

Religion, Diaspora and the Politics of a Homing Desire in the Writings of Zia Haider Rahman, Tahmima Anam and Monica Ali

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Abstract

This paper examines Zia Haider Rahman's interpretation of cognitive burden of home, Tahmima Anam's understanding of the blinded soul and Monica Ali's portrayal of the radical frictions in context of diasporic consciousness. In the shifting consciousness of the diaspora, one's perceptions – of spatial and metaphysical home, identity, religion, war or memory – are always in the flux and yet dangerously alluring. It works with what Susheila Nasta has referred to as the diaspora's sense of loss for a lost homeland, and a "desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with and exile from it" (7). This paper explores the re-presentation of the dangerously seductive power and the politics of home in the novels of the diasporic writers from Bangladesh.

Keywords

Identity, Bangladesh, diaspora, gender, religion, politics

This paper intends to examine Zia Haider Rahman's interpretation of cognitive burden of home, Tahmima Anam's understanding of the blinded soul and Monica Ali's portrayal of the radical frictions in context of what Edward Said calls in *Culture and Imperialism*, an issue of "overlapping territories and intertwined history" (63) of diasporic consciousness. As the title of the essay suggests, the definition or rather the positioning of a good Muslim in the Bangladeshi diasporic context is the main concern in this paper. Religion indeed plays a dominant role in Bangladeshi fiction written in English. The perspective however changes from one novel to another and unravels possibilities of new and challenging discourse of religion in relation to gender, culture, nation and diaspora. In the contesting

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ground of religion, the aspects of restriction and seduction, defiance and devotion are all directed toward a common goal, which is to intensify the diasporic subject's staggering quest for identity. Focusing on the seductive power of diasporic home, Susheila Nasta defines diaspora as the concept that "does not only create an unrequited desire for a lost homeland, but also a 'homing desire,' a desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with and exile from it" (7). In the shifting consciousness of the diaspora, one's perceptions – of spatial and metaphysical home, identity, religion, war or memory – are always in the flux and yet dangerously alluring. Ironically enough, the dangerously alluring power of sexuality plays a crucial role in the context of Islam. Fatima Mernissi once said in *Beyond the Veil* that because the contradictory theory of female sexuality instigates "disruptive effects on Muslim social order," Islam tried to systematically neutralise female sexual aggression (23). Since religion and sexuality are intertwined with the diasporic theme in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslims* (2011) and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What we Know* (2014), my focus in this paper will be to study the juncture of religion and the politics of diasporic homing desire and examine the impact of such entanglement over the Bangladeshi diaspora as depicted in the selected novels.

Brick Lane houses dreams and deceptions of diaspora and religion. Chanu, the protagonist's husband, has been living the life of an exile by choice. His dream to live the life of an educated gentleman is only the residual impact of British colonialism. A postcolonial Pip, overwhelmed with his great expectations, he dreams to be the shadow of an English educated gentleman – as prescribed by Macaulay's *Minute* – disregarding the truths of his own existence. He has lived most of his adult life in London, dreaming about going back home. The life that he lives in London is never his, simply because it is not the life he dreamt of living. He wishfully turns to his two "benefactors" to fulfil his homing desire. In his London home, Mrs Islam, the woman involved in an illegal business of usury, lends him money that he uses to buy a computer for the household and a sewing machine for his wife. Mrs Islam, nay the diasporic Miss Havisham, leads a "perfect" life of a rich immigrant, with two grown up sons and a lavish flow of money. She is the only "respectable" woman in the community to show up at a newcomer's door and offer her help (15). The same respectable woman later turns Chanu's happy home into a place of terror when Chanu fails to repay his loan. The terror then transpires into his two daughters who are reluctant to accompany their father in his quest for a harmonised territory of home in Bangladesh. While his great expectations of living a happy life in London gets destroyed by his failing career and is disrupted by Mrs Ali's constant threats, Chanu takes Dr Azad as his other Havisham, a man who lives a dissatisfied life in his postcolonial "Satis House," occupied by the Stellas of the diasporic world. Dr Azad's wife and daughter are cold and disenchanted, lost (their touch with

Bengali culture) and fallen (from the normative grace bestowed upon traditional Bengali women). The wife smokes and drinks beer, like a man, dresses up like a disresponsible woman (85), and the daughter storms out of the house to party with her friends at some pub. But before leaving the house, the daughter does not forget to show proper respect to her father's guests. She turns around and says "Salaamaleikhum" (87). In his conversation with the honourable doctor's wife, Chanu tries to explain, like a great orator, the tragedy behind every immigrant's success story by saying:

I am talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feeling of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking—. (88)

Mrs Azad cuts his oration short by saying "Crap!" Mrs Azad then gives her own version of the tragedy of an immigrant's life, in which she describes the life of an immigrant woman: "When I'm in Bangladesh, I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I am just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry, that's my business" (89). While Chanu's wife Nazneen feels a strange affection for this "fat-nosed street fighter" of a woman (89), Chanu is shocked to have witnessed the impending collapse of a perfect gentleman's home. Dr Azad, being an epitome of success in an alien country – as a rich medical doctor, and as a learned man of the community – has been a motivating force for Chanu. His boss is a patient of Dr Azad's, and he has befriended the doctor only so that the good doctor can put some good words on his behalf and hasten a possible promotion process. The benefactor however fails to fulfil Chanu's expectation but later compensates for his failure by lending him the money to buy four tickets to Bangladesh. Dr Azad thus makes it possible for Chanu to fulfil their mutual dream for a homeward journey.

Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen write in their "Introduction" to *Migration, Diasporas, and Traditionalism* that Diaspora Consciousness deals with fractured memories and produces multiplicity for histories "marked by a dual or paradoxical nature," which is "constituted negatively by experience of discrimination and exclusion and positively by identification with an historical heritage" (xviii). For James Clifford, this consciousness vacillates between the tension of loss and hope. All his immigrant life, Chanu the derelict dreamer vacillates between loss and hope, always replacing his fears of loss with the dream of building a new home in a place that is seemingly undisturbed by all the Western influences. His vision of this utopic home is quite paradoxical in nature in the sense that he longs to live in a perfect place of harmony where his two daughters

and his obedient wife would live under his magnanimous protection, forgetting all their past histories and heritage. According to Dr Azad's diagnosis, Chanu is afflicted by "Going Home Syndrome" (18), a disease common among immigrants. For the immigrants, "the pull of the land is stronger than the pull of blood," Chanu says to Dr Azad in one of their conversations, "[I] hey don't ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there" (19). Dr Azad has managed to quarantine his own infliction but Chanu's contagion is spread over every sense of his consciousness. He isolates himself from the "uneducated, illiterate, close-minded" Bangladeshi community who "jump off the ship and scuttle over" by the neighbourhood of Tower Hamlets (15). He is better than these lot for he has a college degree and has had ambitions (21). He is different from the rest because he thinks he is conscious of his social standing and has control over his overall situation. England has failed to accommodate him, and therefore England will lose the privilege of having his presence. "These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads," he complains (21). For Chanu, going back home appears to be the best solution: "I don't plan to risk these things happening to my children. We will go back before they get spoiled" (19). Diasporic consciousness for Paul Gilroy is "decentred attachments" relegating a feeling of home away from home (286). Chanu changes his job and becomes a cab driver to earn more money; he makes his wife a part of the working force by letting her sew buttons and zippers for some garments company. He saves money and stays busy designing his future house in Dhaka. He becomes literally and figuratively the architect of his future.

Chanu's dream of harmony and balance is however in direct conflict with Nazneen's view of life. Nazneen understands her thirteen-year-old daughter Shahana's pain when the girl screams, "I did not want to be born here" (144), or when she declares, "I am not going... I will run away" (175). Shahana does run away, and it is Nazneen, who brings her back and stands upright to confront her homesick husband. She knows that the concept of a home will always remain the same in their life; nothing would change except for a location. And most importantly, because Nazneen was not influenced by Chanu's "Going Home Syndrome" her vision of home (or the lack of it) was not restrained by any demarcation lines. For her, home is an imagined concept, easily dismantled by diasporic double consciousness. After the daughters refuse to go back to Bangladesh, Chanu, the helpless father, desperately asks Nazneen, "But you want to [go], don't you?" He rested his chin on her shoulder. Her hair made a curtain between their faces. She thought, Would we still sit like this in Dhaka? In a room like this? And would we sit like this and would it feel just the same and would everything be the same but just in a different place?" (310).

