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Magical Realism(s), Islamic Traditions, and Combined and Uneven Development in Selected Contemporary Muslim Fictions Since the 1980s

by

[Hamidah Allogmany]

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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<u>Abstract</u>

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This thesis explores how contemporary Muslim novels shed light on the diverse experiences of Muslims within the modern world-system of capitalist modernity, while also asking how we can read Muslim literary productions without succumbing to Orientalist stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslims. Through a comparative close reading of six novels written since 1980 and set in six different countries, the thesis examines how contemporary Muslim writers make use of a popular genre (magical realism), and draw on Islamic traditions (especially Sufism), as well as local myths and forms, to engage with the pressures of modernity, as they are experienced in their own communities. This thesis extends the notion of a world literary system developed by scholars such as Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, and the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), in a manner that also rejects essentialist ideas of a fixed Muslim identity, as well as a singular literary form or mode. By comparing different Muslim magical realist texts, the thesis complicates the idea that the magical realism of Salman Rushdie, for example, is a normative model for other Muslim writers. While I broadly agree with critics that magical realism has become a global genre, I argue that a comparison of magical realisms from across the Muslim world can help us to think in more nuanced ways about the relationship between literature, religion, and modernity

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Hamidah Allogmany

Title of thesis: **Magical Realism(s), Islamic Traditions, and Combined and Uneven Development in Selected Contemporary Muslim Fictions Since the 1980s**

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: …………………………………………………………………………. Date: ………………………….

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Chapter 1   Introduction

This thesis explores how contemporary Muslim novels shed light on the diverse experiences of Muslims within the system of capitalist modernity across the globe; in doing so, it also asks how we can read Muslim literary productions without succumbing to Orientalist stereotypes regarding Islam and Muslims. More specifically, through a comparative close reading of six novels written since the 1980s and set in six different countries, I examine how contemporary Muslim writers draw on Islamic traditions (especially Sufism), local myths and forms at particular historical and political conjunctures across the modern Muslim world. Methodologically, the thesis will consider and build upon the notion of a world literary system developed by scholars such as Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, and The Warwick Research Collective (the WReC), in a manner that rejects the idea of an essentialist Muslim identity. Extending the WReC's discussions of peripheral realism as a constantly mutating mode, I suggest that the interplay between Islamic traditions and the so-called magical realism mode has created a dynamic literary sub-genre that I provisionally call Muslim magical realism(s).

Any attempts, I argue, to define the genre or the sub-genre(s)[1] according to one restrictive definition are doomed to fail; I have therefore, preferred to use Muslim magical realism(s) in the plural, partly to avoid such pitfalls, but also because Muslim magical realism(s) (in the plural) conveys the sense that, as a fluid sub-genre(s), Muslim magical realism(s) mean different things in different contexts.

Magical realism has been variously described by critics as a form, a genre, or a mode of writing. For the purpose of this study, Muslim magical realism(s) will be considered as a sub-genre(s). That is to say, magical realism as a mode of writing is not bound by rigid criteria and manifests in various ways in texts within the genre. The texts under discussion here are: Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1987: 2007 translation); Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (1987: 1989 translation); Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988); Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* (1990: 2006 translation); Raja Alem's *Fatma a novel of Arabia* (2002), and Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005).

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[1] Chris Baldick (2001) in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a genre as 'the French term for a type, species, or class of composition. A literary genre is a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common *CONVENTIONS as will prevent readers or audiences from mistaking it for another kind' (pp. 104–05); while a subgenre represents 'any category of literary works that forms a specific class within a larger *GENRE' (p. 247). See Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Scholars writing in the special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* (2012) on peripheral realisms and the WReC's challenge regarding an 'ideal-type' of realism and the assumed binaries between realism and modernism argue that this fails to take account of a world literary system. I will extend this argument in relation to the genre of magical realism by considering notions of a singular modernity and unevenness. Investigating the heterogeneity of this sub-genre(s) — which registers the unevenness of the periphery and the semi-periphery by taking into consideration the specificity of form — challenges not only some existing rigid scholarly positions regarding the mode of magical realism but also the essentialist notion of a homogeneous and univocal Muslim identity. Muslim identities coexist with the pressures of capitalist modernity; sometimes they do so in ways that complement the circulation and accumulation of capital (for example, Muslims can also be moneylenders) and sometimes in ways that might imagine alternatives to the singular logic of capitalist modernity (for example, the mobilisation of Sufi ideas as utopian resources in the novels discussed here). My comparative readings of Muslim magical realism(s) in these selected novels also draw on the work of the Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi to examine and make sense of the reframing of Sufism in contemporary Muslim writing. This is not to suggest that Ibn Arabi is the only Sufi thinker to inform and influence contemporary Muslim writers. Other Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj during the tenth-century and Hafez in the fourteenth-century have also been important for many of the writers considered in the thesis. However, I have chosen to draw on Ibn Arabi's work because his sustained reflections on religion have been widely translated and continue to circulate globally, alongside the literary texts discussed here, and in ways that help to foreground the place of religion in our understanding of combined and uneven development, as it is experienced and understood across the multiple spaces of the Muslim world.

As Sharae Deckard (2012) explains, the term '*peripheral* draws on a world-systems theory of literature, which understands peripherality as the expression of a structural relation in the capitalist world-system rather than as a term of aesthetic valuation'.[2] The fact that the

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[2] Sharae Deckard, 'Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73.3 (2012), 351–72 (footnote 2, p. 351). In a later work, Deckard (2013) also explains the term *periphery*: 'Casanova asserts that literary revolutions are produced on the peripheries in response to dependency and marginalization. As with Moretti, the term *periphery* is not intended as a value judgment, merely as a statement of a structural economic and political relation.' Thus, Deckard notes, '[f]ar from privileging the cultural production of economic cores as somehow more authentic, original, or aesthetically valuable, Casanova's formulation suggests that the production of the peripheries is more original in its formal innovations.' Furthermore, 'Casanova's formulation suggests […] that the relationship between core and periphery's cultural production should not be examined in terms of foreign debt, influence, or mono-directional movement of forms, but rather in terms of structural codetermination' (p. 93). See Sharae Deckard, '"De-Formed Narrators": Postcolonial Genre and Peripheral Modernity in Mabanckou and Pepetela', in *Locating Postcolonial Narrative Genres*, ed. by Walter Goebel and Saskia Schabio (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 92–107)

novels under consideration demonstrate both a multiplicity and broad structural similarities indicates how magical realism is not a fixed category that allows some novels to set the rules for others. While there are many shared elements, there is also a tangible multiplicity in the sense that magical realism is practised differently by individual authors.

Such diversity is manifest in Muslims fiction from around the globe. This formal differentiation also highlights a more fundamental multiplicity within particular Islamic contexts: Muslims are not the same everywhere, and their understanding of Islam is different in different places. Indeed, the complexities of modern Muslim writing are bound up with the multiplicity of being a Muslim in the modern world. So, in order to examine and compare Muslim fiction, the formulation of a critical framework that is sensitive to such plural identities and forms is crucial.

Ursula Kluwick (2011) notes that many magical realist critics emphasise the importance of both cultural and geographical contexts in magical realist texts, such as Brenda Cooper (1998) and Wendy B. Faris (2004), among others. However, magical realism is not a fixed *a priori* category that can be universally applied to all works of this kind. The work of these scholars is focused on magical realist texts from specific nations or regions, rather than the wider world-system within which this thesis situates Muslim magical realism(s). Scholars and critics within the field attempt to identify works according to the significance of these elements (cultural and geographical). Indeed, as Cooper asserts, in a book in which she examines magical realism in her analysis of West African magical realist writers, these works 'are moulded and constructed out of […] cultural and religious heritages'.[3] Many scholars take this into consideration and attempt to differentiate particular texts from others in this way. Kluwick, for example, attempts to distinguish the writing of Rushdie from those of Latin American magical realist authors, suggesting that 'Rushdie's magic realism' can be seen as a distinct form of the genre.[4] However, this exceptionalist claim for Rushdiean magical realism ignores how his writing has also become a paragon of the mode in Anglophone postcolonial studies. Rushdie is a mainstream author, who has received much critical attention, and whose work is seen as an exemplary form of postcolonial magical realism. Kluwick's argument is important in differentiating Rushdie's works from those produced in Latin America; however, instead of singling Rushdie's works out for comparison with Latin American writers, the thesis suggests that when Rushdie's

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[3] Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction, Seeing with a Third Eye* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 37.
[4] Ursula Kluwick, *Exploring Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 19.

work is compared with that of other Muslim authors, his magical realism seems less exceptional. The argument presented here is that contemporary Muslim writers engage with notions and thoughts stemming from Islamic religious beliefs presented by Sufi thinkers, which allows them to shed light on issues that are specific to their own Muslim communities. Such issues include the wave of capitalist modernisation identified in world literature theories.

Being a Muslim is not the same for all Muslims in all countries and at all times; for this reason, being a Muslim is best considered as an intersectional identity, which will be discussed further below. While it is true there are certain core religious beliefs associated with Islam, the mediation of these beliefs in different Muslim fictions registers different historical and cultural experiences from across the modern Islamic world. The reference to Sufism in contemporary Muslim writing is a case in point. As I go on to suggest, references to Sufi visions or mysticism are not simply aesthetic devices, but situated religious responses to the pressures of modernity, as they are experienced at different places and times across the world. Sufism is sometimes seen as a trend in modern Arabic literature. For instance, Ziad Elmarsafy claims that 'it constitutes a useful way of thinking about the present without losing touch with the past'.[5] Differently from Elmarsafy, my concern in this thesis is why Sufism seems to be present in the work of so many contemporary Muslim writers. Muslim magical realists, it is argued here, present ideas and notions that sound progressive and modern, and which are played out in a popular genre, but also engage with this branch of the Islamic tradition: this sub-genre(s), therefore, represents a complicated cross-over of cultures existing within capitalist modernity.

1.1   Muslim Magical Realism(s) and Capitalist Modernity

This thesis is partly informed by the world literary system framework: particularly Moretti's views on world literature, the work of the Warwick Research Collective regarding combined and uneven development, Fredric Jameson's (2002) ideas regarding the singularity of modernity and unevenness, and Harry Harootunian's (2000) ideas regarding capitalist modernity. This theoretical approach assists in demonstrating how magical realism fiction produced in different parts of the Muslim world conveys a sense of this unevenness, and thus such a framework helps us to understand what I call Muslim peripheral realisms. Here, I also wish to draw on the perspectives of the scholars

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[5] Ziad Elmarsafy, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 7.

mentioned above to suggest that the singular and uneven is found in Muslims fiction — elaborated below; in doing so, I aim to show how extant scholarship on Muslim literary production fails to capture the multiple dimensions of Muslim identities that are registered in these works.

In his influential article entitled 'Conjectures on World Literature' (2000) Moretti asserts that 'world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*'; he then proceeds to hypothesise that '[w]orld literature [is] one and unequal'.[6] Building on 'The Modern World-System' theory developed by the historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, Moretti applies the formulation of singular and unequal to literary forms and explains:

> I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal.[7]

Moretti's hypothesis offers the basis for an effective framework for this thesis. While Moretti speaks about world literature, I wish to add that this 'system' — which is described as 'simultaneously one, and unequal' — helps to capture the variety of Muslim experiences in the core, periphery, and semi-periphery of the modern world-system. Muslim magical realist(s) fiction and other Muslim writings are therefore 'inter-related literatures' within the modern world-system; furthermore, religion as an everyday lived experience is naturally more present in works that are written in modern Islamic republics than those produced in more secular nations, such as Britain (as in the case of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*).

The texts chosen for discussion here are set in different Muslim and non-Muslim countries, and are written by Muslim writers from a variety of Muslim backgrounds. Their writing shares common themes (for example, drawing on Sufism, making use of magical realist techniques); however, each text has its own specificity when responding to the forces of modernity, drawing on myths developed in particular cultural contexts, or responding to the environment in which it is set. For example, Alem's *Fatma* draws on the snake myth, which originates in the Arabian Peninsula, to narrate a story framed by patriarchal codes of

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[6] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54–68 (p. 55).
[7] Ibid., pp. 55–56.

behaviour and control to highlight the impact of petro-capitalist modernity on women's lives; while Parispur's *Touba* depicts archetypal figures from Sumerian mythology. Therefore, their writings are a combination of local forms, myths and culture combined with a specific Islamic flavour and presented via a popular international mode of writing.

In his book *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (1996), Moretti argues:

> *Faust* is not "German", just as *Ulysses* is not "Irish" or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "Colombian": they are all *world* texts, whose geographical frame of reference is no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity – a continent, or the world-system as a whole.[8]

Here, Moretti rejects situating these texts within the frame of the 'nation-state' and proposes a new global 'geography of literary forms'.[9] Refusing to situate such literary works in a national frame of reference is important, and this thesis suggests the need to move beyond this in discussions of questions regarding magical realism such as: is it found in this language or the other? Has this nationality produced a magical realist text? This is necessary in order to find a more systemic way (as suggested by Moretti and the WReC, for example) to more effectively analyse and comprehend the mode. Moretti reads García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) as 'the novel of uneven and combined development: the *marvellous reality*, indeed, in which a prophecy in Sanskrit coexists with photography, and South American phantasms with Italian mechanical pianolas';[10] furthermore, it is a 'story of accelerated modernization, and of combined development – where the compiler of heraldic manuals sits at the same table as the unscrupulous young politician'.[11] For Moretti, literature comes under one world literary system, which he adopts as a critical tool and that, similar to Wallerstein's 'The Modern World-System,' originates from economic history.[12] Moretti's identification of the co-existence of disparate elements in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the relationship between the 'foreign form' of magical realism and 'local materials'[13] is especially important when reading texts from across the arena of Muslim literary

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[8] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 50.

[9] Ibid., footnote 31, p. 50.

[10] Ibid., p. 243.

[11] Ibid., pp. 239–40.

[12] Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 55.

[13] Ibid., p. 60.

production. The co-existence Moretti speaks of is a central element of the analysis presented in this thesis. These relationships are also to be found in the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s). Thus, this thesis proposes that selected Muslim magical realism(s) are a form of literary production that shows the co-existence and combination of local traditions and culture, specific socio-political contexts, recognisable elements of the magical realism mode, and strands of Islamic thought.

Following Moretti, this thesis suggests that the emergence of the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s) can be understood in the terms of what Moretti calls 'a compromise'; that is to say, 'when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it's *always* as a compromise between foreign form and local materials'.[14] Moretti further explains:

> Let me now add a few words on that term 'compromise'— by which I mean something a little different from what Jameson had in mind in his introduction to Karatani. For him, the relationship is fundamentally a binary one: "the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction" and "the raw material of Japanese social experience": form and content, basically. For me, it's more of a triangle: foreign form, local material—*and local form*. Simplifying somewhat: foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*: and it's precisely in this third dimension that these novels seem to be most unstable.[15]

It is this 'triangle' of form and material where Muslim magical realist fictions manifest. Magical realism is, therefore, a foreign form and literary trend integrated with local Muslim characters and local narrative, creating such (a) sub-genre(s). Thus, in presenting Muslim magical realism(s) as a sub-genre(s), one must recognise that they emerge not only from the greater entity that is 'world literature' but also from the distinct form of 'Muslim writing' (a growing field of scholarly interest and, arguably, a recent and increasingly successful marketing label). These writers are part of the world literary system, but their literary productions also exist in a stratum of that world literature: literature stemming from different Muslim cultural, political and religious contexts found within the various nations and communities that make up the Islamic world.

Like Moretti, the comparative approach of the Warwick Research Collective's (2015) *Combined and Uneven Development* offers a useful way to examine Muslim fictions as it allows for a non-essentialist comparative approach to address Muslim literary

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[14] Ibid., p. 60.
[15] Ibid., pp. 64–65.

production: an approach structured around an awareness of the combined and uneven within capitalist modernity. Following Moretti, Jameson, and Harootunian, the WReC suggest their own definition of world literature: '*the literature of the world-system* – of the modern capitalist world-system, that is'.[16] They argue that Moretti's phrase '"one, and unequal" […] reactivate[s] the theory of combined and uneven development'.[17] For the WReC, Leon Trotsky's description of capitalism developing as an '"amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms"' is 'central – perhaps *the* central – arc or trajectory of modern(ist) production in literature'.[18] In 1986 Fredric Jameson noted the features of combined and uneven in magical realism, yet the WReC identify this as existing '(although not in quite the same ways) in other modern(ist) literary forms'.[19] On the one hand, they 'understand capitalism to be the substrate of world-literature (or, to borrow the phrase that Nicholas Brown uses […] "political horizon").' They also 'understand modernity to constitute world-literature's subject and form – modernity is both what world-literature indexes or is "about" and what gives world-literature its distinguishing formal characteristics'.[20] The WReC — in agreement with Fredric Jameson and Harry Harootunian — stress 'modernity's singularity and global simultaneity'.[21] Quoting Harootunian, the WReC maintain:

> If modernity is understood as the way in which capitalism is "lived" – *wherever* in the world-system it is lived – then "however a society develops", its modernity is coeval with other modernities [and] "is simply taking place at the same time as other modernities".[22]

This idea of the singularity of modernity and its unevenness allows for 'a single framework'.[23] Modernity, thus, is capitalist modernity. Coeval modernity, Harootunian (2000) elucidates, implies 'contemporaneity yet the possibility of difference'.[24] Harootunian

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[16] Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 8.

[17] Ibid., p. 10. The WReC trace the origin and the development of combined and uneven development theory. The theory 'devised to describe a situation in which capitalist forms and relations exist alongside "archaic forms of economic life" and pre-existing social and class relations' (p. 11).

[18] Ibid., p. 6.

[19] Ibid., p. 22. Jameson explains: 'first, that the kind of comparative work demanded by this concept of third-world literature involves comparison, not of the individual texts, which are formally and culturally very different from each other, but of the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses; and second, that such an approach suggests the possibility of a literary and cultural comparatism of a new type'. See Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88, footnote 5, p. 86.

[20] The WReC, p. 15.

[21] Ibid., p. 14.

[22] Ibid., pp. 14–15.

[23] Ibid., p. 19.

[24] Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. xvii.

provides examples of this in a discussion of different peripheral and semi-peripheral contexts:

> This sense of difference characterized the experience of modernity elsewhere — in China, with its semi-imperialist status, among late developers like Brazil, in colonized societies like India — and reflected the negotiation between the local and received cultural habits — the culture of reference — and the requirements of the new global processes of capitalist expansion.[25]

This negotiation between the local and the global, between 'cultural reference' and capitalism, is registered in Muslim magical realism(s). In the texts under discussion in this thesis, I adopt this perspective on modernity as a critical framework through which to read Muslim magical realism(s). I am interested in how Muslim magical realism(s) register the impact of capitalist modernity, which is expressed differently in different contexts, indeed, 'everywhere irreducibly specific'.[26] For the WReC, modernity is not 'a chronological nor a geographical' classification — in opposition to the postcolonialist assumption of modernity (for example, 'Eurocentric' or 'alternative modernities').[27] This is because, as Neil Lazarus (2012) explains, 'various recent attempts to pluralize the concept of modernity through the evocation of "alternative," "divergent," "competing," or "retroactive" modernity/modernities' stem 'from an initial assumption as to the "Western" provenance of modernity — rather than situating it in the context of *capitalism as a world system*'.[28] With this in mind, this thesis disregards these concepts of modernity; indeed, as Lazarus (and the WReC) assert, these are 'unnecessary and misguided'.[29] Following Harootunian (2000), this thesis considers how Muslim magical realism(s) use Sufism to register the transformation of Muslim societies and cultures by the global forces of capitalist modernity. Harootunian notes how 'the past, especially [the] precapitalist past, offered a storehouse of tropes for modernist rearticulation that could be deployed against the ruin of reification'.[30] The works of Muslim writers examined in this thesis seem to make use of precapitalist Islamic traditions (along with specific local histories) to negotiate the impact of capitalist modernity on their own

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[25] Ibid., p. xvii.

[26] Lazarus following Jameson. Neil Lazarus, 'Modernism and African Literature', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 228–45 (p. 233).

[27] The WReC, p.13. Harootunian criticises the concept of an 'alternative modernity.' For him, the concept 'is the unstated presumption of exceptionalism and uniqueness' and that 'the adjectival "alternative" implies not just difference but one that constitutes a better choice'. See Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, pp. xvi–xvii.

[28] Neil Lazarus, 'Modernism and African Literature', pp. 228–45 (p. 233).

[29] Ibid., p. 233.

[30] Harootunian, *Overcome*, p. xxi.

communities. Thus, '[t]he appeal to elements from a native tradition worked to privilege art and culture produced before and outside of capitalism to authorize its authenticity, superiority, and, ultimately, uniqueness.'[31] This coexistence of a precapitalist past and a modern capitalist present offers a space of negotiation and reconciliation, yet this is not a straightforward relationship. Indeed, it exists 'wherever the meeting between [the] modern and its other took place'; such combinations 'produced what Bloch has described as "nonsynchronisms," a kind of dissonance in the modes of being whereby people were found occupying spaces and temporalities marked by differing modes of production that coexisted uneasily with capitalism in the Now'.[32] This manner of approaching the Now as a manifestation of the coexistence of different modes, rather than paradoxical elements or 'being contingent and asystematic',[33] is a useful way to read the coexistence of the religious with the modern in Muslim magical realism(s). The following section positions Muslim magical realist works within the wider literary debate regarding translation and language to explain the criteria and rationale for the selection of texts for study in this thesis.

1.2   Positing Muslim Magical Realism(s): Translation and Language

The selection of texts to be analysed in this research project has been made using three criteria: the text is a contemporary magical realist novel, the author comes from a Muslim background, and each author originates from a different country to the others. These texts have been chosen from a long list of magical realist novels written by Muslim writers as the most relevant for addressing the themes, techniques and issues studied here. My approach in this thesis intersects with the systemic view of world literature and the necessity of translation. Whether reading a text in the original language has more merit than reading a translation is a question that is always raised whenever a comparative approach is taken in dealing with world literary texts. Since such an approach is taken in this thesis, this question needs to be addressed here. The fact that half of the chosen texts are written in English and the remainder are translated into English shows the presence of a significant appetite for works such as these in the global literary marketplace. This may explain why, as Faris (2004) noted, almost two decades ago 'contemporary magical realism has […] a growing international audience'.[34] However, the value of reading translations remains a debatable issue within world literature scholarship. Scholars like Emily Apter (2013) are concerned

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[31] Ibid., p. 218.
[32] Ibid., p. 216.
[33] The WReC, p. 12.
[34] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 33.

about 'power imbalance in cross-cultural and cross-lingual comparison.'[35] However, this approach has been rightly criticised by B. Venkat Mani (2017) for being 'too lodged in presentist concerns of globalization and the purported cultural homogeneity that comes with it'.[36] As this thesis encapsulates a range of Muslim writers from the Islamic world who write in different languages, translated texts have been used to facilitate in-depth reading and analysis. Thus, as Mani stresses, instead of arguing against translation there are more important questions regarding production and circulation that need to be tackled.

I am also mindful of Aamir R. Mufti's argument (2016) that the dominance of the English language in the literary arena is a problem and that '*a genealogy of world literature leads to Orientalism*'.[37] Yet, Mufti himself declares that '[i]t is of course hardly possible […] to literally "forget English" in our present conjuncture' and that he wishes to 'insist on the necessity and possibility of thinking past, around, and *about* it'.[38] I am more in agreement with Rebecca L. Walkowitz's argument in *Born Translated* (2015), wherein she sees the consideration of translation as necessary in approaching world literature and any attempt at literary comparisons. Walkowitz challenges 'foundational distinctions' and rejects the need to deploy labels such as 'author and translator, original and derivation, native and foreign,' while emphasising that 'born-translated' texts are able to reach a range of readers within the global marketplace.[39] Walkowitz's concept of 'born-translated' texts sees translation not as an 'afterthought' but rather 'as medium and origin' because '[t]ranslation is not secondary or incidental to these works. It is a condition of their production'.[40] Walkowitz's comments on the importance of English for born-translated novels is particularly important for this thesis (as stated above the texts under discussion here are either written in English or are translated into English). As Walkowitz states, 'English-language writing is […] an object of globalization; but it is also […] crucial to globalization's machinery'.[41] One element of this debate concerns who the intended readers of those texts are and how different reading publics might understand these texts. Walkowitz argues (following Pascale Casanova, 2013) that '[t]o write in English for global audiences […] is to write for a heterogeneous group of readers' consisting of 'those who are proficient in several languages, those who may be less-

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[35] Simona Bertacco, 'An Interview with Emily Apter', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 16.1 (2016), 9–27 (p. 10).
[36] B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 5.
[37] Aamir R. Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 19.
[38] Ibid., p. 19.
[39] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 31.
[40] Ibid., pp. 3–4.
[41] Ibid., p. 21.

than-proficient in English, and those who may be proficient in one version of English but not proficient in another'; therefore, 'readers […] are likely to have very different experiences'.[42] Thus, whether written in English or translated into English, the texts become available for global audiences.

While there are magical realist texts being produced in languages such as Arabic, Persian, Turkish and so on, which are not translated into English, the focus of this thesis is not to carry out a multilingual comparative reading; on the contrary, the purpose is to examine how Muslim literary fictions register the combined and uneven development of modernity in ways that complicate the idea of a homogenous and univocal Muslim identity that is sometimes framed and understood as an Orientalist object of knowledge. Indeed, as Walkowitz states — in agreement with Lawrence Venuti (2004) and David Damrosch (2009), among others, who see the value of reading in translation — that 'reading in translation introduces us to works beyond our own literary tradition and beyond the literary traditions of languages we can read fluently' and it 'can [also] lead us to learn the languages of works we've come to love, and […] create literary, cultural, and, sometimes, political solidarities that extend beyond the borders of fluency'.[43] This approach is broadly commensurate with work produced by the WReC (2015), wherein they reject the assumption that '"globalisation" is a tide lifting all boats – that the "world" of world-literature is a "level playing field", a more or less free space in which texts from around the globe can circulate, intersect and converse with one another',[44] and identify this tendency in literary studies as an 'idealist version of comparativism',[45] which they see as both 'idealist fantasy' and 'deeply misconceived'.[46] The WReC further explain how this idealist version of comparativism fails 'to say anything at all about the structure of the world-system'.[47] In a useful summary of WReC's approach, Matthew Eatough (2016) explains how

real economic and political inequalities […] make some languages and literatures more dominant than others. To say that Swahili, Urdu, Armenian, and other "minor" languages should be studied with the same rigor as English may sound like a progressive project, but one can only imagine that these languages are "equal" to

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[42] Ibid., pp. 20–21.
[43] Walkowitz, *Born Translated*, p. 172.
[44] The WReC, p. 22.
[45] Ibid., pp. 24–25.
[46] Ibid., pp. 22–23. The WReC point to the following examples: Jonathan Culler's (2006) 'Comparative Literature, at Last', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, and Emily Apter's (2006) *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*.
[47] Ibid., p. 25.

English if one completely ignores the fact that English has become the language of the marketplace for a good portion of the world's population.[48]

Indeed, Eatough notes that the WReC caution critics to guard against 'fetishizing "multilingualism ... (and hence the authority of professional experience)" over and against the power relations that are encoded in the ways that language is actually used in everyday life'.[49] However, as Eatough notes, the WReC also see how '[t]exts written in an "uneven" environment will retain echoes of their patchwork origins in their depictions of "discrepant encounters, alienation effects, surreal cross-linkages, unidentified freakish objects"'.[50] This mixing of forms and material is certainly found in the novels selected for study in this thesis. While it may be the case that all societies have 'a common reference provided by global capital',[51] it must be noted that societies in the Muslim world (and therefore texts and contexts presented by writers from a Muslim background) also share the common reference of the Islamic faith but in a variety of ways across the globe.

Differently from the WReC's approach to world literature, which reads texts beyond literary genres, this thesis will consider the texts via the lens of the world literary system yet with the magical realism genre as its focus.[52] Mariano Siskind (2012) notes that genre 'has been conspicuously absent from many of the debates on world literature of the last decade'.[53] Against this conspicuous absence, Siskind calls for

a new conception of genre as a contingently bound, heterogeneous discursive constellation that provides world literary readers with a ground for comparison, a structure which is not an inherited form (as the case of traditional genres), but one that has to be articulated and argued every time.[54]

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[48] Matthew Eatough, review of *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, by Warwick Research Collective, *Postcolonial Text*, 11.2 (2016), 1–3 (p. 1).

[49] Ibid., p. 1. Eatough quoting the WReC.

[50] Ibid., p. 2.

[51] Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 63.

[52] The WReC state that they 'prefer to speak then not of literary forms spreading or unfolding across empty time (and hence of literary history as being divided into sequential "periods" – classicism, realism, modernism, postmodernism, etc.), but of forms that are brought into being (and often into collision with other, pre-existing forms) through the long waves of the capitalisation of the world – not of *modernism* (or even *modernisms*) but of the *dialectics of core and periphery* that underpin all cultural production in the modern era' (pp. 50 –51).

[53] Mariano Siskind, 'The Genres of World Literature. The Case of Magical Realism', in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 345–55 (p. 345).

[54] Ibid., p. 354.

This 'bound' and 'heterogeneous discursive constellation' is one feature of what I define in this thesis as Muslim magical realism(s). This sub-genre(s) distinction also provides 'a ground for comparison' of texts in the world literary arena. So, instead of considering the world literary system without specific reference to genre as an analytical tool for comparison, this thesis opens a space to bring these elements together. This is not to say that genre refers to a predetermined system of formal literary classifications; rather it provides a flexible conceptual tool to trace the heterogeneity and dynamic mutations of the formal mode of magical realism. By approaching the topic in this way, I consider how the collisions of different religious and cultural belief systems within the emergent culture of capitalist modernity are mediated in either realist or irrealist codes of contemporary fiction.

The effect of this formal strategy may seem to resemble what is sometimes called magical realism. I argue that the term magical realism is best understood as a subversive set of literary codes that displace any idea of an ideal-type, *a priori* law, or normative model (such as that exemplified by Rushdie or Márquez). The following section will show how scholars of Islam (mostly anthropologists and sociologists) address Muslim identities in order to reject an essentialist idea of Muslim identity. This thesis will build upon and consider the effectiveness of such approaches to address and situate Muslim magical realism(s) within wider critical debates in world literature. As stated above, recognition of Muslim magical realism(s) in the plural will help in capturing the argument presented here.

1.3   Muslim Identities and Islam

There have been attempts by scholars of Islam to redefine, reframe and understand Islam without likening it to other religions such as Christianity in order to capture the full picture of it. Such an approach successfully articulates the variations within Islam and rejects the Orientalist notion that Islam is monolithic. This thesis also draws on Talal Asad's (1986) 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam'and Shahab Ahmed's (2016) *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* — both of which provide alternative ways in which to examine Muslim literary production. Taking into consideration the variety of Muslim societies and their understanding of Islam, this thesis argues that these variations also appear in the Muslim novels studied here. These Muslim writers offer another way of thinking about religious identity and religious practice. Asad's proposal of approaching Islam as 'a discursive tradition' has been followed by many scholars to highlight the diversity found within Islam to oppose essentialist and Orientalist ideas that view this religion as a

monolithic antithesis of the West (as found in the work of scholars, such as Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis, for example). Asad argues:

> If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin […] from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition.[55]

By arguing that Islam is a tradition, Asad warns us that what he means by tradition is not, as some scholars think, 'a fiction of the present' but rather 'consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history'.[56] Therefore, the 'Islamic discursive tradition' is a 'tradition of Muslim discourse,' which 'addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present'.[57] By stating that Islam is a historical tradition that has to be invented rather than a one-size-fits-all belief, Asad offers a more productive and non-essentialist way of addressing Islam and Muslims identities. Similarly, Shahab Ahmed (2016) considers how

> instances of Muslims making meaning for themselves in terms of Islam in all variety of circumstances and in what are, for us, not the usual places […] show[s] that so socially, discursively and praxially heterogeneous, flexible, and diffuse/dispersive is Islam, that Islam becomes *idiom* — that is to say, *Islam is a shared language by and in which people express themselves so as to communicate meaningfully* in all their variety. And, by fact of being *idiom* — that is, by fact of being *a means by and language in which people give meaning to experience in the self, and communicate that meaning to each other* — Islam stakes an experiential claim to being *more than idiom*: it becomes, 'in a sense,' *the reality of the experience itself*.[58]

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[55] Talal Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam', *Occasional Papers Series*, Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University (1986), 1–22 (p. 14).

[56] Ibid., pp. 14–15.

[57] Ibid., p. 14. Asad explains that '[t]hese discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions)'(p. 14).

[58] Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 323.

This idea of shared experience, while taking into account different ways of understanding and expressing lived experiences in a variety of Muslim contexts, which both of these scholars agree on, is taken into consideration in this thesis when analysing different Muslim identities in different places. Yet, Ahmed sees Asad's conceptualisation of Islam as a 'discursive tradition' as problematic because it 'locat[es] the definitive quality of the discursive tradition in the dynamic of authoritative prescription of the correct: that is, in *orthodoxy*', as 'any truth-claim' leading to 'the *prescription and restriction* of truth'.[59] He suggests another type of authority that goes hand-in-hand with 'prescriptive authority' — what he calls 'explorative authority' which means 'the *authority to explore*'.[60] Ahmed goes further to differentiate between these two approaches:

> Whereas the proponent of prescriptive authority views his authority as a license to prescribe to another, the bearer of explorative authority views his authority as a license to *explore* (by) himself. Exploration is […] the business of setting out into the unknown, the uncertain, the unexperienced, the unsettled, the new — it is something that not everyone feels able to do.[61]

Therefore, Ahmed indicates that the latter kind of authority can be found in Sufism where the goal is a '*freeing* […] from the bonds of prescriptive authority/orthodoxy'.[62] Ahmed further notes that for many, drinking wine is not Islamic and that there is a tendency to conceptualise Islam in terms of 'discourses of prescription rather than as discourses of exploration'.[63] A gold coin depicting Jahangir, the Muslim Mughal Emperor, in 1611 holding a wine cup in one hand and a book in the other, Ahmed argues, is a physical manifestation of how Muslims make meaning of Islam, in that this Muslim emperor's wine cup 'cohered with his conceptualization of what is Islam'.[64] While scholarship on Islam, as discussed above, presents different approaches regarding how to conceptualise Muslim identities, most commentators agree that there is no single Muslim identity. In Anglophone postcolonial studies of Muslim writing, the critique of monolithic conceptions of Muslim identity is already well established by critics such as Rehana Ahmed (2015), Claire Chambers (2011), Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin (2011), and Geoffrey Nash (2012). Morey

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[59] Ibid., pp. 272–73.
[60] Ibid., p. 282.
[61] Ibid., p. 282.
[62] Ibid., p. 283.
[63] Ibid., p. 341.
[64] Ibid., p. 71.

and Yaqin, for example, note that: '[w]hat we see [in the Western media today] is the distortion of particular features of Muslim life and custom, reducing the diversity of Muslims and their existence as individuals to a fixed object—a caricature in fact'.[65] My thesis builds on this work by examining how Muslim magical realisms, from a range of different cultural and political contexts, draw on the resources of Sufi thinking to challenge the hegemony of western imperialism and its neo-Orientalist systems of thought, and to reimagine the future of the world in the aftermath of capitalist modernity. With this in mind, this thesis traces the multiplicity of Muslim characters, forms, and socio-political contexts in a selection of recent Muslim fictions.

There is no broad agreement regarding both the meaning of Sufism, nor its legitimacy as a form of Islamic practice (another example of the diversity of Muslim meaning-making referred to by Ahmed). This will be discussed further when analysing the Muslim novels under consideration here. Islam is not, Ahmed adds, '"whatever Muslims say or do […]"' but rather should be considered to be '*whatever* Muslims say or do as a potential site or locus for the expression and articulation of *being Muslim*/Islam'.[66] This is especially important for understanding the labelling of the novels in this thesis as examples of Muslim magical realism(s), particularly as this thesis does not aim to define what a Muslim novel is but rather how these texts present the lived realities of Muslims in different contexts. Some scholars of Islam who have investigated the words 'orthodoxy' and 'Sufism' argue that these terms are not to be found in the Islamic tradition or that they are misrepresented. In order to consider this further, it is important to understand what orthodoxy and Sufism mean in the Islamic context.

1.3.1   'Orthodoxy'

The nature, or even existence of 'orthodoxy'[67] within Islam is a topic that has caused controversy, having been rejected by some scholars as an element of the Islamic experience, while seen to be an overt feature of Islamic life by others. Robert Langer and Udo Simon (2008) note that the word orthodoxy has 'no equivalent' in Arabic and it is 'a loanword' linked to a Christian framework and is therefore 'out of place' in the Muslim context.[68] Yet

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[65] Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 3.
[66] Ibid., p. 304.
[67] Here, I am following Langer and Simon (2008) who note that to show the word orthodoxy's 'somewhat questionable status in an Islamic context it is a common practice to put it in quotation marks' (p. 274).
[68] Robert Langer and Udo Simon, 'The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. Dealing with Divergence in Muslim Discourses and Islamic Studies', *Die Welt des Islams*, 48.3–4 (2008), 273–88 (p. 273). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27798270> [accessed 20 October 2018].

they argue that 'it is not impossible to adopt it'.[69] Alexander Knysh (1993) is another scholar who rejects the term orthodoxy in an Islamic context, but recognises that the 'religious "textualists" and literal-minded "*ulamā*"' deployed the idea of *bi-lā kayf* ('"without asking "how?"''), wherein they insisted that '[f]rom the viewpoint of "zero orthodoxy" […] any pondering on the data of the Revelation, any deviation from its narrow pragmatic and literal interpretation, from the established religious practice, were to be rejected as deplorable "innovations"'.[70] Knysh argues that the classification of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' collapses the pluralism and complexity of Muslim life and that the Islamic tradition should be allowed to 'speak on its own terms'.[71] Thus, the word 'orthodoxy' can be seen as extremely problematic, if not entirely alien to, the Islamic context. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the word 'orthodoxy' to differentiate between mainstream Islam and Sufism. The next question is, then: what is Sufism and how is it linked to Islam? The following section will consider the ways in which Sufism is understood.

1.3.2   Sufism (*Taswwuf*)

Sufism is an English word — 'a traditional label'[72] — for *taswwuf*. This Arabic equivalent of *Sufi* literally means '"woollen"' and '"wearer of wool"' but its root '*ṣād – fā' wāw* – 'has the basic meaning of "purity"'.[73] Nevertheless, wearing wool was not a typical practice of Sufis. It is likely that the name emerged when 'it was first aptly applied to a small group who did wear wool and that it was then indiscriminately extended to all the mystics of the community'.[74] Sufis see themselves as *al-fuqarā* 'the poor' — in English: 'dervish[es]'. This self-identification emerges from the belief presented in a verse in the Quran in which we find the statement '*God is the Rich and ye are the poor*'.[75] There is always controversy regarding what Sufism is. Indeed, many scholars argue that Sufism is 'far too vast' to define in one statement.[76] Scholars of Islam — such as Timothy Winter, William Chittick, and Joseph E. B. Lumbard, among others, have denied the efficacy of an essentialist view on Sufism. For example, Lumbard (2009) notes, that in the same way

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[69] Ibid., p. 280.
[70] Alexander Knysh, '"Orthodoxy" and "Heresy" in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment', *The Muslim World*, 83.1 (1993), 48–67 (pp. 63–64).
[71] Ibid., p. 62.
[72] T. J. Winter, 'The Poverty of Fanaticism', in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*, ed. by Joseph E. B. Lumbard (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), pp. 301–13 (p. 306).
[73] Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 45–46.
[74] Ibid., p. 46.
[75] Ibid., p. 47.
[76] William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), p. viii.

essentialist ideas regarding Islam have caused problems regarding perceptions of this religion; this kind of approach has also confused views on Sufism for the same reasons.[77] Islam, for those holding an essentialist view, is 'a rigid' religion, while 'Sufism is seen as a free, even supra-Islamic, expression of individual spirituality'.[78] Winter (2015) — in a lecture delivered at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam — notes that 'when we speak of Orthodox Islam, we're certainly not using the word in the conventional Western sense, which refers to a median or an authoritative teaching […] that can discuss and rule on questions of religious moment'.[79] Winter explains that this is because 'Islam is not hierarchical in that sense. There's no Muslim Vatican. There is no institution that lays down in some sense, direct infallibly or implicitly infallibly correct doctrine'.[80] Winter also argues that even the word Sufism is problematic. As he puts it, 'Muslims use the word Sufism as though it's an indigenous category, but it isn't quite' because 'just as orthodox Islam, it's not quite an indigenous category and putting them together in this problematic polemical question creates a tension that isn't necessarily there if we look at things from a pre-modern completely authentic indigenous Sunni perspective'.[81] Thus, the term Su*fism*, Winter notes, was coined by Orientalist thinkers.[82]

Yet the word *Sufi* has been used both in negative and positive ways and has been understood from a variety of standpoints. To negate essentialist views on Sufism, Lumbard (2009) — reviewing the biographies of early Sufis — shows how the Quran and the *sunna* for the Sufis were regarded 'as the instruments by which to measure the validity of their insights and inspirations, the validity of what is seen "through the light of God."'[83] What differentiates Sufi teachings from other interpretations of Islam is the 'approach to Islamic faith' with a focus on '*ma'rifa* – the direct knowledge of self and God that flows freely in the purified heart' and 'imaginal perception rather than rational investigation'.[84] Through various meditations, Sufis try to purify the soul in an effort to find unity with God. They place more emphasis on the inward life than the outer. Sufism 'can perhaps better be called

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[77] Joseph E. B. Lumbard, 'The Decline of Knowledge and the Rise of Ideology in the Modern Islamic World', in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*, ed. by Joseph E. B. Lumbard (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), pp. 39–77 (pp. 48–49).
[78] Ibid., p. 49.
[79] Timothy Winter (Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad), *Is Orthodox Islam Possible Without Sufism?*, online video recording, YouTube, 27 December 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQWNeGyRu0k> [accessed 22 April 2018].
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid. Regarding the term Sufism, Winter (2015) notes that 'Orientalists give us this term' and that it is also important to recall that the word is 'only about 200 years old'. Rather than being a noun, Winter argues that Sufism is 'more like a verb […] something that you do, not something that you join or can point to'.
[83] Lumbard, 'The Decline of Knowledge', pp. 39–77 (p. 51).
[84] Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide*, p. 40.

Islamic "spirituality", that is, a concern with the inner life of the soul'; therefore, Sufism 'is likely to be found in any Muslim, whether or not he or she has links with any institutional form associated with the name'.[85] With this in mind, this thesis considers Sufism as a religious reference and element of Islamic spirituality (despite the controversy surrounding the term) and thus is part of the Islamic tradition, an element of religiosity based on both the Quran and the Hadith, rather than a form of writing. In doing so, I hope to show how a combination of the religious and the modern is registered in Muslim magical realist texts, as well as how Muslim writers deploy this precapitalist religious tradition in modern settings. Having discussed the complexity of this issue within Islam and, therefore, the existence of multiple Muslim identities, the following section will draw on attempts by some scholars to situate Islam within world-systems analysis and consider how this might help us to better frame different Muslim identities.

1.4   Situating Islam and Muslims in World-Systems Analysis

World-systems analysis aims to challenge the essentialised theory advanced by Orientalists wherein, as Samman and Al-Zo'by puts it, 'each nation, religion, or civilization appears to have its own ethos that is stable within its spatial boundaries and temporal origins'.[86] The emphasis here is on the importance of differences and unity, singularity and unevenness within Muslim contexts. John Obert Voll (1994, 2010) draws on the 'capitalist world-system' outlined by Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi and André Gunder Frank to formulate the notion of an 'Islamic world-system'.[87] Voll considers Islam in its historical context and argues that the 'Islamic entity was a vast network of interacting peoples and groups, with considerable diversity and yet some sufficiently common elements so that it is possible to speak of these diverse communities as being part of "the Islamic world"'.[88] It is inaccurate to consider Islam as 'a historic civilization,' Voll argues, developing the idea of — building upon Wallerstein's formulation — 'a concept of the global Muslim community as a multi-civilizational and cosmopolitan community of discourse'.[89] This interaction and communication within the Islamic world, Voll adds, is not centred on

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[85] William C. Chittick, 'Worship', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 218–36 (p. 219).

[86] Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by, 'Islam, Orientalism, and the Modern World-System', in *Islam and the Orientalist World-System*, ed. by Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), pp. 3–22 (p. 7).

[87] John Obert Voll, 'Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System', in *The SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, ed. by Akbar S. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), pp. 3–16 (p. 9).

[88] John Obert Voll, 'Islam as a Special World-System', *Journal of World History*, 5.2 (1994), 213–26 (p. 217).

[89] Voll, 'Islam as a Community', pp. 3–16 (p. 4).

the 'exchange of goods' or a 'network of economic activities' but is rather 'built on the shared sources of the Islamic experience, which provide the basis for mutually intelligible discourse among all who identify themselves as Muslims within the Dār al-Islām.'[90] Thus, Voll shows how '[t]he Muslim world contains many different and distinctive regions and peoples. However, they are tied together by a cosmopolitanism that is rooted in the shared message of the Islamic revelation.'[91] This feature of Muslim identities being both distinct while also bound together is also something that is explored in Muslim magical realist texts in order to shed light on the varied experiences of Muslim societies impacted by capitalist modernity across the globe.

The authors of *Islam and the Orientalist World-System* (2008) use world-systems theory as a basis for their critique of Orientalist criticism and apply it in an Islamic context to reject an essentialist and conventional notion of Islam in general.[92] Boris Stremlin (2008) engages with world-systems analysis and Islam — one of the contributors to the book *Islam and the Orientalist World-System* — in which he criticises the denial of Islam as part of the world-system[93] and praises the work of scholars of Islam[94] (including Voll) who operate '[o]utside the world-systems mainstream' analytical framework by providing a more constructive 'engage[ment of] civilizationism without succumbing to essentialism'.[95] He further explains that '[t]he world-systemic denial of the reality of Islam stems from a justified dislike of airy abstractions and monolithic constructions on the basis of "religion"'.[96] Stremlin offers a more comprehensive reading of 'the reality of Islam':

But however much we might insist, in the words of scholar of Islam Willem Bijlefeld, that the invocation of Islam 'does not mean that the complex reality of individual lives, national situations, and international relations anywhere in the Muslim world can be

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[90] Ibid., p. 8.
[91] Ibid., p. 14.
[92] *Islam and the Orientalist World-System,* ed. by Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).
[93] Among those world-systemists Stremlin criticises is Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Stremlin states that Wallerstein's approach 'contains one fundamental contradiction,' and that the paradox in Wallerstein's work is that 'he has argued that world-systems analysis was specifically constructed for the study of modernity [and at the same time] laid out a rudimentary framework for the study of premodern world-systems'(p. 80). Furthermore, Stremlin asserts that while André Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (1993) rightly critique Wallerstein's model of being 'Eurocentric', their model has 'less room for Islam' and '[t]he appearance of Islam marked no watershed in the history of their world-system'(pp. 81– 82).
[94] For example, Marshall Hodgson, John Obert Voll, Richard Eaton, Ross Dunn, Garth Fowden and K.N. Chaudhuri. See Stremlin 'Does Islam Exist? The Islamic *Longue Durée* and World-Systems Analysis', pp. 79–92 (p. 80).
[95] Boris Stremlin, 'Does Islam Exist? The Islamic *Longue Durée* and World-Systems Analysis', in *Islam and the Orientalist World-System*, ed. by Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), pp. 79–92 (pp. 79–80).
[96] Ibid., p. 83.

interpreted solely by a reference to Islam, solely 'Islamically,' and however much we recognize that "being Muslim" implies much more than acceptance of a particular set of beliefs. [97]

This thesis builds on this idea of what it means to be a Muslim, rather than seeing being Muslim as merely having 'a reference to Islam' when analysing Muslim magical realism(s). However, as Stremlin insists, '[t]he denial of Islam as a monolith, or as an antithesis of the West, does not mean that it […] cannot be characterized in terms of a governing reproductive logic.'[98] In light of this, it is important to ask questions such as has the role of the religion of Islam been considered regarding the existence of a literary world-system? Is there a systematic way to view Islam in the literary world-system while avoiding the risk of 'succumbing to essentialism'?[99]

However, while Stremlin focuses on the period before and after the collapse of the caliphate in the Muslim world, this thesis focuses on Muslim literary production since the 1980s, wherein the culture of capitalism is understood as a world-system that includes much of the Islamic world. Like Stremlin, Ovamir Anjum (2008) criticises the world-systems analysis approach, arguing that 'Voll's suggestion cannot stand, conceptually, without Asad's reformulation'.[100] Thus, Anjum's reading brings together both Voll's concept of an 'Islamic system' and Asad's 'discursive tradition' within a framework for understanding Islam and, therefore, the variety of Muslim identities within it. Building on these two notions (as articulated by Anjum), this thesis considers the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s) as speaking to 'the world-system metaphor' which, as Anjum notes, is able to embrace all varieties of experience.[101] This way of looking at how literary fiction mediates the way in which Muslim identity is unevenly affected by the forces of global modernity in different places across the Muslim world is one element that this thesis explores.

In agreement with those scholars who demonstrate the simultaneous diversity and coherence of Islam, this thesis expands this formulation to demonstrate how Muslim literary production is situated independently of, while interacting with, core literary production and offers a space to examine and portray the complexities of modern Muslim identities as presented in the texts under discussion. Like capitalism, Islam is 'a global phenomenon',[102]

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[97] Ibid., pp. 83–84.
[98] Ibid., p. 84.
[99] Ibid., p. 80.
[100] Ovamir Anjum, 'Putting Islam Back into the Equation: Islam as a Discursive World-System', in *Islam and the Orientalist World-System*, ed. by Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), pp. 93–105 (p. 101).
[101] Ibid., p. 101.
[102] Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, p. 144.

but it has been exported in uneven and non-synchronic ways in different places. Thus, Islam integrated with the existing social and cultural components of each society, forming various understandings. Via a comparison of a range of Muslim magical realist texts, this thesis therefore complicates ideas of an essentialising Muslim identity that ignores local context. The following sections will consider how Muslim identities have been discussed in terms of literary discourse, the genre of magical realism, and how Sufi religious elements have been explored in relation to magical realist forms and techniques.

1.5 Muslim Writings and the Controversies Surrounding such Labelling

Having considered Muslim writing within the literary world-system above, this section will deal with other issues surrounding market labelling of Muslim works. While the current critical debate on such labelling has drawn attention to aspects of Orientalism and Islamophobia, it has not included the relationship with the world literary system and how Muslim fiction fits within this. As shown above, the WReC's views on the combined unevenness of the world literary system can provide an analytic framework when considering Muslim fiction, as well as the work of scholars of Islam mentioned above. If this is the case in world literary fiction (as a system), the description of this system can be clearly seen in Muslim writing but in a more sophisticated way and at different levels: modernity (as a force being experienced differently in different contexts), Islamic traditions (how being Muslim is experienced differently and means different things for each Muslim), and local traditions (myths, politics, culture, history, language etc.). As a result of this awareness, this thesis develops an argument regarding Muslim fiction on a broader level — in relation to the world literary system — to further understand the relation between these texts and the sub-genre(s) they represent.

My use of the religious term Muslim to categorise a corpus of literary fiction requires further explanation, especially when literary fiction is itself conventionally associated with the liberal ideology of secularism. To address this question, it is helpful to consider the distinction between *Islamic* and *Muslim.* As Amin Malak (2005) puts it '*Muslim* is derived from the Arabic word that denotes the *person* who espouses the religion of Islam or is shaped by its cultural impact, irrespective of being secular, agnostic, or [a] practicing believer'; on the other hand, '[t]he term *Islamic* emphasizes the *faith* of Islam. It denotes thoughts, rituals, activities, and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam or directly

associated with its theological traditions.'[103] Indeed, the two terms are not interchangeable within the discourse of Muslim literary production. The labelling of the writers I am studying as 'Muslim' is inspired by Malak (2005) who has identified a group of writers as 'Muslim writers.' Malak states that:

[such an author is one] who believes firmly in the faith of Islam; and/or, via an inclusivist extension, by the person who voluntarily and knowingly refers to herself, for whatever motives, as a "Muslim" when given a selection of identitarian choices; and/or, by yet another generous extension, by the *person* who is rooted formatively and emotionally in the culture and civilization of Islam.[104]

Following Malak, Claire Chambers (2011) and Madeline Clements (2016), among others, also adopt this label; Chambers focuses on 'British Muslim writers' and Clements on 'South Asian Muslim Writers.' This thesis, however, takes the designation even further to identify a group of writers as 'Muslim magical realist(s)' wherein both the genre of magical realism and Muslim heritage are embodied.

The term 'Muslim fiction' has also been gaining scholarly interest in the field of humanities in recent years to identify literary works that formulate a genre populated by writers from Muslim backgrounds. Andrea Kempf, in her article entitled 'The Rich World of Islam: Muslim Fiction' (2001), presents a list of recommended Muslim fictional works and argues that 'it is now more important than ever to understand the world of Islam'.[105] Kempf was clearly addressing Western readers in this encouragement to read Muslim fiction to gain greater cultural understanding; however, such a categorisation of fictional works also pointed literary scholars in the direction of further research into this genre. Indeed, as Karine Ancellin (2009) notes, Kempf 'delineated an innovative area of writing.'[106]

Literary critics such as Amin Malak (2005), Chambers (2011), Rehana Ahmed et al. (2012), and Nash (2012), among others, have contributed to a better critical understanding of so-called 'Muslim writing' by attempting to define what constitutes such a category, as well as suggesting which writers belong to this category. These scholars are interested in the connection between Muslim writing and Islamophobia or Muslim writing and Orientalism.

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[103] Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 5–6.
[104] Ibid., p. 7.
[105] Andrea Kempf, 'The Rich World of Islam: Muslim Fiction', *The Library Journal* 126.19 (2001), 128 (p. 128).
[106] Karine Ancellin, 'Hybrid Identities of Characters in Muslim Women Fiction Post 9-11', *TRANS-. Revue de littérature générale et comparée*, 8 (2009), 1–17 (p. 1).

Nash (2012), for example, defines this mode of writing that 'takes Islam or Islamic religious belief and culture(s) as its focus' and states that it 'might be said to constitute a domain outside the established nostrums of postcolonial theory.'[107] Nash's is a particularly fitting definition that can be applied to what I define as Muslim magical realism(s). The second part of Nash's definition is especially important as this thesis reads the novels under discussion beyond the framework of postcolonial discourse; however, in addition, my work demonstrates that the world literary system framework is an effective way in which to examine Muslim writing; for example, in Chapter 4, below, where such a reading of a novel from the Caribbean is presented, which would commonly be read within the frameworks of diasporic or postcolonial discourses.

In *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing,* Ahmed et al. (2012) state that the title 'is partly a necessary staking out of marker posts, an establishment of parameters within which a meaningful unity can be imposed on the works of writers from a host of backgrounds and with a diversity of political and religious perspectives' rather than accepting the existence of '*a* singular Muslim culture'.[108] As mentioned briefly above, scholars raise questions about whether Muslim writing must be written by practising Muslims, by any author who originated from a Muslim background or converts to the faith. Ahmed et al. (2012) provide examples of members of these groups: Aboulela on the one hand and Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi on the other. Between these two groups 'lie a range of positions combining faith and doubt, materialism and spirituality, individualism and community, in ways that undermine the distinct binaries into which those terms usually resolve themselves.'[109] They justify their including 'writing *about* Muslims from an external perspective' due to 'this sense that Muslim and non-Muslim texts are mutually shaping and cannot be sealed off from one another'.[110] I am in agreement with the authors of this collection in that to read Muslim writing as '*a* singular Muslim culture' is misleading. However, their arguments lack any consideration of these texts with regard to literary world theory which, this thesis argues, provides a more useful framework to analyse Muslim fiction while also not accepting the singularity of Muslim identity. It may be argued that this is a leap from the singularity of world capitalism in the work of Jameson and the WReC to identity; however, this does seem the most effective way in which to approach presenting a new theoretical framework.

