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The Routledge Companion to  
Pakistani Anglophone Writing



Edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam

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Aroosa Kanwal, Saiyma Aslam

### De/reconstructing identities

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Faisal Nazir

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# DE/RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

## Critical approaches to contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction

*Faisal Nazir*

Edward Said, in *The World the Text and the Critic*, remarks that ‘the critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts’ (1983: 53). Expounding on this in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said enjoins the critic to ‘connect these different [artistic and political] realms, to show the involvements of culture with expanding empires, to make observations about art that preserve its unique endowments and at the same time map its affiliations, [...] and set the art in the global, earthly context’ (Said 1994: 5). Thus, according to Said, the task of criticism is to deconstruct textual structures which privilege some voices while suppressing others, and to reconstruct the worldly affiliations of artistic works to highlight their political concerns. In opening this chapter with the words of Said, I treat critical approaches to contemporary post-9/11 Pakistani fiction as aligning with his view of literary criticism given in the quotes above. My argument is that critical works on contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction focus on the theme of identity in fiction and discuss fictional works as engaging in the deconstruction of an exclusivist and hegemonic national identity and the reconstruction of this identity in a more inclusive national and/or global cosmopolitan frame. To conceptualise and discuss the deconstructive and reconstructive strategies used by Pakistani anglophone writers, the critics draw upon various strands of postcolonial theory, historicist, poststructuralist, and nationalist, and particularly the cosmopolitan strand dominant in theory today (see Brydon 2004; Spencer 2010; Mishra 2015). In this way, critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction engage with some general theoretical questions and debates in postcolonial theory, particularly those regarding cultural and political representation, the use of poststructuralist approaches in postcolonial theory, the cosmopolitan turn in postcolonial theory, and the Eurocentrism of postcolonial theory.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section I contextualises criticism of Pakistani anglophone fiction within ongoing debates on questions of identity and representation in postcolonial theory; Section II discusses various extended critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction published since 2011 (the year in which *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* published a special edition on Pakistan), and highlights their distinctive approaches to contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction; Section III reviews these critical approaches in light of general theoretical questions regarding identity and representation, and discusses how the critics engage with these questions in their studies of contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction.

### **Pakistani, Muslim, human: Towards a humanistic cosmopolitanism**

Critics who have analysed Pakistani anglophone fiction have largely followed Said's advice and example, treating these novels not simply as 'literary' texts which ask for a purely formalist approach, but as interventions in ongoing debates on identity, culture, and politics which, therefore, need to be studied politically as well as aesthetically. The critics have seen it as their task to bring out the political implications of fiction, particularly for contemporary discussions of gender issues, politico-religious questions, and cross-cultural interaction. More specifically, the Muslim identity of Pakistani writers has led many critics to place Pakistani anglophone fiction within the larger category of 'Muslim fiction/writing' (Chambers 2011; Ahmed, Morey, and Yaqin 2012). In this sense, Pakistani anglophone fiction is seen as a rich resource for debating issues of Muslim identity and culture, which have become prominent since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This approach appears to be highly relevant, as the writers themselves have taken up the themes of religious and cultural identity in their fictional works and have acknowledged in their interviews and non-fiction writing their engagement with the burning political questions of the present times (Chambers 2011; Kanwal 2015; Clements 2016; Bilal 2016).