The paradoxical nature of such fractured memories of vacillating consciousness initiates what Deleuze and Guattari call “a schizophrenic mélange” (1782) of epistemic violence. For Chanu and Nazneen, the epistemic violence occurs in the form of religious performance that allures her to the paths of sexual temptations. Nazneen does not show any interest when Karim the middleman from the garments factory starts visiting her to collect her finished product. The first thing she notices about him is the flimsy pamphlet that he brings with him and flips through the pages while she finishes sewing the hems. The title of Karim’s flimsy magazine is “Are you a Good Muslim? Twenty ways to tell.” Nazneen startles when Karim expresses his intention to say his prayer at her house. It is not permitted in religion to pray with an “unrelated man,” so she decides to pray later (190). But the moment Karim starts praying, Nazneen inadvertently begins reciting the prayer with him. She feels an uncontrollable excitement watching him pray. “She heard the blood pound in her heart and she trembled because he would surely hear it. She closed her eyes.... He bowed, hands on knees, straight back. She saw how well he moved. Twice more. It was he who moved, but she who felt dizzy” (190). Karim becomes for Nazneen, the liaison between religion and sexual desire. In between sewing and praying, they start having their sexual adventures, and in between sex and sewing, they chat about religion and about various ways to be good Muslims and plan to attend meetings organised by a radical organisation called the Bengal Tigers. Diasporic home thus becomes for them a site for seduction and allurements.

The problem with Chanu’s homing desire is that it is not synchronised with his sexual/religious yearnings. Chanu is a pragmatic dreamer, with his attention focused on the concepts, structures and methods to fulfil his dream to return home. He designs the house that he is going to build in Dhaka and stays meticulous in every step of his exit process. He neither shows any sexual intimacy with his wife, nor any spiritual intimacy with his God. Karim, on the other hand, is a romantic dreamer; his dream of home is intermingled with his desire to connect (with the woman he loves or the radical organisation that he creates, or with the God that he fears). As the novel progresses, Nazneen becomes the diasporic signifier of his perfect home – a site of love, dream, desire, nurture and meditation.

As for Nazneen, her exposure to both the pragmatic and the romantic ideology of home gives her the capacity to decide her own definition of home. She decides to stay back in London with her two daughters. It gives her courage to confront Mrs Islam’s business of usury and later, establish her own sewing business. A diasporic new woman, Nazneen breaks away from both Chanu’s nostalgic escapism and Karim’s romantic idealism, and decides not to play the role of a passive muse for either one of them after she learns to perceive the meaning that lies beyond the imagined boundaries of nation, religion, culture or identity in a foreign land. Nazneen realises that just as she has measured Karim

as a source of her ideal love/home/religion, Karim has also seen in her the ideal image of a Muslim Bengali wife – a caring mother and an obedient wife. Karim has never been to Bangladesh but he has placed his dream and desire for a happy ideal home in his love for Nazneen. In his futile quest for a harmonious home, he has joined a radical Islamist group, changed his physical appearance and attire (he grows beard and gives up Western clothes), and has taken Nazneen as a fellow sufferer in his quest. Karim has found in her “an idea of home,” where he can never reach, and an “idea of himself” (as a man with roots in Bangladesh), which he can never be. (381). Realising the gaping distance between their two worlds, Nazneen refuses to continue their relationship by saying, “I wasn’t me, and you weren’t you. From the very beginning to the very end, we did not see things. What we did – we made each other up” (382). On one occasion, Karim reads a hadith for Nazneen from an Islamic website: “A man’s share of adultery is destined by Allah. He will never escape that destiny. The adultery of the eye is the look. The adultery of the ears is listening to voluptuous talk, the adultery of the tongue is the licentious speech” (288). In the context of Karim and Nazneen, religion becomes a Nietzschean “seduction of language” (116) and the religious meaning of adultery becomes synonymous to their definition for the search of home.

The diasporic consciousness works more in terms of psychological quandaries than the notion of geographical displacement in Tahmima Anam’s *The Good Muslim*. The novel narrates the life of Maya, a medical doctor and social activist, and her brother Sohail, a freedom fighter of the Bangladesh liberation War, later turned into a radical Islamist. Maya and Sohail have not migrated into a new country; rather the very concept of their country has gone through the process of migration. Bangladesh, which was once a part of Pakistan until 1971 and of India until 1947, became a new nation. Sohail joined the war in order for that nation to happen, and Maya fled to India during the war and volunteered at refugee camps set by India. In the newly acquired country, Maya volunteered at the Women’s Shelter as an abortion doctor for the rape victims of the war. To make peace with her conflicted conscience, she chose the life of a bohemian doctor and established a charitable medical practice in a remote village of Bangladesh. Being unable to save a new mother from the wrath of a suspicious husband, Maya, “the crusading doctor” (15), gave up that charitable work and returned to Dhaka only to find that Sohail had turned their house in Dhaka into a site for religious congregation. Maya is shocked to find out about Sohail’s radical practices and fails to prevent him from sending his son to a *Madrasa*, where the little boy becomes a victim of sexual molestation. Maya’s attempt to rescue her nephew fails and Maya realises that Sohail has lost his touch with his home – the nation for which he fought a nine months long war. Sohail chooses the life of a religious cleric as a member of the Congregation of Islam, and after the death of his wife and son, leaves for Saudi Arabia for a pilgrimage, willing to never return. Amidst the turmoil that she suffers as a political columnist of a newspaper and