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[107] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 5.
[108] Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin, 'Introduction', in *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*, ed. by Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–17 (p. 2).
[109] Ibid., p. 4.
[110] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

1.6   A Brief History of the Term 'magical realism'

This section will show how considering magical realism as part of the world literary system can assist with reading Muslim fictions identified as magical realism. This thesis tests the interplay between Islamic elements in Muslim magical realism(s); therefore, in order to present this argument, an overview of the origin and development of the genre will be presented, alongside an examination of existing literary criticism on magical realism and the lack of current engagement regarding the use of religious beliefs deployed in this mode of writing by Muslim authors. Then, I will show how this thesis sits within the debate regarding the postcolonial and international aspects of the mode to show the limitations of current approaches to discussing Muslim fiction from across the globe.

Magical realism — studied through the various lenses of Feminism, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and recently what is so-called Sufi literature — has been described as one of the most controversial terms in literary studies. Debate has also involved not only who coined the name of the genre but also what the term constitutes. Following this overview of magical realism's history, a section entitled 'Multiple Kinds of Magic', below, will show the extent to which the term is problematic.

The term magic realism is commonly credited to the German art critic and historian Franz Roh[111] who, in 1925, designated an emerging painting style which 'return[s] to Realism after Expressionism's more abstract style'.[112] The concept emerged in other places, appearing in works by Johan Daisne and Hubert Lampo in the Netherlands, Ernst Jünger in Germany and authors and art critics in Italy.[113] It was in 1927 when the term 'magic realism'

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[111] However, critics such as Irene Guenther (1995) and Christopher Warnes (2009) assert that is not Roh who first used the term but the German Romantic poet Novalis (a pen name) in 1798. Guenther further notes that the concept '*magischer Idealismus*' (magical idealism) already existed in German philosophy and Novalis wrote about it at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet, for Guenther, Roh introduced the term Magic Realism 'in an artistic context' by the publication of his book (1925) entitled '*Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (Post-Expressionism, Magic Realism: Problems of the Newest European Painting)' (p. 34). See Irene Guenther, 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 33–73. Warnes, in speaking of how Novalis coined the term, states that Novalis in his notebooks tried to visualize 'two kinds of prophet who might live outside the boundaries of enlightened discourse without losing touch with the real' and Novalis added that these prophets should be called 'a magical idealist and a magical realist'(p. 20). Yet Novalis 'never developed' the term 'magical realism' preferring the other term magical idealism (p. 20). See Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[112] Franz Roh, 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 15–31 (p. 15).

[113] Irene Guenther, 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 33–73 (p. 55).

was introduced in Latin America through the translation of Roh's work into Spanish — which appears as *Realismo mágico. Post expresionismo: Problemas de la pintura europea mas reciente* translated by Fernando Vela.[114] Then the term spread among Latin American writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Miguel Angel Asturias.[115] A Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar-Pietri and a Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, having been educated in Europe, were familiar with European Surrealism and Post-expressionism and it is believed that Carpentier was 'the originator of Latin American' magical realism.[116] Critics such as Guenther (1995) argue that the term then fell out of fashion, as a specifically 'pictorial term', until its reappearance in the 1960s, mainly due to 'the fact that Magic Realism had "occasionally compromised itself…with Nazi Neo-Classicism."'[117] However, in the literary field, Carpentier referred to a form labelled *lo real maravilloso americano* in 1949. In Carpentier's opinion this was exclusively Latin American magical realism.[118]

The term 'magical realism' appeared in Angel Flores' (1955) article 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction'.[119] While magical realism has its origins in philosophy and painting, it transferred to literature and 'blossomed' through the writing of Latin American authors and what is referred to as the 'Latin American boom'.[120] During this period (1950s -1970s), writers such as Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez — a Noble prize winner (1982) for his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) — assisted in making magical realism a global genre. The majority of extant scholarly literature on this topic emphasises either the geographical location of the author (for example, being situated in African American magical realism or West African magical realism), or on what is classified by critics as a canon or prototype of magical realism, such as the works by renowned authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie. In Amaryll Beatrice Chanady's (1985) important contribution to this debate regarding the mode, she argues that magical realism easily crosses borders: '[m]agical realism, just like the fantastic, is a literary mode rather than a specific, historically identifiable genre, and can be found in most types of prose fiction.'[121] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Faris (1995)

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[114] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 14.
[115] Ibid., p. 14.
[116] Ibid., p. 14.
[117] Guenther, p. 56.
[118] Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 75–88 (p. 75).
[119] Guenther, p. 61.
[120] Wendy B. Faris, 'The Latin American Boom and the Invention of Magic Realism', in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 143–58 (p. 143).
[121] Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York and London: Garland, 1985), pp. 16–17.

demonstrate that the genre became increasingly popular with writers beyond South America. These critics state that while '[i]t is true that Latin Americanists have been prime movers in developing the critical concept of magical realism and are still primary voices in its discussion […] magical realism [is] an international commodity'.[122] Researchers and critics of magical realism such as Faris (2004), Anne Hegerfeldt (2005), Bowers (2004), and Eva Aldea (2010), among others, have contributed to the investigation into the origin of the mode (a word preferred by many critics of magical realism rather than 'genre'). In addition, their work has carefully considered its characteristics, how to distinguish it from its 'neighbouring'[123] genres — such as realism, fantasy, science fiction, and Surrealism — and reads the mode 'explicitly beyond postcolonial and Latin American literatures'.[124] Thus, magical realism is now recognised as a global literary mode: as a 'contemporary trend'[125] and as 'a globalised literary phenomenon',[126] which exists 'everywhere'[127] and which is continuing to increase in popularity. Bowers contends that reading magical realism as if it belongs to particular '"locations" would be misleading'.[128] Yet it is important to attend to the specific contexts in which the texts are situated.

Magical realist texts have been widely discussed and analysed within the critical framework of postcolonialism by critics such as Stephen Slemon, Faris, and Bowers, among others. Slemon (1988) reads magical realism 'within the context of post-colonial cultures as a distinct and recognizable kind of literary discourse.'[129] However, these postcolonial conditions, I argue, might be applicable to some texts that are set in nations impacted by a direct form of colonialism but not for those that might be considered as affected indirectly.

While I am in agreement with these critics that magical realism is a global phenomenon, I argue that previous discussions on whether magical realism is a 'literary language of the emergent post-colonial world'[130] limits the discussion, especially when focusing on Muslim writings, by ignoring other forces which may impact content and form.

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[122] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 'Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 1–11 (p. 2).

[123] Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), p. 6.

[124] Sara Upstone, 'Magical Realism and Postcolonial Studies: Twenty-First Century Perspectives', *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 17.1 (2011), 153–63 (p. 156).

[125] Faris, *Enchantments,* p. 1.

[126] Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang, 'Introduction: Globalization of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics', in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. by Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005), pp. 1–22 (p. 7).

[127] Ibid., p. 15.

[128] Bowers, *Magic(al)*, p. 32.

[129] Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse', *Canadian Literature*, 116 (1988), 9–24 (p. 10).

[130] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: Narrating the Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–7 (p. 7).

Indeed, scholars such as Hegerfeldt (2005), Christopher Warnes (2009), and Sara Upstone (2011) assert that magical realist texts should be read beyond postcolonialism. Although some critics recognise the lack of a postcolonial framework that includes all magical realist texts, they have not provided an alternative. A more nuanced approach, I assert, is needed that can take account of different experiences of modernity across the Muslim world, allow for comparison and pay attention to the specificity of the context, form, and socio-political forces that shape each text. Such an approach will be discussed in the following section. This is far from an easy task, but it is the central thread of this thesis.

1.7   Problematics of the Term: Multiple Kinds of Magic

Previous sections in this chapter have shown how Muslim fiction can be framed within the world literary system and have raised concerns regarding labelling and how religious elements and the mode of magical realism have created the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s). The relationship between magic and realism within the genre of magical realism has always been a controversial topic of debate, which this section will illuminate regarding the problematics of the term. Kim Anderson Sasser (2014) classifies the way 'magic' and 'realism' interact with each other, as well as with other narrative elements, arguing that 'this might take on any one or a combination' of three categories: '"subversion"' that is 'magic works to subvert realism and its representative worldview', '"suspension"' in which 'magic and realism are suspended between each other', and '"summation"' meaning 'magic functions summationally toward reality/realism'.[131] This, Sasser notes, helps in implying 'the broad potential of the mode' in the way magic and realism are combined in various manifestations of the mode.[132] Sasser sees García Márquez's short story 'Light Is Like Water' as an example of the first category (subversion), while critics such as Slemon (1995) reads the relationship between both magical and realism as 'suspension'.[133] On the other hand, 'summation', Sasser adds, means 'adding'; hence, 'magic adds to or builds on the realistic world.'[134] Sasser notes how '[t]here are specific elements that narrative magic might build within the real when it is used in this summational way' in which '[m]agic can construct, or present, within the real any one or combination of the following (not to mention other possible components): spiritual dimensions, cultural aspects, elements of nationhood,

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[131] Kim Anderson Sasser, *Magical Realism and Cosmopolitanism: Strategizing Belonging* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 25.
[132] Ibid., p. 25.
[133] Ibid., pp. 26–29.
[134] Ibid., p. 31. Critics and writers who view magical realism as belonging to this third category, according to Sasser, include Isabel Allende, Scott Simpkins, Robert Wilson, and Faris.

and strategies of belonging.'[135] Sasser's articulation of the possibility of magical realism, for example, to open a spiritual dimension is accurate and acceptable. However, her statement regarding the presence of 'any one or combination' of these elements represents a rule for a text to be identified as a magical realist work that leaves no room for more options when defining the mode. I propose that instead of assuming that every magical realist text has to fit into this perception of the relationship between 'magic' and 'realism' it is more effective to consider every author as having their own way of presenting this to the reader and, furthermore, that the reading experience will differ from one reader to another. I also propose that before we speculate on how all magical realist texts might be grouped regarding both elements, we need to look at what magic means in each cultural context.

Bowers offers the following points when attempting to differentiate between *magic* realism and *magical* realism:

> in magic realism 'magic' refers to the mystery of life: in marvellous and magical realism 'magic' refers to any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science. The variety of magical occurrences in magic(al) realist writing includes ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmospheres but does not include the magic as it is found in a magic show. Conjuring 'magic' is brought about by tricks that give the illusion that something extraordinary has happened, whereas in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary *really* has happened.[136]

While I agree with Bowers's definition of magical realism up to a point, and accept the use of the word 'extraordinary' to describe magical events in a Muslim context, there are also other considerations regarding the labelling of spiritual elements as magic in Muslim magical realist(s) texts. This distinction represents another factor in the argument that Muslim magical realist(s) works represent (a) sub-genre(s). Definitions of 'magic' in English do not describe magic in Islam as they tend to emphasise the use of occult practices. Indeed, as Emilie Savage-Smith (2004) puts it, '[m]any European concepts, such as ghosts, necromancy, and witchcraft, have little or no counterpart in Islam, while the employment of dichotomies often used to characterize European practices […] is to a large extent

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[135] Ibid., p. 34.
[136] Bowers, pp. 20–21.

inappropriate in the Islamic context'.[137] Similarly, Amira El-Zein (2009) indicates that '[d]espite assimilations and appropriations from the ancient religious traditions of the Near East, Islam distinguished itself by emphasizing the difference between magic and sorcery.'[138] In Islam, '[m]agic is considered a divine gift that can heal sickness and possession in the name of God, while sorcery resorts to the evil of heretic jinn and demons, and is condemned by Islam.'[139] While '[b]elief in witchcraft, sorcery, magic, ghosts, and demons is widespread and pervasive throughout the Muslim world',[140] it is the case that '[a]ll magical practices are denounced as un-Islamic by clerics'.[141] El-Zein, however, states that permitted types of magic in Islam ('Islamic magic') are seen in the Quran as healing energy, the divine names, and the magical power of Arabic letters[142] and notes that '[a]ll these kinds of spiritual healing […] were indeed inspired from certain verses of the Qur'an, the most Beautiful Names of God, and the Arabic alphabet by which the Word of God was revealed to Muhammad'.[143]

Since 'magic' and 'realism' are what constitute the mode of magical realism and since magic generally 'was a sensitive issue because it shared or encroached — depending on one's point of view — upon the preserve of established religion'[144] it is necessary to define what magic and reality mean for Muslims. Furthermore, this is a key aspect of this thesis, as an understanding of the relationship between magic, mystery and mysticism will be shown to be important regarding the analytical approach taken when considering the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s).

This is not to reject magic in a Muslim context, but distinctions must be made in order to understand this relationship in terms of religious mysteries and mystic practices. For example, genies/jinn are not seen as magical by Muslims. For Muslims, jinn are as real as human beings: 'jinn are an integral part of Islamic theology. According to the Qur'an, God created humans from clay, angels from light, and jinn from smokeless fire'.[145] In fact, '[a]lthough belief in the jinn is not one of the five pillars of Islam, one can't be Muslim if he/she doesn't have faith in their existence' and 'the Qur'anic message

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[137] Emilie Savage-Smith, 'Introduction: Magic and Divination in Early Islam', in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, 42 vol., ed. by Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), pp. xiii–li (p. xiii).
[138] Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), p. 77.
[139] Ibid., p. 77.
[140] Dawn Perlmutter, 'The Politics of Muslim Magic', *Middle East Quarterly*, 20 (2013), 73–80 (p. 73).
[141] Ibid., p. 74.
[142] El-Zein, pp.78–88.
[143] Ibid., p. 87.
[144] Michael W. Dols, 'The Theory of Magic in Healing', in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, 42 vol., ed. by Emilie Savage-Smith (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), pp. 87–101 (p. 87).
[145] Perlmutter, p. 77.

itself is addressed to both humans and jinn, considered the only two intelligent species on Earth.'[146] So how should we define 'magical' in the texts under examination in this thesis? Bowers (2004) notes how

> varying attitudes to the concept of magic produce a wide variety of magical realist and magic realist works. Magic and the magical are constructs created in particular cultural contexts. It follows that magic realism and magical realism have as many forms of magic and the magical in them as the number of cultural contexts in which these works are produced throughout the world.[147]

As Bowers suggests, it is clearly important to situate these terms and concepts within the cultural context of literary production. As Michael Muhammad Knight (2016) notes, 'to rely on "magic" as a meaningful category of analysis, even if you're writing about non-European contexts, could mean […] living in a Europe-centered universe'.[148] Here, I wish to extend Knight's argument to literary discourse and warn that by defining the kinds of 'magic' found in the mode of magical realism, we may run the risk of being Eurocentric. Indeed, the extant scholarly works within magical realism studies tend to refer to magic as it is understood in English vocabulary to read texts set in non-Western societies. It is interesting that while the word 'magic' in Arabic dictionaries is *sihr* and appears in the Quran, the word 'magical' which is translated into Arabic as *sihri* does not appear in the Quran, nor in well-known Arabic dictionaries,[149] and is only to be found in the contemporary Arabic Dictionary *Mejim Allughat Alearabiat Almueasira* (2008).[150] The word 'supernatural' can be rendered in Arabic as *khariq liltabiea.* If we were to translate 'magic realism' into Arabic, the translation would be *sihir alwaqi* or as most Arab critics translate it *alwaqieia alsahria*. This could imply 'black magic' or 'falsehood of reality,' or it could be understood as a reference to the 'beauty of reality'. Such an understanding is interesting, but it is clearly very different from the conventional meaning of the term in literary studies. To address this incommensaurability, I suggest that magic in Muslim magical realist texts is far from easy to define in Islamic contexts. Muslim magical realist(s) make use of such a combination of elements to portray the various aspects of

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[146] El-Zein, p. x.

[147] Bowers, pp. 4–5.

[148] Michael Muhammad Knight, *Magic in Islam* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2016), pp. 19–20.

[149] See for example the writings of Muḥammad Ibn-Mukarram Ibn-Manẓūr (a scholar of the thirteenth century), in *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2010); Majd al-Din Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Al-Firuzabadi (a scholar of the fourteenth century), in *Al-Qamus al-Muhit* (Cairo: Dar al-hadith, 2008); and Butrus Al-Bustani (a scholar of the nineteenth century), in *Muhit al-Muhit* (Beirut: Maktbat Lubnan,1987).

[150] Ahmed Mokhtar Omar, *Mejim Allughat Alearabiat Almueasira* (Cairo: Alem Alkutub, 2008).

the supernatural and divine believed in by Muslims. As El-Zein (2009) notes, '[i]t is difficult to grasp this constant and complex interchange between the manifest and the invisible without unraveling from the outset the concept of multiple worlds that is at the heart of the Muslim vision of existence'.[151] For the purpose of this thesis, I use words such as magic, mysticism, Sufism, *Barzkah*, real and irreal while engaging with numerous definitions of these terms. As Knight (2016) states regarding magic in Islam 'the categories of religion, science, and magic blur into each other'.[152] Thus, as Knight explains regarding magic and mysticism in Islam: '[a]ttempting to determine where magic begins and mysticism ends, or position mysticism between two subjective categories of magic and religion — as with our boundaries between magic and religion or magic and science — only reveals the flimsiness of our constructs'.[153] With this in mind, this thesis does not aim to 'determine' any of these terms in the textual analysis of Muslim magical realism(s) but rather to show the fluidity between them.

In a related discussion on magic in *One Thousand and One Nights*, Marina Warner (2011) notes that '[i]n the literature of the Middle East, *'aja'ib* – meaning marvels, wonders, astonishing things – describes a genre that ranges from fantastic travel yarns to metaphysical myths.'[154] Such an observation is particularly interesting as the preferred word to use in Arabic is *'aja'ib* rather than magic or magical. Warner makes the distinction regarding the understanding of magic in Islam and Judaeo-Christian traditions by providing an example of the story of Solomon in Islam and those in Judaeo-Christianity: 'Unlike the biblical king, the Muslim Solomon understands the language of beasts and birds and commands the winds […] rules over the higher order of angels and […] is given mastery over the innumerable spirits, the jinn'.[155] In Islam Solomon is also 'the wise ruler [who] is tested by God and tempted in different, often highly ambiguous ways. But his character is steadier – there are no temptress women to lead him away from the true God [as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition]'.[156] Thus, Solomon's magical powers, Warner notes, 'are clearly distinguished from the practice of sinners and apostates: theirs is goety, his theurgy'[157] because the Quran 'establishes that some forms of magic can be divinely approved and benign'.[158] Such a difference is intelligible in *The Arabian Nights* which 'take these aspects of Solomon for

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[151] El-Zein, p. 1.
[152] Knight, p. 6.
[153] Ibid., p. 17.
[154] Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States & the Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), p. 6.
[155] Ibid., p. 36.
[156] Ibid., p. 41.
[157] Ibid., p. 41.
[158] Ibid., p. 41.

granted, and treat them to no exclamations of wonder' thus 'giving the impression that these qualities of his were generally known by the community of listeners as well as by the makers of the literature.'[159] In doing so, *The Arabian Nights* may result in varied reading experiences.

As Warner rightly argues, for Jews and Christians 'Solomon's magical powers cast him in a very ambiguous light – in the realm of fantasy fit for (children's) literature rather than metaphysics.'[160] Given these different understandings of magic in the story of Solomon in Islam, Warner cautions us that 'it would be too blunt to argue simply that something intrinsically Islamic fostered the magus while Christendom preferred the wise judge' as there is 'so much common ground' between the three monotheistic religious traditions.[161] Warner's reading of Solomon's magical powers helps us to reconsider another aspect and another reading that a Muslim reader, for example, may experience in reading magical realist texts. This is not to say that the only possible way of reading these texts is from an Islamic viewpoint, but rather to say that with magical realist texts it is the reader (depending on their background) who decides when the magic starts and where reality ends.

1.8   Sufism and Magical Realism in Fiction

Previous sections have provided a critical history of Sufism and magical realism. It is important to ask how Muslim writers engage with Sufism and use the magical realism mode in conjunction with the associated spiritual practices. In this section, I show how this thesis rethinks and challenges previous discussions surrounding the interplay between magical realism and Sufism. The argument presented here is based on a critique of previous scholarly discussions regarding the use of magical realism by Muslims as Sufi literature, as well as to provide a reading that considers Sufism as a religious reference in magical realist texts. Thus, this thesis will suggest that religious elements coexist with magic in these texts in a way that contests the assumption that such Muslim fictions are 'Sufi literature'. Discussions regarding Sufism and modern Muslim writing tend to take the following forms: firstly, that Sufism is similar to Surrealism; secondly, that Sufism is a literary form of writing and should not be linked with European forms such as magical realism; and finally that Sufism is a religious element deployed by Muslim writers of magical realism.

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[159] Ibid., p. 36.
[160] Ibid., p. 44.
[161] Ibid., p. 36.

Adonis's book, entitled *Sufism and Surrealism* (2005), in which he argues that 'many of the intellectual issues inherent in Sufism and Surrealism are similar to or intersect with each other',[162] was the first critical work to examine the relationship between the two.[163] From the first line of his book, Adonis acknowledges that the title 'will arouse controversy', explaining that '[t]he prime objection' for his argument will be that 'Sufism is a religious movement […] whereas Surrealism is an atheistic movement'.[164] This thesis focuses on magical realism and Sufism, but it is important to give an overview of scholarly works that consider overlaps between Surrealism and Sufism. Nevertheless, Adonis argues that they both share one important aspect by being movements. He further argues that the existence of Sufism as a movement appears to be due to the failure of 'religious orthodoxy and science […] to answer [...] questions posed by man.'[165] Adonis aims to show that the 'encounters and intersections' between Sufism and Surrealism lay out the 'inner tension shared by all creators who find themselves travelling along similar paths in search of a solution, but who, because they are attracted by different things, attain different goals.'[166] However, for a number of scholars, Adonis's identification of Sufism as a movement could be seen as misleading. Chittick (2008), writing in more general terms (rather than addressing the work of a particular scholar), explains how

> Those who take seriously the self-understanding of the Sufi authorities […] picture Sufism as an essential component of Islam [while] [t]hose who are hostile toward Sufism, or hostile toward Islam but sympathetic toward Sufism, or skeptical of any self-understanding by the objects of their study, typically describe Sufism as a movement that was added to Islam after the prophetic period.[167]

In this case, Adonis fits into the second group. Another question is how do Sufis see Sufism? Chittick states that 'most of Sufism's own theoreticians have understood it to be the living spirit of the Islamic tradition'.[168] It is noteworthy, that among those scholars who claim that magical realist texts by Muslim writers are Sufi literature often quote Adonis. The question here is what Sufi literature is Adonis speaking about? When we say Sufi literature, who is the Sufi? Is it the writer? Adonis never refers to the work of modern or contemporary Muslim

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[162] Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, trans. by Judith Cumberbatch (Beirut: Dar alSaqi, 2005), p. 7.
[163] Arturo Monaco, 'The Flux of a Mystical-Surrealist Trend through the Middle East and North Africa', *La rivista di Arablit*, VII. 14 (2017), 63–76 (p. 67).
[164] Adonis, p. 7.
[165] Adonis, p. 8.
[166] Ibid., pp. 25–26.
[167] Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide,* p. 24.
[168] Ibid., p. 24.

writers. It seems to be the writing of the Sufis of the 10th to 13th century as he devotes a chapter to describing the work of al-Niffari. It is important to emphasise that in Islamic civilization during this period, poetry (which many Sufis find the best mode to express the truth of their mysterious relationship with God) was the most important literary mode for 'both the literate and illiterate classes.'[169] This thesis recognises Sufism as an important part of Islam and the living spirit of the Islamic tradition providing specific religious symbolism for Muslim magical realist(s).

However, this thesis does not read the experience and the elements of Sufism as a literary form but rather sees the Sufi experience and these elements as religious, as for many Sufis religion offers them a way to seek oneness rather than resisting the Islamic tradition. Chittick (2008), for example, explains that the Quran and the Sunnah (the prophet's sayings) are 'repositories' for all Muslims.[170] Nevertheless, different Muslim groups scrutinised and explained them 'with varying aptitudes, talents, and goals.'[171] Therefore, each one of these groups 'tended to highlight some aspects of this tradition rather than others.'[172] Adonis declares that his goal of studying Sufism is not as an 'occurrence' but as 'an art form'.[173] He also insists that the 'Sufi experience as "literary heresy" goes beyond the framework of religion, in the literal or established sense of the word' and he also considers the Sufi experience as a 'spiritual [and] ideative path' rather than as 'a religious belief.'[174] This thesis, nevertheless, demonstrates that Sufism as a religious experience (born in a precapitalist world), and the elements within, is found in Muslim magical realist(s) texts and investigates the deployment of these elements mixed with techniques associated with magical realism. If we treat Sufism not as a mode of writing but rather as an interpretation of Islamic teachings, then we can see why it is being appropriated in both Surrealism and magical realism.

Instead of seeing Sufism merely as a tool for writers to link the past with the present, as Elmarsafy (2012) does, I suggest that Sufism does more things in not only Muslim Arab but also non-Arab Muslim fiction. Sufism offers a different conception of the world that combines with, and gestures beyond the modern capitalist world. Furthermore, Sufism can be seen not only as another way to show the multiplicity of Muslim identity and different ways of engaging with Islamic traditions, but as a pre-capitalist past continuing to exist within capitalist modernity (as discussed above). For example, in two of the novels examined here there are echoes of the Sufi thinker Ibn Arabi's teaching on gender relations (as

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[169] Ibid., p. 41.
[170] Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide,* p. 25.
[171] Ibid., p. 25.
[172] Ibid., p. 25.
[173] Adonis, p. 143.
[174] Ibid., pp. 145–46.

expanded upon in Chapter two) that can also be seen as progressive and modern. This thesis aims to examine how certain ideas drawn from Sufism are mediated in different contemporary Muslim novels.

To further clarify this point, this section will examine the problems contained in current scholarly arguments that see magical realist novels by Muslim writers as Sufi literature, by offering new readings that show the possibility of the magical realism mode as including religious elements and the co-existence of magic and these elements.

Some scholars engaging with texts that are generally seen as part of the mode, such as Haifa Saud Alfaisal (2006) and Mona Almaeen (2018), discuss religious elements but reject the label of magical realism. This section will show the limitations of such arguments and offer a reconsideration of aspects of religious elements alongside local traditions and popular genres (in this case magical realism), which constitutes a 'compromise' with 'foreign form'.[175] Therefore, this thesis demonstrates that the combination of local narratives, characters, materials, religious traditions and an imported mode of writing has created the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s).

In her analysis of two postcolonial magical realist novels, Alfaisal (2006) resists not only labelling the novels as magical realist but also denies the validity of the definition of the mode as a global phenomenon, which she describes as 'a European construct that has been uncomfortably grafted onto "other" cultural products to enhance their exotic appeal to a metropolitan consumer market [and] a stylistic label that has virtually nothing to do with indigenist discourse'.[176] She further claims that 'applying the magic realist label to indigenous texts also threatens to turn specific responses to the colonial experience into mere abstraction since it acts as an exotic veil for indigenous religious discourse.'[177] This continues to be a source of contention within the scholarly literature surrounding the magical realist mode. I disagree with Alfaisal because, as this thesis will show, the use of religious elements within magical realism becomes an effective vehicle for re-examining socio-political issues, such as gendered power relations. Alfaisal is building on Alfred J. López's view (2001) that studies of magical realism are 'symptomatic of "the desire of a Western criticism to apprehend a literature utterly alien to it"'.[178] However, Upstone (2011) suggests that Alfaisal's work 'inadvertently opens up the possibility of a space where magical realism and religion might productively co-exist.'[179] Upstone further contends that

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[175] Moretti, 'Conjectures', p. 60.
[176] Haifa Saud Alfaisal, *Religious Discourse in Postcolonial Studies: Magical Realism in Hombres de Maíz* and *Bandarshah* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2006), p. 236.
[177] Ibid., p. 239.
[178] Qtd. in Alfaisal, *Religious Discourse*, p. 260.
[179] Upstone, p. 158.

If texts are magical realist (according to the western critics) and also rooted in indigenous religious belief (according to Alfaisal) then potential exists for readings that find a way to see the religious in the magical realist, rather than in opposition to it.[180]

This potential that Upstone gestures towards here is one of the central concerns of this thesis: that the religious elements within Muslim magical realist(s) texts are rooted in religious forms (precapitalist), mixing tenets, narratives and local myths and culture to engage with socio-political issues in an authentic manner framed by Islamic tradition rather than in direct opposition to dogma. Mona Almaeen (2018) shares the same view as Alfaisal (although Almaeen does not refer to Alfaisal). While Alfaisal calls it 'religious discourse', Almaeen refers to 'Sufism.' Almaeen not only rejects the term magical realism to refer to Alem's novels (including *Fatma*) and Leila Aboulela's works but also prefers to call them 'Sufi literature' and 'Sufi-based feminist novels'. As she puts it: 'Sufi literature is often critically analysed within the framework of Magical Realism, and this literary critical approach determines the reading of the mystical elements. These elements are therefore perceived as myths.'[181] I agree with Almaeen that the mystical elements are not myths but are 'faith-based',[182] however, rather than simply refusing to see these texts as magical realist, I trace specific ways in which to see the mystical/religious elements co-exist with both magic and myths. Almaeen gives an example of visions being read as magic in magical realist texts. She claims that 'the wide critical association between Sufi literature and Magical Realism limits this potential of Sufi literature to the mystical elements, such as visions, which are read as magical.'[183]

Again, as the third chapter of this thesis will show, dreams and visions should not be read merely as magic as understood in a Western sense, but as a range and combination of magic and religious elements in the Islamic context used as a medium to explore and present a variety of experiences within the magical realist mode. In Almaeen's view '[readings of] the mystical experiences in Sufi texts […] as forms of magic […] employ a normative language which describes the mystical experience as an irrational one whose credibility resides solely in its influence on the profane […] this association essentialises the Sufi style

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[180] Ibid., p. 158.
[181] Mona Almaeen, 'Spirituality and Islamic Feminism: A Critical Analysis of Religious Agency in Selected Literary and Cinematic Works' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent, 2018), p. vi.
[182] Ibid., p. vi.
[183] Ibid., p. 1.

within the borders of Magical Realism'.[184] My reading of magical realist texts by Muslim writers is not an attempt to 'essentialise' Sufism within magical realism but rather to find out why and how those writers benefit from such a mode to deploy Sufi notions (wherein religious elements are not read as magic). Almaeen concludes that 'Magical Realism does not offer this spiritual space in the same way that Sufism does.'[185] Such a reading might be interpreted as saying that Sufism is a fictional space itself. If we treat Sufism as a collection of religious symbolism and practices, and magical realism as a fictional space that allows such a religious experience to be articulated, then both Sufism (religious) and magical realism (mode of writing) can work together. This is not to say a novel with Sufi elements has to be recognised as a magical realist text and *vice versa*, yet magical realist tools offer a space in which both religious ideas and magic coexist; indeed, as Harootunian notes, this 'call to tradition' rather 'could be seen as both a critique of contemporary commodity culture and a resistance to it. And it was also in this way that the present constantly produced the past.'[186] Such a reading of an element of Islamic tradition (Sufism) in Muslim magical realism(s) is more useful, as will be shown in the analysis of the texts under discussion in this thesis.

As shown above, the existing literature does not present agreement regarding the deployment of religious references and techniques associated with magical realism. On the contrary, there are a number of controversial viewpoints and frictions to be found in the extant scholarship. While some critics argue that magical realism is a global genre well suited to examining a range of cultural issues, others see the mode as merely a simplistic label used by Western scholars. There is a lack of clarity in the literature regarding how religious elements can co-exist with magical realism, and whether the use of religion is a form of mysticism, an exotic gloss, or another layer of the "magical" used to disrupt traditional perspectives and cultural norms. Little attention has been paid to how religious discourse, symbolism and magic work together within texts. Furthermore, there is no extant scholarship that focuses on Muslim magical realist writers as a specific group. This thesis offers an investigation into how religious elements can coexist with magic in texts written by authors rooted in Muslim culture. Magical realism gives these writers a range of tropes with which to examine or reexamine topics that are important to them. Using dreams, fantasy, magic and religious elements (Sufism) in otherwise realist texts, challenges the reader to question traditional modes of thinking, histories and forms of identity.

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[184] Ibid., p. 23.
[185] Ibid., p. 182.
[186] Harootunian, *Overcome*, pp. 218–19.

This chapter has situated Muslim magical realist texts within the spheres of the world literary system, Sufism, and magical realism as the theoretical framework for this thesis. My argument builds upon materialist approaches to world literature, using a comparative approach in order to examine Muslim writings. I have suggested here that adding to the debate regarding Muslim writings as codified coherent varieties within the world literary system, resolving issues of the language of the texts and translation in alignment with the scholarship of the WReC and other critics, is an important contribution. The chapter has also set out a justification for using the term 'Muslim' rather than 'Islamic' to refer to the novels under consideration in this study. The last section addressed the lack within the field of studies of magical realism regarding religious elements, and the misperception that these texts are Sufi literature.

1.9   Structuring Muslim Magical Realism(s)

In the following chapters of this thesis, I present a critical analysis of six selected Muslim magical realist texts as a phenomenon in Muslim literary productions across the Islamic world whether Muslims are recognised as a majority or minority in their societies. Through a comparative close reading approach, each chapter deals with two novels in order to not only reject the concept of a monolithic Muslim identity but also a defining mode of magical realism.

Chapter two explores two novels by female authors: Raja Alem's *Fatma a novel of Arabia* (2002), and, Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1987, translated into English 2007) — one set in modern Saudi Arabia and the other in modern Iran — to show how gendered subalternity is associated with the uneven development of capitalist modernity in both of these oil-rich states. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that living in a patriarchal society impacted by capitalist modernity that excludes women can be a painful experience for these females and, further, illuminates the way in which these female characters work through their pain of exclusion. Drawing on the work of the Subaltern Studies Collective, theories of social reproduction, and intersectionality, I explore how the agency and subject positions of Muslim women are represented in the fictional worlds of these different major oil-producing states. By drawing on Sufism in a modern narrative of so-called magical realism, the novels, I argue, on the one hand, contest gender roles in contemporary capitalist modernity by offering a view that stems from the Islamic tradition but do not align with patriarchy and capitalist ideology; on the other hand, they register the coexistence of the religious within the modern world. The mode of magical realism with

formal resemblances but different usage, I argue, *re*-presents the subalterns and offers alternative realities to patriarchal institutions and the restrictions of capitalism. Such a comparative reading of the two texts, ultimately rejects the term 'Mulsimwomen' and argues that materialist approaches to the world literary system offer a more useful framework to read the different female Muslim experiences as 'one and unequal', as termed by Moretti.

Chapter three considers two Muslim magical realist texts that have received much critical attention in postcolonial literary research: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (1987 — translated 1989) and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). My reading tries to show how such works not only question and interrupt Orientalist ideas of a monolithic or homogenous Muslim world and identity, but also draw on the resources of Sufism to imagine a utopian future beyond the disenchanted world of capitalist modernity. In this chapter, I draw on Löwy's theory of 'critical irrealism' and the WReC's application of this concept to theories of combined and uneven development. I do this to demonstrate that in these novels' dreams and visions are vehicles to reimagine the world after the integration of Muslim societies and cultures into the modern world economic system, and how dreams express utopian desires for an alternative world. Cooper (1998), for example, suggests that 'Utopia [is] recurrent in magical realist dreams'.[187] In order to bring these various elements into play for the purposes of close textual analysis I will draw on the concept of *Barzakh* in the Islamic tradition and more broadly follow the work of anthropologists who explore the concept as an intermediary space that 'ruptures binary outlooks and invites us to think beyond the present and the visible' and 'to dwell on the in-between',[188] in order to understand why and how Ben Jelloun and Rushdie draw on the Sufi concept of *Barzakh*. I suggest that by drawing on Islamic concepts regarding the meeting of opposites, the novels engage with the religious and the modern to assert that precapitalist and capitalist elements come together at a line of demarcation and that the people are dwelling in the in-between in contemporary capitalist modernity. The aim is not to define distinct characteristics of dreams and visions found within the magical realism mode; rather, the aim is to show the varied ways in which the writers make use of these elements and techniques.

The fourth chapter, 'Recalling the past: Modernity and Tradition in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* (1990 — 2006 translation) and Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005)', explores how modernity and tradition, which have been central to the argument of the

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[187] Cooper, p. 36.
[188] Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams That Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2011), p. 4.

previous chapters, coexist in texts that recall the past while reflecting on the pressures of modernity in the present. Drawing on the work of Harootunian, Jameson, and the WReC, I argue that culturally and historically specific combinations of the modern and religious are what define Muslim peripheral realisms. Moreover, I explore how different articulations of the mode of magical realism offer a way to revisit the past in a dynamic manner rather than merely presenting a dry form of historical reportage. As in the previous chapters, this chapter compares two novels which are set in two distinctly different cultural and geographical regions: Turkey and Guyana. In doing so, the chapter (as does the thesis as a whole) extends the focus of world-systems analysis to address the ways in which Muslim magical realism(s) reframe our understanding of modernity.

Chapter 2   Gendered Subalternity and Capitalist Modernity in Raja Alem's *Fatma a novel of Arabia* (2002) and Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1987) [translated in (2007)]

'[i]t was simply her; it was her genuine self. […] The sensation was of being securely held. The holding was fulfillment. […] She felt complete, she felt everywhere at once.' (147–50) — Alem, *Fatma a novel of Arabia*

'Touba was now someone else. She no longer had the need to search for truth.' (380) — Parsipur, *Touba and the Meaning of Night*

Contemporary Muslim women's writing can help to shed light on how the ostensibly incommensurate relationship between the conditions of women's lives and gendered forms of social reproduction in modern Muslim societies are intimately connected with the uneven development of capitalist modernity, especially in oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Kolya Abramsky (2012) notes that 'less has been written about energy and social reproduction, either from those analyzing social reproduction or from those analyzing energy.'[1] Following Abramsky, Sharae Deckard's pre-print chapter (2018) argues that more attention should be paid to how these relations between oil and social reproduction 'are differently articulated according to period, region, and the particularities of local culture' while they 'also might share similarities […] in terms of the tropes or aesthetics.'[2] Following these suggestions, this chapter takes this into consideration to specifically read magical realist texts on Muslim women's experiences in different Muslim oil-rich states. Sheena Wilson (2014) calls for a '[g]endering' of oil through the examination of 'women's relationship to oil',[3] and Deckard (2018) builds on Wilson's work suggesting the need for a 'gendering of world oil literature'.[4] Here, I aim to extend upon Deckard's approach, which has implications for understanding how gendered subalternity is an essential element in the

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[1] Kolya Abramsky, 'Energy and Social Reproduction', *The Commoner*, 15 (2012), 337–52 (pp. 337–38).

[2] Sharae Deckard, 'Gendering Petrofiction: Energy, Imperialism and Social Reproduction', 2018 [pre-Print] in *Oil Fictions: World Literature and Our Contemporary Petrosphere*, ed. by Stacey Balkan and Swaralipi Nandi, https://www.academia.edu/38327628/Gendering_Petrofiction_Energy_Imperialism_and_Social_Reproductio n [accessed 10 January 2020], p. 4.

[3] Sheena Wilson, 'Gendering Oil: Tracing Western Petrosexual Relations', in *Oil Culture*, ed. by Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 244–63 (p. 244).

[4] Deckard, 'Gendering Petrofiction', p. 1.

combined and uneven development of petro-capitalist modernity in certain parts of the Muslim world. As this chapter suggests, recent Muslim women's writing also draws attention to the limits of critical vocabularies in postcolonial feminist thought for understanding the connections between patriarchal social relations and the cycles of fossil capitalism.

To clarify this specific point about the limits of postcolonial feminist thought, a brief consideration of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reflections on the gendered subaltern may prove useful. Spivak's account of the gendered subaltern is widely cited by postcolonial scholars, but its relationship to the patriarchal foundations of capitalist modernity is not fully understood. Indeed, what Spivak refers to as the gendered subaltern raises profound questions about the conventional understanding of subalternity as a subject position outside capital logic. As Spivak (2012) explains in an interview: '[w]hen in the early 1980s the *Subaltern Studies* folks got inspired by Gramsci, I think, what they looked at was that Gramsci was locating a subject outside of capital logic' and they 'went to Gramsci because of this place outside of capital logic.'[5] From this account of the subaltern historians' work, Spivak draws the inference that '[i]n the old dispensation the subaltern allowed us to stop outside of capital logic.'[6] In her discussion of reproductive heteronormativity,[7] Spivak stops short of considering how a patriarchal division of labour has devalued social reproduction as 'women's work' and relegated it to the domestic sphere; as a consequence, she is unable to account for the ways in which the condition of gendered subalternity and the ideology of reproductive heteronormativity are a crucial yet unacknowledged foundation of capital accumulation. As Silvia Federici (2004) explains, 'the reorganization of housework, family life, child-raising, sexuality, male-female relations, and the relation between production and reproduction' are fundamental to the capitalist mode of production. Federici connects patriarchy with the rise of capitalism, arguing that 'in order to understand the history of

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[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak', in *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, ed. by Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 221–32 (p. 222).

[6] Ibid., p. 225.

[7] In an interview by Nermeen Shaikh (2007), Spivak states that 'the oldest and broadest institution in the entire world [is]: reproductive heteronormativity;' she further explains that 'Reproductive heteronormativity […] means that it is normal to be heterosexual and to reproduce, and it is in terms of that norm that society is made: legal structures, religious structures, affective structures, residential structures, everything;' therefore, '[i]t may be displaced into that corner, this corner, and so on, but it is a very tough perennial. […] It will never go away because that is what writes (and rights) being human, as it were […] Just like death will not go away' (p. 193). See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Feminism and Human Rights', in *The Present as History: Critical Perspectives on Global Power*, ed. by Nermeen Shaikh (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 172–201. In a later interview (2012) with Baidik Bhattacharya, Spivak suggests that reproductive heteronormativity 'cannot be corrected, it can only be approached. And so, the gendered subaltern lives in another space' (p. 225). See Spivak, 'Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak', in *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, pp. 221–32.

women […] we must analyze the changes that capitalism has introduced in the process of social reproduction and, especially, the reproduction of labor-power.'[8] Within modern capitalist societies, '[a]s long as reproductive work is devalued, as long it is considered a private matter and women's responsibility,' argues Federici (2012), 'women will always [be] with less power than men'.[9] In a related discussion, Fredric Jameson (1981) has argued that the patriarchal division of labour which forms the archaic foundation of many modern capitalist societies is 'sedimented' in the cultural forms and genres of those societies.[10] While neither Federici nor Jameson specifically discuss Iran or Saudi Arabia in their analysis, their arguments have important implications for the readings I present in this chapter. This chapter traces the ways in which gendered forms of social reproduction and patriarchal oppression are mediated but also contested in the form of two texts from modern Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively: Raja Alem's *Fatma a novel of Arabia* (2002), and, Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1987, translated into English 2007).[11] In doing so, it considers how these novels combine elements of magic, fantasy, and realism to foreground the ways in which the oppression of Muslim women, and their relegation to a position of gendered subalternity is a crucial determinant in the combined and uneven development of petro-capitalist modernity in the modern Muslim world.[12]

Through comparative close readings, this chapter examines how these two novels challenge the silencing and oppression of women, and represent the experiences of female subaltern characters. Such an approach also emphasises how the otherworldly dimensions of these narratives register a different temporality and a way of knowing that interrupts the

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[8] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), pp. 8–9.

[9] Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), p. 110.

[10] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), pp. 126–28.

[11] Raja Alem, *Fatma: A Novel of Arabia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002) and Shahrnush Parsipur, *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, trans. by Havva Houshmand and Kamran Talattof (New York: Marion Boyars, 2007).

[12] In an often-cited article regarding what is termed 'Petrofiction', Amitav Ghosh (1992) asks 'why, when there is so much to write about, has this [oil] encounter proved so imaginatively sterile?' (p. 30). See Amitav Ghosh, 'Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel', *The New Republic*, 2 (1992), 29–34. More recently, critics of Petrofiction have called for a reading that recognises the role of energy (particularly oil) within the world literary system. Graeme Macdonald (2017), for example, notes that 'oil has recognizable form, and that its mobile, repetitive and relational logics are detectable in petrofictions and […] representations of petro-development, compelling their comparative reading under the sign of world-literature.' See Graeme Macdonald, '"Monstrous Transformer": Petrofiction and World Literature', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53.3 (2017), 289–302 (p. 300) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337680>. In an article published in the same year, Imre Szeman (2017) also argues that 'the world-system is itself dependent on oil, [thus,] energy needs to be a key part of our critical accounts of world-systemic literature'. See Imre Szeman, 'Conjectures on World Energy Literature: Or, what is petroculture?', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53.3 (2017), 227–88 (pp. 286–87) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1337672>. This chapter therfore contributes to (amongst other discussions) what Szeman calls 'world energy literature' by focusing on the experience of Muslim women during petro-development in two Middle Eastern oil-rich countries.

patriarchal order of things, and highlight the impact of petro-capitalist modernity on women's lives, disrupting the terms of exclusion from the public sphere and creating a space where female characters can achieve a form of divine transformation. This is the result of drawing upon elements of Sufism, which is imagined as a path to peace for both protagonists in these novels. This is not to say that the lived experience of Fatma, a Saudi 'illiterate'[13] and 'village girl'[14] is identical to that of the educated female Iranian Touba (who becomes a princess). Rather, the aim here is to consider how these texts offer insights into different lived experiences framed by religion, gender and Muslim identities in societies that are also transformed by the forces of petro-modernity. Thus, this chapter rejects an essentialist assumption of one single female Muslim identity and seeks to show how these novels combine elements of magic, fantasy and realism in narrative forms that fictionalise the singular histories of modernity as they are lived and experienced at different times and in different places.

The novels under examination suggest ways in which their female protagonists contest the terms of their patriarchal subordination in a society driven by resource extraction and capital accumulation. This I argue, is presented in the novels under discussion by making use of the precapitalist Islamic traditions (specifically Sufism) in the modern world and can be understood, as Harootunian asserts, as an 'appeal to elements from a native tradition.'[15] Thus, I read the coexistence of the religious and modern in these novels as a means of articulating the coexistence of a precapitalist tradition (Sufism) with the modern. Both novels engage with Sufi ideas of the divine/transcendental, and the interplay between the worldly and the otherworldly takes on a symbolic significance that opens up a liminal space for rethinking gendered power relations.

In the overlap between the worlds presented, the focalizing protagonists undergo a spiritual journey during which they both lose and invent identities through an encounter with the supernatural. In the narrative temporality of this spiritual journey, they also begin to imagine other possible futures for themselves. Furthermore, the coexistence of the precapitalist and the modern allows for a space of negotiation, reexamination, and resistance to, the patriarchal order that exists within these particular spaces of capitalist modernity. Thus, the novels can be read as manifestations of the specific pressures of capitalist modernity as they are lived and experienced in different Islamic societies.

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[13] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 51.
[14] Kirkus review, see the back cover of *Fatma a Novel of Arabia* (2002).
[15] Harootunian, *Overcome*, p. 218.

Crucial to my argument is a consideration of the way in which Sufism is mobilised both to express and to challenge patriarchal oppression as it is experienced in modern petro-capitalist Islamic societies. Accordingly, my focus in this chapter is not on Sufism itself, nor to engage in theological debates about whether Sufism is a heretical or orthodox form of Islam. Instead, the aim is to understand how the allusions to Sufi teaching in these novels provide a more progressive representation of gender that sits within the Islamic tradition yet offers a counterpoint to a patriarchal viewpoint. Furthermore, rather than subverting the teachings of Islam, I suggest that these texts draw on a well-established strand of Islamic teaching to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islam. Such an argument also has important implications for understanding the agency, history, and representation of the gendered subaltern within the context of oil-rich societies that have been integrated into the capitalist world-system.

Scholarship in Subaltern Studies has certainly touched on questions of religion and gender, as will be discussed below. Yet there have been no sustained attempts within the interdisciplinary field of subaltern studies to explore the agency and subject positions of Muslim women in different major oil-producing states as depicted in literary fiction. By comparing two narratives that employ techniques associated with magical realism to imagine an alternative to modern patriarchal societies, I suggest that these fictions offer different ways of understanding the overlapping histories of Islam, extractive forms of fossil capitalism, and women's place within those histories. Therefore, this chapter aims to address the following questions: how might these novels help to transform our understanding of Muslim women's awareness of their subaltern position vis-à-vis the overlapping histories of patriarchy, Islam and extractive forms of fossil capitalism? In what ways is magical realism mobilised as a narrative form and generic mode for working through gendered forms of social oppression? And how do these codes and conventions encourage readers to imagine an alternative to these overlapping histories of oppression and extraction?

Fatma is a tale set amid the strict cultural norms of modern-day Saudi Arabia. The historical context of the narrative is located at some point after the 1950s, as the presence of cars suggests. Camels were being replaced with cars in the 1950s, which came to be 'widely used across the country'.[16] The novel is a story of female confinement and gendered power struggles. The narrative unfolds in a serpentine structure that combines prophetic visions, magic, possession and the supernatural. In this text, a young wife undergoes an incredible

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[16] Mohamed Al-Harby, 'When the First Car Was Introduced to Saudi Arabia 98 Years Ago', *Al Arabiya English.Net*, 12 February 2018 <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2018/02/13/When-the-first-car-was-introduced-to-Saudi-Arabia-98-years-ago.html> [accessed 18 February 2020] (para 2 of 11).

transformation via ritual and ecstasy to find a more secure sense of self. *Touba and the Meaning of Night* is set during the first eight decades of the twentieth century in Iran, a period that parallels the historical development of the oil industry in that country, from the era of British imperial influence in the form of the Anglo-Persian oil company to nationalisation.[17] Touba's life is one of hardship and pain, throughout which she seeks communion with God. She is trapped in a narrowly defined patriarchal gender role as a wife and mother and becomes increasingly bitter regarding her lost potential; she is thus unable to find the peace she seeks. Touba is in contact with a ghost, experiences visions and trances, and engages in Sufi practices. By doing so, she resists a male-dominated culture and the oppression associated with that culture and maintained throughout the modernisation process, as I go on to explain in more detail below. As Sa'diyya Shaikh (2009) explains in her article on Sufism, '[t]he prioritization of the inner state that assumes the same spiritual imperatives for all human beings, irrespective of whether one occupies a male or female body, signifies one of the organically genderless assumptions within Sufism.'[18] It is only when, as an old woman, Touba sees the truth in everyday things and surrenders control that she is transformed and returns to a quasi-transcendental form of consciousness which is framed as a state of 'ungendered spiritual capacities'[19] — a state described in Sufi teachings and particularly those of Ibn Arabi. Thus, Sufism 'presupposes that every human being can pursue and achieve the same ultimate goals, and that gender does not constitute an impediment or an advantage to these ends.'[20] Such an idea is overtly parallel to Noor's speech (to counter Fatma's husband's patriarchal stance) and Dervish Hassan's in a conversation with Touba's husband. This idea will be explained further below.

In certain respects, the methodologies of the Subaltern Studies Collective seem particularly apposite for reading these novels because of the emphasis they place on the significance of religion, gender, and class in their attempt to formulate a conception of history from below. It is true of course that these South Asian historians, literary critics/theorists, and anthropologists were primarily concerned with the historical records of

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[17] As Katayoun Shafiee (2018) states '[c]ontrary to what the dominant narrative suggests, the energy needs of the British Navy were only a partial connection in the political project to build a British-controlled oil industry in Khuzistan, Iran. During the inter-war period, the major oil companies, such as AIOC, were the first and largest of the new transnational corporations of the twentieth century to emerge at this moment of political power jockeying and energy shifting, coinciding with the collapse of an imperialist "old form of empire"' pp. 13–14. See Katayoun Shafiee, *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2018).

[18] Sa'diyya Shaikh, 'In Search of "Al-Insān": Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 77.4 (2009), 781–822 (p. 790) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20630157> [accessed 21 July 2018].

[19] Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 93.

[20] Shaikh, 'In Search of "Al-Insān"', p. 790.

subaltern insurgency in colonial and postcolonial South Asia, and how these records articulated traces of a subaltern consciousness.

It is important to acknowledge too that the texts under consideration in this chapter are set in modern Middle Eastern countries, where resources extraction is key to understanding European and American imperial influence, and acts of subaltern insurgency are less plain to see than they are in colonial and postcolonial South Asia. For this reason, the methods and vocabularies of the Subaltern Studies Collective need to be revised and reframed. Accordingly, I bring the concerns of the subaltern historians with the forms of historical knowledge and agency of those marginalised and silenced by official nationalist histories into conversation with theories of social reproduction, resource extraction, and recent accounts of the relationship between Orientalism, Islam, and the modern world-system.

The female protagonists in both texts inhabit a subaltern position in the sense that their voices and agency are foreclosed by pre-dominant patriarchal nationalist interpretations of religious law, which is aided and abetted by a patriarchal family structure and reinforced by the forces of petro-capitalist modernity, which depend on this pre-existing social structure. To put it another way, the female characters Fatma and Touba are subaltern as a result of gendered forms of subordination in their societies as they are integrated into the modern world's economic system. Despite the different socio-historical settings of the novels, both protagonists suffer from oppression within social worlds that restrict women's participation in public life. By reading the portrayal of the gendered subaltern in *Fatma* and *Touba* with and against the arguments of the Subaltern Studies Collective — including Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential *Provincializing Europe* — the chapter seeks to extend the work of the subalternists by examining how the novels articulate the agency and consciousness of gendered subaltern figures in these texts, both in relation to the transformations of petro-capitalist modernity and the patriarchal social structures which enable these transformations. Before developing this point in more detail through close textual analysis of the novels, it is important to clarify the provenance and significance of the term subaltern.

The word 'Subaltern' originally referred to a military rank in the British Army and was later used by the imprisoned Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci to refer to those who are subordinated by the hegemony of the ruling classes. However, the term has subsequently been adapted by South Asian historians such as Ranajit Guha to denote a general category of subordination within modern South Asian society, and to attempt to write about Indian history 'from below'. Among the controversial issues the collective have emphasised is that

Indian history is written from the point of view of the West and by Indian elites, but almost never by non-elite or subaltern groups. Guha asserts that the subaltern should not be ignored in writing history. The Subaltern Studies Collective have sought to give a voice to those who were excluded from the history of India. Yet, Guha leaves open the methodological question of how this problem should be addressed when he states that '[t]here is no one given way of investigating this problematic.'[21] The collective defines 'subaltern' as 'a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way'.[22] Some scholars, however, have challenged the methodological approach by which the group have attempted to recover subaltern histories. For example, Gayatri Spivak's essays 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and 'Deconstructing Historiography'[23] have taken issue with the positivist terms that the subaltern historians use, even though their actual practice, she claims, is closer to deconstruction.

While Spivak supports the group's work, she 'felt their methodology did not match their aims; for her, it led to reinforcing some of the power structures they hoped to break down'.[24] Spivak criticises the group for deploying the word 'subaltern' without noticing that 'the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous',[25] and notes that by defining 'subaltern' as an opposite to an elite, the group widen the gap rather than narrow it — something that is compounded by the absence of subaltern women in much of their early work. The term, as Spivak stresses, is 'situational' and 'it has no theoretical rigor'.[26] Spivak poses the question whether the subaltern can speak and, if so, will their voices be heard? She proceeds to argue that any attempt to represent the subaltern by intellectuals will not succeed. This is because any attempted form of representation on behalf of the subaltern will lead to both misrepresentation and denial of chances for them to speak. In an interview with De Kock, Spivak (1992) explains:

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[21] Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 37–44 (p. 43).

[22] Ranajit Guha, 'Preface', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 35–36 (p. 35).

