensibility which enables a writing back to America’s “special interests” is preferred over the promise of inter-racial immigrant solidarity alluded to in Changez’s spontaneous complicity with Wainwright whom he identifies as “a kindred spirit” (p. 40). In *The Silent Minaret*, Issa’s ethical commitment rests partly on entangling and defamiliarizing different traditions whose meaningfulness emerge through “contact with alterity” (Butler, 2012, p. 12) through a threefold movement which initiates from relationships forged over time and through struggle. The novel (i) remembers “the “fragile and uneven”, “hybrid dynamic, ... complex transcultural exchange and fusion ...” (p. 64) of the genealogy of Muslims in the Indian Ocean, (ii) revisits in creative ways the “cultural resources” of Islamic civilizations drawn from Muslim leaders and the Quran and (iii) disrupts the enclosures of community to develop an “ethics of dispersion” based on an interruption of the neat correspondences between origins and transcendence.

14. Unhinging the transcendence of faith

In *The Silent Minaret*, Muslim everyday sociality associated with the mosque interrupts the perpetual need for legitimation which is recurrent in “Muslim writing”, by zeroing onto the “inter-human relations which [it] ... prompts”, (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 52). Pucherova’s postulation that “South African identity” has been “[redefined through an identification with the foreign other ... (2009, p. 930), sheds light on the fact that it is Kagiso, the non-Muslim, who identifies the sounds and the sights of the mosque as a cherished feature of South African neighbourhoods in which he finds comfort when he is away from home; “[he] would throw open the windows in anticipation of azaan ... if he did not hear the faint call of the muezzins declaring God’s greatness to a starry city, he would know that the sun had sunk over the mountain behind into the ocean beyond: Allah-u-akbar, Allah-u-akbar...” (p. 129). Rather than inscribing the mosque as a claim to recognition, “an architecture of authority” (Abdullah, 2011, pp. 36–37), as it has been described in the US and in the cities of Europe (Göle, 2011), it is the social and political significance of the mosque in the anti-colonial history of South Africa, alluding to Sheik Yusuf’s transformative role in shaping the nation and to Muslim slaves’ subterranean practices of Islam, which is brought to the fore:

[it] is impossible to overstate the impact of [Sheik Yusuf’s] detention at the Cape would have on the culture and political ethos of the colony and that of the country into which it would eventually develop ... Slaves were brought in from Mozambique and Madagascar ... The majority were Muslims who, at the Cape, became known as the Cape Malay. Initially, their influence was minimal and their religious practices curtailed, but within just a few decades, their contribution, as ever, the most fleeting visit to modern-day Cape Town will reveal would be definitive. (p. 69)

The mosque is evoked through collective South African imaginary rather than in relation to solipsistic Muslim experiences, as Issa recalls that all religious groups alike became targets of concerted violence. The raid on St George’s Cathedral’ is evoked together with the assault on the university campus on “the first day of Ramadan” (p. 171), configuring oppression and resistance as shared experiences in apartheid South Africa. Kagiso assimilates the silence and closure of the Finsbury Park mosque to the isolation and subjugation of South African shanty towns “[it] is all boarded up, all the ground floor windows and the door covered up with corrugated iron. It strikes him that this is the only time that he has seen corrugated iron in London—the metal out of which nearly all South African shanties are

built ...” (p. 222). The text explores the ways in which “a familiar object” as part of a “familiar landscape” comes to be viewed as “ostentatious and disturbing to the eyes of a public” (Göle, 2011, p. 384) in the British context, referring to the criminalization of the mosque space in Finsbury Park and elsewhere in Lye. The “homing” of Islam, a minority religion, into South African history is juxtaposed to the existential threat that it seems to pose in England even while Frances, points to the slippage between Islam and Christianity, “And my favourite, the Issa Minaret, like his name, in Damascus, where the faithful expect the Messiah to appear on the Day of Judgement” (pp. 78–79). The decentring or dispersing of Islam remains one of the salient features of post-transition literature concerned with contemporary experiences of the Muslim minority in South Africa, according to Baderoon (2001, pp. 133–152), as demonstrated poignantly by Kagiso’s musings over the silent ballet of the devout inside the ghostly Finsbury Park. The poiesis of everyday Muslim sociality, “the quiet prayer hall full of unsaid supplications ... the silence after shoes have been kicked off, the last drip from a tap in the ablution fountain-plop-the hush that follows bending bodies and folding cloth when the straight line of worshippers have fallen to their knees, foreheads to the ground” (p. 196) collides with its derealization rendered in the terse vocabulary of the hostile war on terror narrative: “riot gear, metal battering. Ram, mosque—children, refuge, deportation” (pp. 87–88).