despite the disorder created by Sohail's religious fanaticism, Maya stays resilient, due to her renewed optimism for the growth of democracy in the new country.

According to Robin Cohen, Diasporic community makes effort to belong to the hegemonised culture of nation state of the countries of their settlement, and as the effort becomes difficult, and as they are conflicted by a double consciousness, they attempt at creating their own community based concept of nation states and express and promote "a return movement to their homeland, real or imagined" (105). For Maya, the liberation movement has given her the opportunity to spread root in the real homeland, and the only movement she imagines is that of moving forward with her fight for democracy. She defines herself as Bangladeshi first, Muslim second. On the other hand, Sohail is torn between his national identity and his religious identity, and in the process refuses to belong to the hegemonised culture of the new nation. Sohail is unable to adapt with double consciousness of the imagined diaspora. By Imagined diaspora, I wish to expand Anderson's idea of the imagined community. Just as nation and nation-ness can demarcate the line of belonging within the territory of imagined community, not knowing how to belong to a country that is struggling to balance its inherent traditional culture with accumulated religious culture can also result in the construction of an imagined diaspora. Everyone feels strange and uprooted; everyone suffers from PTSD, and in such cases, both the feeling of guilt and the overarching burden of morality act as a trigger point.

The birth of a nation and the birth of his guilt/morality are interconnected for Sohail. On his way back from the war front in 1971, Sohail killed an innocent Pakistani man. His guilt overshadowed his proud achievement as a freedom fighter and drove him to self-loathing. Upon his mother's request, he started reading the Qur'an as a form of repentance and gradually surrendered himself to the holy book. "There is only one way to be good now. The Book has told him he is good, that it is in his nature to be good. The words have been reclaimed and he swells up with love for the book" (124) because "this Book is what brought him to the surface and allowed him to breathe" (126). In "Diasporas," James Clifford writes that "diaspora presupposes a center, be it territorial or cultural or religious," and argues that such centring on an "axis of origin and return overrides local interactions necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social form." Clifford continues by saying, "the empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*. But there is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation" (235). Sohail's consciousness about an imagined diaspora reshapes itself through the prism of religious ideology, allowing his religious culture to usurp his national culture. He does not feel at home in the country for which he has fought a war; he feels no connection either with his Bengali culture or with the knowledge of the western world. He burns all his English books and expresses his total commitment to his only Book.