[23] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3–32.

[24] Graham K. Riach, *An Analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak?* (London: Macat, 2017), p. 29.

[25] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313 (p. 284).

[26] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 141.

[E]verybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. […] When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere.[27]

Spivak adds that subaltern, for her, is 'to be removed from all lines of social mobility'.[28] For Spivak 'the subaltern has no history and cannot speak' and the situation of female subalterns can be worse: 'the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'.[29] Therefore, representing the subaltern can be a means of empowerment that also risks a particular form of silencing of the voice of the Other via a narrative act of ventriloquism. However, in 'The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview,' Spivak revisits the concept of subalternity stating that '[t]oday the "subaltern" must be rethought. S/he is no longer cut off from lines of access to the centre'.[30] Therefore, as the subaltern voice is 'no longer cut off' it can possibly even be heard. Spivak describes the title and question of her original essay as producing 'an inadvisable remark'.[31] However, her question, as Graham K. Riach (2017) notes, 'was only ever meant to be true in a certain context, at a certain time' and '[i]t is a question that is good to repeat regularly, and Spivak's essay provides some guidance for what we should consider when trying to answer it'.[32]

Spivak's question has certainly been posed in a range of different contexts, and the term 'subaltern' has been extended beyond the field of Italian and South Asian history to include Latin American and African studies. When the question of whether the gendered subaltern can speak is posed in contexts of resource imperialism, such as those of Iran or Saudi Arabia, however, the answer is likely to vary considerably. By examining the concept of gendered subalternity in the case of the Muslim women protagonists in two novels set in modern Saudi Arabia and Iran, I seek to extend both the methodology and contextual frame of reference in which subalternity has been defined, theorised, and understood.

Since this chapter also attempts to offer an account of how the agency and history of the gendered subaltern in Muslim societies are represented, in both texts under discussion,

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[27] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa' (Interviewer Leon De Kock), *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 23.3 (1992), 29–47 (pp. 45–46).
[28] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8.4 (2005), 475–86 (p. 475) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790500375132>.
[29] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', pp. 271–313(p. 287).
[30] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview', in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Vinayak Chaturvedi (London and New York: Verso, 2000), pp. 324– 40 (p. 326).
[31] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 308.
[32] Riach, p. 56.

an overview of the relationship between the subaltern and religion is in order. For subaltern historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) religion and the otherworldly are crucial for understanding the ways in which subaltern subjects understood their position as historical actors in relation to the nascent culture of colonialism and the idea of a global capitalist modernity.[33] In his analysis of the temporality of capitalism, for instance, Chakrabarty takes seriously the suggestion in the British colonial records that acts of anti-colonial insurgency organised by the Santhals of India were carried out because a Santhal god had willed such insurgent acts. Chakrabarty considers Europe as a mythical entity that is seen as the source of modernity which shapes developing countries via the ideology of capitalism. His book, *Provincializing Europe*, examines the language used regarding modernity, diversity, cultural interaction, time and history, emphasising the importance of guarding against the Eurocentrism that continues to influence how scholars view non-Western countries and peoples.

While Chakrabarty may not address questions of gender or Islam in his reflections on non-secular conceptions of subaltern agency and history, nevertheless, his approach to religion and non-secular ideas of time and subaltern agency has significant implications for understanding how the otherworldly dimensions in contemporary Muslim magical realism(s) provide situated cultural frameworks through which to contest and challenge notions of gendered subalternity. Differently from the Subaltern Studies Collective's reading, I also approach the subaltern topic within the framework of combined and uneven development articulated via world-system analysis[34] and social reproduction as stated above. Thus, the novels under examination in this chapter are not only 'abstracts'[35] of the combined unevenness found within capitalist modernity, but also offer a critique of the capitalist oil economy in its complicity with patriarchal systems. A comparison that acknowledges the multiplicity of different Muslim identities (as stated above) within the singular experience of capitalist modernity in Iran and Saudi Arabia is broadly cognate with the theory of intersectionality. First developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), this theory deals with the multiple and overlapping of oppression within categories such as race, gender, and class —

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[33] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*: *Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[34] See chapter one of this thesis.
[35] The WReC, p. 95.

making the experience of each individual distinct.[36] The theory of intersectionality[37] thus allows for these different elements of identity to be examined in the round, rather than privileging, for example, gender. It is important to emphasise too that such theories of intersectionality spring from a feminist engagement with the Marxist standpoint theory of György Lukács. For without a consideration of the ways in which such interlocking forms of oppression are foundational to processes of capital accumulation and extraction, we would be unable to fully understand the socio-economic determinants that underpin these subaltern identities. This chapter adopts a similar approach to Muslim identities (particularly female Muslims); in doing so, it questions whether the term 'Muslimwoman' is appropriate to describe the characteristics of individuals, who may ostensibly share two aspects of identity, being both female and Muslim, and yet live in quite different countries with quite different cultures, languages, histories, and understandings of Islam.

In a separate, but related discussion, Miriam Cooke, in an article titled 'Deploying the Muslimwoman' (2008), merges the words Muslim and woman 'to evoke a singular identity'.[38] Such a term, for Cooke, can be used to describe an identity that 'overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical, and even philosophical diversity'[39] to redefine and reshape the identity of these women via a 'commonality in terms of religion and gender'.[40] Cooke provides examples of Muslim women from around the world to show that 'the Muslimwoman erases for non-Muslims the diversity among Muslim women and, indeed, among all Muslims'.[41] Thus, 'Muslimwoman', Cooke claims 'becomes the emblem of an equally essential (but this time positive) Islam'.[42] However, Esra Santesso (2013) holds a different view and criticises Cooke's work by posing the question '[i]s a veiled member of the House of Saud living in Riyadh really on the same "platform" as a veiled villager in Arar

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[36] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (1989), 139–67. Kimberlé Crenshaw is widely cited as the first scholar to develop the term, though some contend that the term was used previously by scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga in 1980, and Bonnie Thornton Dill in 1979, among others. See Ashley J. Bohrer, *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality Under Contemporary Capitalism* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019), p. 83.

[37] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), for example, notes that default feminist readings tend to lead to representations of a 'Third World woman' who stands as an embodiment of 'underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism and "overpopulation"' (p. 47). Mohanty sees such simplistic readings as a barrier to understanding the various facets of such women's lives and notes that they are not always disempowered subjects (p. 31). See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

[38] Miriam Cooke and others, 'Roundtable Discussion: Religion, Gender, and the Muslimwoman: Deploying the Muslimwoman', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 24.1 (2008), 91–119 (p. 91) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20487917> [accessed 21 March 2018].

[39] Ibid., p. 91.

[40] Ibid., p. 92.

[41] Ibid., p. 93.

[42] Ibid., p. 93.

or a journalist in Jeddah — let alone that of a veiled "foreign worker" from Bangladesh or Indonesia working in Mecca?'[43] Santesso argues that Cooke's statement does not consider the 'economic, educational and technological conditions' of women in diverse situations.[44] Santesso is correct to emphasise the different dynamics of social subordination that need to be taken into account when approaching gendered Muslim identities. Indeed, her critique of Cooke has important implications for my own approach to literary representations of Muslim women as gendered subaltern figures; in particular, Santesso's emphasis on the intersectionality of gendered Muslim identities demands a reappraisal of each specific socio-historical context in which particular Muslim women are figured as gendered subalterns. Considered through a first-world, second-wave feminist lens, it might at first appear that the oppression[45] of Muslim women in patriarchal societies is based on gender rather than anything else — whether such women are princesses, middle-class professionals, or illiterate housewives. For example, a foreign male in Saudi Arabia has access to the public sphere in ways that are denied to a Saudi princess. Yet, in the novels under consideration here, this superficial picture is complicated by considerations of class and education. The eponymous protagonist of Touba is well educated and marries a prince, and thus becomes a princess (although this does not bring consistent wealth and stability to her life), while Fatma is a confined and 'illiterate' housewife.

A superficial comparison of these novels might lead one to conclude that both protagonists are gendered 'subalterns' in the sense that they both experience patriarchal forms of subordination, but this would be to ignore significant differences in their socio-political circumstances. To have one's agency and voice denied because of one's gender, even as one enjoys the material comforts of an affluent and secure lifestyle is clearly very different from being silenced as a consequence of one's gender in a patriarchal household while also having to take on all the burdens of social reproduction and to endure the anxieties and uncertainties associated with poverty, a lack of education, and precarious socio-economic circumstances.

By attending to these differences in class, this chapter tries to develop a more nuanced, intersectional approach to the representation of experiences of gendered subalternity and social reproduction in these two novels; in so doing, I suggest that these

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[43] Esra Mirze Santesso, *Disorientation*: *Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 84.

[44] Ibid., p. 84.

[45] For the purpose of this chapter, I follow Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) definition of oppression as: 'any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression' (p. 4). See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).

novels use the conventions of magical realism and the conceptual resources of Sufism to tell another story about women's lived experiences of the uneven development of capitalist modernity in oil-rich Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Social reproduction is a term associated with the political economy of Karl Marx, which he uses to describe the reproduction of capitalist relations/systems as a whole. Social reproduction includes 'the daily life and long-term reproduction of the means of production, the labor power to make them work, and the social relations that hold them in place'.[46] In her seminal work *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) Silvia Federici — inspired by the writing of members of the Wages for Housework Movement such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Selma James who comprehends the roots of women's exploitation 'in capitalist society [as] the sexual division of labor and women's unpaid work'[47] — revisits Marx's concept of 'primitive accumulation', a term he uses to describe 'the historical process upon which the development of capitalist relations was premised'.[48] Marx examines this concept 'from the viewpoint of the waged male proletariat and the development of commodity production'.[49] Against Marx, Federici examines the concept 'from the viewpoint of the changes it introduced in the social position of women and the production of labor-power'.[50] Drawing on Federici's argument that patriarchal forms of oppression secured the household as a site of unwaged social reproduction, this chapter argues that the representation of gendered power relations in *Touba* and *Fatma* are crucial to our understanding of the ways in which the development of capitalist modernity in Saudi Arabia and Iran are codified in these texts.

Rather than seeing the intersectionality theory in conflict with social reproduction (Marxist feminism) as some scholars claim,[51] Ashley J. Bohrer's (2019) argument rightly offers a way to 'embrace a "both/and" perspective without eliminating the need for […] conjunction'.[52] As she explains in a later article (2019), within capitalism, both exploitation and oppression 'form interlocking, mutually reinforcing circuits.' Thus, to fully understand capitalism, 'one needs to understand the full weight of both exploitations and oppressions, in all of their multiplicity and the constantly changing shape of their conjuncture.' If Marxists, Bohrer continues, rightly elucidate 'the centrality of exploitation' when it comes

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[46] Jack Norton and Cindi Katz, 'Social Reproduction', in *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, ed. by Douglas Richardson and others (2017), 1–11 (p. 1) <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg1107>.

[47] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 8.

[48] Ibid., p. 12.

[49] Ibid., p. 12.

[50] Ibid., p. 12.

[51] For more on this debate, see Ashley J. Bohrer, *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality Under Contemporary Capitalism* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019).

[52] Ibid., p. 23.

to understanding capitalism, intersectionality theorists, on the other hand, far better recognise 'oppression is also absolutely central to confronting capitalism'.[53] Such an approach is useful in understanding the experiences of female Muslims in terms of their 'exploitations' and 'oppressions' and, further, articulates their multiple identities and cultures found in the selected Muslim magical realism(s) texts.

2.1   Saudi Women in the Post-Oil Economy in *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*

Fatma a Novel of Arabia is set in modern Saudi Arabia. The reader is not given a specific date (as is the case with *Touba*); however, we encounter clues that this novel maybe set in an era following the creation of an oil economy.[54] It is a text that can be read not only as a story of a Saudi female's spiritual journey within a patriarchal society but also as an allegory and a critique of the combined unevenness of capitalist modernity as it is experienced in a modern Saudi household, from the viewpoint of female characters. Rather than seeing the novel as a typical magical realist text similar to Marina Warner's *Indigo* and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* as Maryam Ebadi Asayesh (2017) does,[55] or as 'Sufi literature' in the manner of Mona Almaeen (2018),[56] this chapter reads the novel as an exemplary case of what I call Muslim magical realism(s) and offers a more nuanced reading that sets the novel within the framework of magical realism without ignoring the Sufi tradition in a modern setting. Rather than conforming to an archetype of magical realism defined by a German folk tale or a Latin American novel, *Fatma* is a text that combines precapitalistic Sufi traditions, magical elements, and the modern in quite singular ways that correspond with Franco Moretti's triangular account of a world-literary text: 'foreign form, local material—*and local form*. Simplifying somewhat: foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*'.[57]

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[53] Ashley J. Bohrer, 'Response to Barbara Foley's "Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique"', *New Labor Forum*, 28.3 (2019), 14–17 (p. 15) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796019866145>.

[54] Oil discovery in the kingdom is a phenomenon that should not be ignored. As George Caffentzis (2016) notes, oil is fundamental to 'contemporary capitalism' since it is 'a basic industry (oil being a commodity used as a means of production of all commodities) and an extremely large outlier in its organic composition' (p. 163). The oil industry, Caffentzis further states, 'extract[s] a basic commodity' and 'receives much of the surplus labor expropriated in all the other branches of industry.' Therefore, 'from its very beginning, the oil industry has been the center of attention for capitalists everywhere' (pp.164–65). See George Caffentzis, 'The Oil Paradox and the Labor Theory of Value', *The Minnesota Review*, 87 (2016), 160–70 <https://doi.org/10.1215/00265667-3630916>.

[55] Maryam Ebadi Asayesh, *Patriarchy and Power in Magical Realism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

[56] Almaeen, 'Spirituality and Islamic Feminism'.

[57] Moretti, 'Conjectures', p. 65.

The novel begins at the end of the story due to its serpentine structure, which also foreshadows the extensive serpent symbolism throughout. We first meet Fatma in the third sentence of the novel: 'Sajir [her husband] grabbed Fatma by the elbow and yanked her down the dark alley'.[58] Thus, Fatma's introduction to the reader is contextualised by an act of male violence: she is 'grabbed' and 'yanked.' In front of a watching porter, Fatma's *abaya* falls and her 'hair tumbled to her knees. Her breasts were lovely'.[59] There is the shock of uncovered hair in public and then the greater shock of exposed breasts. Fatma is being ejected from her home. Her husband is full of rage; indeed, '[h]is wife's beauty infuriated him'.[60] Sajir calls to the porter '[t]his woman … this woman is a curse! […] Don't you ever, ever let her into this building again. Never!'[61] Sajir is struggling to articulate his rage, as seen in the repetition of the phrase 'this woman.' The use of the word 'curse' by definition presents the idea that Fatma is an evil. The female body is presented as a dangerous presence. The force of masculine language is at once imperative and negative: it is an ironic form of linguistic power that belies a sense of threat, fear and impotency. Therefore, we see a man who is 'infuriated' by his wife's good looks and who feels that he has lost all power over her. From the first pages of the novel, Alem links modernity with patriarchal order: '[Fatma] blinked at the blasts of wind from the cars whooshing by — they were just like the hissing demons that possessed her husband's soul'.[62] Both cars (modernity) and her husband (representative of patriarchy) are alike in their presentation as containing a demonic element. The significance of this section, which forms both the opening and the ending of the novel will be considered further below.

It is in the second chapter that we meet the sixteen-year-old 'thin' and 'trembling' Fatma. The opening paragraphs of this chapter present a potted history of her father and the dysfunctional gender relationships within Fatma's family. Her father, Mansoor, is 'the last in his line'. He has no female relatives and is required to 'dress [Fatma] for [an] occasion'. The imminent 'occasion' is obviously important and '[a]ll through lunch she could feel his distance'.[63] The novel quickly establishes the social and religious codes within the society in which the tale is set to show the reader the norms within this culture. The young woman is an oppressed Saudi female whose father controls every aspect of her life. Fatma's interactions with her father often merely involve him giving curt commands: 'Take a shower'; 'put something new on […] Something presentable'. The occasion referred to

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[58] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 1.
[59] Ibid., p. 1.
[60] Ibid., p. 1.
[61] Ibid., p. 1.
[62] Ibid., p. 2.
[63] Ibid., p. 6.

entails a suitor visiting the house on the invitation of Mansoor and we hear how Fatma is 'old enough to get married […] There's no point in postponing'. This particular scene presents Fatma as 'barely [in] control [of] the ironic lift of her lips'. The author is clearly showing that a latent rebelliousness must be tempered by internal control, in the face of external control, at all times. The situation is a form of theatre, demanding that father and daughter play their assigned roles.

As a subaltern figure, Fatma has no right to speak, to make her own decisions, argue against her father or, in this case, choose her future husband. Like most women in her society at the time the novel is set she requires the constant presence and guidance of a male guardian and protector. Her father's job is to decide when and how she is handed to another protector: a husband. There is a rapidity of action implied in the following series of short sentences: 'He left. He returned with a young man whose presence filled the small room'. These sentences give a sense of urgent momentum to the proceedings. Fatma is not permitted time to think or act: 'somehow [Fatma] knew that her fate permitted no truce with life'. This is a battle. If there is 'no truce with life,' she is at war with life. She is struggling to maintain a sense of her own identity and achieve some form of agency. However, it is the men who seem to be most uncomfortable, spending the majority of the meeting staring at the floor: '[o]nly Fatma […] seemed to relish the delicate moment. She liked the idea of sudden, drastic change'.[64] The girl senses the potential inherent in escaping her father's house and the lack of female presence (due to being an only child and the deaths of her mother and grandmother). The suitor, who it transpires is Sajir, is 'paralyzed by the quickness of her girl-woman's body'.[65] This echoes (or foreshadows) the hypnotised state of the drivers, who are unable to look at the older Fatma in Chapter One.

The power and danger of the tempting female form overwhelms the men. Furthermore, the word choice of 'quickness' does not only imply speed or mobility but also giving life. The men are presented as unequal to the women: women who are always fighting for some kind of power, always fighting against the realities of their lives in this modernising country. The female holds the power of life, the power to create. Sajir and the other men recognise this mysterious power and are in a state of frightened, if unconscious, awe of this particular form of female magic.

Alem breaks the narrative flow of this 'occasion' to take time to present a family tale wherein we hear that the 'women in Fatma's family outlived the men'. The story of Fatma's grandmother, Shumla, is mysterious and adds multiple magical elements to the story

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[64] Ibid., p. 10.
[65] Ibid., p. 11.

(including tales of wild adventures in the stories told about her by the supernatural character Noor, in which she is a strong and independent individual and shapeshifter). Shumla had 'twelve brothers, thirty uncles, hundreds of cousins, and […] dozens of husbands'. On the question of whether this is an incredible woman there is no doubt, particularly given that she gave birth to Mansoor 'when she was, by conservative estimates, a hundred and fifty years old'.[66] One immediately wonders what the source of this longevity is and why it is presented in such a matter of fact way in the fictional world of the novel. Indeed, as Cooke (2007) notes, Shumla reminds us of another ancient 'matriarch [in a magical realist text:] Ursula in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*'.[67] We read that Mansoor 'was utterly devoted to [Shumla], even in his dreams. Fatma's father had no interest in women other than his ancient mother'.[68] This is a male character utterly detached from any concept of romantic love or companionship, which is, as soon becomes apparent, the same case with Sajir. Shumla marries Mansoor off at the age of twenty to her seventy-year-old friend, who dies giving birth to Fatma aged one hundred.

Women like Shumla are presented as having a multiplicity of identities and differing levels of agency depending on circumstances. Although Shumla exists in 'cagelike rooms' (which, as will be shown below, is an allegory of women's confinement as a new aspect of petro-capitalist modernity) she holds court in a circle of female admirers in the community. She is an object of fascination and adoration to those who gather around to hear her stories and wicked jokes: 'Ezrael, the angel of death, sleeps under my bed. He's always been there. I keep my eye on him'.[69] Shumla, therefore, claims power over a male angel, and over death itself. However, these stories are not the only reason that the womenfolk gather around the old woman: 'she also kept a stash of magic cures under her bed. […] Her potions never failed to purify the heart and other vital organs'[70] — thus she assists her female companions in controlling their menfolk to some extent via sex. Magic is, therefore, already present within Fatma's family.

A clue to Shumla's strange passion for life in difficult circumstances and her surprising longevity comes as we hear that the 'grandmother enjoyed hearing about men dying […]; she fed on their deaths'.[71] The grandmother took 'solace' from the deaths of the men in her family, taking strength ('sustenance in an endless, miserable life') and enjoyment

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[66] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 6.

[67] Miriam Cooke, 'Dying to Be Free: Wilderness Writing from Lebanon, Arabia, and Libya', in *On Evelyne Accad: Essays in Literature, Feminism, and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Cheryl Toman (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 2007), pp. 13–32 (p. 18).

[68] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 6.

[69] Ibid., p. 7.

[70] Ibid., p. 8.

[71] Ibid., p. 7.

from announcements of male demise.[72] The fact that Shumla enjoyed the deaths of her male relatives is an odd enough statement, but the suggestion that she 'fed' on these deaths seems positively vampiric. Once more, Alem juxtaposes female strength and misery. However, regardless of Shumla's longevity, stamina, and apparent magical abilities, women in Fatma's world are governed by male relatives and held apart from the public sphere, their lives and identities moulded by the structures of patriarchy and capitalist modernity.

Regardless of her powers of magic and influence over other women in the community, the reader is left in no doubt that Shumla has led an enclosed and restricted life — at least in recent years as capitalism affects these women's lives (more of which below). Fatma reflects that death allowed her grandmother to be 'free at last from life's limitations',[73] which highlights the new restrictions the grandmother is unable to endure. She was not strong enough to escape her reality and accepted her lot. This woman has lived to a great age, which is testament to her strength and will to survive, but also emphasises the years of misery she has endured as a woman in a patriarchal society that is integrating into capitalist modernity. Fatma seems destined to live a similar life but she is presented as different to her female kin, as is apparent in the following lines: '[she] never understood the passion for life that raged in women like [Shumla]. Confined to their rooms, hardly ever rising from their beds on the floor, what did they have to live for?'[74] This image of confinement foreshadows the position Fatma finds herself in when married. However, the young girl in Chapter Two has no personal experience of marriage yet; she has only ever witnessed women in a constant cycle of sex and childbirth ('hardly ever rising from their beds') that links the idea of confinement (imprisonment in their rooms) and the alternative definition of the condition of giving birth.

However, the pressure put on women is not solely due to patriarchal society. In Salwa Abdul Hameed Al Khateeb's (1987) field study on Saudi women she notes how 'women in pre-oil Saudi society used to participate in herding and agricultural activities and their work was not regarded as against Islamic teachings at the time because of its necessity for family survival'; however, '[t]he influx of wealth, the unification of the kingdom, the dissemination of Wahabi teachings, and the growth of urbanization have all combined to put more pressures on women to be veiled and secluded in their homes'.[75] Thus, the novel overtly registers the

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[72] Ibid., p. 7.
[73] Ibid., p. 9.
[74] Ibid., p. 7.
[75] Salwa Abdul Hameed Al Khateeb, 'Female Employment and Family Commitment in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study of Professional Women in Riyadh City' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 1987), p. 355. In her ethnographic study, Al Khateeb investigated 'the mutual relationship between the productive and reproductive roles of Saudi working mothers in the city of Riyadh' and how 'the different material and

pressures of capitalist modernity imposed on women, as they are forcibly moved from productive to solely reproductive labour. The impact of capitalist modernity manifests overtly at the beginning of the novel when we hear that 'the family left their tribal home and moved to Mecca'.[76] The family's migration from a rural setting to the city changes all aspects of their lives. In Saudi Arabia, Al Wahid (as cited in Al Bassam [2011]) notes, 'between the 1950s and the 1980s, there was a complete reversal in the rural-urban populations, with the rural population decreasing from 78 per cent to 19 per cent'.[77]

The novel overtly registers this impact of capitalist modernity as the country develops its economy and infrastructure causing large swathes of the population to migrate for economic reasons. We hear how Shumla 'lost everything she loved. She had no herd to care for anymore, no fields to wander in, only the cagelike rooms of her one-story house'.[78] Douglas Martin's article (1982) published in *The New York Times* entitled 'Saudi Arabia's New Capitalism' describes changes taking place in the kingdom. As he puts it:

> In the desert outside Riyadh, unfinished super-highways – as yet unconnected to anything – sweep majestically over herds of camels. In the oil-rich Eastern Province, churning bulldozers turn the rocky land bordering a date palm oasis inside out. […] The changes are evident in [the] palm-lined port city on the Red Sea, one of the world's ancient commercial centers. Huge Mercedes trucks roar past donkey carts. Saudi construction companies build elegant villas and modernistic office buildings adjacent to Jidda's famed stone houses, which are marked by intricately crafted wooden balconies and shutters. Street vendors hawk blackened ears of charcoal-roasted corn in front of sparkling new supermarkets.[79]

In the first chapter of *Fatma* there are references to 'decrepit stone building[s]' and 'a speeding car';[80] these details draw attention to aspects of life in Saudi Arabia where the 'decrepit' buildings juxtapose with the ownership of vehicles in a society marked by the forces of combined and uneven development as capitalist modernity begins to have a greater impact on Saudi society. This form of alienation due to moving from 'fields' to 'cagelike

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ideological factors that help or hinder women to combine their roles as mothers and housewives with their salaried jobs'(p. 353).

[76] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 7.

[77] Ahmad Mohammad Al Bassam, 'Urbanisation and Migration in Saudi Arabia: The Case of Buraydah City' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2011), p. 112.

[78] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 7.

[79] Douglas Martin, 'Saudi Arabia's New Capitalism', *The New York Times*, 21 February 1982, Section 3, p. 1.

[80] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, pp. 1–3.

rooms' also resonates in the claustrophobic existence to which Fatma is consigned: 'the whole day's cycle of light and shadow played itself out in the room. The effect was of a complete universe rising and falling, constantly changing'.[81] When she is finally able to leave the confines of the marital home (albeit under the tight control of her husband and disguised as a boy) Fatma is aware of the impact of the modern, and on a visit to the ancient city of Najran located in Southwestern Saudi Arabia,

> she was disturbed by the emptiness she saw in [the people's] faces. People seemed so caught up by the noise of the world, so hungry to feed on its confusion. Close to the cities, their emptiness was more pronounced; higher up, in rural areas, people were more relaxed. The few humans Fatma encountered on the mountain roads seemed more real than the ones who lived in crowded buildings.[82]

By drawing on the differences of living in the city and the country, the novel registers how people are becoming immersed by inescapable modernisation while precapitalist modes of living still exist in more remote rural areas where life seems more vivid and authentic. The speed of urban development was 'related to economic development'[83] which was 'in line with the nation's growth plans'.[84] However, the modernisation process and uneven development in the kingdom does not offer better conditions for women living in a domestic world with rigid religious structures that uphold the patriarchal order.

This is a novel that combines magic, religion (Sufism), and the modern in a way that disrupts any sense of stability in a world of contradictions. The first time the reader is aware of the overt presence of magic occurs after the girl is banished to the kitchen when a sheik arrives to read the marriage contract to Mansoor and Sajir. Her presence is not required as ownership of her is transferred. As she waits, she focuses on 'an old brass urn, the only bit of decoration in the house'. The image of an old brass urn holds echoes of genies and lamps, but the fact that it is the only decorative item in the room also emphasises the lack of an active female presence in the house. The urn depicts seven heavens, with silver knights, half human and half bird. Fatma touches the images etched on the brass and the 'bodies of the knights made [her] cheeks and hands feel warm'.[85] Alem is reminding the reader of the young man, the replica of the secret companion, whose presence immediately made Fatma 'warmer' in the first chapter.

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[81] Ibid., p. 18.
[82] Ibid., p. 71.
[83] Al Bassam, p. 114.
[84] Ibid., p. 119.
[85] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 11.

Furthermore, Fatma's isolation, craving for connection, and her need for agency is emphasised once again: '[a]ll through her girlhood and adolescence they'd been her only friends. For Fatma they were the very embodiment of power'. The young girl sees past the decorative elements of the urn and imbues the object and the figures upon it with magical powers. This seems to be a moment of farewell and departure: '[t]enderly, for the last time, she touched them'. However, this poignant moment suddenly explodes into a magical episode containing movement and strange visions:

> They came alive. The tiny urn roared with war cries and shrieks of joy. The knights undulated on the urn […] bodies lithe and threatening, pulsing against the bright curtain. The curtain had been there, blinding the window, for as long as Fatma could remember.[86]

Her touch, as she feels the burning passion of an adolescent about to embark on a new life, a married life, animates the figures. Her 'quickness,' mentioned moments before, gives life and brings magic into the world. The curtain, 'blinding the window' and thus any view of the outside world, is illuminated as the magic figures pulse and push against this barrier and symbol of confinement. The magical connection is palpable and electric: '[w]hen she touched the knights themselves, they flared like lightning; the lightning shot into her. She felt impossibly alive'. Again, the connotations of the 'quickness of her girl-woman's body' giving life to and receiving life are drawn out by the action in the kitchen. The connection goes deeper because language, memory and recognition lie at the heart of this new connection that has its roots in an earlier time: 'Fatma had been three years old when it came to her that the flag-bearer's name was Noor'. Noor, an Arabic word which means light (and thus is central to Sufi ideas presented in the text), becomes a companion to Fatma — as will be explained further below. Neither Fatma nor the reader are given time to reflect upon this realisation and magical occurrence as the realities of the patriarchal order framing her life take hold once more. Her father enters the kitchen and she is 'snapped out of her dream'. On entering the reception room 'her fiancé regard[s] her gravely, as if offended by her dreaminess'.[87] Once more, the reader is reminded that the otherworldly, mysterious nature of the life-giving female is a source of offence to the unenlightened male.

The *abaya* (a robe-like dress) in the story is another instance where magic is vividly presented. Fatma is objectified and then linked to another object throughout the text as both she and it undergo a transformation. As her *abaya* is transformed it gains power, as does

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[86] Ibid., p. 11.
[87] Ibid., p. 12.

Fatma. She is to leave her father's home immediately and it is now that the *abaya* makes its first appearance in the new chronology of the narrative arc. It is 'plain black', but the reader remembers the garment's extensive decoration in the first chapter. Fatma initially thinks that 'her father wanted to please her. But it was *only* [emphasis added] her grandmother's *abaya*; her father was complying with Shumla's wish'. Again, memory transports Fatma back in time: '[s]he remembered the *abaya* from the earliest days of her childhood', an object that was the 'most treasured item' in Shumla's 'wooden trunk. […] never been looked at or touched, never seen the light'. Like the women of the story, confined in their cage-like rooms behind curtains that obscure the outside world, the *abaya* has been imprisoned in darkness, waiting to go into the light. As Fatma briefly enters the world, as she travels between the houses of her father and Sajir, she feels like a 'flesh-eating flower, or maybe an animal brimming with energy'.[88] She is excited: the change and sensual stimulation arousing her to womanhood. She is full of hope and 'light-headed with anticipation of a great transformation'. It is almost an out-of-body experience as she 'float[s] along with her eyes on her new life, a life of human contact'. Fatma's lack of human contact has left her feeling like 'a wild and wicked plant' but she hopes to be changed 'into a human wife'.[89]

Yet she is experiencing an inner conflict: '[t]hough she shivered in fear of the plant or animal or savage creature inside her, she couldn't stop thinking about all the things she was going to learn about the devil-plant'.[90] The fear of her passions, her feminine energy, is represented for her by non-human lifeforms, basic and 'savage', which are potentially dangerous. She feels the power within her but cannot understand it. The idea of exploring these hidden depths, however, fills her with a wild energy — a wild energy that soon becomes problematic. When Fatma and Sajir arrive in their bedroom he gestures her to lie down. They kiss and 'Fatma slipped into a sea of nameless terrors and pleasures. The world was quaking, her mind was floating away. Her secret self was breathing, swimming toward the surface'.[91] Her passions are awakening and manifesting physically and emotionally, directed outwards towards her new husband. She is a willing and enthusiastic partner in what she thinks will be a loving dance, a communion of body and mind. This is not to be: 'Fatma froze. He plunged brutally into her, battering the gate of her soul, breaking it open, smashing her tenderness and wrecking the path that led to the face she'd wanted to show him, her true, hidden face'. Her sudden realisation of the realities of her new relationship is heartbreakingly rendered by the violence of the language: 'plunged brutally,' 'battering,' 'breaking,'

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[88] Ibid., p. 12.
[89] Ibid., p. 13.
[90] Ibid., p. 13.
[91] Ibid., pp. 13–14.

'smashing,' 'wrecking'. The only words that could be linked to love here are 'her tenderness' — a reminder of her tender touching of the knights on the urn. She is willing to allow Sajir access to who she truly is, her real identity, 'her true hidden face' but instead she must now hide from him even as she knows he 'would go on forcing himself on his bride, breaking her, burying her wild flowers under scars and heaps of rage'.[92] She is to be subsumed, buried, beneath masculine sexual violence and her husband's need to control. Her passionate potential is cut off at its source, to remain rooted and hidden within her.

The young bride searches for an explanation and her thoughts immediately turn to a feminine link and potential source for the pain being inflicted upon her: '[c]ould he be the avenging angel of all the men her grandmother had consumed in the heat of her passion to live so long?' Moreover, she muses '[w]as she being punished for the old lady's sins?'[93] Thus, as the chapter ends, Alem reasserts the symbolic links between the female, temptation, sin and punishment in a world dominated by men wearing a mask of masculinity that requires control and submission from the female victims of acts of detached violence.

The third chapter of *Fatma*, entitled 'Untaming the *Abaya*', opens with Fatma observing that '[t]here wasn't much space to move around in' and that there is a 'forbidden' room. She has no curiosity regarding this room: '[s]he had no interest in anything but her dreams'. To distract herself she begins the embroidering of her grandmother's *abaya*, 'taking refuge in the welcoming black silk' — a sentence that reminds the reader of her casting it off in her act of rebellion at the beginning/end of the story. The *abaya*, plain and black, hidden for decades in darkness, is to undergo a transformation at Fatma's hands. She begins by weaving 'a circle' in silver thread on the cowl. Immediately, there is a sense of magic at play: '[t]he cloth around the circle rippled, reaching out to the needles and thread in the sewing box'.[94] There is life in the cloth once the circle is cast and the garment seems to be awakening to the presence of the magic being woven into it. The act of embroidery is a metaphorical foreshadowing of Fatma's own transformation:

> She hesitated about working on the lower part of the gown. Then she came to a sudden decision: the best place to start would be the edges. She would define the borders between black and white and all the other colors. In this way she would limit the kingdom where black, and only black, had reigned for so many years.[95]

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[92] Ibid., p. 14.
[93] Ibid., p. 14.
[94] Ibid., p. 15.
[95] Ibid., pp. 15–16.

Fatma, in defining spaces of black and white, darkness and light, is attempting to find balance. Moreover, the language and specific phrases Alem uses echo Sufi ideas of finding the truth: dark and light and 'pathways of light going between the visible and invisible',[96] as will be discussed further below. Thus, Alem is not only presenting a female character with a source of agency within an alternative world but is also deploying Sufi vocabulary and metaphors to do so.

The reader recalls the language that the Yemenite porter in the first chapter does not understand as Fatma embroiders 'a delicate border of letters on the hem, the cuffs and the neckline' as well as details of 'a mountainous world teeming with miniature life'.[97] Again, the imagery is of feminine creation and the ability to call life into being.

This act of creation also brings nostalgic pain: '[s]he felt a sting of longing for the old urn. But it was too late for sweet memories. Her pain poured into the ranks of knights on the black mountain of silk'.[98] By creating scenes and characters similar to those on the urn, Fatma reconnects with the magic and memories of 'her only friends' in childhood.[99] Although it is 'too late for sweet memories' in the context of her married reality, she begins to create a new space for these 'friends,' a space made up of the mountainous heaps of rippling, quickening black silk of the *abaya*. This is now the site/sight of her passion and inner truth. What the letters spell out or whether Fatma knows, the reader is not told. Alem thus demonstrates that there is some form of magic within and surrounding the young bride when she withdraws from her reality and engages in focused creativity.

What follows accelerates Fatma's transformation and reemphasises the juxtaposition of femininity with danger and sin. Sajir enters and exits the forbidden 'east room'.[100] Fatma smells 'a strange odor' and immediately experiences a dizziness that results in her 'seeing things'. Sajir demands sex. He is sweating and his 'desperate, blind animal reek […] arouse[s] her'. Once more, Fatma's passions make her a willing partner and she 'arched toward him. He recoiled'.[101] The word 'recoil' can be defined as retreating or retiring suddenly but also to beat back. He is moving away but also pushing her away, maintaining control. It is also interesting that the word 'recoil' is used here as the reader is about to learn that the forbidden room is full of snakes, coiled and waiting for Sajir's return.

Alem also uses the worldly and otherworldly dimension to create a space to articulate stories of the marginalised and oppressed where the gendered subaltern character

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[96] Ibid., p. 59.
[97] Ibid., p. 16
[98] Ibid., p. 16.
[99] Ibid., p. 11.
[100] Ibid., p. 15.
[101] Ibid., p. 16.

expresses herself in an alternative world within the 'real' world. This shift between the real and unreal also shows the unstable nature of the modern world and the combined unevenness that exists in the modern setting of the novel. The reader is presented with worldly and otherworldly events that disrupt any sense of reality regarding the day-to-day occurrences playing out in the lives of the female characters in the novel. Before the title page of the novel a short passage is offered that elucidates the core of the story. An omniscient narrator tells us:

> She wonders what it would be like to go sailing — to heaven, perhaps, or to hell. She could fight with sea monsters, or mate with them. Or sit beside them on their lightless deep-sea thrones.
>
> Some time ago she grew weary of living her whole life as a woman. At the invitation of her mysterious friend, she left her body and journeyed in the Netherworld where everything was a shadow, insubstantial yet complete. She was able to travel thousands of years and thousands of miles in the blink of an eye. She found out what it was like to hit the wall of thinking and feeling. Her body took on the shape and substance of a dream. There were no walls anymore.

This passage encapsulates the transformation of Fatma from the 'weary' aspects of being a female with all its restrictions to the acceptance of an 'invitation' to a space with 'no walls'. Within this otherworldly space is the potential for disruption. This symbolic disruption goes some way towards redressing the asymmetrical power relationship between the gendered subaltern and the modern patriarchal society in which she finds herself. Such a narrative choice (the deployment of a liminal space) allows readers to imagine the conditions of possibility for female subaltern agency, explored through a narrative that, arguably, works through the pain of subaltern exclusion by opening up new arenas of being. Alem's presentation of this otherworldly dimension is not accidental; rather, it is an example of how the novel also offers insights drawn from Sufi[102] teachings regarding gender relations. By doing so, the novel situates a precapitalist tradition (Sufism) in the modern world as a critique not only of rigid interpretations of gendered relations within the framework of religion but also a critique of capitalist modernity and its role in the exploitation of women, as articulated by Federici (among others).

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[102] The presence of Sufism in *Fatma a novel of Arabia* has been identified by scholars such as Ghadir K. Zannoun (2015) and Mona Almaeen (2018). Differently from these scholars, this chapter reads Sufism in the novel within world-system analysis, world literature theory and magical realism frameworks as well as situating the novel within the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s).

The story of Eve being created from the rib of Adam is at the heart of Sufi tradition, particularly Ibn Arabi's notion of the relationship between women and men. For him, the relationship is complementary rather than hierarchical:

She was [created] from the rib because ribs are characterized by the quality of bending [*inḥinā'*]. This is so that she might bend toward her child and her husband. The man bends in inclination toward the woman with a bending toward himself because she is part of him. The woman bends in inclination toward the man because she is created from the rib, and the rib has in it the quality of bending and sympathetic affection [*in'itaf*]. And God filled the space within Adam from which Eve was extracted with desire [*shahwa*] for her because there never remains a vacuum in existence. So [God] filled him with desire, and he yearned for her, as a yearning for himself because she is a part taken from him. And she yearns for him out of homesickness for her place of origin. The love of Eve is love for a place of origin [homeland] and the love of Adam is love of himself. From this appears love of man for a woman because she was him in essence. And woman is given the power in loving man, a power expressed through her modesty or shyness [*ḥayā'*].[103]

This idea runs counter to patriarchal views in which the male is eminently superior to the female: '[b]y using a complex analogy between macrocosm and microcosm, on the one hand, and Adam and Eve, on the other' Shaikh (2012) states, Ibn Arabi 'both assimilates and reconfigures standard meanings of those Qur'ān and ḥadīth texts generally invoked to entrench ideologies of gender hierarchy'.[104] This is echoed in a conversation between Noor — a companion described as being 'a strange shadow [...] shaped like a human body, but the face was featureless'[105] — and Fatma that shows how magical inspiration can also reconfigure 'standard meanings' regarding gender:

"My husband says that I'm an idol made of *fertasya* stone," she said. [Noor responds:] "What is he talking about?" [...] He slipped off the wall carrying a copy of *The Wonders of Creatures*, a book by al-Qazwene. He [reads] [...]:

"The *fertasya* stone [...] grows at the base of the tallest mountains. At nightfall it glows like a lantern, giving off bewitching fire and light. But when it's ground up and

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[103] Quoted in Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, p. 163.
[104] Ibid., p. 152.
[105] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 28.

dissolved in celery-water, it turns into deadly venom capable of killing anything that comes in contact with it".[106]

The stones are located at 'the base,' the lowest point, below the tall mountains (possibly representing men and husbands). The stones exist in the shadow of these mountains, and it is only in the darkness that they are truly seen. By using this metaphor, the husband likens his wife to an inanimate object that is acceptable glowing in its place in the foothills of majestic peaks (men/phallic). The stone (woman) has a magical beauty, warmth and light; however, the fire is 'bewitching', and combines beauty with danger. When the stone is crushed, losing its identity and ability to glow with beauty, it becomes even more dangerous: 'a deadly venom'. Furthermore, this water-borne poison shows no distinction as it is 'capable of killing anything.' Thus, the metaphor provides a representation of women as beautiful but dangerous, a source of light and evil, and indiscriminately poisonous when no longer a beautiful object to be admired in a passive state.

Noor disagrees with the husband's use of this imagery and offers an alternative. Noor states that Fatma is more reminiscent of a 'pure, yellow bezoar stone' that has the power to heal rather than kill. The shadow Noor continues: 'you could be that stone, […] Or you could be the Philosopher's Stone that turns base metal into gold. It's all a game. You set the rules [and] can play it any way you like'.[107] The supernatural figure turns the patriarchal image of dangerous females into the image of transformational power and wisdom (the Philosopher's Stone) capable of transmuting 'the base' (as seen in the husband's metaphor, and implying no value) into something beautiful and valuable (gold). Furthermore, Noor can be seen as a guide for this subaltern by explaining that it is a choice ('any way you like') and a game. The rules seem to be a matter of perspective, for if Fatma chooses to see herself in terms of her husband's metaphor this will be her reality. However, by taking a different, more self-empowering perspective, she can change her reality by changing the way she sees herself. Rather than merely accepting her husband's viewpoint, Fatma has the opportunity to hear alternatives. She is given a glimpse of another reality and therefore a choice in seeking the truth.

This process of truth seeking is far from straightforward. Alem uses layers of irony wherein the female subaltern figure, who subverts hegemonic patriarchal power is still herself unconsciously falling into the traps set by traditional belief systems. Fatma begins to question the supernatural agent about its sex, for instance. For her, as for many females in her society, patriarchal gender norms constrain the relationships men can have with women.

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[106] Ibid., pp. 128–29.
[107] Ibid., p. 129.

Unconsciously perhaps, Fatma seems to want Noor not to be male as it is not appropriate in her society for her to have a relationship with a non-relative male. The supernatural agent, Noor, angrily responds with the following speech:

> "What difference does it make? […] "What is a man? A woman? What are *you*? Why does it matter to you? All you have to do is follow me. You'll arrive at your own conclusions."
>
> "And when I do?" There was a note of sarcasm in [Fatma's] voice. "My sex would have no value?"
>
> "You assume there is a barrier between the sexes. There is no barrier. You will become all sexes. In the end, every creature, every being, will drop its mask and simply be itself – the oneself."[108]

Noor is guiding Fatma to the realisation that all life comes from one source and that all life will return to that source after death. Whether the reader is religious or non-religious, Noor's point is that the 'mask' (a word that arises many times throughout the novel and four times in the first chapter alone) of our current identity will fall as we are transformed into another type of energy (the secular law of physics that energy cannot be destroyed only transformed) or to God's light (the religious afterlife). Noor does not specify how this will happen, only that there is a oneness that negates any consideration of identity being linked to gender. Fatma, although gradually transformed by her interactions with Noor, is essentially entrapping herself again within the codes set out in patriarchal logic.

Noor then guides Fatma in understanding how to connect to her soul in order for her to find a way back to God and truth. Alem recalls the notion of the human soul in Sufi teachings, in which its aim is transformation. Fatma travels with the supernatural being, who interprets her dream, to the land in the book: 'in the light [truth], there lies your eventual triumph as a queen [soul], a queen who will escape from the empty pit you find yourself in [the body and the world]'; therefore, '[t]he light is the gift of sight, and it is promised to you and your blind subjects [both her snakes and those who can see without sight, which is also faith]'.[109] This is also reminiscent of the teaching of Ibn Arabi wherein '[t]he growth of the human soul, the process whereby it moves from darkness to light, is also a growth from death to life (*ḥayāt*), ignorance to knowledge (*'ilm*), listlessness to desire (*irāda*), weakness to power (*qudra*)'.[110] When Fatma starts to focus on her 'inner senses,' she begins 'to feel free of her limitations'.[111] We also hear how 'she treasured her solitude. She valued her writhing

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[108] Ibid., pp. 31–32.
[109] Ibid., p. 53.
[110] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*: *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 17.
[111] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 59.

friends and their blind willingness to teach her the secret pathways to beauty and peace'.[112] Noor reminds her of the prophet Abraham in his encounter with fire: 'If you were to match your inner fire against any fire lit in the visible world, you'd see that no flame could burn you. The fiercest fire burns within.' She feels discomfort in her body until she makes peace with her inner feelings, embracing the fire of her authentic passions[113] — passions she had to hide in her father's house and marital home.

Again, this is another example of the character moving towards a state of transformation. One example of this transformation is that Fatma has the power to travel 'some distance to locate things outside' and 'identify all the snakes [over which she has control] in her husband's vast collection'.[114] Thus, '[e]verything in the small world of [her] house became hers'.[115] Her husband has no choice but to take Fatma with him on a snake exhibition trip in the village of Najran since he suddenly has no control over his snakes. He dresses her in 'boy's clothing' and a 'mask' in order 'to pass as a helper'.[116] This act allows Fatma to travel outside the domestic sphere in numerous ways.

Alem shows in *Fatma a Novel of Arabia* both the negative and positive ways in which women can be portrayed in Arabic Muslim traditions. First, women can be portrayed as or in league with Satan. In Arab cultures (as with other cultures), women are sometimes linked with the serpent and the devil in a triangular formation. Hend T. Al-Sudairy (2013) explains that '[t]his ancient triangle […] is founded to attack the male' while the male 'is presented as the victim of the collaboration among the three angles of the triangle'.[117] Fatma is variously described as 'the most dangerous kind of snake, a woman-snake',[118] a 'snakewoman wife',[119] and finally becomes 'Fatma-Serpent' in the final line of the book.[120] This is not to suggest that Alem simply appropriates this patriarchal motif, however. On the contrary, as Ghadir K. Zannoun (2015) notes in a discussion of *Fatma*, Alem 'rewrites the snake as the source of healing and transformation' the symbol of the snake is important as in 'the popular Arabo-Islamic traditions, the serpent is associated with the story of the fall and of original sin, symbolizing deception. Such writings, then, reclaim negative symbolism

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[112] Ibid., pp. 73–74.
[113] Ibid., p. 60.
[114] Ibid., p. 36.
[115] Ibid., p. 28.
[116] Ibid., p. 69.
[117] Hend T. Al-Sudairy, 'A New Reading of the Serpent Myth in the Ancient and Modern Arab Culture', *Studies in Literature and Language*, 6.1 (2013), 54–59 (p. 55).
[118] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 23.
[119] Ibid., p. 113.
[120] Ibid., p. 150.

about women and endow it with new and empowering meanings'.[121] Moreover, Fatma is likened to the Toba (the Sacred Tree) in Islamic belief, as well as Balkees, the Queen of Yemen/Sheba. Noor tells Fatma '[y]ou can be the daughter of Toba, you could be Balkees […] [o]r you could be invisible. It's all up to you'.[122] Once again, Noor shows Fatma that her gender is not what restricts her. What restricts her are the socio-religious codes that bind her community and which she has allowed herself to be bound by. Noor, the supernatural being, does not recognise any man-made limitations ('It's all up to you') while interestingly still applying gender-specific terms ('you can be the daughter of Toba, you could be [a queen]'); therefore, Noor's emphasis is on the potentiality of female power at the same time as negating the importance of patriarchal conceptions of gender as a limit to that power. This demonstrates that women have an inherent power (as the bearers of children, as sights/sites of sexuality and temptation, and so on) that has always been recognised and somewhat feared by men.

Alem refers to the Toba/Touba Tree which is a tree in paradise in the Islamic tradition. Sufis, particularly Ibn Arabi, link this tree with the structure of the world.[123] The tree can be read as a motif for reimagining the future of the world after capitalist modernity and the patriarchal structures that support it. This is in keeping with the thoughts of Pheng Cheah (2016) regarding the possibility of the 'reworlding of the world' in literature.[124] Rather than a 'mapping of the world [in world literature] by temporal calculations [which] is premised on a conceptualization of the world as a spatial category […] that can be divided into zones of quantitatively measurable time', Cheah argues that we need to read '*World*' as 'a temporal category'.[125] Conceptualising the world 'in temporal terms', for Cheah, 'provides a normative basis for transforming the world made by capitalist globalization', and further 'how this normative understanding of the world leads to a radical rethinking of world literature as literature that is an active power in the making of worlds'.[126] In *Fatma*, there is

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[121] Ghadir K. Zannoun, 'Fantasy, Mysticism, and Eroticism in Raja Alem's *Fatma*', *Kohl: A Journal for Gender and Body Research*, 1. 2 (2015), 44–55 (p. 47).

[122] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 128.

[123] For Sufis such as Ibn Arabi, the structure of the world has the sacred Touba Tree at its heart (there are three possible spellings: Touba/Toba/tūbā): the world's '[c]entrality and axiality […] are revealed in the tree of *tūbā,* which stands at the center of the Gardens'. The tree thus 'represents Universal Man, designating, as it were, his place in the Gardens. It relates to the rest of the trees in the Gardens as Adam relates to humankind' because 'God planted it with his own hand in the same way he created Adam. He also breathed the spirit into it, rendering it the most splendid of all trees'; the tree 'raises above the fence of the Garden of Eden, where God planted it, and its branches spread over other Gardens. Its roots are in the soil of our world and its fruits in paradise' (p. 134). See Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

[124] Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 219.

[125] Ibid., p. 2.

[126] Ibid., p. 2.

a scene where Sajir 'stood […] staring' and '[tries] to comprehend the invisible branches of Toba, the Mother Tree, whose black-green leaves were tumbling out of Fatma's *abaya*'.[127] Instead of the relative simplicity of the black and white of the *abaya* we see at the beginning of the story, Fatma is now able to change it to 'black-green,' 'dark green' at will.[128]

As Fatma the Mother Tree, 'Touba' inside her resists: 'Fatma was panting with the effort of trying to keep up with the storm of leaves from the Mother Tree'.[129] Then '[t]he entire room was turning dark green' and Fatma 'knew that the flood of growth would sweep everything before it'.[130] As a result, Fatma becomes like 'a newborn baby' and Noor cleanses her:

> His dark waters, his magic shadow-waters, flooded her, touching her more intimately than she had ever been touched. From the tips of her fingers to the depths of her soul she felt sated, fulfilled. A new feeling of calm came over her. She smiled a deep sensual smile, glowing with satisfaction. She felt at peace, whole again.[131]

This scene shows Fatma's 'self-discovery and self-finding,' a form of cleansing and rebirth through a deep connection with her own soul. The transformation of Fatma in the following extract can be seen to rework and develop this parable:

> She felt cared for. And powerful […] she saw herself clearly for the first time in her life, saw her beauty and individuality. She was able to see herself as a separate being, with the ability to stand back and take a good look at what she was. She beheld her other body, her spirit body, feather-light and free, and she experienced the incomparable richness of a soul transcending the pain of the moment.[132]

Through this repetition of Sufi practices, she is able to free herself from a self-image created within the terms of the patriarchal constraints placed on her life as a subaltern female. Indeed, the narrator describes how Fatma is able to transform her domestic sphere into a site of meditation: '[s]he never felt alone when she sat in the room, never exiled or excluded'.[133] Her enjoyment of being alone, her repeated practice of these acts of meditation, which allows her to escape from the world around her, is a source of relaxation and spiritual comfort from life's suffering and struggle. Such acts of meditation can also be understood allegorically, as symbolic acts of resistance to the social transformations wrought by the forces of extraction

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[127] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 132.
[128] Ibid., pp. 132–33.
[129] Ibid., p. 132.
[130] Ibid., pp. 132–33.
[131] Ibid., p. 135.
[132] Ibid., p. 136.
[133] Ibid., pp. 18–19.

and capitalist modernity, which aid and abet women's oppression within the domestic sphere.

In this way, the novel uses Sufism as a resource to interrupt the combination of pre-capitalist patriarchal religious values and the culture of an emerging capitalist society enabled by fossil oil. By doing so, the novel shows that religion is not inherently a source of patriarchal oppression; rather, it is the emergence of conservative religious ideologies, combined with the invisible forces of oil extraction, that have led to women's oppression in modern Saudi Arabia. The supernatural interventions, which give the female protagonist greater agency in this modern patriarchal fictional world are registered in terms of a release of latent feminine power, as we will see.

Fatma's personal growth leads her husband to eventually surrender his power: '[a]ll [Sajir] wanted was to follow the road of least resistance, to get as far away as possible from people and the world of the living'.[134] Fatma begins to show him her true self and demonstrates compassion even in the face of his oppressive behaviour: '[t]his was the first genuine smile she'd ever shown Sajir, and he was instantly smitten, dumbstruck'.[135] Fatma undergoes radical changes as her inner power grows: 'the great animal lurking inside her, an animal always ready to pounce and paralyze'.[136] Indeed, when she encounters Prince Taray in Najran he tells her '[t]his body belongs to no man, […] Can you feel your own body under me? This mound of softness? Like a serpent or a sand-nymph! It's so alive, it feels like spears shooting through me'.[137] The narrator shows that it is not Fatma's interactions with others that directly facilitate her transformation. Against the patriarchal view that women are vessels for the light or sperm of men, the narrator asserts:

> It was not the man, Taray, who brought Fatma's dead embers to life. It was Fatma's own body, her own touching of it. Her touch triggered the need to be touched. It seemed to come from nowhere, all at once, wild and free, this opening of a long-blocked sensitivity inside her.[138]

The first act of rebellion witnessed by the reader comes in chapter one that is the beginning of the end but not the beginning of the story: '[a] spark of rage twinkled in the statue's eyes. Fatma got to her feet, left her *abaya* in the street and walked away. The black gown was a cold mask between her and the gaping world'.[139] Fatma's rage mirrors

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[134] Ibid., p. 68.
[135] Ibid., p. 68.
[136] Ibid., p. 74.
[137] Ibid., p. 82.
[138] Ibid., p. 82.
[139] Ibid., p. 2.

that of her husband, but it comes after they have parted. She does not resist him or the patriarchal context of his violent and controlling actions. The rage manifests after she has taken the role of a discarded statue. This is no minor act of rebellion. For a Saudi woman to cast off her clothes in the street is a symbolic act that could bring a swift and violent death. The removal of the *abaya* is the removal of a culturally defined barrier between female physicality and the male world for which her body represents a source of temptation and danger. In describing the gown as a 'cold mask,' Alem emphasises the power of dress codes to control and manipulate individuals.