In the context of recent developments in postcolonial theory in which all monolithic identities, particularly national identities, are deconstructed and migrant, diasporic and cosmopolitan identities are celebrated, critical engagements with Pakistani anglophone fiction appear to follow a general pattern: identity deconstruction through an emphasis on diversity, and identity reconstruction through an inclusive national, religious, and/or cosmopolitan approach. Critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction seek to highlight how fiction deconstructs binary oppositions in which Pakistani identity is usually constructed in political and cultural discourses. The binary opposition identified and deconstructed in fiction and its criticism is generally between Pakistan and the West. The conflict of identity in Pakistani anglophone fiction is frequently presented and debated as one between an Eastern, Islamic identity and a Western, liberal/secular one. Literary critics often praise Pakistani writers for staging this conflict of identity in their works and for challenging monolithic constructions of it in historical, cultural, and political discourses emanating both from within Pakistan and abroad (Morey 2011; Cilano 2013; Clements 2016). Pakistani identity, as it is constructed in these historical, political, and journalistic discourses, is identified as overwhelmingly male, Muslim, and national (as opposed to gendered, ethnic, or class-based identities, as represented in literary/critical discourses) (Jalal 1995). In critical accounts, fictional works from Pakistan are often shown to deconstruct this unified and homogenous identity by foregrounding suppressed and neglected groups in Pakistan, such as religious and ethnic minorities, women and secular-minded people largely belonging to the upper or upper-middle classes. According to Mushtaq Bilal,

Identity politics is another theme which runs across the works as well as the interviews of these [Pakistani] writers. Shah, Hanif, Tanweer, Khan and Sidhwa have often written about the lives of Pakistanis who are marginalized either because of their religious or political identities. In these works, one finds an attempt towards devising an alternative to the jingoistic and fundamentalist mainstream narrative of the Pakistani state and society. By writing about working-class Christians, indigenous peoples and Pakistani leftists, these writers explore a Pakistan that is unfamiliar to many a Pakistani.

(2016: 18)

However, since most fictional works in English from Pakistan engage with the question of identity in a global, transnational context, as invoked or evoked within the texts, critics also identify

the presence of a cosmopolitan outlook in them. While the Pakistani identity is shown to be deconstructed by fictional works, from a monolithic identity to a multiple one, recent critical works on Pakistani anglophone fiction describe writers as attempting to redefine the Pakistani identity in cosmopolitan terms by emphasising global allegiances and affinities (Cilano 2013; Kanwal 2015; Clements 2016). Aroosa Kanwal states:

The novels [...] share a common focus on home and identity while historically contextualising domestic themes and issues in relation to a global setting. In terms of identity discourses, there is a gradual transition from national to transnational identity and from transnational to postnational identity.

(2015: 13)

According to Ahmed Gamal, recent works of ‘Anglo-Pakistani writers’ like Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid demonstrate features of ‘post-migratory literature’, a concept he has borrowed from Elleke Boehmer’s book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (2005), in ‘constructing transcultural contact zones grounded in reconcilable compatibilities’ (Gamal 2013: 596). For Gamal, ‘post-migratory literature can be described as that type of postcolonial literature that fundamentally problematises the condition of migrancy by deconstructing the binarism of home and the world and linking the global to the postcolonial’ (2013: 598). While post-migratory literature is open to being characterised as ‘fundamentally cosmopolitan’, what differentiates post-migratory literature from earlier theorisations of the migrant experience is the ‘manifest oppositional stance that might be unavailable in unconditional cosmopolitanism’ (2013: 598).

Gamal’s preference for the term ‘post-migratory’ over the more conventional ‘cosmopolitan’ to describe contemporary postcolonial literature identifies a sceptical attitude among literary and cultural critics towards cosmopolitanism. Described as elitist and superficial, cosmopolitanism has earned a bad name in certain critical circles (see Brennan 1997; Gikandi 2010). The critics discussed in Section II of this chapter reflect these concerns over the exclusiveness of cosmopolitan theory. They not only highlight the brutalities and violence presented by the transnational encounters in the novels they study (Cilano 2013; Clements 2016), they also call for a definition of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in more inclusive humanist terms. That is why critics like Cilano use alternative terms to describe fictions that seek to transcend narrow approaches to identity, particularly national identity. In the introduction to her book *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State*, Cilano describes the book as ‘advocating the end of national identities’ (2013: 1). However, she clarifies at once that: ‘This argument [...] doesn’t lobby for cosmopolitanism or hyphenated identities’ but, through a reading of Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*, emphasises a “human” identity that takes shape through the recognition of historical experience as an equalising force, suggesting along the way that historical narratives can bear meaning outside of national confines’ (Cilano 2013: 1). In contemporary English fiction from Pakistan:

Migrancy as a concept [...] takes on a different inflection from its more conventionalized usage over the past twenty years in postcolonial discourse. These novels’ deployment of migrancy has none of the free-floating or archimedian privileges associated with cosmopolitanism or certain versions of transnationalism. This migrancy isn’t about hybridity or translation, either. Instead, these fictions figure and, in some cases, ironize migrancy as a brutal encounter that is, because of its emphasis on a longer historical

perspective, neither a pre-determined, inevitable clash nor a necessarily optimistic exchange.

(Cilano 2013: 194)

As the above discussion shows, while the critics do reflect the ‘cosmopolitan turn’ in postcolonial theory in their studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction, they also *reflect on* this recent turn in the theory and thus remain alert to the charges of elitism levelled against the cosmopolitan approach, very often by critics working within postcolonial theory. In Section II, I will examine four extended critical studies of contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction in light of this general cosmopolitan drift in postcolonial theory and its relation to critical readings of Pakistani anglophone fiction. As Section II will show in more detail, critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction approach the theme of identity in four distinct though interrelated ways: global/cosmopolitan (Morey 2011), national (Cilano 2013), religious (Chambers 2011; Kanwal 2015), and regional (Clements 2016).

### **Framing Pakistani Muslims: global, national, religious, and regional approaches**

Published in ‘Beyond Geography: Literature, Politics and Violence in Pakistan’, a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (May 2011), Peter Morey’s article on Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) treats the novel as a parody of the post-9/11 confessional statements made by some ‘reformed’ terrorists, particularly the one by Ed Hussain. Describing the novel as a ‘hoax confession’, Morey highlights in his article how Hamid has masterfully deconstructed in his novel such narratives that came out in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent ‘war on terror’. Morey’s article

argues that, in employing the hoax confessional and dramatic monologue forms, the novel not only effectively parodies the cultural certainties encouraged by those ‘true confessions’ of former radicals, in destabilizing the reader’s identification through hyperbole, strategic exoticization, allegorical layering and unreliable narration, but also defamiliarizes our relation to literary projects of national identification, forcing us to be the kind of deterritorialized reader demanded by the emerging category of world literature.

(2011: 136)

On the one hand, Morey considers Hamid’s novel to be a postmodern, parodic narrative, deconstructing and decentring the narratives it parodies, which places the novel ‘firmly in the camp of postcolonial literature that “writes back” to both imperial and neo-imperial centres’ (2011: 142). On the other hand, Morey also considers the novel to be an example of ‘world literature’ demanding the readers to forego their national identity, to become ‘deterritorialized’ (2011: 142). Thus, the deconstructive–reconstructive pattern is visible in this article – nationalist and religious identities are challenged and deconstructed to bring about global, planetary identities defined not by ‘conflicting interests and positions’ but by an in-between space that makes the text ‘a site of struggle for these different versions’ (Morey 2011: 138). However, as Morey notes, there is nothing celebratory about the global encounters the novel presents except for the first half, in which the narrator seems pleased to consider himself solely as an employee of Underwood Samson. But, as Morey states, ‘the story comes to be about the impossibility of

maintaining this globalized, post-political identity position' after 9/11 and the 'resurgent nationalism' coming in its wake, forcing people to define which side they were on (2011: 143).

In contrast to Morey's approach, which sees identity through a postmodernist parodic framework, Claire Chambers brings a comparative approach to the discussion of identity and narrative in the English-language works of Pakistani authors, 'situating them alongside writing by authors of Muslim heritage in other parts of the world' (2011: 123). Justifying her use of religious instead of national identity to classify Pakistani writing, Chambers states that such developments, like the Rushdie Affair, the two Gulf Wars, 9/11, 7/7, and the 'war on terror', have made 'Muslim identity' a 'useful valence for understanding Pakistani texts' (2011: 124). She acknowledges that identity is a fluid thing and that religious/Muslim identity always intersects with other aspects of identity (such as national, regional, gender) and clarifies that, in her article, 'it is the reified figure, and cultural category, of the Muslim that is under analysis' (2011: 124).