15. Muslim culture read through an “ethics of dispersion”

Issa’s thesis is a testimony to the “the intricate fabric of diversity, ... [and the] reality of global cross-pollination and intermingling” (pp. 66–67) which are the foundations of South Africa as of the Muslim communities shaped by the intersections of race connecting Asia, Africa, Europe and the Arabic Peninsula. Issa’s own atypical home made up of an Indian and an African mother as well as his African adopted brother, Kagiso, sets the scene for a transgression of social norms in contravention of essentialist understandings of identity. Frances is introduced to strange possibilities of encounter by Issa, impelling her to rethink religion in terms of hospitality, of openness to different traditions, as mapped out by the braiding of Muslim and Christian rituals in creative neologisms, “cathemosdraquel” (p. 15), “tasbeeh and a rosary- Troseberry ... she’d found herself saying the rosary with the tasbeeh” (p. 18). Secular texts and scriptural injunctions, the narrative also demonstrates, can bind believers and non-believers alike in a mutual obligation to resist oppression, prefiguring the possibility of new forms of relationality, as illustrated by the contemporary resonance of the following lines from the Quran, cited in the novel, “[and] why should ye not/Fight in the cause of God,/And of those who being weak,/Are ill-treated and oppressed?/Men and women and children,/Whose cry is ‘Our Lord!/Rescue us from this town,/Whose people are oppressors;/And raise us from Thee/One who will protect;/And raise for us from thee/One who will help!’ (*Qur’an S.iv., 75*)” (p. 104). In Issa’s absence, Kagiso recalls lines which were written in one of the books which had been smuggled to Issa⁸ and which, as elsewhere in the novel, include Muslim values into the larger story of insurgency against the South African racist regime⁹. Issa’s recapitulation in his thesis of the course of Sheikh Yusuf’s inspirational life is seamlessly integrated in the inter-textual montage which constitutes the ethical foundation of the novel. Issa’s thesis establishes that “the history of Islam in South Africa is synonymous with the struggle against oppression”. It celebrates a vision of Islam enlisted in a wider social and political project by recalling that

[three] centuries later, as South Africa was preparing for its first democratic election ... under the leadership of another insurgent septuagenarian, Muslims were also celebrating the tri-centenary of Islam in the country. The high point of the celebration was a mass encampment around Sheikh Yusuf’s tomb. It was a significant indication of how Sheikh Yusuf had been adopted as a symbol of Muslim presence in the country and Islamic resistance to colonialism and apartheid. (p. 71)¹⁰

The story of South Africa’s struggle against apartheid becomes the ground for Katinka to read the tragedy of the Palestinian dilemma in the light of other battles for human dignity, divested of its sectarian dimension. As a white Afrikaner, she is able to unburden herself to some extent of the shackles of her apartheid past, to make the reverse journey of traditional migrant displacement from London to Palestine. She is the character invested with a new inflection of the meaning of

home, rekindling humanity in a place where it has become the flimsiest, “amidst it all, after all the years of searching in unlikely places, there is the contentment of being at home, in the most unlikely place. Yes, Loved – and at home”. (p. 241). Katinka’s patient learning of Arabic charts her desire to tiptoe into Karim’s world while never losing sight of her “unknowingness”, inscribing “relationality” in excess of religious, ethnic, national and ideological bonds. Issa’s friends never cease, throughout, to grapple with his disappearance and attempt in vain to rekindle his presence through fragmented memories, leaving an aching sense of loss which pulsates through the larger narrative of unresolved grief which emanates from sections of *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* reports. The novel establishes “the limits of any self-understanding, ... [as the] condition for the subject ... [and] the predicament of the human community” (Butler, 2005, p. 83), as reflected in the meditative lines jotted in Issa’s copy of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, “I am a collection of blank spaces defined more by what I don’t know, than by what I do” (p. 99).