By taking off the *abaya*, Fatma is stepping out of the traditional silk garment and into the 'gaping world'. The word 'gaping' in English literally means 'wide open'.[140] Thus, Fatma walks out of confinement (the house and her clothing) into a wider world and is now herself wide open to transformation. The word also has specific medical connotations, and often refers to a hole or wound. The use of 'gaping,' with its sense of injury therefore emphasises the necessity for healing via her new freedom: '[s]he cast it off without thinking, though she knew that nothing would make her husband more furious than her publicly uncovered body'.[141] The reader already knows that Sajir is 'infuriated' by his wife's beauty; however, it is not clear why this is the case, and the public act of throwing her into the street would seem to run counter to the patriarchal imperative to control and hide her from the world. This act of rebellion takes the consequences of his actions to the extreme via an un/conscious disrobing of restriction by a female subject.

As she carries out this act of defiance, Fatma's husband declares '[y]ou know, no matter how beautiful you become, there's not a man alive who could love you'.[142] Sajir also refers to 'his witch of a wife'.[143] The house porter — 'a kindly old man' — follows Fatma and tries to put the *abaya* over her shoulders 'without touching her, begging her to wear it'.[144] The man is 'trembling' but not with excitement at the sight of her nakedness or fear for her safety. Instead, the reader sees that 'the black cloth slithered in his arms like [a] mysterious creature'.[145] The word 'slithered' is a foreshadowing of Fatma's intimate relationship with the snakes that feature so prominently throughout the novel.

The *abaya* contains some form of magic: 'bright words embroidered on the silk nagged him in a language he did not understand. He could feel their awful power in his

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[140] 'Gape', in *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Maurice Waite, 11th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 375.
[141] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 2.
[142] Ibid., p. 129.
[143] Ibid., p. 115.
[144] Ibid., p. 2.
[145] Ibid., p. 2.

bones'.[146] Synonyms for the verb 'to nag' include 'gnaw, 'nibble, irritate'. The bright words, shining with magic, are in a 'language he did not understand' — perhaps because he is a man, and this is female magic. That the words nag or gnaw at him shows this is not a benign form of magic ('awful power') and the connotation of biting links the words on the *abaya* both to the snakes and Fatma's ability to discomfort the men around her.

Fatma's energy ebbs and flows as she walks into the wider world and her initial 'spark of defiance faded'.[147] Her act of rebellion fades too: '[s]he sagged and sighed and with a blindly automatic motion she covered herself'. She does not think about this action because she is culturally programmed to cover herself. As at other moments during the novel, she takes on the form of the tent-like *abaya* as seen here with the words 'sagged' and 'sighed,' as if she too were made of the billowing black silk. Fatma stands amid the traffic, cars 'whooshing by'. The cars are 'like the hissing demons that possessed her husband's soul'.[148] Fatma sees her husband as possessed by his snakes rather than considering her link to the serpents that we later discover inhabit a room in her marital home. Standing vulnerable in the road, Fatma reflects on her historical experience as a woman:

> Twenty years a wife…twenty years of marriage, twenty years in prison…she had no idea where to go or what to do. She had no one to turn to. She'd fallen away from everyone she knew, even her father. She'd never had time to cultivate friendships with other women.[149]

Fatma has no sense of community or how to operate in the world. The city is an alien place. She has no bonds of kinship or even a circle of female companions with whom to interact. This sense of social isolation can also be read in terms of the alienation that capitalist modernity creates as people moving to cities become more and more imprisoned in a new life cycle of alienated labour and restrictions. We hear how the village of Najran 'was truly a land of plenty, and if she managed to live the life of wide horizons she wanted so much to live, she would love to return here one day, to this place of refuge'.[150] Her marriage has been a form of imprisonment too; she has been denied any agency or freedom of movement by the 'poor excuse for a man who kept her a prisoner in that old dump of a house'.[151]

However, this is yet another moment of rebellion and she revels in the assault upon her senses as she stands in the street: '[t]wenty years of not even setting foot on a dusty street

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[146] Ibid., p. 2.
[147] Alem, *Fatma a Novel of Arabia*, p. 2.
[148] Ibid., p. 2.
[149] Ibid., pp. 2–3.
[150] Ibid., p. 102.
[151] Ibid., p. 3.

— now she was taking a bath in dust and noise and light, and she was enjoying the rush, the crazy motion'.[152] Fatma is energised by the sounds, sights and movement of life in the city, even as the cars threaten to mow her down; however, she is not fond of this changing world and we hear how '[n]othing she had seen in the outside world had prepared her for the brilliance of life in [old ancient] Najran'.[153]

The environment is not only alien: it is increasingly dangerous. The passing drivers 'honk'. She watches their faces: 'doll-like, all looking straight ahead as if hypnotized by the same spell. And they wore the same impersonal mask as Sajir when he lowered himself on her and pushed into her'.[154] The men see her but do not see her; indeed, it seems that the magic, 'the same spell' prevents them looking at her. Here we find the second mention of a mask in this first chapter, an 'impersonal mask' with its connotations of being detached, indifferent, dispassionate and inhuman. The reference to Sajir and his detached lovemaking once more foreshadows what is to come as the story moves back twenty years in Chapter Two.

The narrative is disjointed, and we are presented with Fatma's point of view as it moves in and out of focus, from present to past. Time is an uncertain presence: '[s]he stood there for an eternity' watching the cars, 'especially the red ones, red as the devils that grabbed her when Sajir came to bed wearing that grillwork mask of his'.[155] Again, even though Sajir has stated publicly that his wife is a 'curse'[156] and the reader senses the magic coursing through and surrounding Fatma, she sees her husband as cursed and possessed. With the third deployment of the word 'mask', the author presents echoes of a violent marriage ('grabbed') and the presence in the house of some kind of evil or torment ('devils').

The focus here is on the masks people wear, and specifically the masks, literal and metaphorical, worn by the husband: '[t]wenty years, night after night, Fatma faced that mask. Twenty years she fed it, washed its rags and went to bed with it'.[157] Sajir, impersonal, detached, indifferent, is dehumanised in this description as a result of the inhuman treatment of his wife: '[t]wenty years of being treated like a thing, trampled'.[158] Throughout this story's opening, a story that loops back on itself like the serpents at its centre, words like 'crumpled,' 'broken,' 'fallen,' and 'trampled' describe this woman who has been injured, violated and crushed by marriage. There are also time shifts:

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152 Ibid., p. 3.
153 Ibid., p. 76.
154 Ibid., p. 3.
155 Ibid., p. 3.
156 Ibid., p. 1.
157 Ibid., pp. 3–4.
158 Ibid., p. 4.

> A year went by, two years perhaps, or ten — time didn't matter in Fatma's world. She was totally immersed in the snakes' timekeeping: one turn of the tail might mean a lifetime. And a lifetime could be a blink at a flash of the great void they were able to see.[159]

Time is referenced as a fluid concept rather than clock-time: 'time didn't matter'. As noted above, *Fatma* has a serpentine structure with the action moving forwards and backwards through a period of twenty years and ends at its beginning; however, the novel also stretches from modern Saudi Arabia to ancient Arabia via a magical world that has a different temporality. Again, this is an example of reworlding of temporality in ways that run counter to the temporal logic of capitalist modernity with its accelerations across space and time/space-time compression that is enabled by fossil fuel technologies such as the motor car. The narrative is also disrupted by the stories Noor tells Fatma and a journey through classic Arabic and Islamic philosophy's well-known books. Thus, the disruption of time and space works to allow this otherworldly realm to be portrayed.

Fatma has changed the way she engages with the male and now takes an active role that tips the balance of power in her favour. When she touches Prince Taray — whom Fatma meets among other characters in Najran — we hear how her 'touch was more than a lover's touch; it was as if she were molding him in clay or bringing his shape out of stone'.[160] Here, Fatma is becoming aware that this inner journey and connection is the way to freedom from patriarchal oppression: '[s]he wanted to tap the mysteries in her soul that had been ruined by her father's detachment and her husband's cruelty'.[161] Fatma begins to see herself as part of Mother Earth and 'saw her own image running in the river that coursed through the flesh and bones of the world'.[162]

This expansion continues to change the power relationship with her husband. Regarding sexual intercourse with Sajir, she tells Noor: 'I've developed a certain skill [...] the ability to float away while he's knocking against my forgotten center. I don't feel him anymore.'[163] Sajir's behaviour still fluctuates but Fatma's controlled detachment and ability to disregard pain and humiliation 'seemed to have put aside his anger and determination to destroy her, body and soul',[164] which eventually leads to him removing/liberating her from his house. When Sajir forces himself on Fatma once again the narrator describes how:

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[159] Ibid., p. 30.
[160] Ibid., p. 84.
[161] Ibid., p. 83.
[162] Ibid., p. 89.
[163] Ibid., p. 90.
[164] Ibid., p. 90.

[her] body made a decision on its own: Her muscles convulsed, becoming hard as emerald, and gripped his sword. He drew back in shock but was unable to pull out. The Nurse's soft feminine sinews had taken control, ignoring Sajir's curses and threats.[165]

The female's body has imprisoned the phallus, the symbol of male potency and power. Again, Alem reverses the power relationship: 'Sajir realized he was trapped. He was naked before his wife, with no mask to protect him. He lost control of the demon within himself. The demon howled and kept hitting Fatma, to no avail'.[166] Without control/ownership of his penis, the instrument that he uses to 'break' and 'batter' his wife in acts of sexual violence, Sajir is vulnerable ('naked') and he no longer has the 'mask [of masculinity] to protect him'. Sajir, a husband who has completely lost control of his wife has little choice: 'he threw Fatma out of the house and out of his life'.[167] Regardless of his physical superiority and public display of control, by ejecting her from the house and actively attempting to humiliate her in the street, it is clear that Sajir has completely lost control of Fatma. More violence and potential humiliation follows: '[h]e shoved her [and] Fatma landed on the street and rolled in the dust'.[168] However, the reader is told that she 'felt nothing — no anger, no humiliation. She was a crumpled black tent with a bit of embroidery on it. Numbness seeped through her arms and her chest. Her heart was frozen'.[169] This seems to be an image of women wearing the *abaya* as shapeless, anonymous possessions of men. Alem extends the metaphors related to the undervalued, unseen, unheard, objectified female: '[s]he might have been a broken statue piled on top of the trash that never seemed to get picked up'.[170] There is a sense that her beauty should have made her an object of romantic worship in the use of the word 'statue', but she has been broken from the outset of her marriage. She has been thrown into the street like any other rubbish; she is unvalued and ignored. However, this momentarily inanimate object/woman comes alive on her own terms and thereby rebels against patriarchal conceptions of femininity, which underpin the regimes of accumulation associated with unwaged social reproduction.

Fatma's reflections as she stands among the whooshing, honking, devil-like cars are rendered as physical signs that appear on her body: '[s]he watched the devils creep up her arms'.[171] Again this can be read as a rebellion against the transformations going on around

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[165] Ibid., p. 142.
[166] Ibid., pp. 142–43.
[167] Ibid., p. 143.
[168] Ibid., p. 1.
[169] Ibid., p. 1.
[170] Ibid., p. 2.
[171] Ibid., p. 4.

her, which traditional patriarchal structures and capitalist modernity inaugurate in mutually reinforcing ways. Something is flowing within her, taking her over, and yet the reader cannot understand the aetiology of these changes. The Yemenite porter who has followed her also seems to see these changes and so perhaps these manifestations are not merely a figment of Fatma's overwrought imagination fuelled by the domestic abuse she has suffered at the hands of her husband. The porter begins chanting 'a very old prayer used to calm wild animals.'[172] Once again, the male viewpoint of the female being dangerous and animalistic is emphasised.

Nevertheless, these 'ancient sounds quieted Fatma',[173] whether this is because the sounds represent calm amid the bustle of the city or because she is susceptible to a chant meant for wild beasts. The use of prayer also raises questions about the ultimate source of her magic. With this ancient chant, the 'bruises [initially referred to as 'devils'] faded from her arms. She wanted him to go on praying forever.' The porter's prayer brings the possibility of an invocation that causes an intercession from the divine. The prayer does not frighten her but only serves to provide a form of peace. The porter offers to hide her. What seems like a kindly gesture, however, also contains a distinctly paternalistic undertone: '[c]ome on, get out of the light, get back in the shadows.'[174] Is it Fatma specifically who belongs in the shadows, banished from the light of the world, or women in general? The words of prayer are gone and reality returns: '[h]is words hurt her head. She wanted him to sing his prayers again. But he kept talking in human words.'[175] Forms of language are central to the interaction between these two characters. The porter does not understand the embroidered language (feminine) on the female garment (*abaya*) nor the strange actions of this woman. Fatma, in turn, only understands the porter when he chants his prayer, when he makes sounds that do not originate in the human world. Again, the purity of an occulted prayer can be the only language that Fatma relates to due to her alienation from a male-dominated world of fast-moving modernity underpinned by older forms of patriarchal oppression.

As these events unfold, a young man pulls over in his car and tells the Yemenite to leave Fatma alone. Fatma's reaction is a key moment as the chapter draws to an end: 'there was something about him that seemed to have woken from a distant time'. There is an instant connection: '[s]he felt warmer, and her warmth reached out for him'.[176] Alem piles mystery

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[172] Ibid., p. 4.
[173] Ibid., p. 4.
[174] Ibid., p. 4.
[175] Ibid., p. 4.
[176] Ibid., p. 4.

upon mystery as the opening chapter ends: 'Fatma saw his face clearly for the first time. She was stunned: he was the exact replica of her secret friend'.[177] This secret friend represents something of an enigma. The reader has been told that Fatma has been imprisoned in the marital home for twenty years.

The suggestion that she has a secret friend might be taken to suggest that this unhappy wife has taken a lover, but this seems unlikely given the details of Fatma's domestic imprisonment and servitude provided by the text so far. This 'replica' is of a 'companion who stood beside her at the stone wash basin. She asked herself if her secret friend was real or a mirage in the desert of her isolation. She no longer knew'.[178] Thus, the real and unreal are blended, and the reader is told that this companion was 'the figure on the brass urn in her father's kitchen, the hero holding the lion-flag'. This vision and connection with the past acts as a transitional memory-based catalyst that throws Fatma and the reader backwards in time twenty years. Suddenly, she is 'young again'. The moment liberates her: '[h]er husband loosened his grip and let go of her. His cold mask faded away. She was seventeen'.[179] The violent control of the husband disappears with the mask (the fourth use of the word in the chapter) as time and space collapse in the narrative as the chapter ends. In this way, Alem experiments with the conventions of narrative temporality to imagine a different past and future for her female protagonist that is not subordinated to the exigencies of patriarchal oppression and capital accumulation.

At the end of the novel, the final journey towards a state of divine transformation begins; Noor says '[o]pen your heart. Bare your soul. You're coming with me now'.[180] We are told that both Fatma and the husband die, but that Fatma's death was 'the finest death [she] had ever experienced'[181] while her husband's 'was death-in-life'.[182] The final scene shows Fatma with Noor in the eternal world. Moving back and forth between 'magical/spiritual' and 'realist' worlds, the narrative does not follow a straightforward chronological order. The plot structure unfolds other stories in *Fatma* in a similar manner (for example, the story of the snake and Mohammed ben Himyar) and binds her tale together as the reader watches the action unfold back towards the beginning of the novel. As she dies, Fatma knows she is 'going to a world where [she]'ll be able to show [her] true face'.[183] She has transformed: '[i]t was simply her; it was her genuine self. […] The sensation was of

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[177] Ibid., p. 5.
[178] Ibid., p. 5.
[179] Ibid., p. 5.
[180] Ibid., p. 137.
[181] Ibid., p. 149.
[182] Ibid., p. 147.
[183] Ibid., p. 145.

being securely held. The holding was fulfillment. […] She felt complete, she felt everywhere at once'.[184] The author takes her main character on a journey of self-discovery and in so doing provides the reader with certain lessons regarding female agency. This female agency is based on Sufi knowledge. Alem blends Sufi aspects of spiritual transformation in the search for truth and knowledge with aspects of the magical/unreal via the travels through the books and interactions with magical objects such as the urn and the *abaya.*

By writing a novel about modern Saudi Arabia from the standpoint of an illiterate Saudi female subaltern, Alem creates a historical novel that makes the mutually reinforcing relationship between patriarchal social relations grounded in a conservative Islamic ideology and an emerging capitalist economy fuelled by fossil energy intelligible to readers. More than this, by drawing on myths that have their origins in the Arabian peninsula, as well as Sufi teachings and elements of fantasy, Alem imagines an alternative to the pain of domestic abuse and dehumanisation that are inextricably bound up with the patriarchal foundations of capital accumulation in modern Saudi Arabia. If *Fatma a Novel of Arabia* foregrounds the ways in which the agency of women is constrained by conservative ideas of gender within a country that is also transformed by capitalist modernity after the discovery of oil. *Touba and the Meaning of Night* registers different experiences of capitalist modernity in Iran from the perspective of different female characters. As the next section suggests, the experience of Iranian modernity for Parsipur is one of profound socio-political turbulence.

2.2   Women in Modernising Iran in *Touba and the Meaning of Night*

Touba and the Meaning of Night, which Parsipur 'mostly wrote in prison in the 1980s',[185] and was later published in Persian in 1987,[186] is a story of a modern and turbulent Iran that is focalised through the consciousness of different female characters. Through the conceptual lens of the theories mentioned above, this section asks how the experiences of a female subaltern are articulated in a work that registers the impact of capitalist modernity in Iran from an Iranian Muslim woman's perspective. This section also considers how we might understand the novel's form, structure, and narrative voice in comparison with other Muslim magical realism(s) which register the coexistence of the religious (particularly Sufism) and the modern. Moreover, what might such an approach tell us about the combined and uneven

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[184] Ibid., pp. 147–50.
[185] Kamran Talattof, 'Breaking Taboos in Iranian Women's Literature: The Work of Shahrnush Parsipur', *World Literature Today*, 78. 3/4 (2004), 43–46 (p. 45) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40158499> [accessed 21 December 2019].
[186] *Touba and the Meaning of Night* was banned in Iran by the Islamic Republic (see the back cover of the edition of the novel listed in the bibliography of this thesis) and translated into English and published in 2007.

development of modern Iran in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, particularly following the discovery of oil in 1908? Also, how are female characters presented, who are experiencing exclusion from many aspects of social and public life in a male-dominated society during the process of capitalist modernisation as they seek agency in Sufi practices? Through a close reading of Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, this section considers how the exclusion of women from the public sphere in modern Iran is a result of not only patriarchal social norms but is also enforced by capitalist modernity.

Despite the varying experiences of the protagonists in *Touba and the Meaning of Night* and *Fatma a Novel of Arabia* and the different socio-political backgrounds they represent, both Alem and Parsipur deploy a narrative form that resembles the conventions of magical realism and draw on Sufism[187] in a modern setting as a source of agency for these female characters. By drawing on Sufism to counter the patriarchal foundations of capitalist modernity in Iran, *Touba and the Meaning of Night* does two things: on the one hand, it shows the importance of the religious dimension within the modern and, on the other, it represents religion as a source of agency for women through which to challenge the ideology of both patriarchal domination and the forces of modernity. If as Harootunian notes, a 'call to tradition could be seen as both a critique of contemporary commodity culture and a resistance to it',[188] it could be argued that the deployment of a precapitalist tradition such as Sufism could be seen as a resistance to not only mainstream religious teachings but also to the oppressive forces of patriarchy and capitalism, which continue to disempower women.

Much of the critical scholarship on Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* emphasises that the novel is a magical realist text similar in many ways to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.[189] A number of critics also argue that there is a shift in Iranian literary production in the 1980s towards the magical realism mode. Persis M. Karim (2007), for example, notes that Parsipur's *Touba* is 'a departure from previous prerevolutionary writing, which either deployed a straightforward social-realist style or an allegorical and often political message'.[190] In a similar manner, Neda Miladi (2018) argues

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[187] Some critics argue that *Touba* depicts Sufism as 'futile' (Talattof) and 'all in vain' (Kolahjooei and Beyad). See Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 144. See Farzad Kolahjooei and Maryam Beyad, 'Magical Realism as Feminist Discourse: Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* and Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night*', *TELL*, 5.1 (2011), 155–79 (p. 174). However, my reading of Sufism in *Touba and the Meaning of Night* is aligned with Geoffrey Nash (2012), who notes that 'Touba's lifelong relationship with Master Geda Alishah can be seen as the activation of a space in which women can acquire agency' (p. 91). Thus, in this section, I expand upon Nash's argument to show how and why Sufism is a source of agency in two Muslim magical realist(s) texts.
[188] Harootunian, *Overcome*, p. 218.
[189] Critics such as Kamran Talattof (2000), Houra Yavari (2007), and Geoffrey Nash (2012), among others.
[190] Persis M. Karim, 'Biography of Shahrnush Parsipur', in *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, by Shahrnush Parsipur (London: Marion Boyars, 2007), pp. 407–14 (p. 411).

that Parsipur is 'one of the pioneering Iranian writers' in the magical realism mode.[191] In a footnote, Miladi further explains that '[d]uring [the] 1970s, […] translators introduced Iranian readers [to] the literary works of Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes Macías, Alejo Carpentier y Valmont, Juan Rulfo and Mario Vargas Llosa'; indeed, it was through these Farsi translations of Latin American fiction that Iranian authors became 'familiarized […] with the magic realist story-telling [*sic*]'; furthermore, Miladi notes that '[a]fter the global acclamation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the publish[ing] of its Farsi translation in 1978, Iranian Authors [*sic*] become more interested in this writing-style'.[192]

This shift, for some critics, such as Azarmi Dukht Safawi and A.W. Azhar Dehlvi (2006), is attributable to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Thus, they claim that female Iranian writers, such as Parsipur, see magical realism as a literary technique through which to present 'an assertion and affirmation of their literary independence, and as a tool to discover, explore and expose the emotional, ideological, and social layers of human existence'.[193] Indeed, Parsipur herself stated in an interview in answer to the question 'Like other Iranian writers and film makers, were you using symbolism to avoid censorship?': 'Of course I also use symbols to conceal matters.'[194] This is not to say that Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night* is significantly similar to Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but rather to assert that Parsipur's novel is written in her own style of a mode that became a global genre in the 1980s. By comparing the novel with other works emerging from the Islamic world since the 1980s, via an approach to world literature adopted from world-systems analysis, this shift towards magical realism can be clearly seen. As stated above (in the introduction to this thesis) critics note that there was a resurgence of Sufism in Arabic and Turkish literary productions, and in *Touba* we see such 'a departure' from realist texts that occurs within Farsi writing during this period.

By comparing Parsipur's text with *Fatma*, I seek to extend the view that there is a trend not only in Iranian literary writings but also in other Muslim literary cultures since the 1980s, which I term Muslim magical realism(s). Moreover, I read the novel as containing

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[191] Miladi, Neda, 'Writing New Identities: The Portrayal of Women by Female Authors of The Middle East' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universität Leipzig, 2018), p. 41.
[192] Ibid., footnote 3, p. 41.
[193] Azarmi Dukht Safawi and A. W. Azhar Dehlvi, *Revolution and Creativity: A Survey of Iranian Literature, Films, and Art in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2006), p. 97.
[194] Brian Appleton, 'An Interview with Shahrnush Parsipur', *Persian Heritage*, 15 vol.59 (2010), 22–24 (p. 23).

elements of the mode often labelled magical realism while also drawing on Sufi traditions.[195] As Houra Yavari (2007) notes '[t]he novel's creative use of magical realism, [is] colored by a distinctly mystical tone';[196] in a similar vein, Sara Jane Tompkins (2007) notes, in a review of the novel, that '[t]he world that Parsipur created, at once, is normal, supernatural, dreamlike and painful […] blend[ing] mysticism and realism'.[197] Such readings stop short of considering how these formal conventions project utopian alternatives to the patriarchal foundations of capitalist modernity in Iran; it is precisely this reading that this section of the chapter seeks to pursue.

The reader first encounters the protagonist Touba as an 'eighteen-year-old divorcée' who is 'half-naked' as she cleans the courtyard pool.[198] She is clearly unconventional but her subaltern status is made intelligible as a flashback sketches her childhood and first marriage at the age of fourteen. The narrative shifts further back in time to show the world into which Touba was born, as well as moments from her father's formative years. The story is then told in chronological order: from a period 'at the threshold of the twentieth century'[199] to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and Touba's death. However, the narrative is often disrupted by two characters (Prince Gil and Layla) from pre-Islamic stories — the significance of which is discussed further below. Touba experiences subalternity and marginalisation in ways similar to women across generations of her family, including Touba's mother, Touba's daughter (Moones) and Moones' adopted daughter (Maryam), barred from the public spheres of politics and science. Touba's grandfather dies leaving her father, Haji Adib, 'with the responsibility for the many women in the family',[200] since he is the eldest male. This practice is customary in many Muslim societies; the oldest man in the family has the power of guardianship over the females as well as being the 'protector',[201] regardless of whether these women are older or younger than he is. Parsipur depicts the life of these subaltern women within the structure of gendered power relationships in Iranian Muslim society. We hear how every time her father 'entered the house and announced his

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[195] In an interview by Brian Appleton (2010) Parsipur stated: 'My mother's mother was the biggest influence in my life. […] She was a practicing Sufi. She told me a lot about mysticism and many stories about mystics' (p. 22).

[196] Houra Yavari, 'Afterword', in *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, ed. by Shahrnush Parsipur (London: Marion Boyars, 2007), pp. 383–406 (p. 394).

[197] Sara Jane Tompkins, review of *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, by Shahrnush Parsipur, *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 16.1 (2007), 199–200 (p. 200).

[198] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 11.

[199] Ibid., p. 15.

[200] Ibid., p. 21.

[201] Ibid., p. 20.

arrival by invoking the name of God, the women would run to different corners to cover their hair' and that 'Haji enjoyed their imposed silence when he was there'.[202]

Furthermore, this educated and influential man has taken an 'illiterate wife' and 'enjoyed her ignorance and simplicity. A single sharp glance was enough to put the woman in her place'.[203] The environment of the domestic sphere inhabited by the women is one of male control and coercion; nevertheless, Haji Adib is troubled by women and their otherness. The text is replete with negative statements regarding the females in his household: '[u]nfortunately, they think'; 'typical women's foolishness'; '[u]ndoubtedly some of them were going crazy for not having a husband'; [t]hey were dependent on Haji Adib'; 'he couldn't bring strange women into the house [to weave carpets once the females of the family married]. They might then participate in some perverse activities with one another'.[204] Indeed, Haji Adib is becoming increasingly angry with the changing world: 'Yes, the earth is round. Women think. And soon they shall have no shame. [...] As soon as they discover they are able to think, they shall raise dust.'[205] Women are thus a threat to the ordered unfolding of life. Haji Adib links this dangerous femininity with his scientific concerns:

> He suddenly realized why the earth had to be square, why it had been considered unmoving, and why every man had the right to build a fence around his land. If they left this prostitute to her own devices, she would constantly spin around and throw everyone off balance. Everything would then be chaos.[206]

For Haji Adib, women/earth should be held in place, as the word 'unmoving' suggests. Again, the text emphasises male attitudes regarding the need to control women and protect the world from their malevolent influence. Haji Adib's narrative, particularly the incident with 'the Englishman,' also shows Iran as a semi-colonial country[207] foreshadowing the increasing impact of capitalist modernity. Having been humiliated by the Englishman, Adib reaches Moshir O-Doleh's[208] home full of rage to tell him the story and seek justice. Yet, we hear how 'Adib's anger gradually turned to a confused agony over the whole situation. The room in which Adib sat was furnished in European style' and '[a]ll around the room were various easy chairs and other fringed furniture. Paintings depicting scenes of Swiss

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[202] Ibid., p. 21.
[203] Ibid., p. 21.
[204] Ibid., p. 24.
[205] Ibid., p. 25.
[206] Ibid., p. 25.
[207] In the mid-19th century Iran 'lost its independence and moved into a semi-colonial situation in the modern world'. See Ahmad Ashraf, 'Historical Obstacles to the Development of a Bourgeoisie in Iran', in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam to the Present* Day, ed. by M.A. Cook (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 308–32 (p. 322).
[208] 'a Government functionary' — see *Touba*, p. 9.

mountains and European cities hung on the walls.'[209] These details of luxurious imported commodities from Europe foreground the ways in which the culture of colonialism has shaped the culture of modernity in Iran. In the words of Moshir O-Doleh, 'it was now a fact that one needed to adapt to Western ways, or else become subservient to Westerners'.[210] What such statements imply but do not explicitly state is the imperial dominance that Britain has historically exerted over Iran's natural resources and economy, extending back to the establishment of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in the early twentieth century. Such an adoption of 'Western ways' becomes a source of fear for Haji Adib.

The third-person omniscient narrator tells us: '[Haji Adib's] wife could no longer be educated, but it was not too late for his daughter. Then, even if the Englishmen did tell her their own version, it would not have the same effect'.[211] Indeed, as Nash (2012) notes, 'Parsipur's symbolism transparently joins modernity, the Iranian encounter with a triumphalist West, and the forces moving women's emancipation'.[212] At a first glance, women's emancipation can be seen as a colonial strategy for modernising a nation in line with its own cultural values and colonial logic of resource extraction and technological dominance.[213]

However, as the narrative progresses, Parsipur shows the failure of both colonisation and modernisation in this regard, particularly Touba's experiences and those of Moones (Touba's daughter) and Maryam (Moones's adopted daughter), as will be explained further below. If Fatma, at least initially, is a passive character confined in her house, Touba is shown as an active educated woman, who is under the pressure of many forces that limit and restrict women's agency. We hear how as a young girl of fourteen she 'wove a carpet for her dowry' after the death of her father and 'took over the leadership of the household'.[214] Yet such activities are merely within the domestic sphere and she still lacks agency and freedom.

Touba's journey to increased agency and spiritual development unfolds via encounters with the supernatural and Sufi teachings. This is foreshadowed by her yearning for solitude (a consistent theme throughout the novel) and experiencing altered states. Once

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[209] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 14.
[210] Ibid., p. 18.
[211] Ibid., p. 25.
[212] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 88.
[213] As Elhum Haghighat-Sordellini (2011) notes regarding women in Iran and the MENA region, '[i]n pre-industrial societies women are able to combine housework and childcare with paid work. Industrialization and urbanization divide the home and work spheres (work is done in an urban setting removed from the domestic residence). Because the domestic responsibilities remain primary to women, the physical separation of work and home lives limits their opportunities to participate in the market.' (p. 168). See Elhum Haghighat-Sordellini, 'Iran within a Regional Context: Socio-demographic Transformations and Effects on Women's Status', in *Gender in Contemporary Iran: Pushing the Boundaries*, ed. by Roksana Bahramitash and Eric Hooglund (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 162–89.
[214] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 27.

married, she has no household responsibilities as the wife of Haji Mahmud so the 'young bride would sit cross-legged day after day in her own room and stare into space'.[215] Moreover, '[s]he spent long periods of time kneeling in the corner of her room, gradually going into a trance'.[216] However, these activities do not empower her and, furthermore, she feels disconnected from God. Her 'childhood dream of bearing the divine seed was now wasting into humiliation and depression. She was not even worth enough that God would make rain for her at least once'.[217] The country is experiencing drought and famine, and the reader hears how 'during the four arduous years of her unhappy married life, each dry day had brought the continuing accusation [from her husband] that she was responsible for the drought'.[218] This detail is significant because it shows how, despite Iran's fossil oil wealth, the people continue to languish in poverty under the invisible hand of British imperial control, and yet it is women who are framed as responsible for the hunger associated with famine.

The maternal body is figured as a trope for the national body politic and is also framed as responsible for the social reproduction of the land and the soil. Indeed, Touba's sense of unworthiness is focused upon her barrenness and the barren, dry land, for which her husband blames her. Yet, it is the husband who is 'purposely preventing her pregnancy, for the man did not desire to have a child by her. The thought of such a young and beautiful woman caring for his little ones after his death frightened him'.[219] Again, the female body *qua* Mother Iran[220] is shown to be a source of male fear and she is made to feel responsible. Haji Mahmud is repulsed by 'the very thought of her becoming pregnant — or too sure of herself, or arrogant — [and this] would force him to return to his own quarters'.[221] There is a tragic irony in that 'she had dreamed of someday giving birth to a messiah' but, having married Haji Mahmud, 'had deliberately denied herself'[222] the possibility without knowing it. Her self-doubt and feeling of unworthiness increase, and she fears that she is being

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[215] Ibid., p. 31.
[216] Ibid., p. 32.
[217] Ibid., p. 31.
[218] Ibid., p. 12.
[219] Ibid., p. 32.
[220] In Camron Michael Amin's (2001) article on political cartoons in the Iranian press in the 1940s he notes that '[r]epresentations of national vulnerability as feminine and tyranny as masculine were not new to Iranian culture (or anywhere else). But their specific expression in these cartoons from the 1940s tells us of a moment in Iranian history when political pressures coincided with a new cultural climate'. It is 'Iranian men' represented in these images that 'were enjoined to protect "Mother Iran" and her daughters from symbolic and actual harm at the hands of foreign imperialists and treasonous "nation sellers."' See Camron Michael Amin, 'Selling and Saving "Mother Iran": Gender and the Iranian Press in the 1940s', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33.3 (2001), 335–61 (p. 336) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801003014>.
[221] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 33.
[222] Ibid., pp. 41–42.

punished for not having 'waited for God to appoint her a husband […] Had she not sinned by demanding this man for a husband?'[223]

At this point in her life, Touba's thinking is still framed by mainstream, patriarchal notions and therefore she believes that the fault lies with her due to stepping outside of the usual role of the female regarding courtship and marriage. The constant coldness and criticism from her husband undermines Touba's sense of self-worth to the point that she 'would think of killing herself so that her cursed existence would not burden this benevolent man'.[224] Having witnessed the burial of a child, who had starved in the street, '[s]he decided to fast to death, a decision that quickly provided her with a new personality'.[225] In doing so, she asserts control over her body and life by choosing her own form of death. Fasting is usually associated with religious observance but is also used as a tool of protest (i.e. a hunger strike). Maud Ellmann, quoting Simone Weil, notes 'that to hunger is to overcome the pull of "gravity" and to liberate the spirit from the prison of its flesh.'[226] Thus, this course of action represents not only a form of resistance and a desire for physical escape but also a yearning for spiritual release and transcendence.

Fasting quickly brings physical and mental changes; it provides different perspectives on the forms of agency and resistance available to Touba as a gendered figure within the domestic sphere. Touba leaves the house in order to enter a cityscape beyond the walls of her domestic cage. The world looks different and '[i]n the early dawn, every supernatural and miraculous thing seemed real'.[227] The sun and planets are gendered in her imagination:

> A great man was placing a glowing jeweled crown, infinitely large, on his head. Beams of light shot from the diamonds and blended with the ruby rays. Amid all this sparkle, Venus had begun to lose her glow, as if she were her own sacrificial offering.[228]

The male figure is presented as regal, beautiful, and powerful; by contrast, the female is imagined as a sacrificial figure that is subordinated to the light of the 'great man'. Touba's lived experience of patriarchal subordination and her sense of unworthiness are manifesting here as her imagination is stimulated by the city, the sky, and a lack of sustenance. This vision 'absorbed […] her whole being'.[229] She is described as '[h]allucinating from hunger

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[223] Ibid., p. 42.
[224] Ibid., p. 33.
[225] Ibid., p. 39.
[226] Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 92.
[227] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 43.
[228] Ibid., p. 43.
[229] Ibid., p. 43.

[while] at the same time discovering the city'.[230] This moment of discovery is multifaceted as she moves from innocence to maturity: '[a] little girl was crying out from the depths of her being, "Sir, please love me!" It was the voice of her childhood, and she was awakening to the fact that it was receding, going far away'.[231] This is the first step in Touba's long journey toward transformation and represents the pain of rejection, her yearning to belong, and her search for acceptance.

Back at the house, Haji Mahmud is waiting to punish her but he recognises the change: '[h]er will to die had become like a mountain of ice in the midst of a storm-tossed ocean; from it poured nothing but denigration. The man, the husband, could not bear her look'.[232] The man's violence is turned back on him and 'he angrily hit himself on the shins with his own switches'. Haji Mahmud knows that a shift has occurred and '[h]e knew that if he [turned] he must beat her, but if he were to commit such an act [,] he himself would be the one beaten'.[233] Roles are being reversed and a space is created in the narrative for the presence of spirit to emerge. The male-dominated space is disrupted, and Touba enters a dimension that blurs the boundaries between the spiritual and the magical. Ellmann, again quoting Simone Weil, notes that 'to starve is to renounce the past, "the first of all renunciations," because it is to void the body of its stored anteriority.'[234] In a similar vein, Touba wishes to die in order to escape from the reality of her life before this moment, and to move into a liminal space beyond the 'real' in much the same way Sufis attempt to do; indeed, the dawn experience prompts Touba to pray in 'a manner unlike any she had known before.'[235]

However, as she is afraid to leave her room to wash (not wishing to face her husband) and her hair is uncovered, she begins 'repeating the words carefully with mixed pleasure and pain', finding peace in prayer while also acknowledging that she is not following the tenets laid down by Islam. Touba craves solitude — she 'wished to be alone […] she wanted to feel free'[236] — as she begins her spiritual journey and sees her prayer and fasting as a way to become united with God. As Ellmann argues, '*self-inflicted* hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself.'[237] Touba's 'hunger strike'[238] continues until her husband tells her to eat and she 'followed his orders

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[230] Ibid., p. 44.
[231] Ibid., p. 43.
[232] Ibid., p. 45.
[233] Ibid., p. 46.
[234] Ellmann, p. 10.
[235] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 47.
[236] Ibid., p. 47.
[237] Ellmann, p. 14.
[238] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 48.

unconsciously'.[239] This is initially surprising, but Touba's habit of falling back under the control of notions of a patriarchal hierarchy persists throughout the novel.

Nevertheless, her wish to be free of Haji Mahmud is granted and one aim of her hunger strike is achieved — albeit in ways she had not anticipated. This is partly due to the changes that her actions have instigated in Haji Mahmud by shifting the balance of power in the patriarchal household: '[t]hough the woman's behavior during the last few days had disturbed his peace, it had also activated his brain. Without realizing it, he felt a sense of respect for her'. As a result, he takes action: '[h]e explained that he had divorced her ethically, morally, and legally […] and that everything had been done justly'.[240] The only proviso is that Touba agree to a period of 'abstinence,' after which she would be free.[241] Such incidents exemplify how Touba oscillates between imagined spaces of liberation and an oppressive domestic reality. By shifting between these real and unreal dimensions the narrative offers readers a glimpse of a utopian horizon that is mediated through the consciousness of the novel's eponymous female protagonist.

Although she has been controlled by patriarchal forces, Touba is also shown to be different from the women in her community due to her education and ability to explore spiritual issues: '[she] was able to expound on religious issues and read for hours' engaging in such 'activities that Zahra [a maid in her husband's house] had never seen any woman, ever, partake in. She could not even imagine that a woman would be able to perform these acts.'[242] Therefore, Touba is open to considering a variety of religious ideas and, as she is not constrained by an adherence to strict dogma, she is later able to engage with Sufi teachings and practices. The main problem for Touba is that even as she seeks God, she is constantly disconnected from Him as a result of worldly distractions.

Having married again, she remains, for the most part, confined to the world of her house where she finds that she has to 'play the role of the patriarch',[243] with all its associated responsibilities, due to the absence of her wayward, adventuring husband (a Qajar prince). Furthermore, '[s]he was immersed up to her neck in life's problems and could not afford the luxury of returning to her [dream of finding God]'.[244] She is drowning ('immersed') in the responsibilities of wife, mother, and caretaker of the house. This lack of progress on her spiritual path is emphasised in the text as we hear that 'she must continue to weave, cook,

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[239] Ibid., p. 49.
[240] Ibid., p. 49.
[241] Ibid., p. 50.
[242] Ibid., p. 57.
[243] Ibid., p. 109.
[244] Ibid., p. 116.

and sweep. She must whirl in this eternal circle and return to the starting place'.[245] In this scene, the narrator overtly conjures an image of the whirling dervish, circling in the eternal present moment, rejecting past and future, to commune with God ('return to the starting place').

For Touba, the circle of domesticity that traps her leaves her 'on a road that did not move forward but turned in place'[246] — again emphasising the importance of embracing the eternal present moment in search of enlightenment; however, Touba is untutored in Sufi thought and practices and is rooted in the material world for much of the time. Therefore, she is stuck in the groove of her reality and cannot move forward to a meeting with God; however, her brief encounters with elements of Sufism and its associated experiences brings peace and joy. Touba's formal introduction to Sufism is enabled by the social circle around her second husband the prince: a group of people, who profess to be interested in Sufism. Touba 'learned from Morteza how to play the tar' and they 'sang Rumi's poetry, accompanied by the tar. Touba gradually memorized some lyrics'.[247] In the privacy of 'the storage room in her bedroom', she 'dance[s] to Rumi's lyrics, the same dance that she had once seen, from behind the curtain, at one of her husband's parties. […] the dance of the dervishes to Rumi's poetry and to Morteza's own lyrics'. Thus, Touba 'was heading full force toward Sufism',[248] but is not yet aware of how to take the Sufi path in a way that might empower her. Although Touba's husband Prince Feraydun Mirza's circle is interested in Sufism, and he 'declare[s] that if he reached fifty, which he did not think he would, he planned to join the circle of dervishes and devote himself completely to the pursuit of spiritual truth',[249] it is Touba who actively becomes involved in Sufism.

Touba and the Meaning of Night is not only replete with references to Sufi figures such as Rumi and Hafez, but also includes Sufi characters (Dervish Hasan and Geda Alishah), as well as Sufi symbolism — for example, the pomegranate tree that is common in the Persian Sufi tradition — and ideas regarding gender equality. Dervish Hasan is an important figure in Prince Feraydun Mirza's group, described by the prince 'as the Shams Tabrizi of the era, the natural heir of the famous Sufi master and an inspiring friend to Rumi'.[250] In a dialogue between the prince and the dervish on gender relations, Touba is exposed to ideas that do not align with mainstream patriarchal thought. Within the teachings of Sufism — particularly those of Ibn Arabi, as has been noted by scholars such as Sa'diyya

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[245] Ibid., p. 116.
[246] Ibid., p. 117.
[247] Ibid., p. 94.
[248] Ibid., p. 96.
[249] Ibid., p. 87.
[250] Ibid., p. 120.

Shaikh (2012) — ideas regarding gender relationships are those found in interpretations of both the sacred book (the *Quran*) and the prophet's sayings (*Hadith*). Ibn Arabi's teachings regard gender as 'irrelevant to the pursuit of spiritual refinement [, a view that] reflect[s] the normative Sufi assumption that one's inner state is the primary criterion of human worth'.[251] The narrator deploys related dialogue when Touba, hiding behind a curtain, listens to Dervish Hasan and her second husband discussing women and men in ways that clearly foreground patriarchal gender politics in modern Iran. As the product of both a patriarchal and an aristocratic upbringing, the prince believes that '[a] woman had her own specific duties. If she were to overlook or not fulfill her duties, the world would be utter chaos'.[252] Such a statement echoes that of her father at the opening of the novel, and emphasises the belief that there is a need to control women in order to counter threats to the social order. Contrary to the prince's stance, the Sufi teachings of Ibn Arabi recognise the 'equal agency, ability, and value of men and women'.[253] In Parsipur's novel, Dervish Hasan holds a similar view, which is expressed in the following extract:

> members of this world [have] specific duties, but among them, there was a group, whether man or woman, who lived under constant trial and tribulation and were wanderers. If this group did not have any means of expression, it would fall to denigration and meanness, or to madness and debility. Such disturbed ones needed to be protected.[254]

Dervish Hasan believes that Touba 'fit[s] this group'[255] due to such occurrences as 'the incident at the cemetery and the woman's dangerous persistence in her hunger strike to the point of suicide were all signs of her abnormality. These also indicated that she must be of the particular group who have no choice but to follow the path of Sufi tradition' in order to 'find happiness'.[256] The prince 'did not feel comfortable about a woman learning the secrets of "The Truth."'[257] Hiding behind the curtains, Touba is unable to engage in a discussion with the dervish and her husband the prince. She only 'listened' and 'pressed her lips together in anger, and felt her spirit doubling over in her body'.[258] Although the dervish is acting as an advocate for the apparently mystically-gifted Touba, he speaks in terms of abnormality

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[251] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, p. 93.
[252] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 122.
[253] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, p. 93. Furthermore, as Shaikh notes, Ibn Arabi's 'readings of gender are comprised of intertextual conversations among the Qur'ān, traditions, and multiple experiential contexts' (p. 118).
[254] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 122.
[255] Ibid., p. 122.
[256] Ibid., p. 123.
[257] Ibid., p. 122.
[258] Ibid., p. 124.

and a lack of choice: individuals like her must take the Sufi path in order to survive and flourish.

Dervish Hasan suggests that Touba visits the Sufi Master Geda Alishah. Spivak's (1988) definition of a subaltern being someone who cannot speak for themselves, who is often spoken for, seems to describe Touba in this moment and in a later scene where the narrator asserts that:

> rarely were her thoughts verbalized. And if ever she did have to talk, then she began to stutter to the point that the men felt the same sympathy and concern for her as an elder feels for children. She therefore preferred to keep silent.[259]

Rather than simply reinforcing a tragic stereotype of the subaltern woman as a passive victim, however, Parsipur begins to set up alternative ideas regarding Touba's potential to find agency and power via a spiritual journey. This narrative trajectory, in which a female protagonist is at first complicit in her own silencing before drawing strength from external sources, is common to both *Fatma* and *Touba*. While it is Noor (the supernatural creature) who introduces Sufi teachings to Fatma, in Alem's novel, Touba 'lean[s] on Dervish Hasan's talk, hanging tight to the dream of [visiting] Master Geda Alishah. He was a star shining in the sky of Kermanshah. Just as once upon a time all roads led to Rome, now for Touba they all led to Kermanshah'.[260]

The narrative suggests that Touba must maintain her place, both socially and hidden behind the curtain, regardless of the resistance (anger) manifesting as intense emotional and physical pain; however, she is also privy to a discussion that will eventually lead to her transformation. As the encounter with the dervish continues, the prince is unequivocal in expressing his contempt towards women:

> […] women are indeed shit. […] Whether she has soiled us or not […] the sperm comes from the man, the woman is the filth in which the sperm falls, and it is only because of the light of man's sperm that this shit house becomes capable of reproducing.[261]

Females are presented as merely a vessel for receiving male potency in order to carry life (another example of women being seen merely in terms of gendered social reproduction rather than valued as individuals in their own right). Dervish Hasan counters this view (with Touba still voiceless) by stating that:

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[259] Ibid., p. 161.
[260] Ibid., p. 148.
[261] Ibid., pp. 124–25.

Women and children are innocent by nature, eternally innocent. It is men who foul their innocent beings. Initially the woman is born holy. She is a mirror reflecting the depths. If there was foulness in man, woman would reflect it, and if he were spun of light, she would reflect light.[262]

The dervish's words have a therapeutic, clearly calming, effect on Touba. On her journey of self-development, Touba starts to think of 'the inner landscapes of truth'. We hear that Dervish Hasan tells her how '[t]here were many layers inside truth and, like curtains, they would be lifted one by one'.[263] Understood as a metacommentary on the narrative itself, Dervish Hasan's statement suggests that a sense of truth will be revealed as her quest progresses. Truth for Touba entails liberation from the constraints of patriarchal oppression; and, in this way, Parsipur draws upon Sufism as a resource for working through the pain of gendered subalternity.

While Touba is searching for the truths offered by Sufism, the country of Iran is moving rapidly through a period of modernisation. Unlike in Alem's *Fatma*, where historical events do not feature at the forefront of the narrative, Parsipur's protagonist's journey is overtly linked to Iranian and world history. Hence, the novel can also be read as a historical novel of Iran, of global events, and rapid modernisation. The story of Touba is mostly based on descriptions of events offered by the third-person omniscient narrator. Such a narrative strategy provides vivid detail of the development and impact of capitalist modernity in Iran in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As in many countries, Iran was impacted significantly by capitalist modernity during this period; however, the transition is more apparent than, for example, in Saudi Arabia, due to a series of economic and political events that occurred during the reign of the Qajar dynasty at the beginning of the twentieth century until the Iranian Revolution led by the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

Touba is aware of the changes taking place as the country is modernising. She 'realized that the face of the city had changed'.[264] We hear how: 'an automobile came to pick up the prince […] It was strange, this thing that had now appeared on the streets. People also talked about airplanes'.[265] The novel registers this combined unevenness, particularly when describing how 'European furniture had been placed on one side, and traditional pillowed lounges on the other'.[266] Throughout the novel, words such as 'change' and 'strange' are used frequently, bringing a sense of an unstable world. Such a sense of instability has an

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[262] Ibid., p. 125.
[263] Ibid., p. 223.
[264] Ibid., p. 97.
[265] Ibid., p. 95.
[266] Ibid., p. 99.

impact on the population's sense of identity as seen in the words of Touba and other characters.

The longer the country is involved in this process of modernisation, the more Touba moves to embrace religious ideas. Touba begins to withdraw from the material world and has clear doubts regarding the progress that the forces of capitalist modernity promise. While the country is in the flux of modernisation, Touba remains static: '[i]t would have pleased her if she could have continued to move forward; it did not matter where she was going, as long as she was moving on' yet 'it became more and more difficult each day'.[267] Hamideh Sedghi (2007) notes how '[d]uring the early 1900s, Iran's overall economy experienced a slow transformation from a subsistence to a market economy', and explains that '[o]ne of the features of societies undergoing such a change is that household production is still united with production for the market; the two are not separate spheres as they are under advanced capitalist systems'; therefore, 'women's work in the market, to the extent that it exists, remains an extension of their work at home and their reproductive activities […] working Iranian women often combined child rearing with their tasks in the larger economy', yet '[n]ot all women worked outside the family' because '[t]hose who did, […] struggled against poverty […] [w]hile these women encountered male domination both in the household and in the marketplace, the economically secure women stayed home and experienced patriarchy more directly there'.[268] Through Touba's focalising consciousness, the narrator overtly shows how capitalist modernisation worked in tandem with a patriarchal division of labour that devalues the gendered work of social reproduction.

This is not to say that Touba understands the conditions of her oppression in these terms; on the contrary, the narrator suggests that Touba remains fixed in the domestic sphere partly because the routines and responsibilities associated with the domestic space offer a reassuring sense of familiarity that works to shore up her sense of self: 'she knew her own territory, her home'.[269] Yet the narrator also suggests that Touba's reluctance to venture out in the world is also a consequence of the painful realities of patriarchal exclusion. It is only through a process of spiritual transformation that Touba seems able to liberate herself from this attachment to her domestic sphere rather than actively seeking to enter the public sphere from which she is barred.

Alongside this narrative, Parsipur also shows how the unveiling of women, in the era of the Pahlavi dynasty, was seen as part of the process of modernising the country. For

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[267] Ibid., p. 117.
[268] Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 29–30.
[269] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 174.

Touba the act of unveiling was just 'a simple event', which made little difference to her lived experience of patriarchy in the domestic sphere; regardless of this symbolic act, the narrator asserts that her 'mind had always remained focused on the issue of drawing close to God'.[270] Just like Touba, for Madam Amineh (Touba's father's cousin who is close to Touba), '[i]t made no difference […] whether she was veiled or unveiled. She was so deeply involved in work that she could head out of the house in any shape or manner'.[271] In a related discussion, Sedghi notes that unveiling 'became the symbol of the clergy's "emasculation" and women's liberation from clerical patriarchy. Yet unveiling was a far cry from real democratic change. Women still remained subordinated'.[272] Rather than seeing the Pahlavi dynasty as an era of emancipation of women, Sedghi argues that 'the emancipation of women as a public policy instrument provided the state with a new form of power', and that this was revealed in the subsequent 'ability to use gender to emasculate religious authorities and transfer patriarchal power from the domain of the clergy to the realm of the state, and further, to utilize gender to accomplish its Europeanization policies'.[273] Significantly, this shift of power and political authority from a patriarchal clergy to a patriarchal secular state is also dramatised in the novel, where we see that 'since Reza Shah's departure, many women had returned to the chador' while 'being unveiled had also established itself as a custom'.[274] By returning to the chador, the narrative implies that women clearly do not see the change of the dress code as a meaningful form of progress that changes the conditions of women's lives for the better; instead the act of unveiling 'established itself' as a mere custom or empty ritual. Such an argument helps us to grasp the continuing subordination of women during the process of modernisation and the associated mobilisation of different ideologies and forms of political manoeuvring — as seen through the impact on the various generations present in the novel.

The fragmented narrative structure of the novel destabilises any secure sense of epistemological certainty. As well as moving back and forth through time, the overlap between real and unreal fictional worlds, and the interruption of the main narrative with myths from Sumerian mythology make it very difficult to distinguish between what is true and what is not. Although the main plot is presented in chronological order, the narrative is interrupted not only by the initial flashback to Touba's childhood but also by the consistent re-telling of the tales of Prince Gil and his wife Layla. Both of these characters appear as 'real' characters at the beginning of the novel, and are subsequently referred to as archetypal

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[270] Ibid., p. 222.
[271] Ibid., p. 221.
[272] Sedghi, p. 90.
[273] Ibid., p. 67.
[274] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 270.

male and female figures from Sumerian myths throughout the story.[275] The stories told by Prince Gil include tales that seem 'real' and narratives of dreamlike adventures in historical settings. What connects all of these stories is Prince Gil's misogyny.

The stories that Prince Gil tells his friends reflect a patriarchal viewpoint that stands in opposition to the teachings of Sufi masters; indeed, at one point, Gil overtly mocks the Sufi Master Geda Alishah. In this respect, Gil can be seen as a hegemonic figure who defends class and gender subordination as part of the natural order of things. Out of pride, Prince Gil recounts a tale of an encounter with Ivan, a Social Democrat, on a train travelling from Paris to Russia. The conversation between them starts with the young man explaining the goal of social democracy to the prince, which he describes as '[the belief] in the equality of all mankind [including] peasants and women [to] protect […] all deprived groups, classes, and genders, as part of the struggle for equality'. Prince Gil counters this view with an argument that bears a striking resemblance to arguments from natural law: 'I told him that I did not agree with him and did not believe in equality […] according to a very complex law, people were born unequal, including men and women, who were quite different from each other, and in fact this very difference was the element that allowed the growth and perpetuation of mankind'; he continues: '[b]ut the issue did not stop just with men and women. There was inequality in everything […] [it] was not a negative thing since it was very useful to society and to nature […] he could see this law in the jungle. […] [it is] the law of nature'.[276] Prince Gil's views show that he believes that society is served by such inequality, and that social hierarchies are predetermined by nature.

Such views run counter to Dervish Hasan's interpretations. By moving back and forth between the 'real' aspects of the narrative, the spiritual world (the realm of Sufism), the past, and magical/mythical elements (in the subplot of Prince Gil and Layla), Parsipur's narrator creates a space that allows for rethinking gender relations and the role of women in modern Iranian society. Such narrative techniques further highlight the combined unevenness apparent in modern Iran during the period in which the novel is set.