The first difficulty to be faced in using this approach, as Chambers acknowledges, is that a significant majority of the writers regarded as having a Muslim identity are 'secular, agnostic, atheists, or [...] were not brought up as Muslims or come from other religious communities' (2011: 124). Chambers' solution to this problem, after Amin Malak (2004), is to claim that these writers, even when they do not appear to be practising Muslims, have access to what she calls 'Muslim civilizational heritage' (2011: 124). Chambers' comparative approach, as the above discussion shows, also focuses on the deconstruction of the narrowly defined Muslim identity in the novels she studies, and a reconstruction of this identity into a more inclusive and diverse framework of 'Muslim civilizational heritage'.

Moving away from this specifically religious construction of identity, Cilano opens *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State* with the 'spoiler' that the book 'concludes with an argument advocating the end of national identities' (2013: 1). However, Cilano's argument against national identities does not necessarily mean an argument for 'cosmopolitanism or hyphenated identities' (2013: 1). Instead, Cilano reads contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction as offering 'myriads of possibilities [regarding Pakistani identity], creating a spectrum that runs from a reinforcement of dominant modes of belonging to a reinvention of the terms of collective attachments' (2013: 1). She describes her approach in the introductory section of the book:

*Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English* explores how literary texts imaginatively probe the past, convey the present, and project a future in terms that facilitate a sense of collective belonging. The three terms listed in my subtitle – idea, nation, and state – motivate these explorations, as they attract or repel the attachments necessary to formulate a collective identity or sense of belonging to Pakistan.

(2013: 1)

Though her design includes approaches to Pakistani identity that 'reinforce the dominant modes of belonging', Cilano's focus is mainly on texts that 'offer an imaginative alternative to dominant forms of identification' (2013: 1). It is in this light that Cilano sees Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) as exploring 'the possibility of a nationless belonging' for, in her view, the novel 'effectively dismisses the violence associated with national belonging' (2013: 222). Considering that the novel may be seen by the reader as advocating a conventional form of migrancy and cosmopolitanism, she clarifies that 'although Shamsie's novel posits as an ideal a deeply humanist subjectivity, it is produced through historical relations rather than outside them' (Cilano 2013: 222). Among the various migrant experiences which Cilano analyses in the novel, she considers the experience of Hiroko Tanaka to represent this 'humanist subjectivity' in

an exemplary way. According to Cilano, through Hiroko's character and experience, 'the novel presents an alternative type of belonging that seeks to rise above the nation' (2013: 227). Hiroko comes to realise that national belonging has been the cause of some of the worst crimes against humanity, such as the nuclear bombing of Japan during the Second World War and in realising this, she learns that 'to be human is to be recognizable in terms outside of national identities' (2013: 228). Moreover, this human subjectivity is not based on merely personal or individual identity, rather it is constructed out of historical experience and ethical reflection: 'Rather than positing individuals as unproblematised incarnations of national identities [...] Hiroko's idea of the "human" demands historical contextualization and accountability' (Cilano 2013: 228).