16. Conclusion

This paper has considered the ways in which writing from the Muslim diaspora in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Silent Minaret* interrogate the politics of regognizability which have defined Muslim subjects pre- and post-9/11. They recapitulate signs such as the hookah café, Scheherazade’s story-telling and multicultural otherness in order to point to the limits and strictures of “knowability” pre-9/11. Hamid unhinges the schemes of recognition of orientalism and multiculturalism by alluding to the delusional nature of his tale, while Issa’s invisibility makes him an elusive character. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is confined by the mode of writing-back recurrent in Muslim diasporic literature, which is dependent upon a binary framework and rests on the idea that recognition emanates ultimately from the American/antagonist/Western readers, even if this acknowledgement is inflicted upon them via the structure of the dramatic monologue. By rethinking the trajectory of the Muslim diaspora in terms of an ethics of dispersion, *The Silent Minaret*, reroutes the imagination of the politics of war on terror via the experiences of apartheid and anti-colonialism in South Africa, decentering both the exceptionalism of 9/11 and stretching the boundaries of Muslim diasporic narratives. Issa harnesses a dominant motif of South African social imaginary, disappearance, and builds upon a history of relationality across communities, in order to thwart the bio-political control established after 9/11. Hamid attempts to reorient dominant recognition patterns of Muslim lives by exhuming Third-World affiliations which resonate amicably with a Left-leaning readership. The dispersed structure of *The Silent Minaret* informs the possibilities of thinking alterity in more ex-centric forms of identification, migrating stories away from their religious, racial, national, temporal and geographical enclaves.

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Notes

1. Issa’s mother, Vasinthe welcomed Kagiso and his mother Ma Gloria, who are black, into her home while they were on the run from the police. They came to form a unique and transgressive family unit.
2. Frances is a catholic Irish old lady who lives in a flat below Issa’s. They come to develop an unusual friendship despite their age difference. Frances is introduced to the overlapping histories and beliefs of Islam and Christianity by the young South African.

3. Katinka is a young white Afrikaner woman who has left her home to run away from her father’s racism and violence. Issa is persuaded by Kagiso to pick her up as she is hitchhiking her way to Johannesburg. They become friends despite the initial tension and constitute a trio signifying a budding South African nation struggling with the ghosts of its past.

4. Vasinthe is a Professor in medical sciences. She brought Issa up together with Ma Gloria, after her Muslim husband, Mohsin, left her on the lurch. She was brought up as a Hindu.

5. Salahuddin refers to the revered Muslim ruler and warrior who successfully defended Jerusalem during the Crusades, whom Muslims, on the one hand celebrate as a sign of Muslim dominance over the Judeo-Christian world. On the other hand, Christians see in him a symbol of Muslim trespassing onto Christian holy land. Issa’s use of this iconic hero in Muslim lore functions as a provocation to his configuration as a potential invader.

6. Vasinthe affirms to Katinka that, “our family is of diverse faiths. Diversity is our normality. It’s what we take for granted. It’s what we nurtured. In fact, homogeneity has always been anathema for us” (p. 151).

7. Susan Sontag and Amiri Baraka were both subject to stinging criticism and shunned after publication of an article and a poem respectively challenging the mainstream reading of 9/11.

8. "Proceed with caution. This book can change lives. Don't condemn without reading, don't support without reading. Always read. It was that imperative that started the *iman*" (p. 60. Italics in original).
9. The historical 300-year old presence of Islam in South Africa has nurtured Muslim identity within "the realm of citizenship and in open dialogue with other members of the national community" (Vahed, 2007). In post-apartheid times, despite the more tenuous position of Muslim South Africans caught up in the throes of a new nation attempting to find its feet and of global anxiety about Islam, members of the community have participated in broad national debates and have continued forging coalitions with others, in a commitment to advancing an agenda for the "common good".
10. Frenkel (2011, p. 126) notes, however, that there is a degree of sanitization of the role of Muslim traders in slave economy in Shukri's alternative history of Islam in the Cape.

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