While Prince Gil appears in the narrative as Touba's husband's friend and thus a 'real' character, as the narrative progresses the reader questions whether he is in fact a human or mythical character. Both Prince Gil and Layla disappear from the narrative until the moment when Touba asks for a divorce, when her husband takes a second wife. Prince Gil then returns to the story and acts as an adviser sent by her husband. Again, Prince Gil appears

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[275] Shahrnush Parsipur, *A Prelude to Touba and the Meaning of Night*, trans. by James M. Gustafson (2006), <http://www.shahrnushparsipur.com/wp/a-prelude-to-touba- and-the-meaning-of-night/> [accessed 28 March 2018] (para. 9 of 10).
[276] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 132.

as a misogynistic representative of patriarchal thinking. Prince Gil explains his reasoning for hating women in the following extract:

> Looking back and examining my life, I understood that I did not hate women because they dispossess men of their warrior power, but because they are one of the major causes of men's entering into war. Barren desert and poverty also play a role in my hatred. I saw myself as an avenger against women in the name of the barren earth.[277]

Again, a female barren womb is linked to a barren earth. Layla, an archetypal female figure who is sometimes submissive to her husband's orders, and who is killed by him several times in the stories, declares to Touba at the end of the novel 'Poor me! For seven thousand years you remained silent. You became as silent as a stone'; against this silence and passivity, this epic figure declares: '[a]fter seven thousand years of struggle, something else must now begin'.[278] As a mythic figure, who has constantly fought against patriarchal oppression (as personified by Prince Gil), Layla counsels Touba to reject her position of silent passivity, and become active as an independent agent who takes a stand against patriarchy. In this way, the narrative re-frames mythic narratives from the past to address the pressures and constraints that are placed upon Iranian women in a modern Muslim society that is also subject to the invisible hand of British and American imperial influence.

Touba and the Meaning of Night shows the impact of petro-modernity in modern Iran and people's reaction to it. The following passage shows the shock of the new presented in a trip to see a Charlie Chaplin film at the cinema, a modern invention which Touba has never experienced before:

> They went to the movies […] Touba stared in amazement. Some writing appeared and disappeared. A little man wearing an odd hat and shoes and carrying a stick walked on the wall. He jumped up and down and did strange things. He was very comical, but Touba did not laugh. She was deep in God's grandeur. How could it be that an image walked on the white screen? […] Following her first experience with asphalt, this was another significant moment of her life. A long shapeless object came toward her from the wall. She thought of getting up and running away. Moones said it was a locomotive […] Cinema, Touba, thought, was a strange thing.[279]

Touba's 'thought' that cinema 'was a strange thing' bespeaks a wider response to a cultural shock of the modern in twentieth-century Iran — 'strange' is a word that is repeated many times throughout the novel. Yet it is not only Touba who feels this way; her son Habibolah,

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[277] Ibid., p. 145.
[278] Ibid., p. 380.
[279] Ibid., p. 213.

feels that the modern world is a distinct threat to any sense of tradition. We hear how Habibolah:

> […] felt this [threat to tradition] was a sign of the entire society falling apart. A whole tradition was being destroyed, and now people like himself had to struggle a lot more for recognition and identity […] He felt obliged to defend himself and his family against the forces of change that sought to uproot everything. […] He made a pact with himself to stand firm and resist the corrosion of traditions.[280]

For Habibolah, these apparently insurmountable 'forces of change' are understood as a form of 'corrosion.' However, the reader does not see if he does indeed 'stand firm' and 'resist.' As the narrative progresses, the culture of capitalist modernity dominates, and its technologies of commodification, consumerism, and mass communication become an increasing part of Iranian social life, as will be explained further below. As these cultural and economic changes unfold, the importance of spirituality for female characters such as Touba and her daughter Moones is consistently emphasised.

These dramatic changes in Iranian cultural life can also be understood as an extremely painful and disorientating experience, particularly for women, as discussed above. Yet, Parsipur does not only frame spirituality as a source for working through the pain of exclusion, but also suggests that Touba's magical skills as a Sufi mystic are able to predict the future in ways that correspond in quite uncanny ways with the strangeness of modernity. By speaking with a dead girl, Setareh, in daydreams,[281] Touba gains 'respect as a seer and a dervish [and becomes] a gifted mystic'.[282] When Touba embraces these mystical gifts, her influence and standing in the world increase dramatically. We see this when Touba seems to predict several events. Touba 'asked Setareh if Manzar O-Saltaneh would bear a boy or a girl. Setareh responded that she would search in the uterus. Shortly afterward she returned and said the baby was a girl.' She 'told Manzar O-Saltaneh that she would have a baby girl, and when she did bear a girl, all the family and friends were amazed', she 'predicted that Tabandeh […] would bear a boy and, indeed, she did' and also 'predicted that in the affairs of the world there would be bad news, that there would be war. And soon people were talking about the Spanish Civil War'.[283] In this way, Touba's use of magic and mysticism embodies an alternative way of knowing the world that stands in opposition to prevailing patriarchal ideologies. Sufism, solitude, and spirituality influence Touba's life from childhood through

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[280] Ibid., pp. 220–21.
[281] Ibid., p. 200.
[282] Ibid., p. 224.
[283] Ibid., p. 224.

adulthood, and she consistently turns to it in search of truth. The reader is consistently reminded that Touba 'wished to be alone,' and 'that she wanted to feel free'.[284] She sits alone in her room as a young wife, often going 'into a trance and disregard[ing] everyone'.[285] Against the patriarchal constraints of the domestic sphere, Touba's wilful, meditative silence can be understood as a form of agency and resistance. She understands that meditation, self-reflection and solitude can open doors to as-yet invisible forms of knowledge and power.

At the same time, the novel emphasises how Touba has internalised certain patriarchal views. In an attempt to find out more about the mysterious circumstances of Setareh's murder, Touba falls into the trap of repeating the very patriarchal values that were invoked to justify Setareh's death. Touba defers to Mirza Kazem because she assumes that he 'probably knew more than she did', simply because he is a man.[286] She finds out that Setareh was murdered by her uncle (Mirza Abuzar) for being raped by some soldiers.

Time and again, Touba falls back into the patterns of the patriarchal beliefs she has been taught to internalise: '[she] continued to listen […] falling into her usual habit of believing men. If [he] had said he had seen the man, and that it was seven hundred years ago, perhaps then it was true'.[287] Thus, Touba both recognises her credulity while also ignoring it. Despite the fact that Touba is a subaltern figure who struggles, as many women do in her society, she feels sympathy for Mirza Abuzar, Setareh's murderer. We hear how 'she truly felt sorry for him'. Furthermore, she helps him to hide the crime. Her reactions and actions are a result of the traditions and beliefs of her society. She falls into the trap of uncritically repeating patriarchal constructions of honour created by male interpreters of religious texts. Touba reflects that '[a] living girl who has a bastard child in her is hateful and defiled. The same girl, however, if she is killed like this, will be chosen to be among the Pure Ones'. We also hear how 'she tried to put herself in Mirza Abuzar's place'.[288] At no point does Touba imagine being in Setareh's situation. Touba and Mirza bury the corpse under the pomegranate tree to conceal Setareh's 'crime' and later bury Maryam, who is fatally injured in a fight with Pahlavi's regime.

The pomegranate tree is an important symbol in Sufism as shown at the end of the novel. Therefore, Touba's choice of burial site serves to reinforce her belief that the murdered girl 'will be chosen to be among the Pure Ones'[289] in heaven. The guilt lies with the female rape victim, not the male murderer: '[t]he innocent girl's reputation would be

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[284] Ibid., p. 47.
[285] Ibid., p. 51.
[286] Ibid., p. 72.
[287] Ibid., p. 136.
[288] Ibid., p. 179.
[289] Ibid., p. 179.

ruined, and [Touba thought that] Mirza Abuzar […], an innocent and honest man, […] would be put under lock and key'.[290] Nevertheless, we see Touba's conflicted state as she 'felt ashamed'[291] at the moment she recognises that she is 'trapped in a tradition that has approved of such murder'.[292] These problems of identity and belief are continually highlighted throughout the novels under discussion here, providing both points of conflict in the narrative and foils to social and religious wisdom. In the society represented in this novel, belief and religious observance are an important and ever-present part of daily life. Therefore, it is by using this social backdrop, with its problematic interactions, power relations and inhumane treatment of women, that the narrative offers alternative realities through which to challenge and subvert the status quo.

Touba also undergoes a transformation via the Sufi idea of surrender. She has resisted change throughout the novel and still fears it as an old woman: '[o]nly a few things remained that grounded her to life. She felt that if she were to change them, she would forget her soul and her identity'.[293] However, her last encounter with the Master precipitates a shift, in that he tells her that she has to find the truth for herself. At the outset of her story, Touba continually expresses a desire to dedicate her life 'to seek God, [and] to understand truth', but emphasises that 'no opportunity was afforded her' due to her family and domestic responsibilities.[294] The Master guides her to a new realisation: that 'the truths are these very things — the things right in front of Touba's eyes that she failed to see'.[295] The act of withdrawing in Sufism is never disconnected from the sensory world: 'withdrawal takes place in relation to acquired existence (*al-wujûd al-mustafâd*), since the creed (*al-i'tiqâd*) holds this to be so; and in reality (*fî nafs al-amr*) there is none but True Being (*al-wujûd al-haqq*)'.[296] In Ibn Arabi's words: '[f]or him whom God has given understanding, retreat (*khalwa*) and society (*jalwa*) are the same. Rather, it may be that society is more complete for a person and greater in benefit, since through it at every instant he increases in sciences about God that he did not possess.'[297] Touba has not realised that she does not have to distance herself from society. In an extract that seems to parallel Ibn Arabi's words, the Master explains to Touba that the problem is that people 'withdrew from everyone and

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[290] Ibid., p. 180.
[291] Ibid., p. 186.
[292] Ibid., p. 187.
[293] Ibid., p. 343.
[294] Ibid., p. 349.
[295] Ibid., p. 350.
[296] Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations: Volume I*, trans. by Michel Chodkiewicz ed. by William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), p. 159.
[297] Ibid., p. 161.

wished only to immerse themselves in contemplating [the] truth'.[298] Touba rejects this explanation and the Master becomes more forceful: '[t]he truth is this: You have to be the caretaker of a house. This is your role. Good or bad, this is how it is'.[299]

However, he also asks Touba to take his seat so the 'truth will slowly become clear to [her]'.[300] Touba refuses this honour and the Master tells her that all is 'illusion' and 'she must fearlessly approach this new illusion, touch it, examine it. Roles were changing now.' She is being asked to throw off her old beliefs and all restrictions (whether self-imposed or socially prescribed) in the new world of Iran, but she resists this demand. Once again, the Master tells Touba to sit in his place, but she 'headed for the door'.[301] In discussing *Touba*, Nash argues that what 'the voluntary dethronement of male authority in the form of Master Geda Alishah implies, is that Sufi Gnosticism has the capacity to facilitate the mergence of male–female qualities whereas the dominant religious scripturalism has not'.[302] However, Parsipur also has Touba reject the rituals and scripture that she has clung to for decades; thus, the implied author can be seen to release the protagonist from the restrictions of religion that have held her in a state of self-doubt.

Finally, rather than seeking the truth from the Master or retreating to the restrictive space of her decaying house and the company of the corpses therein, she 'took off into the streets. The changes were indeed amazing'.[303] As she walks, the reader is given access to the inner thought process that leads to her revelation: '[h]ow foolish she had been to hide in the house until events suddenly descended upon her like an avalanche.' She understands that her bitterness and strict ideas of propriety have disconnected her from the light of God: '[h]ow ridiculous that she could only judge everyone for their sexual needs, and yet claim to be searching for God all of the time.'[304] As the narrator suggests, Touba has been focusing on the wrong things, and worrying about what other people think for most of her life. The image of Touba 'circl[ing] continuously around a house that one day might not exist'[305] gives a clear sense of ongoing entrapment. Touba has trapped herself in a circular form of thinking, which imagines the house as a prison from which there is no escape. Touba finally realises that her yearning to seek out God in a place outside the domestic sphere was the wrong path:

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[298] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 350.
[299] Ibid., p. 351.
[300] Ibid., p. 350.
[301] Ibid., p. 353.
[302] Nash, p. 91.
[303] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 353.
[304] Ibid., p. 354.
[305] Ibid., p. 360.

'Why had she not gone in search of God? Was it perhaps because God was everywhere? Was God in her house, also?'[306]

As Touba becomes an old woman, the later generations personified by Moones and Maryam also struggle. Although as noted above not only is the word 'change' repeated throughout the novel but also there are scenes where these changes are evident, yet the oppression of women continues. The fact that women begin working outside of the household (following the social reforms introduced by Pahlavi in the late 1930s) might suggest a progression towards women's empowerment and emancipation. Yet the experiences of characters such as Moones and her adopted daughter suggest otherwise. Moones works at a bank, but she also suffers after her second husband is imprisoned due to his political activities. Moones finds herself in a difficult situation, as this marriage, which was undertaken without her family's knowledge or approval, has resulted in her pregnancy. She decides to abort and consequently her womb has to be removed. We hear how:

> [Moones] thought […] If she were a man, she could stand at the crossroads in the bazaar and engage in competition with all other macho men who claimed to be protecting people and won them over. […] But she was a woman. Her world was limited, restricted.[307]

Such a statement seems to suggest Moones' scepticism (presumably as is the case with other women of her generation) regarding the reforms to women's rights and freedoms. Eventually, she decides to follow in her mother's footsteps and becomes 'immersed [...] in mystical prayers'.[308] Her adopted daughter, Maryam, on the other hand, follows the path of her adoptive father, Ismael, who 'los[es] touch with the spiritual world' and 'the material world [which] had torn him apart'.[309] Maryam decides to 'study as Ismael had said, and learn science'[310] leading to her death. In depicting the experiences of women of three generations in Iran including a glimpse of the bank employee's wife (as will be discussed below), Parsipur shows how the experience of women does not improve.

As the novel comes to a close, the narrative shifts again between the unreal (Prince Gil and Layla) and the material world of an emerging consumer culture in Iran, as the culture of capitalist modernity transforms social and cultural life. The signs of such a culture are visible in the references to new technologies of mass communication and popular culture. By juxtaposing these new technologies of modernity with religious ideas of the unreal that

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[306] Ibid., p. 364.
[307] Ibid., pp. 254–55.
[308] Ibid., p. 265.
[309] Ibid., p. 276.
[310] Ibid., p. 324.

allows Touba to access Sufi ideas of the otherworldly, Parsipur questions whether modernity does anything to change the patriarchal views underpinning Iranian women's oppression. If anything, the narrator suggests, these patriarchal views are further reinforced:

> How horrible; this was how one behaved when there was no more faith. Every act became permissible. People acted like animals in a jungle. No order, no calm remained. It was the fault of the Europeans. They had come and brought movies. Some people had radios and listened to European stations. Women had become so impudent that some did not even wear hats anymore. Their hair was out in the open for all to see. Their clothes became shorter every day, revealing their legs to everyone, familiar or strange.[311]

Here, the narrator appears to parody the conservative voice of patriarchal religious nationalism that regards the effects of capitalist modernity as 'horrible,' while at the same time highlighting the importance of faith in a modern setting. Thus, the novel again emphasises the co-existence of the religious and the modern and conflicting ideas of the old and new. Touba's house symbolises the old/tradition; she remains bound to it and refuses to allow modern equipment to enter her home. Ismael and Kamal (characters who are adopted into her family and hold secular views) believe that the house should be 'rebuil[t]'[312]; indeed, Kamal thinks it should be 'burn[ed] down'.[313]

Yet Touba's house is a 'solid foundation' of traditional values situated next to the 'Bank of Saderat' and 'a supermarket', which together symbolise capitalist finance and the modern culture of consumerism.[314] In this way, Parsipur foregrounds the contradictory ways in which modern Iranian culture combines aspects of religion, patriarchy, and the culture of capitalist development. The reader is given an insight into the life of one of the bank's employees (Mr. Tahami), who is immersed in the world of capitalist finance, while Touba is purified and undergoes an inner transformation via her Sufi faith. Touba continues to be amazed at the manifestations of modernity and on her way home 'automatically stopped in front of the Bank of Saderat [where] the bank employees were working hard, their heads bent low over their desks'.[315] The narrator then tells us:

> [Mr. Tahami] had been thinking about getting a second job in the afternoons in order to pay his mortgage, the installments on the freezer, the car, and the washer-and-dryer set […] [r]eturning to the house, he had put up with his wife's complaints and crying. His wife didn't know why she had married only to become an unpaid servant, why she

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[311] Ibid., p. 248.
[312] Ibid., p. 316.
[313] Ibid., p. 306.
[314] Ibid., p. 343.
[315] Ibid., p. 358.

had to wash Mr. Tahami's children's dirty diapers and the dishes and cook food and sweep and was supposed to live in joy just from the idea that she had a husband.[316]

This passage not only registers how capitalism keeps control of labour and encourages consumption, but also that females are 'unpaid servant[s]' in the home; in this way, the novel offers a subtle critique of the ways in which the accumulation of capital is made possible by the unwaged social reproduction of women in the domestic sphere. As the story unfolds toward the end, Prince Gil mocks the Sufi Master Geda Alishah and tells Touba that he is planning on killing his wife, Layla. Throughout the novel, Touba has merely listened to the stories, but now responds forcefully: she 'finally said what she had always wanted to say. […] Why don't you kill yourself?' Upon posing this question, the narrator adds, 'she felt satisfied'.[317] This satisfaction symbolises Touba's final realisation of an alternative to deep-rooted and blinkered patriarchal viewpoints, which she had internalised, as well as the painful experience of patriarchal subordination she has been forced to endure.

The symbolic power of Touba's defiant speech act is further borne out when the pomegranate tree in Touba's courtyard, beneath which Serateh lies buried, suddenly bears fruit — a metaphor for Touba's new awareness 'revealing itself to her'.[318] Parsipur's choice of this symbol from Sufi mysticism emphasises that to find the truth requires a uniting of the masculine and feminine on equal terms. In Sufism, the Sufi enters the Garden of Essence which is the fourth stage the mystic reaches 'on the inward journey'.[319] Within this garden:

> form consists of the masculine and feminine principles uniting in the stage of annihilation, being reborn in the illuminated knowledge of the Unity of Being. To enter, the mystic must lose all traces of individuality. […] The only peril in this garden is to the mystic's individuality, for it dies a spiritual death. The fruit of this Garden is the pomegranate, the symbol of integration of multiplicity in unity, in the station of Union, conscious of Essence. Consumed in the Light [...] the mystic has reached the goal of the Quest, the Truth of Certainty.[320]

As Yavari (2007) notes, Touba '[r]ecognizes that the tree, a graphic symbol mirroring the various stages of her spiritual quest, has borne the fruit of truth'.[321] After going into the street to distribute the fruit, powered by the thought that she 'must tell the truth', Touba knows that

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[316] Ibid., pp. 366–67.
[317] Ibid., p. 358.
[318] Ibid., p. 365.
[319] Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 28–30. Bakhtiar adds, 'Paradise is described in the Quran […] as being four gardens. These are interpreted esoterically as four stages through which the mystic travels on the inward journey' (pp. 28–30).
[320] Ibid., p. 30.
[321] Yavari, 'Afterword', p. 401.

she has 'definitely discovered the truth, but could not verbalize it'.[322] The reader recalls her frustration that the Master never told her 'the truths,' something she did not understand until she refused the offer to sit in his seat and wait for the truth to come in fragments from the words of visitors. Touba surrenders and sinks with Layla down into the pomegranate tree: 'deeper into the depths of darkness, into a darkness darker than itself […] There was in that place a silence to end all silence.'[323] Once again, as in *Fatma*, we find the Sufi ideas of the art of blindness, embracing darkness, and stepping out of time, are all necessary in order to engage in the deep listening required to connect with God.

As Touba and Layla move further into a realm of darkness and silence, Touba finds she has 'become as one singular particle.' She sees 'a ray of light' that Layla explains is 'consciousness' before asking '[d]o you remember that we were one?'[324] As mythic figures both Prince Gil and Layla are presented as immortal ('cannot die').[325] By the end of the narrative, Touba is shown returning to the source, the oneness of life, and now she is free, reconnecting not only with God but with the world itself: 'she was spread all over the earth. She was a thousand earth particles, and she could see through every particle.' The transformed Touba is overtly linked to the 'earth [who] was continuously pregnant. Always in the season of birth'. Touba 'was now someone else. She no longer had the need to search for truth.'[326] Death and life merge as Touba is transformed in the act of re-worlding the temporality of the earth in the gendered terms of the 'season of birth'.

This chapter has suggested that both *Fatma* and *Touba* use magic and the otherworldly to tell stories about the conditions of Muslim women's lives in patriarchal societies that are transformed by the cultural and economic forces of capitalism in oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. The oppression and exclusion of Muslim women in modern Saudi Arabi and Iran should not only be read through the lens of patriarchy, but also in relation to the development of petro-capitalist modernity, which profits from women's unwaged labour in the patriarchal domestic sphere, thereby compounding the pain of social exclusion. By reading these novels with and against histories of subaltern consciousness, as well as theories of social reproduction, and combined and uneven development, I have also traced the way in which Sufism provides utopian resources for these novelists to imagine a world that is not subordinated to the exigencies of patriarchy and capital accumulation. These narratives register a different temporality and a way of

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[322] Parsipur, *Touba*, p. 369.
[323] Ibid., p. 374.
[324] Ibid., p. 374.
[325] Ibid., p. 381.
[326] Ibid., p. 380.

knowing that interrupts the patriarchal order of things, disrupts the terms of exclusion from the public sphere and creates a space where female characters can achieve a form of divine transformation. This is the result of drawing upon elements of Sufism, which is imagined as a path to peace for the protagonists of these novels. In doing so, the chapter has suggested that the novels do not only register the coexistence of the religious and the modern within contemporary capitalist modernity, but also identify other ways of thinking about gender in modern Islamic societies.

Working against essentialising Orientalist stereotypes of a monolithic Muslim woman, the narrative techniques and figurative language of Muslim magical realism(s) employed in these novels construct gendered forms of religious consciousness that cannot be circumscribed within the boundaries of Orientalist or patriarchal thought. Indeed, by comparing these two texts written by different Muslim female writers — one set in Saudi Arabia and the other in Iran — this chapter rejects the 'Muslimwoman' label as a pan-Islamic Orientalist view, which is also a thread the next chapter will take up. Furthermore, the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s) reveals not only different Muslim identities but also different styles and narrative forms. The following chapter will show how dreams and visions offer the utopian resources to reassess and reread not only patriarchy's interpretation of religion, but also the restrictions of capitalism and to reimagine a future alternative to that world.

Chapter 3   The Real and Irreal in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (1987) [translated in (1989)] and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988)

'I decided to give up trying to distinguish the real from the imaginary or to find out where I was' (39) — Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*

'he no longer recognizes the distinction between the waking and dreaming states' (457) — Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

The late Edward Said (1997) (followed then by other postcolonial scholars[1]) notes that '[m]alicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West'.[2] Said criticises the Orientalists' portrayal of Islam and Muslims as 'a single […] coherent entity' and states that '[i]n no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the "Islam" in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam'.[3] This chapter (and the thesis as a whole) extends these observations by considering how so-called magical realism sheds light on the ways in which Orientalist and neo-Orientalist representations of Islam aid and abet the forcible conjoining of the Muslim world and the modern capitalist system. In addressing this question, the chapter counters the charge that magical realism(s) function as a new Orientalist cultural form in the modern Islamic world. Instead, I suggest that there is a utopian dimension to magical realism(s) that seeks to imagine an alternative to the 'real world' of political repression and the socio-economic inequalities of capitalist modernity. In the novels of Salman Rushdie and Tahar Ben Jelloun, for instance, dreams can be understood as an expression of utopian desire for 'a system radically different' to capitalism.[4] Utopians, as Jameson (2005) further explains, 'always aim at the alleviation and elimination of the sources of exploitation and suffering, rather than at the composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort.'[5] This chapter aims to address issues such as these, and a series of other related questions, by considering how magical realism(s) are deployed as a vehicle for

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[1] See chapter one of this thesis.
[2] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, rev. edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. xii.
[3] Ibid., pp. xvi– l.
[4] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. xii.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.

expressing utopian desire. In doing so, it also suggests ways of reading Muslim magical realism(s) beyond rigid Orientalist views of a monolithic and essentialist Muslim identity.

This chapter (as in the previous and following chapter) compares two Muslim magical realism(s) novels: one is subject to debates in Francophone postcolonial discourse — Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (1987, translated into English 1989)[6] — while the other is widely discussed within Anglophone and postcolonial magical realism discourses — Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988).[7] As has been argued above (in the Introduction), magical realism is not a fixed and knowable category or genre; rather it is a formal experiment that is made intelligible through each reading and is therefore not monolithic or stable. Indeed, magical realism is a shifting term rather than a 'catch-all' conceptual and aesthetic term; nor is it a fixed object or category that is true for all texts across space and time. Furthermore, magical realism(s) from the Muslim world are not all the same and do not represent some form of pan-Islamic literary form; on the contrary, I seek to show how such works question and interrupt Orientalist ideas of a monolithic or homogenous Muslim world and identity. While both novels under analysis in this chapter deploy elements of what we might call magical realism, they differ in their depictions of the different Muslim identities, sub-cultures and socio-political contexts which they fictionalise.

By comparing these two novels set in modern Morocco (Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night*) and South Asia/Britain (Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*), this chapter aims to address the following questions: how do these writers make use of dreams in a manner that is strikingly similar to the Sufi Islamic notion of *Barzakh* (creative imagination) and does this concept link to recent literary theoretical concepts such as critical irrealism? How and why do these two examples of contemporary Muslim magical realism(s) mobilise and reframe or

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[6] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989). Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* won Le Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary prize. Commenting on Ben Jelloun's response regarding his choice to write in French rather than in his mother tongue, Arabic, Mary Anne Lewis (2016) states that Ben Jelloun is explaining 'his use of French not as a choice at all, and much less so as a problematic one' but 'as a vehicle used to reach the greatest readership possible'(p. 303). See Mary Anne Lewis, 'Between Francophonie and World Literature in French: Tahar Ben Jelloun's Evolving Authority', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 21.2 (2016), 301–09. < https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1130942>. Ben Jelloun has been criticised not only for writing in French but also that his novels are manifestations of an Orientalist stereotype regarding Arabs and Muslims in North Africa in order to 'seduce the French and sell at the global market'. See Anouar El Younssi, 'An Exoticized World Literature: Ben Jelloun at the Two Shores of the Mediterranean', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 34 (2014), 225–50 (p. 228) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24392137> [accessed 28 July 2019]. However, Dominic Rainsford (2017) sees such an argument as being 'simplistic and tendentious, underestimating the complexity and self-awareness of Ben Jelloun's writing'. See Dominic Rainsford, 'Literature, Catastrophe, and Numbers: Saadat Hasan Manto and Tahar Ben Jelloun', *The Comparatist*, 41 (2017), 5–18 (p. 12) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26254789> [accessed 11 June 2019]. For the purpose of the analysis in this chapter, the focus here is to read *The Sacred Night* as a form of Muslim magical realism(s) rather than rehearsing previous scholarly arguments. I also read the novel in English translation for reasons illustrated in the Introduction of this thesis.
[7] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage Books, 1998 [1988]).

adapt Sufi Islamic ideas to the role of different states of consciousness and unconsciousness (dreams and visions) to allow their protagonists, and potentially their readers, to experience/witness a form of self-realisation (a realisation that is not always positive and can lead to self-destruction or self-discovery) while attempting to understand the nature of truth, fact, and faith? Also, how does the use of mystic Sufi knowledge in recent literary fiction from different parts of the Muslim world complicate superficial attempts to theorise a monolithic Muslim magical realism? Furthermore, how does, for example, Rushdie's secular magical realism shed light on the combined and uneven development of South Asian society and identity (in a way that parallels but is also different from what Moretti says about Márquez)?

We have already seen above how theories of a literary world-system are useful for understanding different Muslim identities. The WReC's theory of combined and uneven development can also help us to make sense of how magical realist texts that draw on Sufi teachings may be related to wider socio-economic transformations and tensions between modernity and religion. This is not to suggest that these texts merely register the pressures of combined and uneven development, however; they also use elements of dreams and fantasy to reimagine the world after capitalist modernity. In doing so, the texts foreground a link between the utopian dimension of dreams and visions in literary texts, and the transformations wrought by the global forces of modernity, as will be shown below.

The two texts have been chosen for comparison for the following reasons: both texts exemplify how dreams and visions are used to explore religious/spiritual issues and motifs as resources within the framework of magical realism to reassess contemporary capitalist modernity. Both novels mobilise precapitalist traditions (primarily Sufism) regarding the concept of imagination (*Barzakh*) to show the experiences of people within Islamic societies undergoing transformation by capitalist modernity. Via close readings of Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (1987) and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) it will be shown that the interconnection of religious elements and magic in these texts provides readers with ways to investigate ideas regarding identity, self-realisation, and faith through the techniques of using dreams, visions, and different states of consciousness — presented in explorations of the nature of being that challenge orthodoxy in Islamic contexts — within literary spaces that open up beyond rational thought and everyday experience. By making use of Sufi mystic ideas about imagination, these authors combine Islamic viewpoints and traditions in a modern secular literary form; in doing so they suggest that magic and religious symbolism coexist alongside elements of the modern world as the protagonists seek a personal truth regarding the nature of being.

There are, of course, risks at stake in any cross-cultural comparison. However, as articulated in chapter one of this thesis, reading texts via a comparative approach beyond geographical boundaries helps us to better understand not only how these texts illuminate different Muslim identities but also how magical realism is not a normative form of writing. I am in agreement with John J. Su (2011) — who follows Nicholas Brown's cross-cultural comparative approach (2005) — wherein he states that '[t]he division of the globe between wealthy and poor nations establishes a rift whose existence can be fully appreciated only by reading texts that come from both sides of the divide'.[8] Su notes that 'beyond the rift [Brown[9]] identifies there exists a series of *micro-rifts* within countries and ethnic or cultural groups that complicate the preoccupation with the dynamics of center and periphery'.[10] My comparative reading of Rushdie and Ben Jelloun not only extend Su's methodology of a cross cultural comparison, but also his argument regarding 'a renewed interest in imagination' in literary works 'as a response to the perceived consolidation of an imperialist form of capitalism as a world-system'.[11] Such an approach is cognate with recent theoretical accounts of 'critical irrealism'. In their discussion of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, the WReC draw on Michael Löwy's (2007) concept of 'critical irrealism' to make sense of how the forces of combined unevenness are registered in Salih's novel. As they put it:

> [t]he proximity of discordant discourses and unrelated narrative registers moving between the mundane and the fantastic, the recognisable and the improbable, the legible and the oneiric, the worldly and the mystical, can perhaps be understood as stylistic forms stemming from and transcending the novel's social ground, and thus as abstracts of incommensurabilities attendant on combined and uneven development. Perhaps too the melodramas of sexual violence can be understood as analogous to the crimes committed against the people and the land by capitalism's penetration of pre-capitalist societies.[12]

Such an articulation and linking of concepts is especially useful in order to facilitate a comparative reading of *The Sacred Night* and *The Satanic Verses* as instances of Muslim magical realism(s). With this in mind, this chapter extends Löwy's 'critical irrealism' and

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[8] Su paraphrases Brown. See John J. Su, *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 14–15.
[9] Brown reads 'British modernism between the world wars, and African literature during the period of the national independence struggles' and 'reconstellates' them 'in such a way […] to make them both comprehensible within a single framework within which neither will look the same' (pp. 1–3). See Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations*: *The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[10] Su, *Imagination*, p. 15.
[11] Ibid., p. 153.
[12] The WReC, p. 95.

the WReC's use of this concept to explore how these texts combine elements of the worldly and the mystical in order to make sense of the relationship between Islam and modernity. Both Ben Jelloun and Rushdie draw on the Islamic tradition (specifically Sufism) in order to counter the forces of capitalist abstraction, which threaten to denude Sufi mysticism of cultural meaning and value. Rather than an abstract sign of incommensurability, I suggest that the utopian reframing of the Sufi imagination in these two contemporary magical realist novels has the capacity to reimagine the world after the transformations wrought by capitalist modernity.

Moreover, rather than simply applying the scholarship of Western Marxist academics regarding the literary imagination, I suggest that there are clear connections with the thinking contained within the Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi's writings on imagination and to the use of dreams and visions within the modern Islamic worlds that are fictionalised in the work of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. So rather than ignoring the religious background of each author (and how this seems to manifest in their characters and plots), this chapter seeks to offer a reading that takes this into consideration. While Su's case studies are focused upon contemporary Anglophone literature (including Rushdie's fiction) across the globe, this chapter (and this thesis generally) focuses upon Muslim novels — specifically those recognised as a form of magical realism — from different countries including what is recognised as Anglophone (for example, *The Satanic Verses*) and Francophone writing (for example, *The Sacred Night*).

By drawing on the precapitalist Sufi tradition in the modern world, both novels provide examples of how specific combinations and collisions of the religious and the modern not only register but combine these different discourses in order to reimagine the world in contemporary Islamic societies. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* consists of nine chapters in which dreams and visions are experienced by the two protagonists Gibreel Farishta, Saladin Chamcha, and other characters. It is a story of migrants from an Indian Muslim background struggling with crises of identity, disorientation and alienation after their arrival in the United Kingdom. Rushdie presents overlapping and parallel narratives framed by the everyday reality of life for immigrants juxtaposed with powerful dream sequences and techniques that have been likened to the magical realism of Márquez.

On a first reading, Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* uses similar formal techniques. The narrative moves between the past and the present, the real and the irreal, as Zahra (a woman brought up as a boy) tries to escape her past and family. The story is an exploration of the impact of traditional thinking about gender and rigid social codes, and the challenges of resisting these codes. In this respect, the novel is quite different from *The Satanic Verses*,

which is concerned with migrant identity rather than gender identity. Yet both novels use these different concerns with identity as a vehicle to explore the wider political transformations that are taking place within the Muslim world, and to reimagine that world after these transformations have taken place.

Löwy's (2007) concept of 'critical irrealism' will be deployed here to explore how Sufi ideas are mobilised in the postmodern aesthetics of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie as a response to the Islamic fundamentalism of political leaders such as Khomeini and the Salafi King of Morocco, Hassan II. Löwy posits the question '[a]re there not many nonrealist works of art which are valuable and contain a powerful critique of the social order?' and coins the term 'critical irrealism' in order to develop this issue.[13] He provides an example of how a story such as 'Sleeping Beauty' 'is certainly not realistic: its fundamental logic is not that of "fidelity to real life"; [on the contrary,] it is founded on a logic of the imagination, of the marvelous, of the mystery or the dream'.[14] Löwy suggests that irrealism 'does not oppose realism' but rather 'describes the absence of realism'.[15] For Löwy critical irrealism is a term that 'can be applied to *œuvres* that do not follow the rules governing the "accurate representation of life as it really is" but that are nevertheless critical of social reality'.[16] This is certainly the case in the texts examined here, wherein, as Löwy notes regarding similar artistic offerings, '[t]he critical viewpoint of these works of art is often related to the dream of another, imaginary world, either idealized or terrifying' and 'one opposed to the gray, prosaic, disenchanted reality of modern, meaning capitalist, society'.[17] Löwy's theory of critical irrealism is particularly useful for analysing Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Both novels use narrative strategies to offer a 'dream of another, imaginary world', but they also do so in order to offer a critique of the disenchanted worlds in which they are situated. Moreover, both novels draw on ideas regarding imagination and dreams from precapitalist Islamic traditions to imagine an alternative world. This is not to say that both authors deploy exactly the same techniques, but rather that they play with ideas of an alternative world (via different styles of narrative voice, plot, and structure) in order to offer critiques of societies experiencing the impact of capitalist modernity, and use dreams to imagine a different utopian future.

Critical irrealism, Löwy further asserts, 'belongs to the tradition of Romanticism, and to its later manifestations such as Symbolism and Surrealism' and '[s]everal [of its] themes

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[13] Michael Löwy, 'The Current of Critical Irrealism: "A Moonlit Enchanted Night"', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 193–206 (p. 193).
[14] Ibid., p. 194.
[15] Ibid., p. 195.
[16] Ibid., p. 196.
[17] Ibid., p. 196.

can be found in critical irrealism', including 'a critical attitude towards the disenchanted modern world'.[18] In a discussion of the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, as an example of critical irrealism, Löwy asserts that this author offers a combination of 'realistic detail with a fantastic atmosphere of supernatural forces' which represents a 'deep-seated Romantic rebellion against the industrial/capitalist mechanization of life'.[19] While magical realism certainly has been differentiated from other literary genres (as explained in the Introduction to this thesis), Löwy's reflections on the role of religion within Romanticism can assist with reading Muslim magical realism(s). As he explains, '[r]eligion – both in its traditional forms and in its mystical or heretical manifestations' was 'an important means of "re-enchantment" chosen by the Romantics'; furthermore, 'they also turned to magic, to the esoteric arts, sorcery, alchemy, and astrology; they rediscovered Christian and pagan myths, legends, fairy tales, and gothic narratives; and they explored the hidden realms of dreams and the fantastic'.[20] Löwy's account of the role of religion in European Romanticism as a response to the destructive forces of capitalist modernity are particularly germane to my own comparative readings of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Indeed, reading the religious elements in both novels as a form of 're-enchantment' opens up new perspectives and I read the combination of the religious, the magical, and the modern as a formal critique of Islamic fundamentalism and Cold War geopolitics, among a range of issues that are engaged with in the texts, as an attempt to reimagine the world and to propose alternative ways of being within it.

Here, I wish to extend Löwy's approach to show how Sufi ideas have been taken up in both novels analysed in this chapter — a central element of the selected Muslim magical realism(s) sub-genre(s) — in the late twentieth century. Moreover, I consider these works in the context of a turn to more fundamentalist ways of thinking about Islam which came about in part as a response to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European imperialism and subsequently to US foreign policy in the Middle East during and immediately after the Cold War. In response to such fundamentalist ideas, leading writers and artists turn to Sufi ideas precisely because they seem to offer an alternative to fixed and essentialising ideas of religious nationalism and political theology. Such ideas, I argue, take different forms in the fictional worlds of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. This chapter will also focus on elements relevant to offering a new understanding of how critical irrealism can assist reading dreams and visions in the magical realist texts explored in this chapter. In his discussion of Löwy's

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[18] Ibid., pp. 196–200.
[19] Ibid., p. 202.
[20] Ibid., p. 198.

concept 'critical irrealism', Michael Niblett (2012) notes that 'the clearest example of the kinds of generic discontinuities Jameson speaks of is to be found in "magic" or "marvellous" realism (itself, of course, a form of irrealism)'.[21] While this concept may be useful in discussing texts that can be identified as magical realism, this is not the case for 'all' magical realist texts. Furthermore, I argue that the idea that 'irrealism' offers a space between what is understood as 'real' and 'unreal' allows for the Sufi concept of *Barzakh* to be deployed in order to better understand the 'third space' presented in the Muslim magical realist texts discussed in this chapter.

The word *Barzakh* is mentioned three times in the Quran 'in which it plays the role of a barrier between two things (bodies, situations)' and as 'a limit that separates two entities, preventing them from mixing with each other'[22] and yet 'provides for their unity'.[23] These Quranic examples are crucial to Ibn Arabi's philosophical formulation of *Barzakh*.[24] Ibn Arabi links this concept to his thoughts about imagination (*al-khayāl*).[25] For Ibn Arabi imagination is 'an intermediate reality' and 'intrinsically ambiguous' and can be defined as 'neither this nor that, or both this and that' thus 'it is a *barzakh*'.[26] As he further explains:

> A *barzakh* is something that separates (*fāṣil*) two other things while never going to one side (*mutaṭarrif*), as, for example, the line that separates shadow from sunlight. God says, 'He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a *barzakh* they do not overpass' (Koran 55:19); in other words, the one sea does not mix with the other. Though sense perception might be incapable of separating the two things, the rational faculty judges that there is a barrier (*ḥājiz*) between them which separates them. The intelligible barrier is the *barzakh*. […] Any two adjacent things are in need of a *barzakh* which is neither the one nor the other but which possesses the power (*quwwa*) of both.

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[21] Michael Niblett, 'World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature', *Green Letters*, 16.1 (2012), 15–30 (p. 21) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2012.10589097>.

[22] Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the world* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 75.

[23] Ibid., p. 11.

[24] Salman H. Bashier (2004) notes that 'the development' of the concept *Barzakh* in the Islamic tradition moves 'from its temporal designation in orthodoxy, signifying a period of time that extends between death and resurrection, to its spatial designation within mysticism' (p. 81).

[25] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover Ibn Arabi's notion regarding the world of imagination in detail. Indeed, as Henry Corbin (1969) notes, '[t]here is no incoherence, as has been claimed, in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of the Imagination; but there is an extreme complexity to reckon with'; he also adds that '[t]he "field" encompassed in the "science of the Imagination" is so vast that it is difficult to enumerate all its sectors'(p. 217). See Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[26] Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 117.

[…] It is called *barzakh* as a technical term (*iṣṭilāḥ*), and in itself it is intelligible, but it is only imagination.[27]

Ibn Arabi is obviously writing on a complex religious and philosophical idea rather than a literary technique. Yet, his remarks regarding *Barzakh* as 'never going to one side' and 'posssess[ing] the power of both' resonate with Jameson and Harootunian's account of combined and uneven development and nonsynchronous synchronicity.[28] Once the old encounters the new, they meet at a line of demarcation,[29] and both temporal categories can be seen to hold the power of this combination while at the same time remaining distinct from each other. With this in mind, it is my intention to demonstrate how the dreams and visions in the novels studied here are, as Rim Feriani (2017) notes, echoes of *Barzakh*.[30] Indeed, for Ibn Arabi, dreams are 'the most common human experience of the nature of imaginal things'.[31] Ibn Arabi was of course writing in a very different context, and was clearly not thinking specifically about different ideas of time or modernity in his formulation of *Barzakh*. Yet the use of Sufi ideas in postmodern novels such as *The Sacred Night* and *The Satanic Verses* clearly raise questions about the persistence of these ideas, and the ways in which this precapitalist notion coexists with the culture of capitalist modernity, Cold War geopolitics, and Islamic fundamentalism.

By drawing on the Sufi tradition regarding the meeting of opposites, the novels engage with the religious and modern to assert that precapitalist and capitalist elements come together at a line of demarcation (or a *Barzakh*) within the modern world. In other words, if combination, by definition, means 'a joining or merging of different parts or qualities in which the component elements are individually distinct',[32] the concept of *Barzakh* is useful to understand how the combination of the religious and modern is articulated in the texts under examination in this chapter. It also helps us to understand how the novels use dreams for imagining an alternative world and how dreams can express a utopian desire for an alternative world.

In broad terms, my comparative reading of Rushdie and Ben Jelloun is cognate with the work of anthropologists such as Stefania Pandolfo (1997), Vincent Crapanzano (2004)

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[27] Ibid., pp. 117–18.
[28] See chapter one of this thesis.
[29] The word 'demarcation' is another translation of *Barzakh*. See S.A.Q. Husaini, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn Al-'Arabi* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970).
[30] A number of scholars, including Miriam Cooke (2007) and Rim Feriani (2017), have explored the notion of *Barzakh* in texts by Muslim authors.
[31] Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 119.
[32] 'Combination', in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Angus Stevenson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 345.

and Amira Mittermaier (2007; 2011) who explore the notion of *Barzakh* as an intermediary space. Ibn Arabi 'employs the term "Barzakh" to remind us that the realm of the divine self-disclosure is an "isthmus" between two realities'.[33] Pandolfo and Crapanzano see the term *Barzakh*'s 'potential for expanding or rupturing a Western epistemic outlook that tends to approach the world in terms of either/or'.[34] Pandolfo reads the *Barzakh* as 'a heterological space of intercultural dialogue'.[35] In a similar vein, Crapanzano sees the *Barzakh* as 'a constitutive space-time' existing in 'the betwixt and between'.[36] Following the work of both her fellow anthropologists, Mittermaier argues that '[a] *barzakhian* perceptive […] ruptures binary outlooks and invites us to think beyond the present and the visible' and 'to dwell on the in-between'.[37] In the novels under discussion here, I suggest that the focalising characters negotiate the contradictory combination of precapitalist beliefs and the secular culture of capitalist modernity, and that as a result they are in a state of indeterminacy and ambiguity: they are dwelling in the in-between. The notion of *Barzakh*, Mittermaier notes, 'can offer us insight into modes of being in the world that might not easily be intelligible from within rationalist, secular vocabularies but are nevertheless of political and ethical relevance'.[38] This space (*Barzakh*) can also be identified as that described by a number of critics as magical realism's 'third space' (as mentioned above) in the fictional worlds of both Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Thus, we can also see how both authors not only engage in what Löwy describes as critical irrealism in order to offer a critique of the effects of globalised capitalist modernity but also deploy a religious notion regarding different states of being and lines of demarcation. Such an argument helps us to look at *Barzakh* not only as a religious Sufi concept but also as a potential philosophical framework to assist in understanding how and why both Ben Jelloun and Rushdie intentionally or unintentionally deploy such a Sufi/Islamic concept in a modern setting (i.e. a way of re-worlding the world).

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[33] Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 181.

[34] Amira Mittermaier, 'The Book of Visions: Dreams, Poetry, and Prophecy in Contemporary Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 39.2 (2007), 229–47 (p. 231) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30069574> [accessed 18 September 2019]. This quote is from Mittermaier's earlier article (2007) from which she developed her argument for her full-length study.

[35] Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 5.

[36] Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 6.

[37] Mittermaier, *Dreams That Matter*, p. 4. In an account of her ethnographic fieldwork, Mittermaier utilises the concept of *Barzakh* to explore the role of 'dreams-visions' and imagination in modern Egypt. Mittermaier specifically focuses on 'not ordinary dreams but dreams-visions' which 'are highly valued because they *come to* the dreamer as opposed to being *produced by* her' (p. 6). In the Islamic tradition, Mittermaier notes, these dreams-visions 'far from reflecting only past experiences' in fact 'can foreshadow, or even bring about, future events' (p. 7).

[38] Ibid., p. 4.

My reading does not suggest a definitive set of characteristics of dreams and visions in texts that can be described as containing elements of magical realism; rather, the aim here is to reject any presupposed reading of this kind. Critical scholarship on magical realism has often focused on the use of dreams. Bowers (2004), for example, notes that the Flemish writer Johan Daisne's *De Trap Van Steen En Wolken* (*The Stairs of Stone and Clouds* [1942]) 'develops magic realism as a means of defining the space between dream and reality; the use of dreams as a source of magic brings his magic realism closer to the surrealism that inspired Roh and German post-expressionism'.[39] In a similar vein, Isabel Allende (1991) identifies dreams as an important component in the magical realism mode: '"magic realism is a literary device or a way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history"' because '"[a]ll these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism .... It is the capacity to see and to write about all the dimensions of reality"'.[40] As noted above, these critics use a key word here which is 'space' that links back to magical realism's 'third space' and if we consider such a space in a Muslim context regarding dreams and visions then we clearly see how Muslim authors seem to plug into the Islamic concept of *Barzakh*. So rather than generalising certain characteristics of the mode of magical realism we need to take into consideration cultural understanding. This is not to suggest that Muslim authors are all doing the same thing in their works but to read their texts within a specific cultural context. In attempting to differentiate the mode from other forms, Amaryll Chanady (1985) makes the distinction that in magical realism, 'the portrayal of […] dreams […] does not make a story into an example of magical realism, unless the imagined events are presented as objectively real'.[41] Faris (2004) notes that '[i]n magical realism dreams free themselves from total immersion in individual psyches, often to manifest themselves in the outer world, whereas in modernism dreams tend to remain rooted in individuality and interiority'.[42] Therefore, for Faris and others, dreams in magical realist texts can be seen as experiences that manifest in the physical rather than only the psychical world and become a form of reality. However, to say that dreams and visions must have a certain specificity in order to be recognised as technical elements of the magical realism mode is misleading.

The representational conventions that have been associated with the magical realism(s) of writers such as Allende and Márquez offer a space for the representation of

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[39] Bowers, p. 62.
[40] Qtd. in Wendy B. Faris, 'The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism', *Janus Head*, 5.2 (2002), 101–19 (p. 107).
[41] Chanady, p. 29.
[42] Faris, *Enchantments,* p. 104.

irreality in order to challenge the unthinking acceptance of dominant views of social reality, especially those which are imposed by authoritarian states. On first glance, the fiction of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie merely appears to make use of similar strategies, in order to valorise the power of the imagination and challenge what we might think of as orthodox interpretations of Islam, and the strict religious codes it prescribes. Yet a closer comparison of such codes also allows us to grasp significant differences between the fictional worlds of these texts in ways that also speak to the coexistence of religion, culture, and modernity in the different social, linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical spaces that are evoked. Therefore, this chapter approaches Muslim magical realism(s) as a specific instance of what the WReC call peripheral realisms, or realisms which tell another story about the uneven temporalities of religion, culture, and capitalist modernity as they are experienced and understood at different places and in different times across the Muslim world. Following the WReC, I read the sub-genre(s) of Muslim magical realism(s) as forms that are part of this modern literary world-system. To put it simply, the works of Ben Jelloun, Rushdie and other Muslim writers examined in this thesis are distinctive yet we can find common elements; thus, I suggest these works can be read not only as manifestations of the combined and uneven development of capitalist modernity but also as examples of both the singularity and multiplicities of Muslim identities (as discussed in chapter one). The next section develops these ideas further by examining how the exploration of Muslim identity in *The Sacred Night* is used as a vehicle to explore the social transformations caused by the impact of capitalist modernity in Morocco.

3.1   The Utopian Imagining of *The Sacred Night*

The Sacred Night — a sequel to Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child* (1985)[43] — is a novel in which the protagonist Zahra (the first-person narrator) appears as an old woman telling the story of her life that began as 'a child whose identity was clouded, unsteady, a girl disguised as male by a willful father who felt demeaned and humiliated because he had no son'.[44] Ben Jelloun sets his novel in modern Morocco and follows the trajectory of a female character's spiritual development on the Sufi path. Zahra's society is shown to be impacted by different forces, such as colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism.

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[43] Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child* translated into English in 1987.
[44] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 2.

By using dreams as a narrative device and as a religious concept, and by blurring the line between what is real and what is not, Ben Jelloun crafts his own style of magical realism. Indeed, Ben Jelloun asserts that his novels '"have an original novelistic form. Original? That is not the right word! Different perhaps. […] It's my own way of telling a story"'.[45] Yet, as I go on to argue, Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* can also be seen as another example of the sub-genre(s) that I identify as Muslim magical realism(s). This is a novel that registers the socio-political conditions in modern Morocco post-independence. A specific period or date is not given (except for an old family snapshot from 1922); however, Ben Jelloun's own experience provides clues that the novel could be set during the rule of King Hassan II.

During this period, Ben Jelloun was part of 'a student revolt against the Moroccan police and King Hassan II's repressive regime' and in 1966 Ben Jelloun 'was arrested […] and sent to a military camp for 18 months'. Ben Jelloun has made overt connections between this experience and his creative output in that '[t]his very oppression, he declared, urged him to write and denounce state oppression'. The author openly criticised the authorities in Morocco for 'religious hypocrisy' and 'women's oppression'.[46] However, this critique is not straightforward; rather, the implied author is utilizing irreality in a narrative that registers the cultural, political, and economic transformations that have taken place in modern Moroccan society. *The Sacred Night* registers the realities of political and religious oppression in the speech of a dying man encountered by Zahra:

> All the people you see here were poor; beggars and tramps, diseased. One day an order was given to clean up the town for an important visitor, a foreigner who was to take a short walk in the streets. We were the dirty, unacceptable face of the country, whose image had to be polished. […] There were raids. They stuck us all here and completely forgot us. […] We are human castoffs, forever forgotten.[47]

These references to the oppression of people who are 'forgotten', 'dirty' and the 'unacceptable face of the country' illuminate daily life in Morocco and its authoritarian state after independence. As Mohamed Daadaoui (2016) notes, '[t]he Moroccan monarchy's strength lies in its spiritual authority, which is based on a variety of religious claims about political legitimacy' by emphasising connections between the secular and temporal 'includ[ing] [the] "sharifian" lineage (the king's claim to be a descendant of the Prophet

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[45] André Rollin qtd in Mustapha Marrouchi, 'Breaking Up/Down/Out of the Boundaries: Tahar Ben Jelloun', trans. by Patricia Geesey, *Research in African Literatures*, 21.4 (1990), 71–83 (p. 77) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3819322> [accessed 16 July 2019].
[46] *The Facts on File Companion to the World Novel 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Michael D. Sollars and Arbolina Llamas Jennings (New York: Facts on File, 2008), p. 404.
[47] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 154.

Muhammad), possession of a divine blessing ("Baraka"), and the king's title of commander of the faithful' thus provided him with 'unlimited political powers anchored in Islam'.[48] Such power, which established itself on religious legitimacy is, therefore, exploiting faith for both political and economic purposes. The dying man's speech that Zahra encounters is indicative of this commentary on the political situation in Morocco during the time in which the novel is set.

However, Ben Jelloun does not make it clear whether this man is 'real' or part of one of Zahra's visions. We hear that '[h]e was not a jinni' and he tells Zahra that she is '"the first human being to enter this warehouse"'. Zahra remarks that it 'was a vision' but 'all true. It had happened in winter. The townspeople still talk about it'.[49] This blurring of the line between what is 'real' and 'irreal' is a way in which Ben Jelloun makes use of this narrative strategy as a testimony of the corrupt political situation. This is pronounced in the words of the dying man: '"I am the last survivor, the one who has to disappear because his testimony is so horrible"'.[50] This is complicated further as the dying man and Zahra's voices become one: '[t]he dying man's voice entered me and merged with mine until it became my own voice. I could no longer hear the dying man, but I spoke inside myself, endlessly repeating what he had told me'.[51] Zahra is haunted by the voices of the dead generations (in a manner similar to the gothic tradition), which speak on behalf of the oppressed. As Kerstin Oloff (2012) notes in a discussion of selected Caribbean fictions, 'the gothic mode is often subsumed by, or is employed alongside, magical realism, which is, like the gothic, a style of disruption growing out of capitalist unevenness subjectively experienced as ruptures in time'.[52] Michael Niblett (2014), following Oloff, notes how 'the reworking of Euro-American gothic tropes in a Caribbean context, where they amalgamated with local forms and contents, illuminate the particular inflection of capitalist modernity in Guyana'.[53] Niblett sees the Gothic devices in Edgar Mittelholzer's *My Bones and My Flute* (1955) as not only 'encoding certain anxieties specific to the Guyanese political situation' but that 'might be seen also as registering the impact of these wider, world-systematic pressures'.[54] My reading of Ben Jelloun's novel's usage of this gothic trope aligns with Niblett's argument in this

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[48] Mohamed Daadaoui, 'Islamism and the State in Morocco', *Hudson Institute*, 29 April 2016. <https://www.hudson.org/research/12286-islamism-and-the-state-in-morocco> [accessed 14 November 2019] (para. 1 of 29).
[49] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 154.
[50] Ibid., p. 154.
[51] Ibid., p. 155.
[52] Kerstin Oloff, '"Greening" the Zombie: Caribbean Gothic, World-Ecology, and Socio-Ecological Degradation', *Green Letters*, 16.1 (2012), 31–45 (p. 9) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2012.10589098>.
[53] Michael Niblett, 'Specters in the Forest: Gothic Form and World-Ecology in Edgar Mittelholzer's *My Bones and My Flute*', *Small Axe*, 18.2 (2014), 53–68 (p. 54) <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-2739839>.
[54] Ibid., p. 63.

sense. This is also in keeping with Löwy's argument regarding irrealist works; we have already seen how '[i]rrealist works of art can take various forms: gothic novels, fairy tales, fantastic stories, oneiric narratives, utopian or dystopian novels, surrealist art, and many others.'[55] Ben Jelloun's novel, as an irrealist work, contains a mixture of these elements that are linked to these different forms to offer a critique of a corrupt system that combines elements of religious conservatism and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small political elite.