Kanwal also insists on the importance of historical contextualisation for a better understanding of the complexities of Pakistani Muslim identities in the post-9/11 era. As she states in the Introduction to *Rethinking Identities*, her 'purpose [...] is to provide a historical depth to current negotiations of national, Muslim and diasporic identities, and to historicise contemporary encounters between the West and Muslims/Islam' (2015: 2). She is particularly interested in how Pakistani anglophone writers 'problematise identity crises'. For this she 'draw[s] upon numerous interlinking contexts to illuminate a spectrum of locations (local, regional and global; national, transnational and international) that are mutually informative in the construction of post-9/11 (Pakistani) Muslim identities' (2015: 2). In keeping with her aim to historicise the identity crisis depicted in Pakistani anglophone fiction, and thus to challenge the stereotypical ways in which this identity is represented in post-9/11 political and cultural discourses, Kanwal pays particular attention to post-9/11 fictional works by Pakistani writers that use a pre-9/11 setting for, in her view, such works present 'a compelling critique of reductive nationalisms among Pakistanis' (2015: 12). The second-generation Pakistani writers she studies represent 'a more inclusive view of life' than the one found in 'conservative nationalism and monolithic definitions of Islam', as these writers 'arguably seek to define or speak for a community' and 'dismantle negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in the West' (2015: 13). Kanwal thus identifies a work of identity deconstruction and reconstruction in the works of such major Pakistani writers as Hamid, Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and Nadeem Aslam. These writers are seen as deconstructing the stereotypical identities of Pakistani Muslims constructed by political and cultural discourses. (Kanwal discusses these discourses in the Introduction with reference to the work of such scholars and critics as Morey and Yaqin, Mahmud Mamdani, Tariq Modood.) Along with carrying out this deconstruction of stereotypical identities, works of Pakistani anglophone fiction 'take 9/11 discourses in new directions whilst recognizing the need to negotiate identities in the wake of contexts beyond 9/11' and respond to this need 'by creating a third space beyond East/West cultural boundaries' (2015: 7). In Kanwal's view, this 'third space' is reflected in the emergence of the idea of a 'non-territorial global *ummah*' in place of nationally or regionally defined identities.

Though Clements' (2016) focus is, like Kanwal's, also on religious identities, she adopts a regional framework to present her thesis on the theme of identity in contemporary 'South Asian' English fiction. Her book 'explores the hypothesis' that the 'international novels' of Salman Rushdie, Hamid, Aslam, and Shamsie 'can be read [as] part of a post-9/11 attempt to revise modern "knowledge" of the Islamic world, using globally disseminated literature to reframe Muslims' potential to connect with others' (2016: 2). Describing their fiction as a contribution to 'world literature', Clements analyses how this fiction 'maps spheres of Islamic affiliation and affinity' and examines the 'inter-cultural and intra-cultural affiliations and affinities the characters pursue in these texts, asking what aesthetic, historical, political and spiritual identifications or commitments could influence such connective attempts' (2016: 2). Clements uses 'affiliations' and 'affinities' as key terms in constructing her argument, and defines them respectively as 'the

more active and selective of the modes of Islamic connection' and 'a more natural, unplanned or even involuntary sense of being drawn to a particular community grouping, geographical area or imaginative realm' (2016: 3). While claiming that the writers she studies in her book represent a diversity of 'Muslim experiences of ordinary cosmopolitan contact, co-operation and conflict', Clements argues that the novelists do not attempt a 'simplistic revival' of exoticising 'commercial multicultural fiction' and also resist 'cosmopolitan perspectives' which may homogenise the diversity of experiences represented by the writers (2016: 10). Clements' concluding remarks on the fictional works of Aslam, Hamid, Rushdie, and Shamsie further highlight the deconstructive/reconstructive framework used in her study:

Considered together, the fictions in English produced by South Asian authors of Muslim background provide a nuanced perspective on contemporary Islam, unsettling crude stereotypes and pessimistic East-West binaries, and writing rather of a world defined by ambiguities and even – occasionally – of hope.

(2016: 158)

### **Rising into theory: identity, deconstruction, reconstruction**

Though Muneeza Shamsie (2017) has discussed the long history of critical engagement with Pakistani anglophone literature in her recent book, it is only since the beginning of the twenty-first century that Pakistani anglophone writing, particularly fiction, has received extensive critical attention. The brief overview in Section II shows that identity deconstruction and reconstruction are the central concern of critics in their analyses of Pakistani anglophone fiction. In this section, I will discuss the significance of this particular reading of fiction in the context of the debates around the question of identity in contemporary literary and cultural theory. I will then pose some critical questions regarding Pakistani anglophone literature and the critical studies I have examined in this chapter and suggest how a more rigorous deconstructive reading of Pakistani anglophone fiction can contribute further to debating questions of identity and representation in critical studies.