The experience of reading *The Sacred Night* is far from straightforward; indeed, it is markedly unstable as it is not clear whether events such as the old man's testimony are real or a figment of Zahra's imagination, which leads the reader to vicariously 'feel' this social disruption and again draws attention to the combined unevenness within Moroccan society. As Löwy argues, irrealist art offers critiques not in the form of 'a rational argument, a systematic opposition, or an explicit discourse' but 'takes the form of protest, outrage, disgust, anxiety, or *angst*'.[56] By drawing on details of the real world of modern Morocco (the violence and disruption stemming from post-colonial instability and the forces of capitalist modernity) and by combining these with the oneiric and magical, Ben Jelloun presents a powerful critique in these terms.

The narrative shifts between horrifying scenes and fantastical scenes throughout the novel; for example, from Zahra's encounters with her 'toothless mother',[57] and the violent scene with her sisters where Zahra is 'unable to escape their torture',[58] to that of an imaginary world described as a place of 'astonishing adventure'.[59] In all of these scenes the real and irreal are blurred. In an account of the encounter with her sisters, Zahra states that '[w]hether this was a vision, a nightmare, a hallucination, or a reality I cannot say.'[60] Zahra's sisters are no exception when it comes to exploiting religion to justify their actions, for they are also trapped in this system. The following passages provide further evidence of this:

> We have expelled you from the family in the presence of men of religion and witnesses of good faith and high virtue. […] We are going to plug up that hole forever. You're going to have a circumcision. […] Since your betrayal we have discovered the virtues of our beloved religion. Justice has become our passion, truth our ideal and obsession, Islam our guide.[61]

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[55] Löwy, p. 194.
[56] Ibid., p. 196.
[57] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 82.
[58] Ibid., p. 148.
[59] Ibid., p. 38.
[60] Ibid., p. 147.
[61] Ibid., pp. 150–51.

For the sisters this is the 'truth' built on that which is purported by the men of religion while for Zahra the truth is 'a barbarous idea'. This 'truth' which Zahra

> later discovered […] is a commonly practiced operation in Black Africa and in parts of Egypt and the Sudan. Its effect is to deprive young girls just awakening to life of any possibility of desire and pleasure. I also learned that neither Islam nor any other religion has ever permitted this kind of slaughter.[62]

Here, Ben Jelloun is not critical of Islam as a religion but rather shows how Islam is mobilised to justify practices such as these in Morocco. Thus, the novel does two things: it refuses the essentialising view of Islam as an oppressive religion, particularly when it comes to women, while also showing how religion remains an integral part of modernity. Although there is not a great deal of description of the Moroccan streets or the life that goes on within them, the novel gives us glimpses of this at the beginning and the end. In doing so, it demonstrates how modern aspects of Moroccan life and older traditions co-exist in a process of combined and uneven development.

In one scene, the narrator offers a description of the modern city of Marrakesh that registers specific combinations of the modern and the archaic. In this scene, we hear how '[n]othing had changed' yet in the same chapter we encounter 'a truckdriver' who smokes 'marijuana' and hear how Zahra 'watched a girl ride by on a moped'.[63] The public square of Marrakesh described in the first pages is full of clues that show an urban commodity culture that is open for business: from 'the café' and its 'waiter' and 'customers' to a reference to 'Charlie Chaplin' and to 'a German tourist woman'.[64] This public square is also populated by a mixture of people — 'a truckdriver from the Shawia',[65] 'the Sahraouis, selling all kinds of powders: spices, henna, wild mint, chalk, sand and other ground and sifted magic products',[66] and those 'from the South'[67] — who represent the variety and mobility of those found in Moroccan society impacted by the culture of capitalist modernity. Furthermore, this scene is a spectacle of buying and selling. On first glance, this may be read as something people have been doing for centuries, yet the emphasis here is more on spending and possessing rather than merely trading. Zahra encounters a young man unpacking a trunk in the public square who tells her '[a]nything you want to get rid of, whatever weighs you down, just put it in the trunk. I'll take anything, especially coins!'[68] The phrase 'especially

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[62] Ibid., p. 155.
[63] Ibid., p. 8.
[64] Ibid., pp. 8–9.
[65] Ibid., p. 8.
[66] Ibid., p. 9.
[67] Ibid., p. 12.
[68] Ibid., p. 11.

coins!' is particularly revealing here, for it suggests that cash money is the most valuable commodity. The trunk is described as 'a house, which has harbored several lives'.[69] Among the items in this trunk is a photo of a French family. As Zahra 'ponder[s] the fate of that family of French settlers taken from the trunk in bits and pieces, [she] saw a woman spinning around'. The woman's demeanour is initially 'erotic' and she is described as being 'young, and very beautiful'. She is also out of place in a 'square reserved for men and a few old beggarwomen'; however, she is confident and 'slipp[ing] a cassette of Berber music into a tape deck, d[oes] a few dance steps, t[akes] out a microphone' and begins to lecture the crowd regarding immorality.[70]

Here again we see the combination of tradition, in the form of Berber music, and modernity, in the form of electronic equipment. There is a clearly disruptive element to the woman's presence. She states that she comes 'from a season outside time'[71] and tells a tale of the 'bedouin people'.[72] One onlooker berates her saying '[w]e're here to listen to music and to see you dance. This is not a mosque, you know'.[73] Another asks 'when do women not yet old dare to flaunt themselves like this? Have you no father, brother, or husband to guard you from harm?'[74] The males in the crowd are representative of patriarchal thinking (and the voyeuristic male gaze) that has persisted into late twentieth-century Morocco. These questions are met with a retort that draws attention to the lechery of men in an open critique of patriarchal norms and the exploitation of women. As vivid as this encounter is, after the woman departs Zahra states 'I wondered if I had dreamed that young woman or had really seen and heard her'.[75] Zahra's statement adds an element of confusion for the reader and one asks whether she is in fact the young woman. Yet it is not only Zahra who is puzzled: there is also a 'lack of understanding in the crowd'.[76] The line between what is understood as 'real' and 'unreal' is blurred. Once again, Ben Jelloun presents a critique of modern Morocco through the disruptive interplay between the real and irreal in order to show the 'absence of realism'[77] in a society integrated with capitalist modernity.

Much of the previous critical scholarship on Ben Jelloun's novel has focused either on the tradition of storytelling, the significance of religion, or the challenge to patriarchy in *The Sacred Night*. Mustapha Marrouchi (1990) notes that Ben Jelloun's 'use of narrative

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[69] Ibid., p. 10.
[70] Ibid., p. 12.
[71] Ibid., p. 12.
[72] Ibid., p. 13.
[73] Ibid., p. 13.
[74] Ibid., p. 13.
[75] Ibid., p. 14.
[76] Ibid., p. 13.
[77] Löwy, p. 195.

forms demonstrates his modernity' while simultaneously emphasising 'his participation in a centuries-old tradition'.[78] This appears, Marrouchi notes, in Ben Jelloun's use of the 'traditional culture […] of the storyteller and the *Halqua*' in Morocco.[79] Marrouchi's claim that the author's work contains 'a hodge-podge of elements borrowed from the Koran, the worship of Saints, Muslim mystics […] and popular traditions (e.g., the story-teller and the *Halqua*)' is compelling.[80] Yet, he does not examine the symbolic significance of this hodge podge. Some critics have tried to address this question by emphasising how considerations of religion are inseparable from the literary form of Ben Jelloun's fiction. As Hafid Gafaïti (2005) reviewing Carine Bourget's (2002) *Coran et tradition islamique dans la littérature maghrébine* states, Bourget analyses 'Islam not only as a religious discourse or a cultural background, but as a mode of production of meaning in novels and essays written by major francophone North African novelists and scholars [including Ben Jelloun]'.[81] Other critics appear to side step the more complex question of literary form by reading Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* as a critique of a patriarchal Muslim society and associated fixed gender roles through the lenses of postcolonial, queer and gender politics.[82] Among these critics is Valérie Orlando (1999), whose argument touches upon 'space' and the 'real and unreal' aspect of Ben Jelloun's work.[83] Orlando draws upon Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the 'nomadic' and Homi K. Bhabha's 'third space' to argue that the novel deploys an 'anomalous space in which […] Zahra wanders' just like the author, who is 'living in exile writing on the dissonant issues taking place in his own country'.[84] For Orlando, Ben Jelloun's 'ultimate goal is to find a space of empowerment for himself and his feminine

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[78] Marrouchi, 'Breaking Up', p. 72.

[79] Ibid., p. 72. Halqua, Marrouchi explains, 'means a "round table." In Maghrebian countries, the market is held outdoors and is called a *souk*; it attracts not only merchants but story-tellers, poets, and troubadours as well' hence '[t]he presence of the Halqua is vital to the narration of events; it is the space within which the story is reflected' (footnote 4, p. 81).

[80] Ibid., pp. 74–75.

[81] Hafid Gafaiti, review of *Coran et tradition islamique dans la littérature maghrébine*, by Carine Bourget, *Indiana University Press*, 36.2 (2005), 151–52 (p. 151) <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2005.0115> [accessed 13 Feb 2019].

[82] Jarrod Hayes (2000), for example, reads the sexual and political in Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (along with a range of Francophone North African novels) through a postcolonial and feminist lens arguing that by including 'marginal sexualities or the transgression of sexual taboos in their novels' Maghrebian authors 'reveal what is considered shameful in official discourse' and 'destroy the officially propagated image' of their nations 'as a nation of "good Muslims" who abide by the strictest interpretation of Islamic family values'(p. 17). See Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Mustapha Hamil (2001) argues that Ben Jelloun 'reverts to Sheherazade's narrative skills to stage a journey across prohibited territories' and that Zahra's 'personal search for self, words, and identity can […] be viewed as an allegorical rendition of the author's own quest' (p. 62). See Mustapha Hamil, 'Rewriting Identity and History: The Sliding Barre(s) in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night*', in *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition*, ed. by Mildred Mortimer (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), pp. 61–80.

[83] Valérie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999).

[84] Ibid., p. 12.

character'.[85] Regarding aspects of the real and unreal in this novel (and *The Sand Child*) Orlando claims:

> The real and the unreal are of little consequence because, like the duality of masculine-feminine or French-Moroccan arenas, the author's task is […] to negotiate a milieu where opposition may be united in order to craft his story and his sense of place.[86]

Orlando rightly notes that there is a sort of negotiation and unification of what might be seen as opposites in the novel: '[i]t is in this outside space where existing ideologies concerning femininity, masculinity, Islam, the East, and the West may be negotiated'.[87] Yet her remark that the real and unreal are 'of little consequence' (as this is not the focus of her chapter) runs the risk of ignoring the potentiality of this narrative technique to facilitate such a negotiation. By reading the co-existence of seemingly disparate formal elements as an instance of what Moretti calls 'a compromise'[88], this chapter extends these previous critical readings by suggesting that Ben Jelloun's Muslim magical realism registers the profound socio-economic and patriarchal inequalities in modern Morocco in order to invite readers to imagine an alternative to the driving forces of capitalist modernity.

Zahra's experience of life — as a Moroccan female Muslim is clearly different from the other characters in the novel, as well as different to the experiences of Muslim protagonists in the other novels under examination in this thesis. The commodifying aspect of capitalist modernity is seen to have a clear impact on the people of Morocco. One element of this, is the effects of capitalist modernity on women in a colonial and post-colonial patriarchal society. In her field study (1982), the anthropologist Fatima Mernissi conducted interviews with the rural women of Gharb, Morocco — to highlight the economic dimension of patriarchy. She argues that during colonization, capitalism led to the overt exploitation of women who were 'lavishly offered [as] gifts […] [t]o the French occupiers [by Pasha El Glaoui]'.[89] This, however, does not mean that their situation got any better after the country

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[85] Ibid., p. 77.
[86] Ibid., p. 78.
[87] Ibid., p. 110.
[88] Moretti, 'Conjectures', p. 60. See chapter one of this thesis.
[89] Fatima Mernissi, 'Women and the Impact of Capitalist Development in Morocco (Part I)', *Feminist Issues*, 2.2 (1982), 69–104 (p. 85). The narrator tells us '[t]he father [in the picture] is a civil inspector in the colonial administration. He hangs out with the local pasha, the famous Glawi' (p. 11). This figure whose name is related with the French coloniser 'was the Pasha of Marrakesh, the right hand of French Resident-General Louis Lyautey, and a great friend of foreign figures and politicians […] [and] was regarded as a traitor after he collaborated with the French to oust sultan Mohammed V'. See Latifa Babas, 'Thami El Glaoui, the Pasha who led an Ostentatious Lifestyle', *Yabiladi*, 24 October 2018. <https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/70238/thami-glaoui-pasha-ostentatious-lifestyle.html> [accessed 14 July 2019] (para 1–7 of 7).

transitioned to becoming an independent nation. Mernissi notes that one of the characteristics of independence in Morocco is the importation of 'peasant women who dance at the evening parties of the city bourgeoisie' as a result of 'the coming of tourism' which led to women being seen as 'object[s] of pleasure' and 'prostitutes'.[90] As Mernissi further explains:

> [t]he disintegration of the extended family (which used to make up for the fragility of the marriage tie, exemplified in polygyny and repudiation) and the fragile economic status of women (exclusion from inheritance of land, lack of remuneration for work done for a relative in the framework of the family, the narrow limits within which a woman is allowed to move in certain communities, etc.) offered up these totally deprived women to the jaws of a savage capitalism, which began during the colonial years and flourished under the directives of a "national" bourgeoisie.[91]

This disintegration of social structures happened '[w]ith the loss of the economically self-sufficient extended family' which led to 'women los[ing] any guarantees of access to employment and a minimum of security in a traditional system that was fiercely hierarchized'.[92] *The Sacred Night* can also be read as a critique of a capitalist social structure that commodifies women's sexuality and domestic labour. This can be seen both at the beginning of the novel with the woman dancing in the public square and later in the blind Consul's interactions during the 'The Brothel Charade', where the women 'clearly had no desire to stay with the Consul'.[93]

The narrator Zahra tells us: 'It was a not inconsiderable sum' to pay for the service. The place is a business run for the women to earn a living while also clearly being exploited and coerced: 'a beautiful young woman came in, frightened, as though the madam had pushed her in from the other side of the door. She looked at us, bewildered [and] trembling; she must have been new to the business.'[94] This aligns with Silvia Federici's argument that:

> the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female

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[90] Mernissi, 'Women and the Impact of Capitalist Development in Morocco (Part I)', p. 94.
[91] Fatima Mernissi, 'Women and the Impact of Capitalist Development in Morocco (Part II)', *Feminist Issues*, 3.1 (1983), 61–112 (p. 67).
[92] Ibid., p. 67.
[93] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 116.
[94] Ibid., p. 117.

body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor.[95]

This is an aspect of life in modern Morocco that has been noted as being a growing phenomenon post-independence: 'The Middle Atlas is known throughout Morocco for its prostitution […] held in brothels and private homes' and '[a]ccording to the brothel madams, the Middle Atlas is regarded as the region for girls of pleasure' because '[e]ach year since the end of the 1960s, many Moroccans visit the area for a prostitute or a girlfriend; some come from other Arab countries and from Europe, especially in the summer'.[96] Mernissi argues that 'the changes which the advance of capitalism has produced […] have broken down the survival networks which used to assure a minimum of security for women within the domestic mode of production'.[97] Although prostitution has been called the oldest profession in the world, the chapter entitled 'The Brothel Charade' contains effective elements which clearly evoke the impact of capitalist modernity in Morocco after independence. Yet, the ghosts of colonisation are clearly still present beyond independence. As noted above, a young man with a trunk sits in the square and takes out 'disparate objects, commenting on each one, reconstructing a life, a past, a time, gone by'.[98] The scene is a site of memory of a colonial history that haunts the present but is also an example of the commodification of the past and an active space of exchange. As we have seen, the fictionalised events in the public square of Marrakesh depicted in the novel represent in a microcosmic form how tradition, religion, colonisation and capitalist modernity combine in quite bewildering ways.

Rather than simply providing detailed descriptions regarding historical and socio-political transformations in Morocco in the manner of a realist historical novel, *The Sacred Night* offers spaces for the oneiric experience that echo a Sufi understanding of the value of the world of imagination. Ben Jelloun himself states that '[i]n all my books there is this positive reference to mysticism, because ultimately it is a response to fanaticism'.[99] There are many references in the *The Sacred Night* to Sufism and a Sufi figure. Some scholars,

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[95] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 16.

[96] Bernhard Venema and Jogien Bakker, 'A Permissive Zone for Prostitution in the Middle Atlas of Morocco', *Ethnology*, 43.1 (2004), 51–64 (p. 61) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3773855> [accessed 19 June 2019].

[97] Mernissi, (Part II), p. 82.

[98] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 10.

[99] Bourget citing Déjeux in French: '"Dans tous mes livres il y a cette référence positive au mysticisme, parce que finalement c'est une réponse au fanatisme"'. See Carine Bourget, 'L'Intertexte islamique de *L'Enfant de sable* et *La Nuit sacrée* de Tahar Ben Jelloun', *The French Review*, 72.4 (1999), 730–41 (p.733) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/398797>[accessed 17 July 2019].

such as Rim Feriani (2017),[100] have identified the presence of Ibn Arabi's thinking regarding dreams and imagination in *The Sacred Night*. Here, I consider not only the presence of combined unevenness but also how the novel presents the Sufi notion of imagination in terms that seem to closely match ideas presented by Ibn Arabi as 'an essential cognitive instrument that "he who does not know the status of imagination is totally devoid of knowledge"'.[101] Ben Jelloun's text articulates precapitalist spiritual thinking to allow his protagonist to cast off the restrictions imposed by a corrupt political elite (as will be elaborated below) and to imagine a different utopian horizon beyond the depredations of patriarchy and neocolonialism in modern Morocco.

Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* articulates religious/Sufi ideas regarding imagination within an irrealist fictional world. Once Zahra enters this world of imagination, she has the ability to see beyond the limitations constructed by human thought. The world of imagination, for Ibn Arabi, can be experienced most directly in dreams: '"God placed dreams in the animate world so that all men might witness the World of Imagination and know that there exists another world, similar to the sensory world"'.[102] The fourth chapter of *The Sacred Night* entitled 'A Beautiful Day' is where Zahra seems to enter that realm of creative imagination. When a bride approaches her in a cemetery, Zahra asks 'What was she? An apparition, an image, a piece of a dream, a voice, a lapse of time escaped from the twenty-seventh night?'.[103] As the female disappears Zahra is swept up by a 'handsome horseman' who is directly linked to the apparition who has advised Zahra to '[g]o and join him'.[104] On a first reading, it seems that Zahra has called forth this 'unknown man, perhaps a prince […] or a tyrant, an adventurer or a bandit'.[105] This moment in Zahra's story seems to act out specific elements of Ibn Arabi's teaching wherein '[t]he world of imagination is the world of dreams where everything is real yet, like a phantom, untouchable and unreachable. Imaginable forms, like dreams, have an apparitional or phantasmal quality: they are perceivable, meaningful forms yet without physical presence'.[106]

The fifth chapter takes Zahra into an imaginary world. In this chapter the imaginary is represented not as a fantasy world or world of illusion but as a world that is being

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[100] Rim Feriani, 'Symbols and Worlds: A Study of the Sacred in a Selection of Works by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Salman Rushdie' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Westminster, 2017).
[101] Akkach quoting Ibn Arabi. See Samer Akkach, 'The World of Imagination in Ibn 'Arabī's Ontology', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24.1 (1997), 97–113 (p. 98) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199708705640>.
[102] Qtd. in William C. Chittick, 'Death and The World of Imagination: Ibn Al-'Arabī's Eschatology', *The Muslim World*, 78.1 (1988), 51–82 (p. 54) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1988.tb02810.x>.
[103] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 33.
[104] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 33.
[105] Ibid., p. 36.
[106] Akkach, 'The World of Imagination', p. 102.

reimagined. She describes herself as a 'slave, just free, [who] was being carried off, perhaps to a new prison' by a mystery horseman.[107] He takes her to a village populated solely by children who do not age. The children live in a 'self-sufficient community, far from town and roads, far from the country itself' — a commune that is apart from modern Morocco and situated in a bucolic idyll. One child asks the horseman 'how was hell? What did the dead tell you, and what did the damned do to you?'[108] This seems to be a description of the outside world rather than a religious hell. In comparison to the 'perfectly organized' community that has 'no hierarchy, no police, or army, and no written laws', the oppressive state beyond is a place of the damned, and is populated by those with no hope who are condemned to everlasting pain. This utopia is 'a little republic, dreamed and lived by children'.[109] Yet, utopia, as Jameson (2004) notes, 'emerges at the moment of the suspension of the political'.[110] He further explains that

> We need, then, to posit a peculiar suspension of the political in order to describe the utopian moment: it is this suspension, this separation of the political — in all its unchangeable immobility — from daily life and even from the world of the lived and the existential, this externality that serves as the calm before the storm, the stillness at the centre of the hurricane; and that allows us to take hitherto unimaginable mental liberties with structures whose actual modification or abolition scarcely seem on the cards.[111]

Clearly, *The Sacred Night* is not a utopia in the sense that (say) Thomas More's *Utopia* is. Yet irrealism does contain utopian elements, and, in this particular chapter of the novel — 'The Perfumed Garden' — the reader encounters a certain idea of utopia, where the political is suspended. The function of such a world 'lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future' because of 'our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity or futurity — so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined'.[112] I am

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[107] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 36.
[108] Ibid., p. 37.
[109] Ibid., p. 37. Adam Roberts states that Utopia is a term coined by Sir Thomas More in the 16th century who wrote 'about an imaginary country in which everybody was contented and the people all lived in harmony with one another'. However, '[t]he word is now used to describe any conceptual country or place where the evils of present-day living have been eradicated' (p. 107). See Adam Roberts, *Fredric Jameson* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
[110] Jameson, Fredric, 'Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review*, 25 (2004), 35–54 (p. 43).
[111] Ibid., p. 45.
[112] Ibid., p. 46.

aware of the fact that a Jamesonian approach may see the idea of the present differently; nevertheless, it is clear that the author allows us to think beyond the idea of being trapped in a non-utopian present. Thus, Ben Jelloun is combining different elements in his use of an irrealist form, to represent utopian ideas that are drawn from Sufi thought.

This world seems more heightened than reality, it feels like being 'lifted […] up'[113] as Zahra is raised in an '[a]dventure,' a 'strangeness of which pleasure is born,' and we hear how Zahra 'dozed, dreamed, forgot'.[114] By drawing on the Sufi Islamic tradition, *The Sacred Night* presents an alternative world stemming from precapitalist notions and utopia that offer a way in which the characters (and therefore the reader) can reassess the impact of capitalist modernity in the peripheral space of a North African Muslim society. This world is governed by 'principles and feelings' and Zahra learns that '[t]o really understand how things work in this village, you have to start by forgetting where you come from and how you lived back there'.[115] This irreal scene can be read as a critique and challenge to the reality of life in a corrupt and socio-economically divided Moroccan society by emphasising that we should not rely on this pessimistic view of social reality 'to really understand' the world. As Mark Fisher (2009) notes in a related discussion, '[c]apitalist realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if, that is to say, capitalism's ostensible "realism" turns out to be nothing of the sort'.[116] The novel emphasises this lack of reality: a boy tells Zahra 'you have to wipe your memory clean' and explains '[w]hat we all have in common here is that we have all suffered from injustice; here we have a chance to make time stand still and repair the damage'.[117] The shared space that the boy refers to here can be understood as a criticism of the corrupt postcolonial Moroccan state, and the potentiality of utopian thinking (as Jameson notes) to make time stand still and to 'repair' the destruction caused by an elite that has enriched itself at the expense of the rest of the population. In this alternative world of imagination Zahra is free of limitation and restriction. It is a freedom from fear that she witnesses, detaching from ideas of what is wrong or right, what to do or not to do. The first-person narrator tells us:

> Not only was my mind free of fear, but I felt a deep harmony […] between a dream that had filled my lonely nights and this story I was living out in happy curiosity. I was like a child on its first trip.[118]

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[113] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 33.
[114] Ibid., p. 36.
[115] Ibid., p. 38.
[116] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2009), p. 16.
[117] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 38.
[118] Ibid., p. 38.

This world of creative imagination, a world that lies beyond the material world echoes the one described by Ibn Arabi. Zahra is not beyond her physical body but rather reconnects with it. Hence, Ben Jelloun evokes a religious notion within an irrealist form of art that allows space for a rethinking of the real. Zahra states that this world 'fired my imagination and troubled my senses. I decided to give up trying to distinguish the real from the imaginary or to find out where I was'.[119] The word 'fire' carries connotations of destruction, warmth and light, or as a catalyst for burning energy. The word 'fire' is also defined as refining or purifying. Thus, in these terms Zahra is being purified through this fueling of imagination and is becoming detached from any material sense of reality. This is not unconscious or the result of the pain that she experienced (living as a boy in a girl's body to fit the expectations of a social norm in her society); it is a conscious decision: she 'decided'[120] and now sets out on a new path with her new sense of self.

Zahra's decision takes the form of 'giv[ing] up trying to distinguish the real from the imaginary or to find out where [she] was'.[121] This particular sentence brings two dimensions together in its merging of the 'real' and 'imaginary'. The section as a whole demonstrates a resistance to the orthodoxy of having to follow a dogmatic set of rules (as will be discussed further below) in order to identify one's self as a Muslim. Zahra welcomes this change and embraces a new world that is not illusionary but rather a world of understanding, full of knowledge. Indeed, we hear how Zahra 'was learning', 'rediscovering' and '[her] body was breaking free of itself'. Learning in this world is 'without tension,' a world in which she is 'not worrying about people looking at [her]' and she just 'felt good'.[122] The world of imagination is not governed by the capitalist reality characterised by power, greed and destruction. Therefore, greater freedoms are also experienced, as the narrator explains in the following extract:

> These were my first steps as a free woman. Freedom was that simple: to go for a morning walk and to cast off these binding clothes without asking permission. Freedom was giving my body to the wind, the light, the sun, in happy solitude. I took off my slippers. I tread on sharp pebbles, but felt no pain. I came to a clearing and sat down on a mound of damp earth.[123]

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[119] Ibid., p. 39.
[120] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 39.
[121] Ibid., p. 39.
[122] Ibid., p. 40.
[123] Ibid., p. 41.

This image of 'casting off these binding clothes' reflects the restrictions placed on women in a patriarchal society. This world of imagination is not a place in which the female needs to ask 'permission' to be herself; freedom is at the heart of it as a lived experience:

> I was happy, delirious, all new and alert. I was life, pleasure, desire; I was the wind in the water, the water in the earth, the water purified, the earth ennobled by the spring. I trembled with joy. […] I had never felt so much before. […] My body […] was coming back to life. [...] I was screaming as loud as I could, 'I'm alive...alive!... My soul has come back, and it cries from my chest, I'm alive, alive!'[124]

The words 'delirious', 'pleasure', and 'joy' convey a sense of enjoyment and vitality. The repetition of these words emphasises a 'coming back to life', and the phrase 'I'm alive, alive!' represents a resurrection and reconnection with creation. The Zahra-narrator continues the emphasis regarding the creative imagination as something leading to transcendence: 'Believe me, my friends, this was no dream, I lived it'.[125] This world of creative imagination is also similar to Ibn Arabi's description of a world where he insists there is a spiritual lived experience. Zahra again states 'I don't know what it is, but I can feel it'.[126] Ambiguity is what characterises imagination and Ibn Arabi states, '"[it] is neither existent nor non-existent, neither known nor unknown, neither negated nor affirmed"'.[127] All Zahra knows is that she has felt and lived in a new way, where everything is at once real and unreal and full of lifeforce. These images of another imaginary world are likened to the creative imagination in the Sufi tradition as a religious reference for purifying the self and gaining deeper understanding of the spiritual dimension.

The nonlinear and disrupted narrative structure of Ben Jelloun's work reframes the Sufi idea of *Barzakh* in a thought-provoking way that speaks to the unresolved contradictions of socio-economic reality in contemporary Morocco. That such a religious concept can be so profoundly illuminated in an irrealist novel form raises questions about the critical role of Sufi philosophy in modern Islamic societies. Once again, the reader is unsure about what constitutes the magical or the real. From the beginning of the novel, the reader has no way of knowing what is actually happening and what is a dream or a vision. The story is told from Zahra's point of view, so we only see and hear what she sees and hears. It could be argued that she is an unreliable narrator; however, from the outset, Zahra makes it clear that she 'couldn't tell the difference between dreams and what [she] now saw before [her]'.[128]

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[124] Ibid., p. 41.
[125] Ibid., p. 43.
[126] Ibid., p. 44.
[127] Qtd. in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 118.
[128] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 39.

The tension and disturbance in the novel represents a critique of a corrupt postcolonial state that preaches conservative religious and patriarchal values while enriching itself at the expense of the people. Zahra is 'increasingly disorientated, disturbed, sinking into confusion and nightmarish visions'[129] and the reader is therefore also disorientated and at times confused due to this disruptive narrative strategy.

The pressures of capitalist modernity as experienced in Ben Jelloun's Morocco are also expressed in the way in which Zahra rejects private property. The novel's structure and form create a space for an alternative perspective on lived reality. The Consul says, 'That's what you call freedom', to which she replies 'Yes, to cast off everything, to own nothing so as not to be owned. To be free of all shackles, perhaps even of time itself.'[130] Although she must endure hardship and pain, she has chosen the clear Sufi path to reconnect with the divine by freeing herself from socio-religious restrictions and man-made constructs such as private property, the patriarchal family, and secular time. She continues in this vein by elaborating that:

> Man has nothing in the beginning, […] and he ought to have nothing at the end either. But he is inculcated with the need to possess: a house, parents, children, stones, deeds, money, gold, people. I am learning to possess nothing. […]
> That thirst for possession and consumption is the expression of a great lack within us. Something essential is missing.[131]

Zahra is highly critical of these driving forces of capitalist modernity: accumulation, the desire for possessions, and accumulation which drives us away from 'our dignity'.[132] Capitalism, as Fisher notes, paraphrasing Jameson, 'had seeped into the very unconscious; now, the fact that capitalism has colonized the dreaming life of the population is so taken for granted that it is no longer worthy of comment'; therefore, he argues, 'it's as well to remember the role that commodification played in the production of culture throughout the twentieth century'.[133] Neither Fisher nor Jameson are thinking about Morocco here, but *The Sacred Night* reflects this idea of predatory capitalism which has colonised the dreaming life. The novel offers an insight into this '[s]omething essential [that] is missing.' Zahra, like the Sufis, understands that being disconnected from the divine represents a hole that must be filled in some way. In the world of the profane and everyday living, people collect material possessions as a sign of power and social status in order to dull the pain of isolation. She has

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[129] Ibid., p. 159.
[130] Ibid., p. 77.
[131] Ibid., p. 77.
[132] Ibid., p. 77.
[133] Fisher, pp. 8–9.

cast off everything, including her family and identity. She is an explorer who is not restricted by orthodox beliefs. She is a 'wanderer, held back by no religion'.[134] This casting off is a form of resistance to modernity, and yet is nevertheless part of the modern world.

Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* registers the modern and the religious not as purely in opposition; rather 'Sufism impregnates each line of the description made [in the novel]' — for example, '[t]he detachment from the surrounding materialism is represented by the thick and rough woollen jellaba worn by Zahra'.[135] Thus, the precapitalist ideas contained in the text (specifically Sufism) offer the utopian resources to reassess and reread not only patriarchy's interpretation of religion but also the inequalities of capitalism while offering a space to reimagine a future alternative to that world. This form of resistance to a materialistic worldview that obfuscates true reality is not only expressed by Zahra but also the Consul. In a conversation with Zahra he states:

> […] blindness is not an infirmity. Or at least not for someone who knows how to use it. Using it does not mean deceit; it means revealing the virtues of the obscure. It's like intelligence, which someone once defined as the failure to comprehend the world. Which recalls our mystical poets, for whom appearance was the most perverse mask of truth. You know from your experience that clarity is a delusion.[136]

The ability to see the world through sensory perception is not enough. Thus imagination 'reveal[s] the virtues of the obscure'. *The Sacred Night* can also be read as openly resistant to considering Islam as a monolithic entity or defined by orthodox interpretations regarding the behavior of the faithful. Sufis (or at least Ibn Arabi, whose teachings are echoed in the novels studied here and elsewhere in this thesis) does not reject taking the teaching of the scripture literally. Yet, Ibn Arabi also glosses such literal readings with his own interpretations and encourages his readers to do the same. As Chittick (1989) notes, Ibn Arabi 'never denies the literal and apparent meaning [of the Quran]. But he frequently adds to the literal sense an interpretation'.[137] In Sufism and its concept of the role of creative imagination, a rigid idea of religious law does not exist. We see this lack of rigid laws when Zahra enters the 'little republic, dreamed and lived by children'.[138] This is a case of clearly resisting the world of law and hierarchies in which people are categorized according to

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[134] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 77.
[135] Original in French: 'Le soufisme imprégne chaque ligne de la description faite. Le détachement du matérialisme ambiant est représenté par la djellaba d'homme en laine épaisse et rugueuse que porte Zahra'. See Virginia Boza Araya, 'Le monde arabe en filigrane dans l'oeuvre de Tahar Ben Jelloun', *Letras*, 42. (2007), 147–70, (p. 163) <https://www.revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/letras/article/view/1615> [accessed 12 Novmber 2019].
[136] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, pp. 124– 25.
[137] Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xvi.
[138] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 37.

human legal codes, with the police and soldiers upholding a world of shallow power, a world of written rules. Sufism never rejects the scripture (the teaching of the Quran and *hadith* which is part of 'reality' in the Muslim context) but rather engages with the traditions of Islamic hermeneutics as they would do with the imaginative world. An example of this can be seen when the Consul describes working with his students:

> 'The kids are terrible. I try to teach them the Koran as I would a beautiful poem, but they keep asking awkward questions, like, 'Is it true that all the Christians will go to hell? or 'Since Islam is the best religion, why did God wait so long to spread it?' I merely look up at the ceiling and repeat the question: 'Why was Islam so late in coming? Do you have any idea what the answer is?'[139]

Zahra replies:

> I've thought about it. But I'm like you, I like the Koran as an exquisite poem, and I detest people who exploit it like parasites and limit freedom of thought. They're hypocrites.
> They invoke religion to crush and to dominate. For myself, I invoke the right of free thought, the right to believe or not to believe.[140]

For the Consul, the problems arise from those who 'made for themselves a veil of their oaths' and Zahra sees this as an attempt to 'limit freedom of thought' by those who force their interpretations on to others as the truth. The Sufi goal is purification, to return from the profane world to the spiritual. It is a journey of self-denial, discipline and material poverty. Zahra is clear in her choice of words. In conversation with the Consul she declares 'I have renounced the world, withdrawn from it in the mystical sense, rather like al-Hallaj'[141] — she is on a spiritual journey. She has '[t]hrown it all away'[142] and so is following the initiate's path of Sufism: a path that involves '"ridding oneself of everything but God"'.[143] In 'own[ing] nothing'[144] Zahra (like Sufis) is '"poor in God"'.[145] Zahra stresses over and over again that she has not experienced a hallucinogenic state or the kind of dream that one has while one sleeps and then awakes to find it was a dream. As she explains, 'I wanted to forget, to believe that what had happened to me was just another hallucination, a truncated dream

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[139] Ibid., pp. 72–73.
[140] Ibid., p. 73.
[141] Ibid., p. 76.
[142] Ibid., p. 77.
[143] Shiblī qtd in Éric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, trans. by Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), p. 5.
[144] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 77.
[145] Geoffroy, p. 5.

in which everything was all mixed up',[146] but this is not so. Zahra does not hold onto 'reality' and chooses 'to dissolve [her] past in the coma of complete amnesia, with no regrets and no remorse. [She] wanted to be born anew in a fresh, clean skin'.[147] Her choice of forgetting her tragic past 'with no regrets' leads to her self-realisation and the ability to discover her real identity, and accept this other world as reality and to ultimately be reborn. This is directly linked to issues of identity and she 'destroyed [her] identity papers and followed the star that traced the route of [her] destiny'.[148] She realises that it does not matter what these papers say about her because these are what society and the 'real' world of capitalist modernity want her to be. Indeed, as Orlando (1999) notes '[i]n the final pages [Ben Jelloun's] protagonist at last succeeds in transcending the material world when she enters an illuminated paradise of true feminine identity'.[149] She has found the path to enlightenment. Zahra describes how she 'had a wonderful dream. There was a journey in it, and a boat, and I swam in pure water'.[150] The journey is moving towards the light of her destiny, the boat is her soul cleansed as it moves through the pure water of creative imagination and connection away from the sullied everyday material world. Yet, while Zahra begins to overtly walk the Sufi path, she does not totally reject modernity; indeed, we hear towards the end of the novel: 'Today I would have used one of those small tape recorders, but this was before the days of cassettes'.[151] Zahra even accepts a position as '"public scribe and secretary"' during her time in prison.[152]

This section has shown how *The Sacred Night* is a novel that accommodates elements of precapitalist (Sufism) tradition within capitalist modernity, and also offers a utopian projection of an alternative to the culture of capitalist modernity. This is done via a narrative structure that builds on critical irrealism in a way that allows for a powerful recognition and exploration of the specific combination of political corruption, authoritarianism, religious conservatism, and pro-western foreign policy that defined the experience of modernity in postcolonial Morocco. The next section aims to show how such ideas are deployed in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

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[146] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 45.
[147] Ibid., p. 54.
[148] Ibid., p. 97.
[149] Orlando, p. 78.
[150] Ben Jelloun, *The Sacred Night*, p. 86.
[151] Ibid., p. 144.
[152] Ibid., p. 165.

3.2 Dreams and Dystopia in *The Satanic Verses*

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a magical realist novel which has gained much more scholarly attention than many of the other Muslim magical realism(s) texts under examination in this thesis. *The Satanic Verses* has caused controversy due to what has come to be known as the 'Rushdie Affair'. It is, of course, important to acknowledge that this controversy is a significant material context for understanding the reception of the novel, and its recognition in the global literary marketplace. A consideration of this material context is already very well established. As Rehana Ahmed (2015) has argued, the framing of the Rushdie affair in terms of a simple binary between the liberal defence of free speech and an Islamaphobic representation of the history of Islam forecloses a consideration of the specific dynamics of race and class among, for example, the British Muslim community in Bradford, which regarded the British political establishment's defence of the novel and its author as a further sign of their own socio-economic marginalisation within a liberal secular society. Ahmed, quoting Homi Bhabha and Terry Eagleton, states that '[t]he silencing of such voices (working class, Muslim and potentially challenging to the "end-of-ideology" ideologies of an "unreconstructed liberalism") is necessary to the novel's "speech". Reading for the silencing of class as dissent reveals the novel's liberalism and the limits of this liberalism for an anti-racist politics'.[153] Rather than rehearse these debates, and particularly Ahmed's reading of the parallels between events in the text (for example, the protests) and the realities of multicultural Britain, this chapter focuses instead on *The Satanic Verses* as an example of what I call Muslim magical realism(s). The following section builds on the reading of Ben Jelloun's work by suggesting that *The Satanic Verses* registers the combination of the religious (specifically Sufism) and modern in societies impacted by capitalist modernity.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the forces of capitalist modernity are clearly manifested in the commodification of religion by Bombay cinema via the references to advertising, and the rise of a transnational postcolonial elite. But the novel also shows how religious ideas from a time before this new world of capitalist culture co-exist alongside this commodity culture in a way that serves to critique the capitalist world it has produced. Harry Harootunian (2000) notes how a 'call to tradition could be seen as both a critique of contemporary commodity culture and a [form of] resistance to it'.[154] My reading of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* extends Harootunian's notion to consider how Rushdie's use of Islamic tradition (Sufism)

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[153] Rehana Ahmed, *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 72.
[154] Harootunian, *Overcome*, p. 218.

functions as both a critique of societies impacted by capitalism and how the past interacts with the present. Moreover, Löwy's concept of 'critical irrealism' and the WReC's use of this concept can help us to understand how such a narrative form presents such a critique. Such a reading will allow us to consider the singular ways in which the form of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* mediates the specific combinations of Islam and modernity — both in Britain and India.

Scholarship on Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*[155] by scholars such as Sara Suleri (1994), Roger Y. Clark (2001), Robert Spencer (2010) and Rim Feriani (2017) among others, has identified both orthodox Islamic and Sufi elements in the text. For David Myers (1990-1) Rushdie is 'a "free-thinking mystic"'.[156] This is problematic as merely deploying Sufi ideas in this work does not make Rushdie a mystic. Clark notes that 'Rushdie may not be compatible with most mystics or theologians, yet he feels free to take Sufi notions and use them for his own narrative aims'[157] and the novel 'affirms the value of love and tolerance on a symbolic and mystical level'.[158] Clark's argument is vital because, as this thesis argues, reading Rushdie's work and other Muslim magical realism(s) texts as 'compatible with most mystics or theologians' would be misleading. Yet, I also do not read Rushdie's use of Sufism 'in secular and irreverent contexts […] follow[ing] in the Sufi's, rebellious footsteps' as Clark does.[159] So rather than calling the authors in this thesis mystics or Sufis, I posit a reading of the use of Sufi ideas as being linked to world-systems analysis as stated above. In other words, world-systems analysis is useful to understand how and why Rushdie (and other Muslim writers) use these older, precapitalist traditions within modern settings as utopian resources for imagining an alternative to the culture of capitalist modernity.

In her article (1994) 'Contraband Histories: Salman Rushdie and the Embodiment of Blasphemy' Suleri argues that 'Rushdie has written a deeply Islamic book' and that the novel is 'a work of meticulous attentiveness to religion'.[160] *The Satanic Verses*, for Suleri,

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[155] The debate on *The Satanic Verses* tends to consist of two central positions: secular and non-secular readings of the novel. The former defends the novel for the sake of freedom of speech while the latter criticises the text for attacking Islam and its prophet and propagating Orientalist stereotypes. Others focus on history, fiction, and South Asian Muslim migration in the novel. For more about this see Anshuman A. Mondal, '"Representing the very Ethic he Battled": Secularism, Islam(ism) and Self-Transgression in *The Satanic Verses*', *Textual Practice*, 27.3 (2013), 419–37 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.784022> and Anshuman A. Mondal (2014) *Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech After Rushdie* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[156] Qtd. in Roger Y. Clark, *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 180.

[157] Clark, p. 23.

[158] Ibid., p. 181.

[159] Ibid., p. 23.

[160] Sara Suleri, 'Contraband Histories: Salman Rushdie and the Embodiment of Blasphemy', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. by M. D. Fletcher (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 221–35 (p. 222).

'perversely demands to be read as a gesture of wrenching loyalty, suggesting that blasphemy can be expressed only within the compass of belief'.[161] In a similar vein, Spencer notes that the novel shows Rushdie's 'profound interest in Sufism'.[162] Such an articulation is important for this chapter's argument as it seeks to consider Rushdie's engagement with Islam and its traditions. I am aware of Anshuman Mondal's (2014) claim that Rushdie 'abuses his power of description in order to perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes'.[163] Yet, we cannot deny — as Rushdie himself and a number of critics note — the references to Sufism in *The Satanic Verses* (and in his other works). This is not to say that the novel does not draw on Orientalist stereotypes of Islam but it also important to acknowledge how the novel makes use of Sufi thinking in order to reimagine the world after empire (a move that also calls into question the authority of such Orientalist stereotypes). Thus, the aim here is to show how the text presents examples of multiple Muslim identities, which are formed in the context of a combination of precapitalist ideas and modern secular ideas that the novel likens to a collision.

The novel is set in Bombay and Britain during the late 1970s/early 1980s, Mecca in the 7th century, and Titlipur (a village in modern India). It contains different plots, different settings, and different periods of time and different languages: Indian English, British English, and Arabic in one novel[164]; thus, the reading experience is never stable or as Angela Carter stated in her review, it is '[a] roller coaster ride over a vast landscape of the imagination'.[165] The following analysis of the novel seeks to demonstrate how the combination of precapitalist ideas and traditions with that of capitalism define capitalist modernity. In order to draw on the Sufi tradition, Rushdie makes use of the irreal in the form of dreams and visions portraying a dystopian world full of doubt and confusion. While *The Sacred Night* provides cryptic references to the political condition in Morocco, *The Satanic Verses* presents a variety of socio-political issues in Britain and India.

In his essay 'In Good Faith,' (1991) Rushdie describes *The Satanic Verses* as a '*[m]élange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*'.[166] Such a description is particularly significant for this chapter's argument. The text is a

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[161] Ibid., p. 223.

[162] Robert Spencer, 'Salman Rushdie and the "War on Terror"', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46.3–4 (2010), 251–65 (p. 262) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2010.482364>.

[163] Anshuman A. Mondal, *Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech After Rushdie* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 99.

[164] Similar to the texts discussed in Rebecca L. Walkowitz's *Born Translated* (2015) — as discussed in chapter one of this thesis.

[165] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (cover copy).

[166] Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith,' *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981– 1991*(London: Granta, 1991), p. 394.

combination of many elements at once: Sufism, *Hamza-nama* painting, the magic carpet of *One Thousand and One Nights*, 'Kan ma kan/ Fi qadim azzaman'[167] [an opening sentence of Arabic folktales], and Urdu *ghazal* poetry[168] — all in a secular modern irrealist form of writing. Thus, the novel is made up of disparate elements and can be seen in the same light as Márquez's work *One Hundred years of Solitude*. As Moretti's remarks regarding this latter text '[i]t is the novel of uneven and combined development: the *marvellous reality*, indeed, in which a prophecy in Sanskrit coexists with photography, and South American phantasms with Italian mechanical pianolas.'[169] However, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* can also be read as critical irrealist form of writing where the reader encounters sequences of dreams and visions as three different plots unfold over nine chapters. In earlier scenes of the novel, the Chamchawala art collection tells the story of Muslims in India — a story of a mixture of cultures and identities:

> The pictures also provided eloquent proof of […] the eclectic, hybridized nature of the Indian artistic tradition. The Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings; individual identity was submerged to create a many-headed, many-brushed Overartist who, literally, *was* Indian painting. […] In the *Hamza-nama* you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis.[170]

Such a description not only vividly shows the diverse elements that shape Indian identity but also resists the idea of one single Muslim identity. To be an Indian and particularly a Muslim Indian is to embrace these cultural elements. Rushdie draws attention to these elements not only in shaping his characters but also the story itself which is a 'hotchpotch' and forged by the combined unevenness of capitalist modernity. Moreover, the novel can be read as another example of Muslim magical realism(s) wherein characters have different experiences and understandings of Islam. India like many other parts of the world is impacted by capitalism and the political debate in the scene where Zeeny Vakil (Saladin Chamcha's friend) introduces him to her friends is indicative of this. The debate goes:

> 'What is Amirka for us?'' he demanded. 'It's not a real place. Power in its purest form, disembodied, invisible. We can't see it but it screws us totally, no escape.' He compared the Union Carbide company to the Trojan Horse. 'We invited the bastards in.'[171]

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[167] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 143.
[168] Suleri, 'Contraband', p. 224.
[169] Moretti, *Epic*, p. 243.
[170] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 70.
[171] Ibid., p. 56.

This passage presents a critique of Americanisation as one aspect of capitalist modernity in the form of an inescapable corporate force that wields a great deal of power across the subcontinent. This is a reference to the Bhopal disaster:[172] a gas leak in 1984 at the Union Carbide plant, owned by a U.S. multinational chemical company in India. This conversation highlights the destruction to both people and the environment as a result of irresponsible capitalist activities.

The disaster caused the deaths of thousands of people and '[a]t least 200,000 […] were exposed to the toxic gases, more than 60,000 were seriously affected and over 20,000 of these [were] permanently injured'.[173] The company 'was among the top 20 profit-making Indian companies'.[174] Thus, the novel's critique highlights that '[c]apitalist managements clearly prioritize the need for accumulation' over health and safety.[175] By comparing the Union Carbide company to the Trojan Horse, I argue, the novel satirises the company's claim that its 'involvement in the Third World is benevolent'[176] and offers a critique of Americanised capitalism and its destructive impact on the Indian subcontinent. The debate continues:

> 'For me,' he said, 'the issue cannot be foreign intervention. We always forgive ourselves by blaming outsiders, America, Pakistan, any damn place"'[177] […]
>   Now a young man stood up […] Assam had to be understood politically, he cried, there were economic reasons, and yet another fellow came to his feet to reply, cash matters'.[178]

The emphasis here is on the economic world-system and its influence on the lives of people. Yet the inherent instability and inequality is not confined to India. London is also portrayed as unstable, as seen through Gibreel's experience of London:

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[172] The Bhopal disaster is one of the cases in Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011). The violence referred to in the title is a direct result of the capitalist system; for Nixon, it is a 'continued slow violence of delayed effects' (p. 63) causing both environmental and 'physical damage' (p. 65). Through a reading of literary works, Nixon articulates 'the slow violence of ecological degradation' (p. 13). In his reading of Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, Nixon shows how this 'fictional reworking of the Bhopal disaster, offers a powerful instance of a writer dramatizing the occluded relationships of transnational space together with time's occlusions' (p. 46). Here, I argue that by referring to this disaster, Rushdie's novel can also be read as drawing attention to this capitalist violence. For more on the Bhopal disaster, see also Kim Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[173] Frank Pearce and Steve Tombs, 'Bhopal: Union Carbide and the Hubris of the Capitalist Technocracy', *Social Justice*, 16.2 (1989), 116–45 (p. 117) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29766466?seq=1> [accessed 10 January 2020].
[174] Ibid., p. 126.
[175] Ibid., p. 137.
[176] Ibid., p. 118.
[177] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 56.
[178] Ibid., p. 57.

> The city's streets coiled around him, writhing like serpents. London had grown unstable once again, revealing its true, capricious, tormented nature, its anguish of a city that had lost its sense of itself and wallowed, accordingly, in the impotence of its selfish, angry present of masks and parodies, stifled and twisted by the insupportable, unrejected burden of its past, staring into the bleakness of its impoverished future.[179]

This 'unstable' city driven by capitalism and 'corruption'[180] registers the combined unevenness of modernity. While this can be read as the experience of an Indian immigrant moving to England, it also portrays certain elements of the reality where the novel is set.

Rushdie's novel contains references to the aggressive advertising and commodification that is a major element of capitalist modernity. Indeed as, Mehmet Ali Çelikel (2015) notes, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* 'satirises the aggressive capitalist tendency of imperialism by harshly deploying aggressive marketers, brand names and strong commodification'.[181] One of these instances in the novel is how the media and the business world become interested in the spiritual pilgrimage led by Ayesha. As Çelikel argues, '[t]he values of consumer culture become more important than the values of religion and nationality'; in this way, the novel can be read as a 'representation of greedy commodification of values'.[182] Politicians, journalists ('[p]hotographs of Ayesha were appearing in all the papers') flock to meet the pilgrims as they walk to the sea, along with

> [...] businessmen who offered to sponsor the march if the yatris would only consent to wear sandwich boards advertising various goods and services, [...] and the pilgrims even passed advertising hoardings on which the lepidopteral beauty had been painted three times as large as life, beside slogans reading *Our cloths also are as delicate as a butterfly's wing*, or suchlike.[183]

The Ayesha tale expresses a utopian desire for an alternative world, even if it is also commodified. Rushdie seems to be drawing attention to how the Hajj experience (the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) has changed as religious tradition meets capitalist modernity. Jahanzeeb Qurashi (2017) notes, how '[t]he pilgrim approach is becoming more materialistic than before, due to the commodification of Mecca and Hajj'.[184] Thus, Hajj has 'become a

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[179] Ibid., p. 320.
[180] Ibid., p. 327.
[181] Mehmet Ali Çelikel, 'Multicultural Uniformity: Postcolonial Reification in the Novels of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi', in *The Silent Life of Things: Reading and Representing Commodified Objecthood*, ed. by Daniela Rogobete, Jonathan P. A. Sell, and Alan Munton (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 141–52 (p. 147).
[182] Ibid., p. 149.
[183] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 488.
[184] Jahanzeeb Qurashi, 'Commodification of Islamic Religious Tourism: From Spiritual to Touristic Experience', *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 5.1 (2017), 89–104 (p. 101) <https://doi.org/10.21427/D7JX40>.

product of Islam' and both Mecca and Hajj 'are highly commercialised, the more you pay (Simple-Haji vs Branded-Haji) the more you enjoy Hajj's so called facilities'.[185] The novel clearly registers this 'aggressive' form of capitalism, but this can also be read as a sign of precapitalist cultural forms coexisting with capitalist modernity. This combination is also seen in Gibreel's career as an actor in Bombay cinema, wherein he stars (often wearing masks) as Hindu deities and heroes 'based on old fables'.[186] Gibreel 'had spent the greater part of his unique career incarnating, with absolute conviction, the countless deities of the subcontinent in the popular genre movies known as "theologicals"'.[187] These films are consistently popular with audiences, providing 'box-office hits',[188] and represent the successful commodification of religion and culture in India. Thus, one might also argue that Bombay cinema is a form of commodity culture and that 'theologicals' combine the precapitalist and the modern, and that the novel, by extension, commodifies religion through reproducing it in printed form. *The Satanic Verses*, therefore, draws attention to the fact that Gibreel is a movie actor, who commodifies religion by making a film about its history that can be sold to mass global audiences. Rushdie's novel is, by implication, doing the same thing. By drawing attention to this process of commodification through a strategy that might be thought of as a form of critical irrealism, it might encourage us to question a world that commodifies everything rather than to uncritically accept this as part of postmodern consumer culture.

If in *The Sacred Night* there is a shift between the real and irreal from the point of view of Zahra the narrator, in *The Satanic Verses* we are exposed to this real and irreal from a cinematic point of view. We hear how Saladin Chamcha's dreams 'turned out to have the terrifying quality of being serial, each one following on from the one the night before, and so on, night after night'.[189] This description of dreams echoes the structure of the narrative. What is more, these dream and vision sequences are not only an echo of Sufi thoughts on creative imagination but also a literary device similar to Löwy's concept of critical irrealism. Thus, *The Satanic Verses* evokes a religious concept and at the same time a fictional mode of art wherein critiques take form in another imaginary world and, as noted by Löwy, such a world can be 'either idealized or terrifying'.[190]

Using an irrealist form of writing allows Rushdie to offer a critique of the transformations wrought by capitalist modernity. Mark Fisher's concept of capitalist realism

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[185] Ibid., p. 101.
[186] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 342.
[187] Ibid., p. 16.
[188] Ibid., p. 342.
[189] Ibid., p. 285.
[190] Löwy, p. 196.

is also useful in understanding this dystopian narrative presented via dreams in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. For Fisher, there is a 'widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it' and, he argues, '[o]nce, dystopian films and novels were exercises in such acts of imagination – the disasters they depicted acting as narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living'[191]; but the world these works project, Fisher asserts, 'seems more like an extrapolation or exacerbation of ours than an alternative to it'.[192] This is not to say that *The Satanic Verses* is a dystopian novel but rather that the world that is depicted in the novel is a similar 'extrapolation or exacerbation' of our present time. In the novel, Thatcher's Britain is presented as a dystopian world: 'It's a bloody revolution. Newness coming into this country'.[193] Thatcher is described as a 'radical' whose policy, Hal Valance (a film producer) tells Chamcha, 'is literally to invent a whole goddamn new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old [...] and bring in the new'.[194] Here, Valance is critical of Thatcher's goal of creating a brutally capitalist Britain. By describing Thatcher as 'radical', Erin Elizabeth Greer (2018) rightly notes, 'Valance posits the market as the source of "newness" broadly conceived', thus, '[s]ocial change [...] follows from economic rather than political processes, and the political realm is called upon [...] to keep out of the way of the realm that can do so: the market'.[195] Such a dystopic world is linked to a dominant economic market system which leads to social unrest and destruction and presents a microcosm of the race-related violence that is highlighted in a novel which deals with the immigrant experience.