Globalisation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism are some of the key terms in contemporary literary and cultural theory and various critics have described a 'transnational' and a 'cosmopolitan' turn in theory in recent years (Jay 2010). Postcolonial theory has likewise engaged with these issues and, according to Robert Spencer, 'postcolonialists are currently refining a variety of cosmopolitanism capable of reconciling seemingly contradictory objectives' (2010: 40). Postcolonial critics are constructing a 'distinctively postcolonial cosmopolitanism' which is 'conscious of the need to think and campaign at the local and national levels, whilst at the same time thinking and campaigning at the level of transnational institutions and arrangements' (Spencer 2010: 40). Critical studies of contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction also demonstrate what Spencer calls a 'dialectical understanding of cosmopolitanism' (2010: 40) in their focus on the deconstruction and reconstruction of Pakistani Muslim identities in fiction. At local and national levels, critics appreciate writers' attempt to deconstruct the dominant discourses of identity which have marginalised some aspects of Pakistani identity while privileging others.

Thus, the deconstruction and reconstruction of Pakistani Muslim identity in contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction are, according to the critics discussed above, a highly valuable intervention in the context of global political conditions since 9/11 and theoretical and critical developments in the twenty-first century. For their part, the critics' use of various frameworks to theorise this deconstruction and reconstruction of identity is a significant contribution to



the ongoing debates around Pakistani Muslim identity in literary and cultural theory. However, in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter, I would like to raise some essential questions regarding critical reflections on identity and representation in Pakistani anglophone fiction with reference to Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' It is my opinion that engaging with these questions can be helpful in reassessing the representation of identity in contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction.

In her celebrated and influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak identifies a conflation of the two different meanings of the word 'representation' in critical discourse and in critics' self-definition of their role as critics (1993). As Spivak describes, there is a political interpretation of the word 'represent' which, in political discourse, is taken to mean to stand in place of the people, to become their 'representative'. And then there is an aesthetic or literary/artistic interpretation of the word, an interpretation in terms of mimesis, an imitation or re-presentation of reality. This conflation can be observed in much postcolonial literary criticism, particularly that under discussion in this chapter. In the critical works discussed in Section II, Pakistani anglophone writers are supposed to 'represent' Pakistan in both these different senses: in the literary/artistic sense, to describe or portray Pakistani identity and culture, but in the political sense to speak for and to become the voice of that identity and culture. Thus, Pakistani anglophone writers become representatives of Pakistani identity because they re-present that identity. This conflation of the two senses of representation leads to some problematic assumptions about the 'insider' status of Pakistani anglophone writers and their deconstruction of Pakistani Muslim identity in their fiction.

Pakistani anglophone writers are supposed to provide an inside view of Pakistani (Muslim) identity and culture. There are some very strong reservations in postcolonial theory regarding this claim of deriving an 'inside view' of a writer's native culture from his or her works. These reservations are based on sociocultural as well as aesthetic grounds. From a sociocultural perspective, a gap is identified between the identities of the authors and their identification with their native culture. Most of the anglophone writers from the postcolonial world belong to an elite, educated, English-speaking minority and many do not even live in their country of origin. As Bilal notes,

Importantly, the few contemporary writers who are generally considered 'Pakistani' in the Anglophone publishing world are not just 'Pakistani'. For example, Hamid, Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, Nadeem Aslam and Aamer Hussein are all British nationals. Writers like Bapsi Sidhwa and Daniyal Mueenuddin are American nationals, and Musharraf Ali Farooqi holds a Canadian passport.

(2016: 2)

Their contact and interaction with the people and the culture they write about, and therefore their experiential knowledge of these people and their culture, is very limited. In this sociocultural sense, then, their 'insider' status is considered highly suspect. As Spivak states, 'Certain varieties of the Indian elite are at best native informants for the first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other' (1993: 79). Pakistani anglophone writers can also be seen to be approached as 'native informants' by theorists and critics located mostly in the West and in this way being burdened with a duty of representation which the writers may not be able, or even willing, to carry.

Moreover, while critics appreciate the deconstruction at work in the novels they study, they do not read the novels deconstructively. Deconstructive reading as practised by the major theorists of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Derek Attridge, and Spivak, attempts

to open up fissures and gaps *in* the texts under study and not just those fissures and gaps identified *by* the texts. Such a reading often approaches a text from its margins and digs up elements that lie buried beneath its surface. In the criticism discussed in this chapter, the critics note the various deconstructive strategies used by writers – how writers destabilise and decentre nationalist and religious identity discourses – but, in doing so, restrict themselves to being observers and commentators on writers’ deconstructive practices. Thus, critics do not engage in deconstructive reading of texts, they only highlight the deconstruction already at work in them. If the texts they have analysed were read deconstructively, they would no longer be seen as constructed upon a preconstituted essentialised otherness which can be called upon to deconstruct dominant discourses by a simple shift of focus from one kind of identity to another kind – from national to ethnic, cultural to class-based, religious to minority/sectarian, male to female. To read deconstructively would mean to see othering at work in each text specifically, to see how each creates and secures its own margins, without which it cannot constitute itself as a specific, bounded text. In ‘Postcolonial Remains’, Robert Young expresses his dissatisfaction with how postcolonial criticism has made use of the concept of the other and advises postcolonial critics to ‘rethink’ it in accordance with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgia Agamben (2012: 39). As Young describes, in the works of these philosophers, the other is not someone external to the self but rather a constitutive part of the self. While the critics discussed in this chapter do appreciate writers’ efforts to emphasise religious, cultural, ethnic, class, and gender diversity in Pakistan, they do not address the essentialism that this strategy often involves.

When read with the understanding of otherness recommended by Young, it will be seen that in Pakistani anglophone fiction the desire to bring a specific marginal identity (e.g. ethnic, gender, class) to the centre of the narrative from the periphery is also the desire to remove an identity (e.g. national, religious, male) from the centre to the periphery. Deconstructing a narrative, through writing or reading, does not mean replacing one identity by another at the centre of the narrative, but rather displacing the centre itself. For the writer, it means acknowledging that s/he can only ‘mix writings [or mix identities], to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them’ (Barthes 2003: 149). For the critic, it means never taking the identities represented in a text as unified and absolute, but always intertwined with their ‘others’, to whom they must hold fast for their own survival and recognition. Thus, the binary oppositions in which identities are constructed in Pakistani anglophone fiction – cosmopolitan/national, secular/religious, female/male – can be seen as simple inversions of identities constructed in nationalist, religious, and patriarchal discourses, still relying upon the concept of identity found within the very discourses that the fiction is lauded to challenge and deconstruct. A more rigorous deconstructive reading need not necessarily lead critics to adopt a politically uncommitted approach to identity but may, on the contrary, lead them to unravel more layers of identity than the binary oppositions in which the identities are generally constructed.

In light of this discussion, we can see that critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction approach this fiction at two levels, the local, national level and the global, cosmopolitan level. At the local level, critical studies highlight the deconstruction of dominant identity discourses in the works of Pakistani anglophone writers. They note how fictional works challenge the hegemonic nationalist and religious discourses of identity by giving prominence to neglected and marginalised elements within Pakistani society. At the global level, critics identify in contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction an effort to reconstruct the Pakistani Muslim identity in global, cosmopolitan terms. However, critics also attempt to redefine the concept of cosmopolitanism through their studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction. In this way, critical studies of Pakistani anglophone fiction intervene at both the national and global levels, elaborating

the literary strategies of Pakistani anglophone writers through a deconstructive/reconstructive framework and contributing to the ongoing theoretical and critical debates on the questions of culture and identity in today's world.

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