The novel emphasises the homogeneity of a consumer culture that leaves people with no real choices. This is suggested in the text where we hear how in the modern reality of London, and specifically in the context of its weather,

> [...] when the light is not brighter than the dark, when the land is not drier than the sea, then clearly a people will lose the power to make distinctions, and commence to see everything – from political parties to sexual partners to religious beliefs – as much–the–same, nothing-to-choose, give-or-take.[196]

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[191] Fisher, p. 2.
[192] Ibid., p. 2.
[193] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 270.
[194] Ibid., p. 270.
[195] Erin Elizabeth Greer, 'Making Conversation: Fiction, Philosophy and The Social Medium' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), p. 71.
[196] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 354.

If *The Sacred Night* imagines an alternative reality to that of capitalism, *The Satanic Verses* might appear to suggest that there is 'no alternative.' Fisher notes that the eighties (the same period as *The Satanic Verses* is set) is the time when 'capitalist realism was fought for and established' and the time when 'Margaret Thatcher's doctrine that "there is no alternative" – as succinct a slogan of capitalist realism as you could hope for – became a brutally self-fulfilling prophecy'.[197] This to Fisher was a phenomenon which he calls 'reflexive impotence' in which people 'know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can't do anything about it'; nevertheless, 'that "knowledge", that reflexivity, is not a passive observation of an already existing state of affairs [therefore] [i]t is a self-fulfilling prophecy'.[198] Capitalist realism, Fisher notes, leads people to experience 'mental health problems'.[199] *The Satanic Verses* resonates with this idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gibreel dreams that he is the Angel Gabriel: 'I am the bloody archangel, Gibreel himself, large as bloody life'.[200] Gibreel faces 'his mental illness with courage, refusing to play it down or call it by a false name' yet 'his recognition of it had, understandably, cowed him'.[201] Thus, Gibreel's frustration at his inability to prevent experiencing vivid and disturbing dreams and visions mirrors his inability to operate effectively in the new culture he finds himself inhabiting in London.

As in the cinema, he must constantly reinvent himself and take on 'other identities' — as does his friend Chamcha who must become a disembodied 'Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice' working as a voiceover artist for television and radio ('he could convince an audience that he was Russian, Chinese, Sicilian, the President of the United States'[202]), but never presenting his authentic self. Thus, I argue that such a deployment of the real and irreal allows for this inescapable capitalist world to be represented in a surreal way that highlights the pain and frustration modern life can cause individuals — particularly migrants who find themselves between two worlds (the past or 'home' and the present in a different culture to that which they have known previously). Joel Lazarus (2015), paraphrasing Fisher, states: 'this reflexive impotence is also expressive of a wider societal condition: a continued post-modern lack of faith in any bigger vision of the future, a lack of faith that has helped to sustain what he calls "capitalist realism"'.[203] I see Gibreel's loss of faith as an allegory of

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[197] Fisher, p. 8.
[198] Ibid., p. 21.
[199] Ibid., p. 21.
[200] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 83.
[201] Ibid., p. 339.
[202] Ibid., p. 60.
[203] Joel Lazarus, 'Cultivating Self-Belief and Educated Hope: Toward a Contemporary Radical Democratic Practical Theory of and for Transformative Art', unpublished paper delivered at the conference's 'Inaugural Conference on Cultural Political Economy' (University of Lancaster, 1-2 September 2015) (para. 9 of 26)

people lacking faith in any alternative reality beyond capitalist modernity, as well as highlighting the difficulties inherent in the migrant experience. In framing Thatcher's vision of Britain as dystopian, Rushdie enjoins us to imagine a utopian alternative to it. By identifying this lack of faith as part of living in the system of capitalist modernity, readers are encouraged to imagine the condition of possibility for change.

In the following sections, I will mainly focus on Gibreel's dreams and visions as these are the central element of the narrative. Unlike in *The Sacred Night* wherein Ben Jelloun seems to present an overtly Sufi journey undertaken by the protagonist Zahra, Rushdie shows us two opposite experiences of faith, exemplified by Gibreel and Ayesha, as will be elaborated upon here. Gibreel, with all his religious knowledge — and who has claimed at the opening of the novel as having been 'regenerated, a new man with a new life'[204] (he is talking about a new experience he will embark upon not a new spiritual life) — is able to be open to the world of creative imagination but he resists it as he tries to remain in what he sees as the real world, the modern world. As a child, Gibreel is exposed to a 'philosophy of rebirth' and was 'convinced of the existence of the supernatural world'.[205] On first glance, Gibreel seems as if he is transformed but the narrator tells us that this 'transformational process rushed out of his body.'[206] The word 'rush' can be defined as to fall quickly— a sense which is emphasised in the novel: he 'find[s] himself collapsed, once again'.[207] Here, the word 'again' emphasises that Gibreel consistently rejects this world of creative imagination or the Sufi path. So rather than suggesting that Gibreel is on a Sufi journey which leads to purification, I read Gibreel's journey as a journey that has gone wrong.

This allegorical reading is further borne out later in the novel when we are told that '[h]e had changed' and 'he had lost his faith'[208] and that he is experiencing 'a punishment of dreams'.[209] Feriani (2017) reads Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* 'through the lenses of the Sufi conceptual framework of Ibn Arabi',[210] and argues that the novel 'project[s] intermediate worlds, like that of the *barzakh*, where the "hidden" meets the "openings"'.[211]

<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/cperc-conf/files/2015/08/Lazarus-Cultivating-Self-Belief-and-Educated-Hope-2015.pdf> [accessed 21 November 2019].

[204] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 31.

[205] Ibid., p. 21.

[206] Ibid., p. 355.

[207] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 355.

[208] Ibid., p. 29.

[209] Ibid., p. 32.

[210] Feriani, p. 228.

[211] Ibid., p. 182. As Feriani explains, '[f]rom a Sufi perspective, visions are "openings" into the Sacred in the sense that they give access to an incorporeal world and allow the Sufi seeker to perceive or see things and persons in corporeal forms' (p. 154).

Focusing on Gibreel's journey, Feriani claims that his series of visions 'enable him to access a "hidden" world'.[212] Gibreel's dreams 'can be interpreted as the spiritual "openings", akin to those experienced by a Sufi seeker during his or her search for the Sacred'.[213] Gibreel's journey, 'towards the "hidden"', for Feriani, 'is symbolised by a spiritual "death" of his old "self"'[214]; thus, 'Gibreel undergoes transformation'.[215] I agree with Feriani's argument up to a point in that these dreams and visions are echoes of the Sufi tradition, and that Gibreel encounters the spiritual world in several instances. However, I would also argue that Gibreel constantly rejects the spiritual and thus he ends up committing suicide. Rather than reading his 'spiritual "death"' at the beginning of the novel as one that leads to a positive religious experience, as Feriani does, I would suggest that Rushdie is demonstrating how rejection of faith in the capitalist world can lead to a particular kind of desperation. If Gibreel's narrative shows the consequences of faith being ignored in the modern world, Ayesha's tale presents the opposite approach to faith and therefore emphasises the potential combination of religious traditions and capitalist modernity.

While critics like Feriani see Gibreel's journey as one that 'leads to the Sacred'[216] and focus upon purely spiritual matters, I offer a different reading regarding why Rushdie chooses to explore notions of *Barzakh*: briefly, because this philosophy demonstrates how seeming opposites (such as religious tradition and capitalist modernity) come together. The narrative demonstrates the possibility of this coexistence of the religious and modern in the Ayesha tale, as elaborated below. The reader is told that Gibreel's dreams are 'between two realities, this world and another that was also right there, visible but unseen'.[217] Such a dual understanding of the real may seem to correspond with the concept of creative imagination in Sufism. However, I argue that Gibreel, being detached from his faith, loses the ability to experience a transcendental journey to self-discovery and the Sacred. Whereas Ayesha emphasises the need to 'open [our souls, leading to a] move through into wisdom',[218] Gibreel is not open to his experiences. Thus, Gibreel's journey to this world can be described as dystopic. His journey as a Muslim migrant from India who is yearning to live in a better world turns out to be a dystopic experience. These Indian migrants to Britain are described as 'mingling with the remnants of the plane, […] fragmented […] absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, […] extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten

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[212] Ibid., p. 154.
[213] Ibid., p. 215.
[214] Ibid., p. 228.
[215] Ibid., p. 220.
[216] Ibid., p. 223.
[217] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 351.
[218] Ibid., p. 501.

meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*'.[219] The novel illustrates aspects of the immigrant experience, which is a story about marginalisation and alienation, particularly in the case of Chamcha's subplot. He is treated and looked upon as a dehumanised 'other' by police and immigration officers in the host nation. The city of London is also described in the words of a shopkeeper Sufyan's wife (a Bangladeshi immigrant family whom Chamcha stays with) as:

> […] a demon city in which anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt like your ears would drop off but when you turned in the direction of the words you saw only empty air and smiling faces, and every day you heard about this boy, that girl, beaten up by ghosts.[220]

This dystopic view of London (a dark place filled with racism) in the eyes of those migrants is clearly emphasised. Here, my reading of dystopia follows Michael D. Gordin et al. (2010) where they note it is 'not simply the opposite of utopia' but rather 'a utopia that has gone wrong'.[221] In this sense, Gibreel's loss of faith and his resistance to his experiences in an imaginary world leads to darkness and eventually to him killing himself.

There are moments or scenes of utopia such as the ending of the Ayesha tale and the final chapter of the novel.[222] Yet Gibreel's dreams are described as 'a punishment of dreams'[223] and 'persecuting visions.'[224] In differentiating between utopia and dystopia Gordin et al. further assert that:

> [w]hereas utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now. Thus, the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare.[225]

This nightmare of dystopia is presented in Gibreel's tormenting dreams and visions. Gordin *et al*, see utopia and dystopia 'not as terms or genres' but as 'concrete practices through which historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a

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[219] Ibid., p. 4.
[220] Ibid., p. 250.
[221] Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash 'Introduction: Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time', in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, ed. by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 1–17 (p. 1).
[222] See Stephen Baker's (2000) *The Fiction of Postmodernity*.
[223] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 32.
[224] Ibid., p. 111.
[225] Gordin et al., p. 2.

plausible future'.[226] Bill Ashcroft (2017) rightly notes that '[w]hile [their approach] seems to dismiss literary genres, we can on the contrary see art and literature as concrete practices imbued with a vision of possibility'.[227] Such a vision of possibility manifests in *The Satanic Verses* to reimagine our present. We hear more about Gibreel's dreams:

> what was so strange if his dreams characterized him as the angel, dreams do every damn thing, did it really display more than a banal kind of egomania? But Gibreel was sweating from fear: 'Point is, Spoono,' he pleaded, 'every time I go to sleep the dream starts up from where it stopped. Same dream in the same place. As if somebody just paused the video while I went out of the room. Or, or. As if he's the guy who's awake and this is the bloody nightmare. His bloody dream: us. Here. All of it.'[228]

This world of imagination provides anything but peace for Gibreel and again there is a reference to modernity and media ('somebody just paused the video'). It is a 'fall' — the opposite of Zahra's experience in *The Sacred Night* in which her dream is 'astonishing 'and 'beautiful' and lifts her up. Indeed, Gibreel is:

> '[a] [l]ittle devil, [his mother] scolds, but then folds him in her arms, [...] and he falls past her into sleep, growing bigger as he falls and the falling begins to feel like flight [and] [i]n the early dreams he sees beginnings, Shaitan cast down from the sky.[229]

Gibreel's dreams take him to a world where devils and jinns exist. He is disconnected from the divine and only sees Shaitan initially. The narrator describes one of these dreams: 'Sometimes when he sleeps Gibreel becomes aware, without the dream, of himself sleeping, of himself dreaming his own awareness of his dream, and then a panic begins'.[230] The dreamer is conscious, and it seems that the dreams flow into reality and reality flows into dreams, in other words, all mixed up.

It is another reality. Gibreel also seems to somehow know that this certainly exists but continues to resist, thus creating a dystopic experience. He feels out of control and the dreams are like '[t]hose dreams of being pushed out on stage when you've no business being there, you don't know the story haven't learned any lines, but there's a full house watching, watching: feels like that'.[231] The dreams increase his feelings of isolation, of being lost and not belonging:

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[226] Ibid., p. 2.
[227] Bill Ashcroft, *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 42.
[228] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 83.
[229] Ibid., p. 91.
[230] Ibid., p. 92.
[231] Ibid., p. 109.

But when he has rested he enters a different sort of sleep, a sort of not-sleep, the condition that he calls his *listening*, and he feels a dragging pain in the gut, like something trying to be born, and now Gibreel, who has been hovering-above-looking-down, feels a confusion, *who am I*.[232]

Gibreel 'enters' this world and passes over a threshold into a new arena of experience and again refuses it. His dreams are within a 'sort of sleep' or 'not sleep'. In fact, they are a 'different' sort of 'condition' wherein the '*listening*' allows learning and new understanding. Yet, for Gibreel it is a sort of 'pain' and with this comes 'confusion', which ultimately leads to less knowledge of the self. Indeed, Gibreel poses the specific question '*who am I*'. As H. B. Danesh, M. D. (1997) notes in his book entitled *The Psychology of Spirituality*, '[w]ithout self-knowledge life becomes anxiety-ridden, confusing, frightening, and painful' and those who are less-knowledgeable 'become confused about themselves, the nature of their reality, and the purpose of their existence'.[233] Gibreel prefers blindness (in a manner contrary to that described by the Consul in *The Sacred Night*) rather than this sort of dream:

What he longs for: black, dreamless sleep. Mother-fucking dreams, cause of all the trouble of the human race, […] if I was God I'd cut the imagination right out of people and then maybe poor bastards like me could get a good night's rest. Fighting against sleep, he forces his eyes to stay open, unblinking, until the visual purple fades off the retinas and sends him blind, but he's only human, in the end.[234]

Gibreel totally rejects the creative imagination, seeing it as a source of pain and distraction. The narrator tells us that 'the dream-worlds of his archangelic other self begin to seem as tangible as the shifting realities he inhabits while he's awake'.[235] Gibreel knows he has 'a choice […] between two realities, this world and another that was also right there, visible but unseen'.[236] This is in keeping with Löwy's ideas regarding 'a border territory, between reality and "irreality."'[237] Gibreel inhabits this space between realities, moving between the two via dreams and visions. He inhabits the modern world; however, he is also consistently thrust back into historical scenes from the Islamic tradition where he is a main character (in much the same way as he was in Indian theological films where he played numerous Hindu gods). Such a juxtaposition in *The Satanic Verses* allows the frustration with the unfamiliar to be portrayed via the irreal as a utopian resource for imagining an alternative world.

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[232] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 110.

[233] H. B. Danesh, M. D, *Psychology of Spirituality: From Divided Self to Integrated Self* (New Delhi: Sterling Paperbacks, 1997), p. 84.

[234] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 122.

[235] Ibid., p. 205.

[236] Ibid., p. 351.

[237] Löwy, p. 196.

It is then a choice to be made whether to leave his doubts behind and move towards the divine or to remain on the lower plain of 'real' life. The narrator tells us that 'a choice would be offered him, a choice'.[238] Yet Gibreel 'felt slow, heavy, distanced' and he 'realized that he had not the faintest idea which path he would choose'.[239] Thus, 'he had been dragged away'[240] and 'he stepped down the left-hand path'.[241] Through his resistance, Gibreel is constantly pulling away from a connection with the divine. Rather than transcending, he continues to fall. In the opening scenes of the book he is falling physically; for the remainder of the novel he is falling spiritually.

The collapse of the barrier between reality and dreams is thus a collapsing of the past and the modern world into one. As the WReC note, in a discussion of another critical irrealist text, 'the fictive, illusory world […] can be seen as the real world defamiliarised and transcended, while retaining its indelible imprint'.[242] Indeed, Gibreel 'no longer recognizes the distinction between the waking and dreaming states'.[243] This state of mind is a merging of both worlds: the worldly and otherworldly. The dream world of the creative imagination is 'leaking'[244] into the modern world. In this sense, my reading aligns with Stephen Morton's (2008) interpretation of the Ayesha chapters as a comment on the coexistence of the secular and the religious.[245]Ayesha, for Morton, 'embodies a more open and inclusive approach to Islam, which encourages dialogue and debate rather than foreclosing it'.[246] In addition to the secular and religious, I also read these chapters as presenting examples of the coexistence of the religious and the modern within capitalist modernity. Moreover, this coexistence of precapitalist traditions and the modern is again found throughout the novel, in the London and Jahilia chapters, as well as the Ayesha chapters.

In the dream sequence chapters, Rushdie seems to be considering whether religion is an opponent of modernity or whether faith/religion is part of capitalist modernity. This is prevalent in the chapters 'Ayesha' and 'The Parting of the Arabian Sea'. In a conversation between Ayesha, who acts as a Sufi mystic, and Mirza Saeed who identifies himself as modern he tells her '[g]et out of here with your visions and your invisible spouse. This is the modern world, and it is medical doctors and not ghosts in potato fields who tell us when we

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[238] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 351.
[239] Ibid., p. 351.
[240] Ibid., p. 351.
[241] Ibid., p. 352.
[242] The WReC, p. 92.
[243] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 457.
[244] Ibid., p. 304.
[245] Stephen Morton, *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 80.
[246] Ibid., p. 83.

are ill'.[247] He insists that 'we are modern men. We know, for instance, that old people die on long journeys, that God does not cure cancer, and that oceans do not part. We have to stop this idiocy'.[248] He states that 'a secular man lives in the world of things'[249] and that he is of a rational mind, pleading 'Let's be scientific, please'.[250] For Saeed being modern means a rejection of faith as in this material world '[w]ealth is an excellent goddess'.[251] While there is friction here between secular and religious thinking, a tussle between the old and new, in the end the old ways win to survive in the new age. Saeed's resistance to Sufi mysticism ultimately fails: 'Mirza Saeed, worn-out and filthy, was in a state of deep frustration on account of his failure to convince more than a handful of the pilgrims that it was better to put one's trust in reason than in miracles'.[252] At first glance this can be read as a sign that these pilgrims are losing their minds, but these pilgrims are shown to be at peace while it is Saeed who is torn. Yet Saeed does not remain rigid in his convictions.

We glimpse in his words both hesitation and uncertainty: Saeed 'had had no time for the Supreme Being for many years, but now a couple of Ayesha's phrases popped back into his mind. *God will save you. Everything will be given*'.[253] He later tells Ayesha: 'I'm not a bad man. […] I've been damn impressed by many things on this walk; *damn* impressed. You have given these people a profound spiritual experience, no question. Don't think we modern types lack a spiritual dimension'.[254] Such a statement is profoundly indicative of the combination of the religious and modern. By asserting that the absence of the 'spiritual dimension' is a lack in the modern world, the novel shows how hard it is to completely ignore faith and its ameliorating effects.

If Gibreel's storyline manifests as a dystopian vision, Ayesha's provides a happy ending wherein there is a reconciliation between the religious and modern. Stephen Baker (2000) notes that there are 'two utopian conclusions' in the novel: firstly, 'the moment of religious epiphany […] in which the prophetess Ayesha finally converts Mirza Saeed Akhtar'; and secondly the ending of the novel 'with the homecoming Saladin Chamcha and his [realisation] that he is really Salahuddin Chamchawala […] [which is] the novel's true utopian conclusion and its true spiritual homecoming'.[255] In both of these utopian scenes, once the characters reconcile themselves to their faith and the modern world, and the past

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[247] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp. 232–33.
[248] Ibid., p. 476.
[249] Ibid., p. 478.
[250] Ibid., p. 495.
[251] Ibid., p. 476.
[252] Ibid., p. 495.
[253] Ibid., p. 233.
[254] Ibid., p. 498.
[255] Stephen Baker, *The Fiction of Postmodernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 192–93.

with the present, the balance that has been lacking throughout the novel (particularly in Gibreel's case) is restored. These continuities with the past are seen more in the final chapter of the novel where Saladin is reunited with his homeland and reconciled with his own heritage. On a first glance the continuous and discontinuous passages in the novel might be read as if Gibreel (as the narrator tells us) 'has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* – that is, joined to and arising from his past […] whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities'.[256] However, as Shailja Sharma (2007) notes, '[t]hough [Rushdie] seems to suggest that authenticity and continuity are misleading questions, the end of the novel rewards Chamcha for his return "home" and thus reclaiming continuity, even as Gibreel's efforts at remaining true to his chosen and unchosen roles are doomed to death'.[257] While Chamcha remains rooted, if temporarily dislocated from his past, Gibreel, although more equipped, as an actor, to take on different, and therefore discontinuous, identities, becomes a fragmented and tormented subject during his migrant experience. The fact that he is compelled to play various roles during his visions explodes his sense of self and leads to his eventual downfall. This is an example of how the novel's staging of discontinuous identities interrupts the Orientalist framing of Islam (as noted and debated by other critics), in ways that also express a utopian desire for an alternative world to that which is represented by Margaret Thatcher's marketised British society — a society which is also hostile to immigrants.

This chapter has demonstrated how each of these Muslim magical realist texts has its own specificity regarding features of narrative form, presentations of different Muslim identities and socio-political backgrounds, and other topics such as immigration and colonialism. Thus, through close analysis of Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* this chapter has shown how the novels question and interrupt Orientalist ideas of a monolithic or homogenous Muslim world and identity. Magical realism(s) are deployed as a vehicle for expressing utopian desire: both authors use dreams to imagine a utopian future.

The 'call to tradition' of the precapitalist past (Sufism) in the modern of the Now is an element that is deployed differently in these novels and this is an example of the value of the world-systems analysis approach to reading texts such as these. Moreover, both of these Muslim magical realism(s) novels register the combined unevenness in different Muslim communities. By comparing the novels and by applying Löwy's concept of 'critical

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[256] Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 427.
[257] Shailja Sharma, '"Precious Gift/Piece of Shit": Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the Revenge of History', in *Scandalous Fictions: The Twentieth-Century Novel in the Public Sphere*, ed. by Jago Morrison and Susan Watkins (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 136–49 (p. 148).

irrealism' and the WReC's ideas regarding the combined unevenness found within the modern world-system, I have shown how critical irrealist texts are not to be seen or labelled as depicting similar techniques but rather how each text is unique in terms of narrative form and context. As understood by the anthropologists mentioned above, *Barzakh* is a concept that 'ruptures binary outlooks and invites us to think beyond the present and the visible' and 'to dwell on the in-between'.[258] In such terms, this chapter has argued that both novels demonstrate that lives lived within the framework of capitalist modernity are played out in a state of indeterminacy and ambiguity in the realm of the in-between. Utopian and dystopian elements in both texts offer a way in which to critique and reimagine capitalist modernity. The following chapter explores the notion of recalling the past and negotiating modernity and tradition in two very different societies impacted by capitalist modernity.

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[258] Mittermaier, *Dreams That Matter*, p. 4.

Chapter 4 Recalling the Past: Modernity and Tradition in Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005) and Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* (1990) [translated in (2006)]

'[i]t was one of Celâl's trademarks to mix objects dating back centuries with those from his own past; the muddy slopes of his future Bosphorus were littered with Byzantine coins and modern-day bottle caps, both bearing the name Olympos' (21) — Pamuk, *The Black Book*

'[i]t never ends […] [t]he past is always here. It shapes us [and] walks with us' (170) — Shah, *A Silent Life*

Throughout the previous chapters I have shown different manifestations of instances where the precapitalist past coexists with capitalist modernity. By comparing Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*[1] and Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life*,[2] this chapter aims to show how irrealism is used as a literary mode to recover different histories of Islam. The comparison of two texts from very different contexts is quite deliberate and serves to further reinforce my thesis that Muslim magical realism(s) do not reflect a monolithic Muslim identity. In this respect, my approach extends Natalie Melas' account of the incommensurability that underpins comparative postcolonial literary scholarship.[3] The Guyanese setting of Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* is as much concerned with the history of Guyana as a peripheral zone in modern world economy for cultivating and extracting cash crops that has historically used indentured labour, and the importance of gender and histories/memories of labour struggles, as it is with considerations of religion and Muslim identity. By contrast, Pamuk's Turkey is a country that is modernising, and responding to the fashions and trends of a globalising American commodity culture, but is also still overtly rooted in Islam. Such a comparison also allows us to think with but also beyond the theories of Wallerstein and other world-system thinkers to examine how the texts extend current thinking about core-periphery-semiperiphery relationships within world literature. Despite the clear and obvious difference in these novels in terms of socio-political and cultural contexts and the very different historical experiences of capitalist modernity to which the novels respond, they both register

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[1] Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, trans. by Maureen Freely (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).
[2] Ryhaan Shah, *A Silent Life* (Leeds, England: Peepal Tree Press, 2005).
[3] Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

the act of recovering history. By doing so, they draw attention to the relationship between the past and present to imagine alternatives to the singular logic of capitalist modernity. Speaking of the (semi) peripheral, the WReC note that 'the *epistemology* of irrealist representation is quite often historicist: the attempt will be made to peer back into the past, by way of recovering both the specific history of the present and the alternative histories that might have been but were not, yet that (paradoxically) still might be'.[4] Such an articulation is key to this chapter: the importance of recovering history in order to understand the present and reconsidering the present in order to have a clearer view of history. This is not to suggest that these texts form one entity or characterise what an irrealist novel is; rather, they exemplify significant manifestations of an approach to recovering history.

In Pamuk's *The Black Book* and Shah's *A Silent Life* the past vividly merges with the fictional present as a way of illuminating the impact of commodity culture upon their own societies undergoing the transformations wrought by the global forces of capitalist modernity. History, as Harootunian (2019) notes, 'is not simply what happened in the past as it yields to a new present but a constant intermingling and interaction of pasts in the present'; indeed, '[n]othing is ever sharply delineated in the historical divisions of tenses like past and present'.[5] The epigraphs quoted at the beginning of this chapter convey ideas that are central to this chapter's argument, primarily the coexistence of a precapitalist past and the present/capitalist modernity. While both novels can be broadly classified as magical realism and depict the impact of an inescapable modernity, they differ widely in respect of the presentation of Muslim communities, identities, and their historical and cultural contexts. Muslim magical realism(s), as argued in the theoretical framework presented in chapter one of this thesis, conveys the multiplicities of Muslim identity as a religious reference or label and as an element of this mode of writing.

The goal of this chapter is neither to define nor to provide a survey on what modernity is (as it is beyond the scope of this thesis). However, Jameson's account of singular modernity and Harootunian's reflections on capitalist modernity are particularly useful definitions of modernity when it comes to analysing Muslim magical realism(s). For Harootunian the precapitalist and the modern combined define the culture of capitalist modernity. Jameson (1986) suggests that 'magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological

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[4] The WReC, p. 72.
[5] Harry Harootunian, *Uneven Moments: Reflections on Japan's Modern History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 1.

features.'[6] Such an articulation of magical realism is significant for this thesis as a whole and particularly for this chapter. Here, I wish to extend Harootunian and Jameson's ideas by considering the coexistence of the religious (specifically Sufism) and the modern, which take different forms within the emergent culture of capitalist modernity in the fictional worlds of Shah and Pamuk.

Shah's *A Silent Life* registers the history of the experience of those engaged in indentured labour in Guyana, which as Sidney W. Mintz (1996) notes regarding the plantations in the Caribbean: 'were landmark experiments in modernity' where '[w]orkers were disciplined to work interchangeably, and by the clock'.[7] In his discussion of different texts from the Caribbean, Michael Niblett (2020) — following Richard Walker and Jason W. Moore (2017) — notes that '[t]he apparent paradox whereby precocious technological and institutional innovations flourish in seemingly "backward" frontier zones is perhaps one of the clearest manifestations of the acutely uneven form of combined subsumption typical of such zones'.[8] Such an argument is important for my reading of Shah's *A Silent Life*, but it also overlooks certain important details. Whereas Niblett's aim is to argue for 'the literature of the capitalist world-ecology'[9], I suggest that the combination of the religious and the modern can also be read as a manifestation of this combined and uneven reality in a text that sheds light on the experience of the modern Guyanese Muslim community. A similar argument can be made for Pamuk's representation of Turkey. Turkey's integration into the capitalist system, as Çağlar Keyder (1987) explains, is due to '[t]he import-substituting industrialisation that followed during the 1960s and 1970s [which] led to the gradual ascendance of capitalist relations, to increasing domination by the bourgeoisie and to the emergence of a capitalist state'.[10] The 'breakdown of the international order in the inter-war period and the establishment of US hegemony following World War II', Keyder notes, 'provided an important dimension to the global context'.[11] Pamuk's *The Black Book* registers this emergence of a capitalist state in the urban world of an Istanbul that is marked by the pressures of combined and uneven development, as will be elaborated below.

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[6] Fredric Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.2 (1986), 301–25 (p. 311) <https://doi.org/10.1086/448333>.

[7] Sidney W. Mintz, 'Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2.2 (1996), 289–311 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3034097> [accessed 14 September 2020].

[8] Michael Niblett, *World Literature and Ecology: The Aesthetics of Commodity Frontiers, 1890-1950*. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 57.

[9] Ibid., p. 10.

[10] Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (Verso: London and New York, 1987), p. 1.

[11] Ibid., p. 3.

The coexistence and overlapping that Jameson speaks of can be traced through both novels. In other words, the texts under consideration register this coexistence of the Islamic tradition (precapitalist) with that of capitalism, creating a form of writing that explores this singular phenomenon as it is manifested differently in different places and at different times. It should also be noted, as Neil Lazarus (2012) does, that 'far from implying that modernity […] assumes the same form everywhere, as Jameson has sometimes mistakenly been taken to suggest' it rather 'implies that it is everywhere irreducibly specific'.[12] This is extremely apparent in the novels examined in this chapter. Turkey (or specifically the Muslim population of Turkey), for example, has experienced modernity in a range of ways that differ from the experience of Muslims in Guyana (as demonstrated in the textual analysis presented below).

If modernity is 'to be understood as governed always – that is to say, definitionally – by *unevenness*, the historically determinate "coexistence," in any given place and time, "of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance"'[13], then the complexity of Muslim magical realism(s) can be found within the infusion of religious elements with aspects of modernity. Jameson states, regarding magical realism, that 'the […] superposition of whole layers of the past within the present […] is the formal precondition for the emergence of this new narrative style'.[14] This reference to the past brought into the present forms the basis of this chapter, as the novels under consideration have many layers in which the present seems to be in negotiation with the past. This occurs, as the WReC note in a related discussion of 'irrealism' in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), due to 'the coexistence and clash of customary and emergent social and cultural practices in a traditional society in the throes of capitalist modernisation [wherein] its literary forms are abstracts of this substance'.[15] The WReC's approach to Salih's novel is instructive for my own reading of Shah and Pamuk. As a novel set in Sudan, *Season of Migration to the North* also tells a story about the ways in which a Muslim society is transformed by the pressures of colonial modernity. Like Salih's novel, the literary form of *A Silent Life* and *The Black Book* can be understood as abstracted representations of the social contradictions of capitalist modernity. I am able to show here how Muslim magical realism(s) deal with an abstract singularity of modernity and unevenness in the Muslim world. Building on the work of scholars of peripheral realisms, it is also necessary to examine how peripheral realisms

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[12] Neil Lazarus, 'Modernism and African Literature', pp. 228–45 (pp. 232–33).
[13] The WReC, p. 12. (The WReC quoting Jameson).
[14] Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', p. 311.
[15] The WReC, p. 88.

are understood as a mode of expressing combinations of the religious and the modern, and the religious in the modern. A resurgence of Sufism and the explosion of magical realism that occurred in the literary arena in different places during the 1980s could therefore be seen as the emergence of a systematic literary field. Such combinations vary in the different fictional worlds and contexts discussed here.

The resurgence of Sufism in the 1980s has been noted by critics in contemporary Arabic novels (Elmarsafy 2012) and Turkish literary production (Göknar 2012). It is noteworthy too that in the 1980s magical realism became a mode of writing at the same time that Sufism became prevalent in both Arab and Turkish fiction, as noted above. Sufism, on one hand, may be seen to have an aspect of modernity because although it is based on religious tradition it is attractive for a modern mind seeking alternative spirituality in a disenchanted world. On the other hand, the turn to Sufism may also be connected to the recent history of the modern world-system, particularly the struggle to control the global energy market, and the rise of so-called political Islam. Wallerstein's (2008) account of the political importance of religious affiliations in the modern world-system may also assist in understanding how these elements manifest in specific literary works. Wallerstein scrutinises the political construction of Islam in the modern world-system and argues that, similar to other religious movements in modern history, the existence of political Islam is connected to religious affiliation. Wallerstein divides the history of the political importance of religious affiliation into three categories. From the sixteenth century until the mid-twentieth century 'religious affiliations were politically extremely important'.[16] In the period 1945-1970 within the modern world-system 'there was a steady decline in the centrality of religious categories.' This happened, according to Wallerstein, due to three main phenomena: (a) geopolitical problems: 'free world versus the Communist world' based on 'competing political philosophies' rather than 'religious faiths', (b) the rise of the 'movements of national liberation' of postcolonial nations which 'did not use religious affiliations' to organise themselves, (c) 'the collapse of the resistance to the process of [the] secularization of the state by […] the Roman Catholic Church'.[17] Wallerstein also explores the emergence of religious 'fundamentalisms' ,including political Islam and argues that the period from the 1970s to the present moment characterises 'a political shift of some importance. It reversed a five-century trend in the other direction'.[18] This happened due to three major changes in

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[16] Immanuel Wallerstein,'The Political Construction of Islam in the Modern World-System', in *Islam and the Orientalist World-System*, ed. by Khaldoun Samman and Mazhar Al-Zo'by (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), pp. 25–36 (p. 25).
[17] Ibid., pp. 26–27.
[18] Ibid., p. 27.

the world: 'the end of the Cold War; the collapse of the Old Left antisystemic movements; and stagnation in the world-economy'.[19] As Samman and Al-Zo'by (2008) explain:

> [w]hile Wallerstein locates the political and cultural agency of Islamic movements within the framework of instrumental logic, in that they are conceived as the objects of history and not the subject of it, he rejects the conventional view that these movements are either anti- or pre-modern phenomena whose function is nothing more than a reactionary struggle against the forward facts of history.[20]

Wallerstein's views on the modernity of religious affiliations are significant as religiosity is often found in the literary works of Muslim writers and demonstrates how Islam is a part of the story of modernity. Although each context has its own specificity, this religiosity can be clearly linked with wider transformations in geopolitics, particularly since the end of the Cold War. The resurgence of the religious (Sufism) in Muslim literary production since the 1980s may well explain how such works are indirectly connected to these geopolitical transformations and the rise of political Islam.

The definition of modernity is controversial, whether in literary or socio-political debates. Currently, there are rapid social changes occurring at different levels in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia. In a recent speech, the spokesperson of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, Fatimah Baeshen (2018), quoting Prince Khalid Bin Salman, stated that '[w]e're not Easternizing we're not Westernizing[,] we're just Modernizing[,] and we're doing it in a way that is still intrinsically true to our values and our traditions'.[21] This viewpoint is crucial to note, not only for the purposes of this chapter but also with regard to the wider argument of the thesis. Muslim societies have been impacted by the inevitable changes brought about by modernity and capitalism; therefore, it is no surprise that these elements also appear in the literature produced in these societies, wherein authors deploy modern forms of writing, rooted in specific socio-political contexts and, yet infuse their works with aspects of religious and cultural traditions. With this in mind, this discussion engages with the limitations of existing scholarship regarding religious/spiritual elements and the treatment of magic and realism as binary opposites in the mode of magical realism and builds on the theory of world literature with a focus upon the Islamic context.

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[19] Ibid., p. 27.
[20] Samman and Al-Zo'by, pp. 3–22 (p. 15).
[21] National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, *How Best to Understand Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" Plan? - 2018 Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference*, online video recording, YouTube, 2 November 2018, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx_5cCpxrbE> [accessed 14 January 2019].

The protagonist of *A Silent Life* is a female Muslim, Aleyah, from a small country town in Guyana, who has Indian ancestry, and lives in a mixed Hindu and Islamic community that has been influenced in one way or another by colonialism. The experiences of Aleyah, a modern Indo-Guyanese female Muslim, are radically different to the middle-class male Turkish Muslim protagonist of *The Black Book*, Galip, who lives in Istanbul. Although Shah's *A Silent Life* won the Guyanese prize for fiction in 2007,[22] it has not gained as much scholarly attention as Pamuk's *The Black Book*. Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006 and thus attained global fame. Hence, I also challenge critical assumptions that privileged texts offer a rubric of how magical realism works. The novels under consideration in this chapter both have protagonists who are focused on memories, looking back in time to find the truth in magical and mysterious ways, recovering history and the stories of people who lived in the past. In *A Silent Life* the act of recovering history is registered through strange and bizarre visions, wherein Aleyah is often transported into the past and sometimes seems to participate in events so she can find the truth and build a new life. In *The Black Book,* Galip, who is searching for his wife, is also always searching in the past by exploring memories. Within these texts, there are many allusions to Sufism and spirituality, as well as reflections on the status of Sufism in modernising Islamic societies.

Many critics argue that Orhan Pamuk explores modernity as a Western phenomenon while also presenting Eastern traditions in his work. Pamuk's *The Black Book*, as will be shown, portrays how tradition and modernity coexist. Horace Engdahl (2010) notes how:

> Conservative nationalists in Turkey […] branded [Pamuk's] work as being too strongly influenced by western values. Oddly enough, the same demand for a writer to be loyal to his origins is voiced by post-colonial western intellectuals […] argu[ing] that, in giving the prize to writers such as […] Pamuk, the Academy was actually rewarding European literature (or today's iteration of the longstanding western Canon) in an exotic guise, thereby joining forces with cultural imperialism.[23]

However, it is useful to consider Pamuk's work as 'a creature of modernity'.[24] If Pamuk's work is to be described as such and seen as part of 'world-literature', then '"[t]radition" […] comes into existence not as the lingering forms of the past but as the coeval other of

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[22] See Joy Mahabir, 'Introduction: Tracing an Emerging Tradition', in *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature*, ed. by Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–21 (footnote 20, p. 17).

[23] Horace Engdahl, 'A Nobel Sensibility', *World Policy Journal*, 27. 3 (2010), 41–45 (p. 42) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40964055> [accessed 10 June 2019].

[24] The WReC, p. 50.

"modernity"".[25] It is important to emphasise that the WReC do not consider the role of religion in this interplay between past and present; however, their comparative approach does offer a way to critically address this issue. Adapting Jameson's 'generic discontinuities' in peripheral literature, the WReC also note that this

> involve[s] much more than a 'transformative negotiation with the modern of the metropolis' [quoting Andreas Huyssen 9], arising as they do from situations described by Neil Larsen as 'both modern and traditional, both "ahead of" and yet "behind the times" at once, as if not one but two or multiple histories were being lived out in one and the same space'.[26]

This emphasis on the simultaneous experience of multiple histories has important implications for my analysis of Pamuk and Shah. The novels under discussion here are examples of how culturally and historically specific combinations of the modern and religious are what define Muslim peripheral realism(s). *The Black Book* is replete with elements of, and references to, Sufism, while in *A Silent Life* we see this strand of Islam in the act of humming or prayers throughout the work. Both novels under consideration here register combined unevenness in ways that foreground specific combinations of the religious and the modern. However, each text depicts extremely specific cultural elements, myths and traditions, as well as political contexts, and demonstrate the influence these factors have on specific societies. These Muslim authors make use of a popular genre that provides them with a way to revisit the past in a dynamic manner rather than merely presenting a dry form of historical reportage. The past is present in the modern setting of the novels and religious identity is also a consistently core element, which in the end shapes and moulds who the characters are. Both novels deploy focalizing protagonists who are concerned about the changes occurring in their societies and are in need of their faith. Therefore, modernity and religion are central, coexisting, components of their identity. However, the past is also a vivid presence, bound up with socio-political specificity and many layers of ethnic and cultural history.

The various Muslim identities are depicted in comparison in this analysis between one community and another — for example, Turkish Muslim and Indo-Guyanese Muslim — but also in more complex and diverse ways. Indeed, there are diverse Turkish identities

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[25] Ibid., p. 76.
[26] Ibid., p. 82.

'reflec[ting] the hybrid nature of the Turkish social scene';[27] these include nationalistic, religious, Kemalist and those who identify as '"western" or "citizen[s] of the world" [who are usually the] youth from educated families'.[28] These multiple layers therefore form diverse identities within each community. This is the case in Turkey (a country with a majority Muslim population), and the same is true in the Caribbean and the Americas (where Muslims are in the minority), which is also shaped in part by the multiplicities of Muslim identity. John Tofik Karam et al. (2015) see 'Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA within a wider Islamic world' and note that 'Muslims [have] sought to forge their own identities, affinities, and detachments in multiple ways'.[29] Indeed, '[t]he shifting relation between Muslim identities and ethnicity can be traced through the plural histories of the Islamic presence in Latin America and the Caribbean'.[30] A similar point is made by John Voll, who claims that '"the case of Muslims in the Caribbean region is a strong reminder that minority … identities may have many different dimensions and are not simply monolithic"'.[31] Thus, the complexities of Muslim identity are not only due to geography but also many elements regarding Muslims' understanding of what it means to be a Muslim (as discussed in chapter one of this thesis). The following sections explore how these ideas have been deployed in each novel.

4.1   Memories, the Past, and Capitalist Modernity in *A Silent Life*

A Silent Life is 'the first work by a Guyanese woman writer to provide a Muslim female perspective'.[32] It is a novel that explores the experiences of characters living in post-independence Guyana. The past is presented to the reader via magical visions seen by the protagonist Aleyah. There are also frequent references to supernatural creatures that are specific to Guyanese culture such as jumbies (spirits of the dead: 'typically an evil one').[33] By setting her novel in the real world of modern Guyana, drawing upon the historical and

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[27] Nuran Hortaçsu and Nevra Cem-Ersoy 'Values, Identities and Social Constructions of the European Union Among Turkish University Youth', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 35.1 (2005), 107–21 (p. 116) <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.235>.

[28] Ibid., pp.109–10.

[29] John Tofik Karam, María del Mar Logroño Narbona, and Paulo G. Pinto 'Introduction: Latino America in the *Umma*/The *Umma* in Latino America', in *Crescent Over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, ed. by María del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto, and John Tofik Karam (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), pp. 1–21 (pp. 2–3).

[30] Ibid., p. 8.

[31] Ibid., p.15.

[32] Mariam Pirbhai, 'Recasting *Jahaji-Bhain*: Plantation History and the Indo-Caribbean Women's Novel in Trinidad, Guyana and Martinique', in *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature*, ed. by Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 25–47 (p. 39).

[33] 'Jumbie', in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Angus Stevenson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 949.

socio-political issues faced by three generations of a family, and by combining magical moments linking the past and present, Shah creates a layered historical novel of Guyana's past.

Capitalist modernity has clearly impacted Guyana differently than say, for example, Turkey. Indeed, Wazir Ahmad Ishmael (1993) notes that 'Guyana's population and settlement history is a product of the development of the Atlantic world and a reflection of the expansion of capitalism, and European colonialism'. In Guyana, all the ethnic groups (except for the indigenous Amerindians) were brought into the country 'as a result of Guyana's incorporation into the modern world system'. Whether as 'slaves, indentured [or] free laborers' they were imported to 'provide the necessary labor for cotton, coffee, and sugar plantations'.[34] In a related discussion, Michael Niblett (2014), examining Edgar Mittelholzer's *My Bones and My Flute* (1955), also set in Guyana, notes that the author's use of 'Euro-American Gothic tropes in a Caribbean context, where they amalgamated with local forms and contents, illuminate[s] the particular inflection of capitalist modernity in Guyana.'[35] This consideration of how such an amalgamation might elucidate a specific capitalist modernity in Guyana is significant for my reading of *A Silent Life*. Niblett draws on Michael Taussig's (1980) suggestion that '"certain fantastic and magical reactions to our nonfantastic reality" [can] be viewed as "part of a critique of the modern mode of production"'.[36] Niblett further explains:

Taussig is interested in the resurgence of devil beliefs among peasantries forced into wage labor in the tin mines of Bolivia and the sugar plantations of western Columbia. These beliefs, he argues, represent a reaction to the alienation the peasants experience on entering the ranks of the proletariat. Where once they exercised control over the means of production, they now control neither the material of labor nor its organization. The meaning of this "new experience of commodity production" and of "the contradictions that it now poses is inevitably assimilated into patterns that are preestablished in that group's culture." In this sense, the peasants' invocation of the devil signifies "a response to the change in the fundamental meaning of society as that meaning registers in precapitalist consciousness.[37]

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[34] Wazir Ahmad Ishmael, 'Urbanization in a Peripheral Capitalist State: A Guyana Case Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Portland State University, 1993), pp. 51–52.
[35] Michael Niblett, 'Specters in the Forest', p. 54.
[36] Ibid., p. 64.
[37] Ibid., p. 64.

Niblett argues that in the Guyanese context this precapitalist consciousness can be found 'in certain of the responses of Amerindian communities to the intrusion of capitalist modes and structures', which manifest in 'the mobilization of Guyanese supernatural traditions' in Mittelholzer's work.[38] In Guyana, and the Caribbean as a whole, the impact of capitalist modernity created 'massive economic and political upheaval, including crisis in the sugar industry, widespread labor unrest, and — in the 1950s — the introduction of modernization programs in many areas.' Hence, Niblett suggests '[t]he gothic devices in Mittelholzer's text' are not only 'encoding certain anxieties specific to the Guyanese political situation' but are also 'registering the impact of these wider, world-systemic pressures'.[39] Here, I wish to build upon Niblett's insights in order to consider how the amalgamation of magical realism and Sufism (an element of precapitalist consciousness) represents a reaction to capitalist modernity in Shah's novel.

Faith plays a role in the protagonist's identity and therefore the religious elements (specifically Sufism) and local cultural references work syncretically to create identity, making this novel a very specific form of Muslim magical realism set in Guyana. In a related discussion, Aisha Khan (2015) asserts, '[a]s diasporic populations, Muslims in the Americas, […] form communities […] that can suggest to observers self-defined, enclosed entities within which the beliefs and practices of Islam are expressed and contained'.[40] Therefore, Khan notes, 'Islam in Muslim minority societies is neither diminutive nor merely reiterative'.[41] This manner of considering Muslim minority societies is important not only when rejecting the notion of an essentialist Muslim identity, but also to understanding that when studying texts from the Caribbean analysis should not be limited to diasporic- or postcolonial-related discourses. In his article on the Puerto Rican Muslim community, Omar Ramadan-Santiago (2015), in agreement with John Voll's observation, argues that 'there is no way to identify a "Caribbean Muslim" identity,' adding that to attempt to do so 'would be a rather arduous and unfeasible task'.[42] However, his research shows that 'there is still a possibility for multiple Caribbean Muslim identities as opposed to a singular one [and that] they are being created at this very moment'[43]; furthermore, 'some Muslim Puerto Ricans are able to create their own identities, using cultural and religious influences to shape the persons

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[38] Ibid., p. 65.
[39] Ibid., p. 63.
[40] Aisha Khan, 'Contours: Approaching Islam, Comparatively Speaking', in *Islam and the Americas*, ed. by Aisha Khan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), pp. 23–45 (p. 33).
[41] Ibid., p. 41.
[42] Omar Ramadan-Santiago, 'Insha'Allah/Ojalá, Yes Yes Y'all: Puerto Ricans (Re)examining and (Re)imagining their Identities through Islam and Hip Hop', in *Islam and the Americas*, ed. by Aisha Khan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), pp. 115–38 (p. 134).
[43] Ibid., p. 134.

they see themselves to be'.[44] Such an approach of identifying Muslim identities in the Caribbean is particularly useful in the context of this discussion.

More specifically, as this chapter shows, Shah's novel helps us better understand the perspective of a female Guyanese Muslim. In other words, how Islam is not only part of this individual's story but also how being Muslim in a particular nation/society forms the core of identity regardless of the inherent differences between the lived experiences of those living in different geographical areas. In her multi-site ethnographic research on Bahamian and Brazilian Muslim women, Jerusa Ali (2015) also notes that for those who 'are proud of their local roots' Islam for them 'is a cultural marker and a boundary to local cultural cohesiveness, yet as a worldview it provides the foundation of their identity and belonging'.[45] This can clearly be seen in Shah's representation of what it means to be a modern Muslim woman in Guyana. Yet this is not to suggest that Muslim women in the Bahamas would have a similar experience as those in Guyana, rather the emphasis here is that Muslims are part of the Islamic world whether they are in the minority or majority in the country that they live.

Aleyah becomes an eyewitness to events in her family's past and sometimes interacts with those whose lives she is observing, in a series of events from the past not only seen by Aleyah but also physically experienced by her as if in the present; for example, when she touches her dead grandfather and follows him in the dark.[46] Although the back cover of *A Silent Life* tells us that this series of magical moments are 'dreams of dancing' and 'darker visions', I do not consider them as such due to the fact that they are connected to events that happened in the 'real' world of the story in the past. These occurrences are reported in the present tense giving a sense that the events never end, and these magical moments seem vividly real. Scholars have used various labels to describe these magical moments. Mariam Pirbhai (2010) calls them 'near-psychic visions'[47], while Judith Misrahi-Barak (2009) refers to 'ghostly visions'[48]; and Jean Y. Lee (2017) variously labels them 'clairvoyant visions', 'involuntary and cinematic visions', and 'waking visions'.[49] Rather than approaching these

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[44] Ibid., p. 115.

[45] Jerusa Ali, 'Bahamian and Brazilian Muslimahs: Struggle for Identity and Belonging', in *Islam and the Americas*, ed. by Aisha Khan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), pp. 186–213 (p. 205).

[46] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 26.

[47] Mariam Pirbhai, 'The Jahaji-Bhain Principle: A Critical Survey of the Indo-Caribbean Women's Novel, 1990-2009', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45.1 (2010), 37–56 (p. 49) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989409359852>.

[48] Judith Misrahi-Barak, 'Ryhaan Shah's Silent Screams of *A Silent Life*', in *Voices and Silence in the Contemporary Novel in English*, ed. by Vanessa Guignery (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 249–59 (p. 253).

[49] Jean Y. Lee, 'Clairvoyant Memories of an "Aproned Leader": Bearing Witness to the Transgression of Gender Boundaries in *A Silent Life*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 25.1 (2017), 77–93 (pp. 78– 85).

moments or time-slips as visions, I read them as a form of involuntary transportation into the past wherein the protagonist experiences a historical moment not only via sight but also through other senses, which convey a vivid impression of the past in the present.

In one such scene, Aleyah states that '[w]ith no moon in the sky there is no movement on earth to measure time by'.[50] This statement conveys a sense of disorientation, dislocation, and of time being out of joint. Shah presents these moments in the present tense in order to convey to the reader that the events are as real as those experienced by Aleyah in 'real' life. The use of active first-person verb forms reinforces this; for example, when witnessing her grandfather's hair turning white the words 'I see,' 'I crouch,' 'I am watching,' 'I sit,' 'I feel,' 'I reach out,' 'I touch' show that she is transported into a historical moment.[51] The repetition of the first-person pronoun reinforces the notion that she is physically present as an active agent rather than merely a passive viewer.

In another scene, Aleyah is watching her own history. Sitting with her grandmother, the question 'What does Aleyah mean?' enters her head. Her grandmother answers that it means 'the exalted' and at this moment Aleyah is transported back in time as a witness to a moment in her own infancy: 'I see her lean into a cradle and pick me up. My mother and father look on, smiling, as she rocks me in her arms, singing my name over and over'.[52] Throughout the novel, the past intrudes upon the present in the form of family secrets and tensions. Furthermore, at some points, the past seems to actively invade the present in a spectral form. While sleeping with Nani, Aleyah sees the door of the room fly open and her dead grandfather 'stands in the doorway'.[53] What follows is a re-enactment of her grandfather's suicide: '[h]e levers himself up on the rope, kicks the chair away, then lets his body drop in one quick, sudden moment. It jerks once, twice, and then is still'. The action in this scene is vividly real: Aleyah and her grandmother 'stare at the body that dangles […] the body sways'. Yet almost immediately the light of dawn brings doubts and Aleyah states that 'I think […] I see the faintest spectre of a hanged man […] but I blink and it is gone'.[54] For the character and the reader there is constant confusion between past and present, real and unreal, history and modernity.

In this liminal state, Aleyah does not know if what happened was real or if she 'had a bad dream'. Once again, therefore, we can see how mystery and Sufism are major elements found in Muslim magical realism(s) texts. Shah does not allow the narrative to remain in any

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[50] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 27.
[51] Ibid., p. 27.
[52] Ibid., p. 31.
[53] Ibid., p. 56.
[54] Ibid., p. 57.

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way linear or stable, thus creating fluxes in time and space that emphasise the cyclical nature of history. The spectre of the hanged man is not a traumatic memory, as Aleyah was not present during the historical moment. She is transported as a witness to history and there is clearly a magical element as the past again intrudes physically upon the present: she 'tread[s] on something soft [and] reach[es] down [to] pick up a small bunch of threads'. These threads are real and are important for the remainder of the story where they seem to be a metaphor for the threads that bind the past to the present: '[t]hey are pale gold and coarse. Directly overhead is the beam where my grandfather threw the rope. I take these strands of rope to my room and put them away carefully in a corner of my suitcase'.[55] The fact that Aleyah picks up the rope and is able to keep it adds more mystery and disrupts the reader's ability to comprehend the interplay between the real and unreal, and the past and the present.

The relationships that the characters have with the past are constantly emphasised, as are their differing attitudes to it. Early in the text we hear Aleyah's mother state that '[t]he past is dead and buried and done with'; however, Aleyah is far from convinced of this:

> I wanted to tell her that this was not true, that the past was always there, that I'd seen the old world whole and living right in front of me. I thought everyone's eyes could do this, that it stood to reason that nothing lived could ever be laid aside and forgotten. To my child's mind this made perfect sense, that we carried around inside us the voices, the stories, all the history that lay behind us and that without these we would be ghosts without form or substance, nothing but transparent shapes inhabiting the moonlight.[56]

For Aleyah the past is somehow concurrent with the present because it forms who we are and is the source of our identities as individuals, family groups, communities and nations. She is aware that the roots of stability lie in the past but so do the tensions and secrets that destabilise families, communities and societies. Unlike her mother and her aunts, she has had the privilege of higher education — '[y]ou're a modern woman, educated and so on'[57] — her work and personal problems are firmly situated in the present but she consistently emphasises the importance of the past in order to understand present-day life. Her family believe that the past should be left alone and that uncomfortable realities should be obscured, particularly from those outside of the immediate family; however, Aleyah firmly states to the other women in the family that '[i]t never ends […] The past is always here. It shapes us [and] walks with us'.[58]

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[55] Ibid., p. 58.
[56] Ibid., p. 12.
[57] Ibid., p. 151.
[58] Ibid., p. 170.

Aleyah undergoes a transformation due to her education and life in England. When she returns to Guyana she notes how the word 'home' is a word that 'holds such magic', as it conjures vivid memories of the past that seem to bleed into the present. She can see how her personal story is in no way original and that anyone who hears it 'know[s] a similar tale already, a tale of love lost, and may even have been waiting all these years for the past to catch up and spin itself out again'.[59] The cyclical nature of history is particularly apparent to this modern woman who has studied and formed economic theories regarding developing countries and social justice. She has seen the impact of corruption and in-fighting on the poor and dispossessed of developing countries while being engaged in projects funded by international aid from developed countries. If the lessons of history are not learned, there is always a possibility that history will repeat itself. Aleyah recognises the tensions and points of friction that lead to violence and prevent social progress: '[e]veryone wants the little for themselves, so the seams of race, religion and culture run red with battles for the spoils. Here, it is race, and our battle does nothing to improve our lot'.[60] She returns from the developed Western world and declares ironically: 'I might have gone away and changed the patterns of my life but here the rhythms have stayed the same. It is satisfying to know that there is such steadfastness'.[61] For Aleyah, who has been abroad for many years, the importance of stability and understanding history is a way of dealing with the instability of the modern capitalist world (something overtly demonstrated through the character of her ambitious but failing bank-worker husband).

The events depicted in this novel stretch over three generations. During these years, there were many socio-political and cultural changes in the country. Following independence, the Guyanese were engaged in a process described by President Burnham[62] as '"aimed at eradicating the old colonial and capitalist values and introducing and emphasizing new and relevant ones"'.[63] However, at the time of the novel's writing, the government of Guyana was extremely authoritarian and a great deal of social inequality existed in the country. Real change came only after Burnham's death in 1985, heralding a 'much-awaited return of normalcy, democracy, civility, and national self-respect for [the] Guyanese, both at home and abroad'.[64] Shah's novel is set during this transitional period,

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[59] Ibid., p. 141.

[60] Ibid., p. 142.

[61] Ibid., p. 140.

[62] President Forbes Burnham was the first president of Guyana.

[63] Burnham qtd in Moe Taylor, '"Only a Disciplined People Can Build a Nation": North Korean Mass Games and Third Worldism In Guyana, 1980–1992', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 13.4 (2015), 1–25 (p. 15).

[64] Dennis Conway, 'Pursuing an Appropriate Development Model for Caribbean Small Islands:

before and after Burnham's rule (and the associated 'kick-down-the-door crime'[65] described by Aleyah's father), and overtly engages with these socio-political issues, including 'the fact that Guyana is a multiethnic society, a reality captured in description of the country as "The Land of Six Peoples"'.[66] Within the text we see the frictions caused by problematic race relations and the clash between socialist and capitalist forces as the nation develops. Thus, *A Silent Life* 'consciously highlights the gaps in the colonial archive, while also dispelling the stereotypic image of the Indo-Caribbean woman's passive circumscription with an insular domesticity'.[67] Aleyah's political awareness and activism is inspired by her grandmother's past political activities, described by Aleyah's great aunt Khadijah as 'socialism this and socialism that'.[68] In London, while reading *The Communist Manifesto*, Aleyah is transported back in time to a rally at which her grandmother holds the stage: 'voices reach clear into [her] rose-covered room […] the pages of the book flutter'.[69] The assembled workers are clearly angry and rail against the ruling elite who 'keep us poor and powerless.' The government are described as 'Bullies!' and people shout about how:

> 'They keep us weak.
> They keep us beggars.
> So they can stay masters.'

In response to such calls, Aleyah's grandmother declares 'you demand […] dignity and fairness. You are not alone! Together you have power!'[70] During her time in England, particularly during her studies as she receives letters from home that describe the tensions and fears that exist in her home country, Aleyah begins to see the need to engage actively in bringing about change. She recognises her country as one with 'a history that has been dictated by the imperatives of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and oppression',[71] and one

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Can Past Experience Help Subvert the Neo-Liberal Agenda?', paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, XX International Congress (Guadalajara, Mexico, 1997), pp. 1–37 (p. 7).

[65] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 81.

[66] Kalowatie Deonandan, 'Guyana's PPP: From Socialism to National Democracy', in *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, ed. by Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close, and Gary Prevost (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 107–131 (p. 110). The main ethnic groups are 'Amerindian, African, Chinese, East Indian, English, and Portuguese'. See Peter Hitchcock, *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)' p. 53.

[67] Mariam Pirbhai, 'Recasting *Jahaji-Bhain*: Plantation History and the Indo-Caribbean Women's Novel in Trinidad, Guyana and Martinique', in *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature*, ed. by Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 25–47 (p. 39). Mariam Pirbhai (2013) further argues 'Nani's involvement in the labor movement […] can be said to have a historical corollary in Nelly Sudeen, the first Indo-Guyanese woman to publicly engage in labor advocacy in the 1930s to early 1940s' (p. 39).

[68] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 18.

[69] Ibid., p. 69.

[70] Ibid., p. 70.

[71] Deonandan, p. 109.

that is 'steeped in an economic quagmire'.[72] The novel registers these realities, the pain of transition, the need to look to the past to build a future. Shah's *A Silent Life* registers the impact of modernity on the daily life experiences of the modern Muslim Guyanese community (at home and abroad) through the representation of the trajectory of gender role changes.

Such gender role changes are bound up with wider transformations in the socio-economic sphere. Silvia Federici (2004) notes how 'primitive accumulation' — a term 'upon which the development of capitalist relations was premised' — involves 'the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women's labor and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force'; this required 'the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged-work and their subordination to men' as well as 'the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers'.[73] For Federici, this is not a recent phenomenon in capitalist history but has 'accompanied every phase of capitalist globalization, including the present one' where 'the continuous expulsion of farmers from the land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times'.[74] Thus, Federici asserts, '[i]f it is true that in capitalist society sexual identity became the carrier of specific work-functions, then gender should not be considered a purely cultural reality, but should be treated as a specification of class relations.'[75] Federici's argument is particularly useful for reading Shah because *A Silent Life* explores gender roles within the context of a plantation work force. Aleyah's great grandparents were imported indentured labourers, her great grandmother employed as 'a weeder, helping to clear the fields. It was a poor life'.[76] The realities of a patriarchal order are emphasised throughout the novel and we hear of 'many sessions of complaint and commiseration'[77] among the women in the family; indeed, Aleyah's mother describes her experience of growing up and being restricted regarding her life choices:

> She [Aleyah's grandmother] told me it was no use for any girl child to learn to read books or have ideas more big than their bellies, because all you'd ever need to know was how to make children and look after your husband and do housework.[78]

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[72] Ibid., p. 118.
[73] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 12.
[74] Ibid., pp. 12–13.
[75] Ibid., p. 14.
[76] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 179.
[77] Ibid., p. 47.
[78] Ibid., p. 29.

The traditional role of women is changing in Aleyah's time, and many become more involved in education and the professions. Indeed, one of the characters makes this explicitly clear when they say that 'the position of women in this country really changed'.[79] What this 'change' or transition actually means in practice is partly signalled in Aleyah's seeking higher education and later gaining high-status employment. Her husband, however, has a traditional outlook and asks: 'since when do you make the decisions for the family? I'm the head of this house. You go where I go. It's never the other way round'.[80] As Lee (2017) notes, 'Aleyah had assumed that Dean was a "modern man," who would support her employment' and 'can help her balance tradition and modernity'.[81] This shifting of women's role in society is a constant preoccupation throughout the novel. Unlike her mother, who is a housewife, and the other women in her community, Aleyah is an example of an educated Muslim modern woman.

If Sufism is part of what it is to be a modern Indo-Guyanese Muslim, Hindu culture and heritage are also integrated in this formation of both her identity and the novel's wider content. In one of the scenes where Aleyah converses with Miss Rani, Aleyah is reminded that she not only belongs to a Muslim family but also her Hindu ancestor who 'would have known [...] the *Svetasvatara Upanished*'.[82] In fact, Aleyah's great great grandfather (Janki) is a Muslim married to a Hindu bride (Gaitree). Therefore, *A Silent Life* shows different layers that form this specific Muslim community. Although both novels portray communities that share one aspect of faith (Islam) as an identity, both depict completely different environments, attitudes toward faith or religion and views of modernity, while recalling the past in order to negotiate the present.

Throughout *A Silent Life* there are always fears, uncertainties, and silences reflecting the stark realities of living in a society going through a process of uneven development. The problems of the past, whether in the family or wider society, are often ignored by characters in the novel in an attempt to move forward; for example, Aleyah's father instructs her to 'study hard and you make your own life. You don't worry your head about all that went on here [...] You leave all that alone'.[83] However, both Aleyah and the narrative resist these calls to ignore history and look blindly to the future. Shah's consistent shifting between tenses does not allow the story to maintain a linear trajectory and thus mirrors Aleyah's

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[79] Ibid., p. 166.
[80] Ibid., pp. 123–24.
[81] Lee, p. 88.
[82] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 136.
[83] Ibid., p. 33.

attitudes and experiences, reminding the reader of the importance of understanding the past in order to deal with the present and consider ways to prepare for the future. Indeed, Aleyah is extremely aware of the impact of the past, not only as something to draw lessons from but also as a potential source of infection and disruption.

When talking to a fellow student in London, we hear how she 'had wanted him to tell [her] that the rope that dangled from the sky was a relic of the past and not a portent of the future'.[84] Once again, Shah is demonstrating that the ties that bind families, communities and nations are made up of various threads connecting the past and present, and which have the ability to shape the future. This is emphasised time and again in the novel, a further example being when Miss Rani tells Aleyah:

> […] many are afraid of change. To take a chance on something new, only the brave dare. We all want the future to be better and brighter, no? It's a sweet and simple sentiment, but just as a diamond finds its sparkle only after it's cut and honed, so too the future is shaped.[85]

This shaping of the future must come from an understanding of the past and this also requires a re-evaluation of socio-political structures and power relations with regard to race, gender and labour conditions. Aleyah's grandmother's activism brings criticism from certain sectors of society who believe she has transgressed by taking on a male role ('She's forgetting her place'[86]). The failure of her husband to step forward as an effective mouthpiece ('He needs his wife to come and help him out now')[87] causes friction between the pair and leads to his rapid decline as he becomes emasculated; however, he understands that she needs to speak out: '[i]f you ever stop-up your words they'll choke you. You aren't like the other women round here'.[88] Parts of the community are not ready for change and hold on to traditions and religious teachings in order to resist it. As Aleyah's grandfather explains:

> In the Bible and the Koran and the Gita, it's the men who preach and do battle and the women – they keep to their things. So it's been, so it's always been, but you, Baby, you want to turn everything on its head. […] You want to breathe out words that shake up the world and burn a hole in the sky.[89]

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[84] Ibid., p. 72.
[85] Ibid., p. 135.
[86] Ibid., p. 26.
[87] Ibid., p. 26
[88] Ibid., p. 28.
[89] Ibid., p. 28.

Even the forceful female activist finds herself questioning her stance and resistance to rigid gender roles held in place by patriarchal institutions and power structures: 'I clean forgot myself, forgot who I was. […] I'm sorry, so sorry. I won't talk to anyone but you from now on. I'll stop-up my mouth'.[90] We can see here that the deployment of time-slips and the interplay of past and present in this novel is an extremely effective way of emphasising the central theme of the novel, which is the constant need for understanding the past in order to negotiate the present. This is further enhanced by Shah's use of cultural elements to show the collisions between past and present, tradition and modernity, and religious and secular attitudes in a developing nation.

Shah's *A Silent Life* is another example of a text that can be described in the terms of Moretti's triangle ('foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*').[91] While the novel contains elements of the international form of magical realism, it is also made up of many aspects of both Guyanan culture in general as well as specific Islamic elements. Aleyah seems to examine her society and culture in more nuanced ways than some of the other characters due to her vivid visions of the past and her understanding of history. Consequently, she seems more equipped, as a modern woman, to look to the future. Shah's *A Silent Life* shares with many Muslim magical realist texts echoes of Sufism. Previous critical discussions on *A Silent Life* have focused on the *jahaji-bhain*'s experience appearing in the novel or how a 'combination of *kala pani*[92] discourses' with elements of 'magical realism produces a postmemory of indenture'.[93] A consideration of Muslim histories of indenture might bridge these two points. It could be argued that postmemory of indentured labour and Muslim magical realism(s) are mutually exclusive. Yet Muslim magical realism(s) can perhaps offer a different way of thinking about that postmemory of indentured labour and *kala pani* by articulating the Muslim historical experience of indentured labour. However, the focus here is to examine the combinations of religious traditions and the modern in *A Silent Life* as one form of Muslim magical realism(s).

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[90] Ibid., p. 28.
[91] Moretti, 'Conjectures', p. 65.
[92] The term *Jahaji-bhain*, as Kavita Ashana Singh (2016) explains, 'draws on ethnicity, community, and indenture.' It 'comes primarily from literary expressions of Indo-Caribbean feminism and echoes thus the emphasis on self-representation. […] Loosely meaning "ship sister," referring to the ships on which women travelled to the Caribbean from India, the term first references women's solidarity formed during indenture, in suffering and loss, but also expresses "a shared collective destiny fueled by deeply engrained social and cultural principles of communalism" […] The *jahaji-bhain* collective, a means to feminist empowerment *within* the ethnic community, is the support system which then allows Indian women to resist and transgress both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic, national, or transnational forms of gendered control and violence.' See Kavita Ashana Singh, 'Comparative Caribbean Feminisms: *Jahaji-bhain* in Carnival', in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, ed. by Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 133–51 (pp. 138–39). *Kala pani*, according to Lee (2017), 'is translated as "black waters," and signifies the loss of caste from crossing the ocean' (footnote 4, p. 91).
[93] Lee, p. 90.

Shah presents a work full of sadness, fear and trauma, mainly centred on Aleyah's grandmother: 'deep wells of sadness that went clear to the centre of the universe. Nani was clinging to the edges of those wells and I sensed that if she ever let go she would fall and fall'.[94] In her introduction to *Islam and the Americas* (2015), a book in which the contributors show Muslims 'as creative actors participating in the making of the societies of which they are a part',[95] Aisha Khan asserts that 'Islam makes its presence felt in both direct and oblique ways; its definition and significance are matters of interpretation that vary with the historical moment, particular relations of power, social formation, and Zeitgeist' in these societies.[96] Such a presence is also articulated from the first page of the novel. We are told that Nani is in danger of succumbing to her sadness, but '[t]he humming kept her safe, […] anchored her to this side of the world'.[97] Aleyah's grandmother is humming the Sufi *Zikr* — which is the core of Sufi ritual[98] — and this keeps her alive: '[i]f the humming ever stopped, Nani would disappear'.[99] As the novel progresses, the reader gets more details about the humming and how this represents a link with the past, tradition and heritage; for example, Aleyah reflects on how:

> Prayers can sound so pretty, and when you hear them singing in the old Arabic way it makes you remember that you belong to a long line of family that goes all the way back to the time when the world has just started spinning round.[100]

While the use of the word 'spinning' is clearly related to the creation of the world, it can also be seen as a reference to Sufism. The whirling of the Sufis is a 'repeat[ing of] […] zikr as they turn,' this is done to 'empty their hearts of all but the thought of God and whirl in the ecstatic movement of His breath'.[101] These Sufi prayers become part of her identity even if she does not understand them. We see this as Aleyah develops and grows later in the novel, recalling these prayers at key moments in her life:

> I throw myself into a big armchair and say a prayer of thanks, doing so guiltily. I feel as though a prayer has been answered, though I never knelt or bowed my head or held my hands before me and asked for any help or guidance. But now I place my hands

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[94] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 7.

[95] Aisha Khan, 'Introduction: A Storied Hemisphere', in *Islam and the Americas*, ed. by Aisha Khan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), pp. 1–22 (p. 3).

[96] Ibid., p. 1.

[97] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 7.

[98] Nicolaas Biegman, *Living Sufism: Rituals in the Middle East and the Balkans* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), p. 11.

[99] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 7.

[100] Ibid., p. 30.

[101] Shems Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes: Being an Account of the Sufi Order Known as the Mevlevis and its Founder the Poet and Mystic Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 26.

together, prayer-folded in my lap, and hum one of Nani's Arabic chants, hoping it is one of praise and thanks.[102]

This passage shows that Aleyah is not a practicing Muslim due to the fact she never 'knelt' (*ruku*) or 'bowed' (*sujud*), which are both part of Muslim daily prayers; she does not know what kind of prayer it is but hums it anyway. Although Aleyah cannot remember the prayers exactly, she can feel their power:

> Darkness descends. The world has fallen down a hole and I with it. I want to sing one of Nani's prayers as I fall, but I do not remember the words and can only hum the keening tune. I make the slightest rustle of sound and fall into the long-ago music like a leaf borne steadily, lazily downward by a gentle wind.[103]

This darkness echoes Sufi spiritual meditation and is another example of how the magical and Sufism blend to form Muslim magical realism(s). For the Sufis 'creating complete darkness in the meditation place, that means a complete absence of physical light. It does not mean an absence of spiritual light'.[104] Aleyah engages with the Sufi tradition in England with her boys: 'I sit and watch them and hum all of Nani's prayers so that the music fills the room and makes a blanket of sound that I hope will keep them safe'.[105] In her most miserable time in England, caused by the tension between her and her husband Dean, she questions her behaviour:

> I did not set out to be a sinner, but a sinner's eyes look back from the scrap of mirror above the small dressing table, its frame glued fast to the wall. They are dark rimmed and sunk deep in the skull. They are hollow and empty, peering at horizons that shift further and further towards a place where land and sky meet as one element. I am banished here, a disembodied being in a place without shape, colour, texture. My sin has stripped me of every feature and I am one with this nothingness. But it is comfortable.[106]

The state that Aleyah experiences at this point in the novel echoes the Sufi's 'constant renewal of [the] self' expressed in both '*fana*' and *baqa*', "annihilation" and "subsistence"'.[107] In Sufism this 'station of no station, one continually encounters *fana*, […] nothingness; and yet (paradoxically) one also encounters *baqa*, [...] presence. This

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[102] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 116.
[103] Ibid., p. 123.
[104] Sayyid Nurjan Mirahmadi and Hedieh Mirahmadi, *The Healing Power of Sufi Meditation* (Fenton, MI: Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of America, 2005), p. 46.
[105] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 137.
[106] Ibid., p. 119.
[107] Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide,* p. 56.

combination avoids the conceptualized state of complete nihilism'.[108] Aleyah's pain and
guilt have taken her beyond immediate reality and have stripped her of her sense of self,
leaving her numb in a state of 'nothingness' but not in a nihilistic sense. This echoes her
mother's words: '[y]ou need faith not understanding'.[109] Sufi meditation therefore creates a
liminal space of here/not here, real/unreal. Sufis, such as Ibn Arabi, develop this notion of
nothingness. In an account of Ibn Arabi's ideas regarding this in-between state (*khayāl*),
Chittick (2003), notes that:

> [Ibn Arabi] insists that everything that the word [*khayāl*] properly designates falls into
> the realm of the in-between. […] The faculty of imagination lies between sense
> perception and the intellect. But the greatest of all in-between realms is the universe.
> The cosmos in its entirety is an image suspended between Absolute Being and pure
> nothingness. [110]

Having gone through this humming and meditating process, Aleyah feels more
'comfortable' even as she seems to be losing her core identity. She is able to find a balance
between being modern and connecting with a form of Islam that offers her some peace
without being overly pious. Sufism in the novel, as in the other novels discussed in this
thesis, help us to think about the connection between the worldly and other worldly in new
ways.

This section has shown how *A Silent Life* is a novel that contains elements of
precapitalist (Sufism) tradition within capitalist modernity, and also offers a way to revisit
the past in order to examine the culture of capitalist modernity in Guyana. This is done via
a narrative structure that re-presents past moments in the present in order to vividly
demonstrate the overlapping relationship between them. The next section aims to
demonstrate how such ideas are deployed in Pamuk's *The Black Book*.

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[108] Meena Sharify-Funk and William Rory Dickson 'Traces of Panentheism in Islam: Ibn al-'Arabi and the
Kaleidoscope of Being', in *Panentheism across the World's Traditions*, ed. by Loriliai Biernacki and Philip
Clayton (Oxford and New York: *Oxford University Press*, 2014), pp. 142–60 (p. 156).
[109] Shah, *A Silent Life*, p. 170.
[110] William C. Chittick, 'Imagination as Theophany in Islam', *Temenos Academy*, 6 (2003), 65–82 (p. 72).
Chittick explains that '*khayāl* is not too far from the basic meaning of the word *imagination* in English. There
is one connotation of the English word, however, that is not present in the Arabic' (p. 66). Chittick further adds
that 'one meaning of the word *khayāl* is the faculty of imagination'; however, '[w]hen we look at the non-
technical use of the word, we find that the earlier and more basic sense of *khayāl* is not "imagination" but
"image"' (p. 66).

4.2   Ottoman Past, Tradition, and Capitalist Modernity in *The Black Book*

The Black Book is a magical realist novel which is set in Turkey's capital city Istanbul during the 1970s. It can also be described as a detective novel as the protagonist, Galip, is searching for his wife, Ruya, and her half-brother, Celâl, both of whom seem to have disappeared. Many elements of *The Black Book* show how modernity has impacted upon modern Turkish life. Like *A Silent Life*, Pamuk's work recalls the past and how important an understanding of history is in order to negotiate the modern world. However, while *A Silent Life* portrays this using both dialogue or involuntary transportation back in time, Pamuk depends more on objects and places to emphasise the novel's main themes, such as the mannequins and the contents of Alaadin's shop. Material things in this book are mainly a reminder of the past and sometimes contain extraordinary elements. Pamuk emphasises the existence of the past within the modern moment by showing how the past surrounds us in the material culture of the object world, and that if we can see it and touch it, the realities of the present may also be more clearly understood.

Turkey, as with many countries that are home to Muslim communities, has recently gone through a process of modernisation. However, in Turkey the transition appears more complex due to the changes before and after Kemalist reforms. The role of religion within the modernisation process can be understood in the terms of three distinct stages: in the late Ottoman Empire, Islam/religion was 'a linking institution between the center and the periphery […] despite the secularization process'.[111] After the establishment of the new republic, the role of religion was relegated to the past: 'being modern means getting away from Islamic identity'. The forces of secularisation may have led to a decline in religious engagement and influence, but religion is still a part of modern Turkish life, even if it remains on 'the periphery'. By establishing the multi-party system, the third stage of modernisation saw a backlash against secularisation wherein the 'Islamic movements have carried out religion from "private space" to "public space"'.[112] With all the political changes associated with modernisation, whether before or after the new Republic was formed, it seems that religion though moving from public to private or vice versa was and has continued to be an important part of modern Turkish identity and everyday life.

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[111] Malik Abdukadirov, 'The Place of Religion in Turkish Society: An Analysis Through the Lens of the Center-Periphery Thesis', *Journal of International Social Research*, 10.54 (2017), 517–22 (pp. 521–22) <https://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.20175434615>.
[112] Ibid., p. 522.

Though the novel shows the inevitable modernisation of modern Turkey, at the same time it emphasises that religion and the past are major components of this modern identity. Thus, the novel registers this co-existence of the modern and the religious and the real and unreal. Pamuk's magical realist text contains more of the real than the magical, but the magical appears at important moments and illuminates central themes of the novel. The text is replete with references to the Sufi realm, which adds layers of mystery to the story. We hear that it is not a form of escapism but rather 'it [is] a happy realm'.[113] Sufism can thus be seen as a means by which to feel comfortable within the modern capitalist world.

Previous critical readings of *The Black Book* have framed the text as a space of negotiation between a rather generalised neo-Orientalist idea of the East and the West. Reviewing early scholarship on Pamuk's work, Aylin Bayrakceken and Don Randall (2005) note that his work is often read as representing a 'clashing' and 'differences' between East and West.[114] Kürşad Ertuğrul (2009) concurs with this reading and argues that Pamuk 'expresses the conventional idea of Turkish modernization in which modernization coincides with Westernization'.[115] For critics such as Bayrakceken and Randall, and Erdağ Göknar (2013), such a reading is misleading. Bayrakceken and Randal state that Pamuk's Istanbul-centred examination of East-West 'is not properly speaking a matter of "encounter" but of long-standing contact, intimate engagement', and that Istanbul should be seen 'as a site of exceptionally intense and long-standing cross-cultural interactions'.[116] Similarly, Göknar notes how '[a]nalyses of Pamuk's work often stop at the level of the binary opposition, declaring […] for example, his writing illuminates an "East/West problematic"'.[117] Such an argument regarding the limitations of previous scholarship is important and this chapter will also step beyond this binary opposition.

In this chapter, Pamuk's novel is read in terms of the singular modernity and unevenness that is registered by this author, and in other examples of Muslim magical realism(s),and shows the specific ways in which the modern and the religious are combined. Such texts also demonstrate how Muslims negotiate capitalist modernity and how understanding the past is an important aspect of this. Göknar's elucidation on the

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[113] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 115.
[114] Aylin Bayrakceken and Don Randall, 'Meetings of East and West: Orhan Pamuk's Istanbulite Perspective', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 46.3 (2005), 191–204 (p. 192) < https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.46.3.191-204>.
[115] Kürşad Ertuğrul, 'A Reading of the Turkish Novel: Three Ways of Constituting the "Turkish Modern"', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41.4 (2009), 635–52 (p. 646) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743809990109>.
[116] Bayrakceken and Randall, p. 197.
[117] Erdağ Göknar, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of The Turkish Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 33.

'resurgence' of Sufism in Pamuk's fiction and Turkish literary production is noteworthy.[118] In an earlier article, Göknar (2012) notes:

> The recuperation of Sufism in literature is a topic that demands further study. […] Sufism as a cultural influence has made a resurgence in Turkish literature since 1980 through the influence of Pamuk's work. This aspect of *din* is now commonplace.[119]

Such a statement is significant for this chapter's argument (and the thesis as a whole) as it seeks to consider this 'resurgence' not only in Pamuk's work but also other Muslim literary productions. However, Göknar's later assertion, in his book (2013), to explain why the resurgence of Sufism in contemporary Turkish literature occurred seems to fall short. Göknar sets his reading within the arena of Turkish literary production while also noting the influence of Jorge Luis Borges on Pamuk. For Göknar, 'Borges [was a] source of the literary possibilities in Islamic texts and mystical literature for innovations in the modern novel'.[120] This scholar sees Borges as a major influence on Pamuk's work and how this work in turn has influenced Turkish literary production: '[Pamuk's novels] establish culturally productive relations between *din* and *devlet*'.[121] If this is the case in the Turkish literary arena, this hardly explains the situation in Muslim fiction in other parts of the world where authors also choose to incorporate the religious into the everyday reality of modern life. Hence, instead of trying to find out who influences whom in order to explain this phenomenon, we need to look at it on a broader level.

It is important to consider the impact of singular modernity (as explained in more detail in chapter one of this thesis) and the religious in order to read Muslim modern fiction, including Pamuk's. Karim Mattar (2013) rightly criticises Ian Almond's (2003) reading of Pamuk's *The Black Book*. For Mattar, Almond attributes 'aspects of the novel's source material, specifically its treatment of the Islamic sects Sufism and Hurufism, yet argues this treatment plays into Pamuk's postmodernist destabilization of the myths of religious truth, identity, and so forth'.[122] Mattar goes further to argue that Almond misreads Pamuk.

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[118] Göknar (2013) sets his reading within Turkish literary production and Pamuk's collective works and presents a concept of '*din ü devlet* (the "religion" of Islam and the secular "state")' during the period of Ottoman rule to clarify his argument that 'literature mediates between the discursive power of religious tradition and secular modernity in Turkish cultural logic.' This concept explains 'the political authority that rests in the mutual dependency of Islam and the secular state tradition' (31).

[119] Erdağ Göknar, 'Secular Blasphemies: Orhan Pamuk and the Turkish Novel', *Novel*, 45.2 (2012), 301–26 (footnote 33, p. 320) < https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-1573985>.

[120] Göknar, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy*, p. 219.

[121] Ibid., p. 34.

[122] Karim Mattar, 'The Middle Eastern Novel in English: Literary Transnationalism After Orientalism' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 2013), p. 149.

Specifically, Almond's argument on 'dualism' in *The Black Book* where he states: 'these twin poles of East-West, Feeling-Reason, Spirit-Matter are represented by the figures of Galip and Jelal'.[123] Mattar quotes from Pamuk's statement in a *Paris Review* interview (2005) wherein the author explains that there is '"a *combination* […] of the Eastern past and the Western present"'.[124] Hence, Mattar notes, '[r]ecognizing the past within the conditions of the present, it both allegorizes and embodies Pamuk's vision for the future of Turkish identity'.[125] Although Mattar's argument emphasises issues of translation that 'replicate translational prejudices against Islamic source material',[126] here the important part of his argument is the assertion that *The Black Book* is a novel that 'model[s] a more historically sensitive reconciliation of past and present, 'East' and 'West', and so forth'.[127] This chapter contends that this 'combination' and Moretti's 'compromise' is what defines Muslim magical realism(s). However, rather than reading Pamuk within the context of Turkish literary production (as does Göknar) or those of the Middle East (as does Mattar), I suggest that Pamuk can be read within the framework of combined and uneven development articulated via world-system analysis.[128] *The Black Book*, as with other Muslim magical realism(s) texts, registers the combination of and negotiation between the modern and the religious. The past is a key to understanding the present rather than seeing it as an obstacle to progress. Sufism plays a part in this process of negotiation as it does not pull away from religious identity and at the same time it reflects some ideas of the modern, thus offering a middle ground between modernity and tradition.

The Black Book registers the changes brought about and the impact of modernity on every aspect of life in modern Turkey. The following passage is indicative of this:

> An American movie would come to town and every youth in the city wanted dark glasses; something would come out in the papers and all the women wanted lip gloss or all the men wanted skullcaps that made them look like imams; but most of the time these fads that spread through the city like a plague seemed to rise up out of nowhere. How else to explain why thousands, tens of thousands of people would suddenly decide that their every radio, radiator, rear window, room, worktable, and counter had to be adorned by the same wooden sailboat? How was a man to understand why every mother and child, man and woman, old and young, suddenly craved the same picture of an innocent child with a single tear rolling down his very European face, or why this face was suddenly staring at you from every wall and door in the city? This country

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[123] The name is spelled differently in the two translations. Ian Almond, 'Islam, Melancholy, and Sad, Concrete Minarets: The Futility of Narratives in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*', *New Literary History*, 34.1 (2003), 75–90 (p. 78) <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2003.0002>.
[124] Mattar, pp. 152–53.
[125] Ibid., p. 153.
[126] Ibid., p. 146.
[127] Ibid., p. 167.
[128] See chapter one of this thesis.

was … these people were … It was I who completed his sentence — the word he was looking for was *strange*, or *incomprehensible*, or even *frightening*.[129]

This passage shows Pamuk's recognition of the shock of this modernisation that Turkish society has undergone/is undergoing. The transition to the new world of capitalist modernity and its associated consumer culture invades the society as 'a plague' but the source of this is unknown: it 'seemed to rise up out of nowhere' in a '*strange*' '*incomprehensible*' and '*frightening*' manner. This, for example, is seen in how the owners of the mannequin shop react to the world that is changing around them:

> Bedii Usta and his son could not at first figure out whom these people were imitating, whom they had taken as their models for change. […] as if in obedience to a secret and invisible master, they were changing, disappearing, and a whole new set of gestures was taking their place.[130]

These descriptions are the features of capitalism that are entering and being projected as a model for change. For the father 'these [are] new fake gestures'[131] that he is unable to comprehend, and he dies without reconciling with these inevitable changes. Ultimately, the son declares: 'My father never stopped hoping that our people would be so happy one day that they'd stop trying to imitate other people!' However, as the character Celâl notes, 'they hoped in vain!'[132] The concern here is about imitating or copying modern Western ways:

> […] as if copying the Americans ever did us any good. What I've learned is this: Those who say that people come in pairs are wrong. No two people are alike. Every one of our poor girls is poor in her own way. Each of our stars is alone in the sky, a destitute starlet like no other.[133]

Even if American capitalist hegemony influences the modern Turkish lifestyle, copying Americans is not seen as healthy. However, Turkey is not America; therefore, modern Turkish identity needs to be seen as being made up of culturally specific elements that shape it such as heritage, the past, and religion, as well as modern cultural influences. As the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) notes '[g]lobalization does not necessarily […] imply homogenization or Americanization' it is rather that 'different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently'.[134] For Appadurai 'renditions of American popular

[129] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, pp. 45–46.
[130] Ibid., p. 63.
[131] Ibid., p. 64.
[132] Ibid., p. 65.
[133] Ibid., p. 104.
[134] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, vol.1, Public Worlds (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 17.

songs are […] more disturbingly faithful to their originals, than they are in the United States today. An entire nation seems to have learned to mimic Kenny Rogers and the Lennon sisters'. Appadurai notes that it's possible to emulate American popular culture in the Philippines whilst every other aspect of the lives of these songs is not in 'synchrony' with American culture, values, history or ideology.[135] Turkish copies of American culture are perhaps similar to those in the global South: they make American culture into a part of their own culture by indigenising it, so it's not exactly American anymore. To show these different layers of modern Turkey, Pamuk presents vivid descriptions of modern Istanbul. Ruya's notebook which Galip finds during his search for her is not merely a random collection of thoughts and observations but a specific set of combinations of the local and global: it is a 'Turkish literature notebook whose margins were decorated with sketches of models and names of international film stars, along with Turkey's own best-looking singers and athletes'. One such note refers to a text by Sheikh Galip, the late eighteenth-century Turkish Sufi poet: 'They may ask about *Love and Beauty* in the exam'.[136] *The Black Book* is a work that accommodates these elements. The novel and Ruya's notebook are manifestations of this amalgamation of the co-existence of the global and local. This amalgamation can also be noted in the description of the city of Istanbul, which is magnificent in the way it shows this co-existence:

> Soon the city was sketching in its details; among the walls, chimneys, and rooftops they could now see billboards advertising banks and cigarettes, and as their giant letters emerged from the mist, the imam's tinny voice came bursting through the loudspeaker right next to them.[137]

We see in Pamuk's description how the modern (billboards advertising banks and cigarettes) and the religious (the imam calling for a prayer using modern technology) are juxtaposed. Hence, the novel registers the co-existence of the modern and religious within its setting. Pamuk presents this combination not only via the novel's structure but also through sensory details that are seen (in the form of the advertising of a bank) and heard (the calling to prayer). The novel never implies that these changes are damaging or should be resisted but rather we see that any failure to integrate with these forces of change will lead eventually to

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[135] Ibid., p. 29.

[136] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 48. A number of scholars writing on Pamuk's *The Black Book*, such as Sooyong Kim (1993), note that *Hüsn-ü Aşk*, translated into English as *Love and beauty,* is the masterpiece story by Sheikh Galip the Turkish Sufi poet. See Sooyong Kim, 'Master and Disciple: Sufi Mysticism as an Interpretive Framework for Orhan Pamuk's "Kara Kitap"', *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 17.2 (1993), 23–42 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43384432> [accessed 23 February 2019].

[137] Ibid., p. 199.

hopeless desperation, as in the case of Bedii Usta and his failure to reconcile the changes brought by the forces of capitalist modernity.

Such inescapable changes have to be linked to the past to be comprehensible. However, modernisation holds inevitable dangers: 'those charged with this task would quickly guess that the only way forward was to rip away our memories, our past, our history, leaving us with nothing to share but our misfortunes'.[138] The past and cultural heritage should not be ignored because '[t]o be a bad imitation of someone else, wasn't that better than being someone who'd lost his past, his memory, his dreams?'[139] Capitalist modernity creates an amalgamation of the old with the new, Galip has lost his sense of identity and must rediscover it via a process of assimilation. It is therefore essential that he connects with the past as the forces of modernity reshape his world. Rather than presenting the past as being in conflict with modernity, Pamuk emphasises that the two are in a dialogue: 'there is always someone willing to rummage through the forbidden pages of the past in search of treasure'.[140] Such treasure is presented as a way to the truth. Galip is not only searching for his missing wife and her half-brother (Celâl) but also the past and how history has shaped the city.

In this way, Pamuk combines the new with the old, the past with the present, by presenting the magical aspects of places such as the mannequin shop. Magical elements are found in the description of the items in the mannequin shop, the goods contained in Alaaddin's shop, 'the eye' or moments that disrupt the reader's sense of 'realness' as the story unfolds. Thus, instead of consistently deploying overtly magical scenes, Pamuk switches between the magical and the real. Indeed Gloria Fisk (2018) notes how Pamuk uses 'magical-realist devices [...] to make the limitations of translation and mimesis readily visible', and emphasises how '[t]hat quick alternation between the real world and its opposite is literalized in the structure of *The Black Book*, which separates the chapters that follow the fictional plot with diegetic newspaper accounts that impede it'.[141] Pamuk's alteration makes the reading experience unstable at every moment, shifting between styles, and moving backwards and forwards in time at the beginning of every chapter.

Pamuk also sometimes blurs the line between what can be described as the Sufi realm, the mysterious and magical or dreams, to leave the reader unsure about what is real and what is not. The shopkeeper Alaaddin reminds us of the story of Alaaddin and

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[138] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, pp. 126–27.
[139] Ibid., p. 194.
[140] Ibid., p. 208.
[141] Gloria Fisk, *Orhan Pamuk and the Good of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 77.

his magical lamp in *The Thousand and One Nights*.[142] Although we do not see supernatural creatures in this shop there is a sense of the magical being triggered in this place: 'Alâaddin's shop shimmering before their eyes like a fairy tale from a distant land. […] there was something surreal about Alâaddin, something that tugged at the boundaries of the known world and defied everyday logic'.[143] Pamuk links the classic story of Alaaddin with this shop and mixes elements of the magical with the real. Similarly, the mannequin shop is an eerie place: 'All around us were mannequins, squirming and fidgeting, hoping perhaps that by moving they might come to life.' The mannequins are 'possessed of a life force […] lit up with life. […] wanting to become part of this other world and know its secrets'.[144] The mannequins are created in the image of characters from the past and members of the public observed in Istanbul over decades.

However, the mannequins are not acceptable to retailers who want to project a modern image to their customers. The authenticity of the mannequins is such that people do not want to be reminded of their heritage as they attempt to look and act Western. This chimes with Galip's experiences during his search and exploration of his city that he now sees in vivid detail. We hear how 'the ghostly past was pressing down on him so hard his mind was spinning',[145] and Celâl's, in one of his articles, makes clear the pressing need to seek it out: 'I remember my own past and my own city, and as tears roll down my cheeks I make my slow and painful way back to my own neighbourhood, […] searching for my very past behind every door I open'.[146] The old ways and gestures captured by these mannequins are overtly linked to identity and Bedii Usta's son explains how 'that "special thing that makes us what we are" was buried inside these strange and dusty creatures'.[147] There is a sadness in these mannequins that is linked directly to spirituality, the past and identity. Celâl notes that they 'like all of us, had, […] caught by chance a glimpse of an inner essence, only to forget what it was. It was this lost memory that pained us, reduced us to ruins, though still we struggled to be ourselves'.[148] Again, Pamuk emphasises the importance of remembering the past and where we come from, in a work that consistently demonstrates the unstable nature of identity when faced with the forces of capitalist modernity. *The Black Book* registers such changes that take place in Istanbul in the image of the replacement mannequins that are more suited to modern tastes:

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[142] Sevinc Turkkan, 'Orhan Pamuk's Novels and their "Afterlife" In English and German Translations' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012), p. 125.
[143] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, pp. 41–42.
[144] Ibid., p. 62.
[145] Ibid., p. 242.
[146] Ibid., p. 249.
[147] Ibid., p. 61.
[148] Ibid., p. 64.

Twenty arduous years later, in the great westernizing wave of the early years of the Republic, when gentlemen threw aside their fezzes to don panama hats and ladies discarded their scarves in favor of low-slung high heels, mannequins began to appear in the display windows of the finest clothing stores along Beyoğlu Avenue.[149]

By emphasising that these changes of dress code are associated with the new mannequins' appearance in modern Istanbul the novel suggests the link between identity formation, the mannequins, marketing and consumption. William Leach (1993) argues that mannequins in general were associated with consumption and desire from the outset of the rise of capitalist consumer culture.[150] The mannequins described in *The Black Book* are uncanny figures. The older ones were too accurate and lifelike, and reflected an unwelcome image of and for the population of Istanbul. They seem to imbued with an older magic based on links to tradition and the layers of the city that stretch back far into the past. The new mannequins are uncanny because of the familiarity of Western cultural elements that are aspired to while remaining somewhat alien as the shoppers see a desired but inauthentic reflection. This reveals the ways in which the culture of capitalist modernity is also magical, promising transformation and cultural transcendence. As Eric Arnould et al. (2018) note 'magical thought and action, supposed by modernist theory to be in decline, is foundational in marketing practice'.[151] The mannequins in *The Black Book*, I argue, complicate the distinction between the culture of precapitalist tradition and capitalism. In doing so, the text also emphasises the coexistence of precapitalism within capitalist modernity.

A mysterious '*eye*' is given its own chapter in the novel. This strange presence has many connotations that can be identified as magic, but I am particularly interested in its association with Sufism. The eye, as Göknar (2013) notes, 'is described as possessing some divine qualities' and has 'a mystical perspective ("He")'.[152] This sacred idea is reproduced and commodified as the third/evil eye is ubiquitous in the marketplaces of Istanbul. This then could be seen as another example of capitalist modernity commodifying a precapitalist symbol. Cooper's (1998) account of the third eye of magical realism in West African fiction

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[149] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 60.
[150] See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), pp. 64 –67.
[151] Eric Arnould, Julien Cayla and Delphine Dion, 'Fetish, Magic, Marketing', in *Magical Capitalism: Enchantment, Spells, and Occult Practices in Contemporary Economies*, ed. by Brian Moeran and Timothy de Waal Malefyt (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 115– 136 (p. 115).
[152] Göknar, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy*, p. 214.

offers some suggestive pointers for reading Pamuk's account of the third eye; however, I argue that the third eye of *The Black Book* represents a more overtly, religious (Sufi) idea. In magical realism, Cooper notes, '[t]he goal of the third eye is to have the confidence to perceive the system and the humility to recognize that the vision of structure is mediated by the eye, in complex, but not altogether random ways'.[153] The *eye*, in *The Black Book* is being introduced as 'an *eye* [Celâl] met many years earlier, in a dark alley in the middle of the night'.[154] On one hand, this idea that an *eye* is watching echoes the *muraqabah* in Islam. This Arabic word means '"to watch , observe, regard attentively"' which is a 'technical spiritual term […] [for] a complete state of vigilant self-awareness in one's relationship with Allah in heart, mind, and body'.[155] At the core of *muraqabah* is the 'knowledge that Allah is always watching us at all times and, as a consequence, we develop greater attention and care for our own actions, thoughts, feelings, and inner states of being'.[156] This resembles the description of the *eye*: '[Celâl] felt as if there were an eye hanging over him, watching everything he did. But it did not belong to a fellow passenger, for they were all gazing absently at the crowds'.[157] Later, Celâl feels that he is 'under the eye's constant surveillance'[158]; however, '[t]here was nothing frightening, ugly, or comical about this eye; nor was it alien or cold; […] [t]he eye knew me, and I knew the eye. What's more, we'd known each other for quite some time'.[159] This sense of a long-term relationship parallels the notion of *muraqabah* and the lifelong scrutiny of Allah. Yet this eye also has what might be seen as magical features. It is variously described as 'the crow's eye',[160] a 'phantom eye', and an 'imaginary eye'[161] which 'he could almost feel […] on the back of his neck — an "eye" — that's the only way he could put it'.[162] The fact that Celâl can feel this eye makes it a real presence and one that is his 'creation'. Via this '"metaphysical experience"',[163] he 'transform[s] [him]self into that eye and [is] watching' himself. There is an element of spirituality here as the experience makes Celâl feel 'at one with Him'.[164] Thus, Pamuk plays with many ideas at once. Both magical and spiritual elements are present, bringing a sense of the unevenness that exists in

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[153] Cooper, p. 14.
[154] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 57.
[155] Justin Parrott, *How to be a Mindful Muslim: An Exercise in Islamic Meditation* (2017), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/justin-parrott/how-to-be-a-mindful-muslim-an-exercise-in-islamic-meditation/> [Accessed 9 Mar 2019] (para 6 of 52).
[156] Ibid., (para 6 of 52).
[157] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 67.
[158] Ibid., p. 115.
[159] Ibid., p. 114.
[160] Ibid., p. 71.
[161] Ibid., p. 114.
[162] Ibid., p. 105.
[163] Ibid., p. 114.
[164] Ibid., p. 116.

a modernising society. Furthermore, Pamuk juxtaposes the magical and the real in ways that his narrator experiences as frightening. What Celâl finds 'most frightening [is] it was not a dream.'[165]

Yet again we see how Muslim magical realism(s) offer a third space that exists between one could be considered the real and the unreal resembling the notion of *Barzakh* discussed above. I am in agreement with Cooper regarding her point that '[m]agical realism strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death'.[166] Thus, Sufism provides a more tolerant way of being in this world of binary opposition while at the same time engaging with an Islamic tradition. This tolerance is an aspect of modernity and secularisation but is also presented in the work of Sufis scholars such as Ibn-Arabi from the 13th century. Sara Sviri (2016) notes in an article entitled 'Seeing with Three Eyes: Ibn al-ʿArabī's *barzakh* and the Contemporary World Situation':

> [...] the practice of 'seeing with three eyes' derived from Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision of the *barzakh*, suggest[s] that the two-dimensional and binary limits of our cognition miss out on glimpsing a larger, more inclusive and unitive picture. Ibn al-ʿArabī's perspective teaches that beyond the dichotomies at the root of our cultural, religious, moral and political viewpoints – and even beyond the benign slogans of peace and love – there stretches a larger and wider perspective; if you wish, you can call it 'mystical', of a land of marvels.[167]

Ibn Arabi developed this idea from the verse in the Quran which reads: '"And it is He who has released the two seas, one fresh and sweet and one salty and bitter, and He placed between them a barrier (*wa-jaʿala baynahumā barzakhan*) and a prohibiting partition"'.[168] The verse above explains: 'two seas, undeniably, are contrary to one another, entirely different from one another, characterized by opposite attributes, yet contiguous, sharing an imaginary line, which keeps them apart and prevents their waters from mixing'.[169] It is a line

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[165] Ibid., p. 311.
[166] Cooper, p. 1.
[167] Sara Sviri, 'Seeing with Three Eyes. Ibn al-ʿarabī's *barzakh* and the Contemporary World Situation', *Synthesis Philosophica*, 62.2 (2016), 385–93 (p. 391) <https://doi.org/10.21464/sp31212>.
[168] Quran verse qtd in Sviri, 'Seeing with Three Eyes', p. 387. See chapter three of this thesis for more about the concept of *Barzakh*.
[169] Ibid., p. 387.

'separating between two opposites yet holding them together'.[170] This kind of otherworldly experience seems to bring that balance into the unsettling world portrayed in the novel. To see from a third dimension and a third eye is to imagine a way of bringing unity between opposites. This echoes the world described in *The Black Book*: 'the enchanted world of sleep'[171] and the 'gray land between wakefulness and sleep'[172] — another example of combination and unevenness seen throughout this novel. This may also explain how Muslim identity may be conceived as singular while also obviously containing a range of multiplicities. The 'all-knowing, all-seeing eye',[173] which follows Galip and is found in Celâl's column, echoes this third way to see the world. Göknar (2013), discussing *The Black Book*, argues that Sufism is important in modern literature 'because it tolerates paradoxes' and 'envisions possibilities of non-duality and therefore is valuable to critiques of nationalism, orientalism, and secular modernity'. Furthermore, it 'enable[s] the re-enchantment, by means of various mystical intertextualities, of a literature disenchanted through the secular master plot'.[174] I am in agreement with Göknar that Sufism 'envisions possibilities of non-duality' (as seen in the previous chapters of this thesis) — particularly when characters are resisting patriarchal systems of power — and that dreams and imagination in Sufism are valued as the bringers of a realisation that extends knowledge and awareness, providing a deeper understanding of the nature of being. So, Sufism offers a 're-enchantment' (a renewed pleasure and delight) with life even in a secular reality. Sufism is also the religious material the novel presents in order to show the co-existence of the religious and the modern, and of capitalist modernity and tradition.

This chapter has demonstrated how Muslim magical realist texts are different when it comes to form, content, and narrative voice, while at the same time depicting in similar ways how capitalist modernity and the traditions of faith coexist within different geographical and cultural contexts. Despite the clear differences between these novels in terms of socio-political and cultural contexts and the very different historical experiences of capitalist modernity to which the novels respond, they both register the act of recovering history. Such an approach extends Melas' account of the incommensurability in her reading of postcolonial comparatism. The amalgamation and interplay of the Islamic tradition (precapitalist) within capitalist modernity are registered differently in Shah's *A Silent Life* and Pamuk's *The Black Book*, yet we can see the systematic way in which the literary

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[170] Ibid., p. 388.
[171] Pamuk, *The Black Book*, p. 247.
[172] Ibid., p. 250.
[173] Ibid., p. 114.
[174] Göknar, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy*, p. 35.

production of these Muslim writers is linked to the capitalist world-system. Wallerstein's views on religious affiliations and the rise of political Islam, when linked with transformations in geopolitics, help us to comprehend how religiosity/Islam is part of the story of modernity registered in the literary texts of Muslim novelists. Through a close reading of both novels, this chapter has shown how the act of recovering histories is used in both novels as a vehicle to understand the shock of modernity that acts as a form of negotiation between the past and the present. In doing so, both texts offer a critique of the impact of capitalist modernity as manifested differently in different places within Islamic contexts. The comparative approach this chapter adopts (as with the thesis as a whole) helps us to comprehend, to borrow Niblett's (2012) phrase, 'likenesses – and likenesses of the unlike'.[175] However, each text is set in a very specific environment, containing different forms of identity, and the unevenness of capitalism that shapes both the structure of the novels and the identities of the characters.

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[175] Niblett, 'World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature', p. 27.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to extend the work of critics of world literature by suggesting that the emergence of Muslim magical realism(s) is considered as part of a literary world–system that has been shaped by specific historical experiences of combined and uneven development. Rather than situating these selected literary works in a national frame of reference, the thesis has adopted a comparative literary approach that not only challenges the assumption of a monolithic Muslim identity and some of the more rigid critical views regarding the genre of magical realism; it also argues that Muslim magical realism(s) express different cultural experiences and historical experiences in very different contexts. In doing so, the thesis has sought to read Muslim literary productions without succumbing to Orientalist stereotypes regarding Islam, Muslims, or indeed Muslim novels. It is true that these selected contemporary Muslim writers engage with notions and thoughts stemming from Islamic religious beliefs presented by Sufi thinkers, which allows them to shed light on socio-economic transformations that are specific to their own communities. Yet this is not to suggest that they do so in exactly the same way. As the chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, the coexistence of different literary modes of representation in the narrative form and structure of these texts can be read as a symbolic expression of pre-capitalist pasts combining with aspects of modernity. What these texts also manifest is the uncertainty, fears, and silences of the focalising characters as they are experienced at different places and times across Muslim societies marked by the pressures of combined and uneven development. However, the conventions of so-called magical realism also offer a way of reimagining the world.

By offering a critical engagement with literary critics regarding world literature, Muslim identities, Muslims fiction, and magical realism, the introduction to this thesis has presented an attempt to rethink and reframe Muslim literary productions. We have seen how more careful consideration of specificity of form and context is essential particularly when discussing Muslim texts. In doing so, chapter one refuses to take a rigid stance (such as suggestions regarding the characteristics of the magical realism mode or those who are in favour of labelling work as Sufi literature) regarding the classification of such texts.

As we have seen in the texts discussed in chapter two, the novels draw attention to gendered forms of social reproduction and patriarchal oppression that are mediated but also contested (by drawing on Sufi teachings regarding gender relations) in the form of two magical realist texts. Such experiences can be painful for Muslim women, as demonstrated

by the textual analysis contained in the chapter. Both Raja Alem's *Fatma a novel of Arabia* and Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, shed light on Muslim women's experiences in two different oil-rich Muslim states: Saudi Arabia and Iran. By comparing both novels, this chapter has built on the recent literary discussion regarding 'gendering oil'.[948] In other words, this chapter offers a means of understating how the condition of gendered subalternity underpins the combined and uneven development of petro-capitalist modernity in the Muslim world. The following chapter shows similar but different instances of how texts do not merely register this combined and uneven development but also offer a way in which to reimagine the world after capitalism, emphasising the link between dreams and visions, modernity and transformation. By reading Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* via Löwy's (2007) concept of 'critical irrealism', I suggest that we can begin to understand how the use of Sufi mystic ideas about imagination (*Barzakh*) in these texts functions as a utopian resource that combines Islamic viewpoints and philosophical traditions in a modern secular literary form that invite readers to imagine the world otherwise.

The last chapter of this thesis explores the notion of recalling the past and negotiating modernity and tradition in societies impacted by capitalist modernity (Turkey and Guyana) and how religious identity plays a part in this process of negotiation in both Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* in Turkey and Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* in Guyana. We have seen how different usages of the mode of magical realism offer a way to revisit the past. Rather than reading these texts as magical realist simply due to being similar to those written by Latin Americans, or as Sufi literature, this thesis offers a more fruitful way in which to read these texts within the world literary system that reframes our understanding of modernity.

It seems fitting to end with a remark from the contributors to *Islam and The Orientalist World-System*, with which my framework broadly intersects:

> One need only visit Mecca, a major sacred site for many of the globe's Muslims, to witness the scale of this assault, where Burger King, McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Cinnabon and, not least, Disney World's prized symbol, Mickey Mouse, are all located yards from the gates of the Holy Mosque and the sacred ka'ba.[949]

Such an observation is crucial to be aware of in a contemporary Muslim world that is subject to the commercial pressures of modernity. However, rather than reading this description of

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948 Wilson, 'Gendering Oil', pp. 244–63 (p. 244).
949 Samman and Al-Zo'by, pp. 3–22 (p. 10).

the city of Mecca as detailing an 'assault' I suggest that it shows not only the pressures of capitalism but also the combination of the precapitalist and the modern in dynamic coexistence, as argued throughout this thesis. We find in these texts the lived realties of Muslims in different societies that are transformed by the forces of capitalist modernity. The readings contained in this thesis extend the important work of the WReC by focusing on the importance of religion to our understanding of combined unevenness. In other words, the WReC's theory of combined and uneven development can also help us to make sense of how magical realist texts that draw on Sufi teachings (particularly those of Ibn Arabi) may be related to wider socio-economic transformations and tensions between modernity and religion. By drawing on the Sufi Islamic tradition, the novels also present an alternative world stemming from precapitalist notions and offer a way in which the characters (and therefore the reader) can reassess the impact of capitalist modernity in Muslim societies. This thesis also extends the work of other scholars working on contemporary Muslim writing, as has been explored in detail above. Each of the readings in the thesis foreground how magical realism is not only a genre, but also a literary mode that explores the epistemological status of religion as a way of knowing and re-imagining the world. Such a mode of writing includes Islam, but is not necessarily limited to it. Indeed, the thesis raises broader questions about the significance of religion in contemporary magical realisms. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, the texts chosen for analysis represent a snapshot of a particular mode of Muslim literary production from the 1980s to 2005. Such literary productions have, logically, continued to manifest in the global literary marketplace. Authors from across the Muslim world continue to make use of the magical realism mode while also drawing upon various aspects of the Islamic tradition; for example, Hammour Ziada's *The Longing of the Dervish* (2016 translation), Shokoofeh Azar's *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* (2017 translation), and Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019). In view of this, potential future research questions might include those such as: within the range of recent Muslim fictions how many can be read as forms of Muslim magical realism(s) and why should this be the case? Could this work be extended to explore other religions and spiritual belief systems that might be found in contemporary texts that take the form of the mode of writing identified as magical realism? By combining the worldly and the mystical the texts examined in this thesis try to make sense of the relationship between Islam and modernity. In doing so, readers are invited to imagine the conditions of possibility for change. Considered together, each of these chapters offers a new approach to reading contemporary magical realism, world literature, and contemporary Muslim fiction. There has not been a sustained book-length study that explores magical realist texts by Muslim

authors from across the globe, and neither have materialist critics of world literature paid sufficient attention to Muslim literary production. This thesis has tried to address this gap in existing critical scholarship through a detailed series of comparative reflections on the place and importance of Muslim literary production in relation to current debates in world literary studies.

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