While religion invokes a sexual temptation in *Brick Lane*, Anam's *The Good Muslim* observes the annihilation of sexual pleasures and women's rights in the ritualistic observance of religion. Take for example, Sohail's marriage with Silvi, the woman who watches Sohail from a house across the road, preaching about all the religious scriptures of the world, like a leader of a syncretised cult. Maya recounts the day Silvi came to their house to meet Sohail. Maya pictures an imaginary scenario in which she sees Silvi reminding Sohail of the story of Bilal, a disciple who, while being severely punished by his own clan for converting into Islam, did not stop chanting the glory of "One, only One" God for there can be only one (176). After the fated meeting between Sohail and Silvi, the topic of Sohail's preaching shifted from all gods to One God, and his audience were made to sit in segregation, because Islam would not permit men and women to sit together in a public place (179). Gradually, Silvi's religiosity pulled Sohail away from his familiar definition of home, which eventually caused him to question his obscure relationship with the secular/national culture of his homeland. As Nietzsche has said in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, "Punishment makes men harder and colder; it concentrates, it sharpens the feeling of alienation" (82), Sohail alienates himself from society and from his family and creates an alternative home on the rooftop of his mother's house, where people come to listen to him speak of God's words, taking him to be the wisest of men. Religion becomes the centre for him, and his dwelling place evolves into a location of centre declaring its solidarity with what is not there.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been responsible for opening a diverse channel of discourse on colonial politics. Many a writer from across the globe has used Conrad either as a point of reference or of departure. Take for example, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration through the North* (1969), which takes its cue from Conrad and explores the diasporic dilemma in context of Fanonian-Freudian-Saidian psycho-sexual politics, and W.G. Sebald whose *Austerlitz* (2001) plunges into the dark histories of exile and holocaust. Zia Haider Rahman, in his debut novel, *In the Light of What We Know*, turns on a high voltage light bulb of knowledge with an intent to illuminate the darkness of a diasporic heart and yet bounces back to a destination, preordained by the inevitable darkness, guarded by religion. The unnamed mediating narrator of the book unfolds the story of his friend Zafar, a Bangladeshi-British banker cum mathematician cum lawyer cum eclectic thinker, who trots around the globe chasing his "homing desire." Zafar leaves his banking job and goes to Afghanistan to work as a Human Rights lawyer for the UN. A citizen of the world in all possible way, he has Bangladesh, London, Boston, New York, Afghanistan and Pakistan in his roster of home. A child of rape during the liberation war, he has no familial attachments with the homeland (where his unmarried mother was raped and impregnated by a Pakistani soldier during the war, gave birth to him, and later handed him over to be raised by an uncle), or with the adopted home in London. If only he could call any of the

places his home, his self-seeking journey might have come to a hopeful end. Exile and homeless since birth, Zafar turns his life into a mission for truth or knowledge, home or hope. As the unnamed narrator notes, Zafar's "lack of home," or "the unmooring of his body... leads to and results from the unmooring of his soul" (247).

In the process of his journey through the heart of darkness, he takes Emily Hampton-Wyvern as a metaphor for home. He follows Emily to Afghanistan, where they both work for the UN, and lets Emily accept him as her lover and later fiancé in her usual indifferent and reluctant way. His ruthless attempts to bridge the gap between his oriental reality and Emily's occidental fantasy fall apart because of Emily's reluctance to accept him as one of her own kind. The unnamed narrator defines Zafar's pursuit as a longing for home: "Zafar had set himself in the pursuit of knowledge, and it is apparent to me now, in a way it was not before, that he had done so not in order to "better himself," as the expression goes, but in order to lay ground for his feet to stand upon; in order that is, to go home, somewhere, and take root" (497).

In an article titled, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall defines diaspora experience by "the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity, which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (223). A Bangladeshi by birth, adopting into British nationality, and then living in the US and later in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Zafar belongs to a category that Robin Cohen calls "a diaspora of a diaspora" (261). Cohen argues, cultural identity is not a fixed essence; 'it is constructed through a blend of memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. (261). Zafar cannot go back home because he does not have a home to return, and because he does not have one, he invests himself in constructing his identity by blending his narrative with knowledge, memory and fantasy. In his pursuit, Emily becomes his allurements, an interpolation of a home, and in order to actualise his homing fantasy, he unwittingly engages with her in a game of "Empire and the Ego" (222). Afghanistan becomes a radial point for people from all over the world to collide and shatter into fragmented identities. Emily and Zafar are at a loss (or lost) and spend a lifetime in pursuit of meaning that always seems to be attainable while they are staying at transit points – in countries that belong to none of them. They are displaced but they have no homeward journey to complete. They are fixed in their state of displaced nothingness, and although one of them may have functioned as a catalyst (Emily) while the other becomes an intermediary (Zafar), they both fail to resolve the issue of their isolation from society, from culture or from each other.

Knowledge is a burden. Zia Haider Rahman's unnamed narrator and the protagonist display visible signs of exhaustion for carrying that overloaded burden all their lives. The unnamed narrator's mundane marriage and his

apparent betrayal of friendship stamp the label of failure on his overtly ambitious and elitist life. Zafar, the protagonist, on the other hand, fails to comply with the overwhelming burden of his cognitive load and ends up in a psychiatric facility. However, the whole extravagant pursuit of knowledge seems pointless at one point when Zafar's knowledge of metaphysics, mathematics, science, literature, philosophy and history are all reduced to one simple question: "do you know the Shahadah?" (311). Zafar is asked that question by a man named Dr Reza Mehrani, a scientist with Iranian ancestral history, at a private gathering in Colonel Sikandar's residence. Right before he was asked that question, Zafar was talking about the issue of ethno-cultural bonding among the people of South Asian Diaspora:

I think that expatriate Pakistanis and Bangladeshis – the babus as you call them – they can no longer keep their distance. And there's a deep pleasure in talking to someone who knows where you're coming from right away, who knows what you're talking about and can even finish your sentences. Nothing really beats that familiarity, that feeling of being swept into a vortex of mutual understanding. You all must know this. But equally I find it troubling. Is everybody so pleased to find a shared experience that their emotions rule the content? Not always but sometimes, sometimes as I walk away from the conversation, I wonder if it was a conversation framed by common defensiveness, a sense of unity by exclusion, which makes me uneasy because those kinds of conversations also exclude things that could challenge or test whatever's being said. (321)

After Zafar brought out the issue of exclusion that dwells within the boundary of those expatriate communities, Dr Reza Mehrani announced, "You're one of us, dear boy. You're one of us... because you are a Muslim" (321). He then asked Zafar, "Do you know the Shahadah?" In answer to his question, Zafar gave him the English translation: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger" (322). Dr Reza chided Zafar for using a non-English word for God in his translation of the Shahadah complaining that the use of the word Allah destroys the meaning and "leaves the impression we worship some foreign god called Allah, when in fact the Shahadah is a beautiful creed of monotheism" (322). Upon asked to recite the Shahadah again, Zafar gave a corrected version by saying "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger" (322). In response, Dr Reza Mehrani gave his final verdict: "You are one of us because you are a Muslim and you are from here" (322). Even though Zafar protested the statement by saying that he was a Bangladeshi, his protest was silenced after General Khan dubbed Bangladesh as "a wound of betrayal of East Pakistan" (322).

With the proclamation of the Shahadah, Zafar's religious identity superseded his national one and he became a liaison for the Muslims who were working together for the greater good of the Muslim brotherhood of Afghanistan and its

surrounding region. However, the irony lies in the fact that Zafar never believed that Islam could hold answers to all his questions. In an earlier conversation with the narrator, Zafar stated, “I believed that Islam’s response to the pursuit of meaning was not to provide answers but to drill and drum men into forsaking meanings for ritual and habit. I believed such things when meaning counted for more than the rewards of ritual” (167). But in the end, it is the ritual of knowing his Shahadah, which rewarded him by making him a member of an imagined community of brotherhood, disregarding all his past identities. Because he was fortunate to be a part of the real good Muslim community, and because he earned the trust and protection of Colonel Sikandar, he walked unharmed through the fragile door that separates the jihadists from the Muslim Allies of the western world.

In a conversation with Zafar about his visit to Bangladesh, Emily gives the impression that Zafar’s visit to Bangladesh resonates a “romantic journey home” (377) and makes a typical orientalist comment, “I’m curious to know what it’s like to go back home” (375). Emily’s remarks threaten Zafar’s volatile identity and brings him face to face with his horror of living in a homeless, rootless life – as a British, Bangladeshi, Muslim man – serving successfully as a diasporic “Native Informant” (Spivak, *A Critic of Postcolonial Reason* 342) because of his credibility as a Bangladeshi and a Muslim (387). Zafar is Haider’s Kurtz of the post 9/11 era, whose epiphany of “the horror” is analogous to his pursuit of knowledge. Zafar wanted to blend his Bangladeshi and British cultures by writing his stories and connecting them with those of Emily’s, but was reminded by Emily that no part of her story was his (275), and by Phillip – the privileged white man working for a Western Development Agency – that Zafar’s culture could almost match with an Afghan’s because of his identity as a Bangladeshi and a Muslim (387). Phillip’s patronising approval might have worked in favour of Sohail in Tahmima Anam’s novel, but Zafar was not in pursuit of a home where religion functions as a bonding agent.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes that “the phrase false expectation suggests great expectation” (33). Monica Ali’s Chanu has suffered the consequence of being entrapped within this paradoxical framework of false/great expectation of real/imagined home. Tahmima Anam’s Sohail builds his own Satis House on the edifice of religion. Zia Haider Rahman’s Zafar also finds himself in the same muddle by falling desperately in love with Emily – the allurements of an unattainable home. And in the light of what we know, the Nietzschean shout of love (or cry for acknowledgment) of Chanu, Sohail, and Zafar ends up being consumed by an unconquerable horror,” and makes them realize that the diasporic world they live in is indeed “a madhouse” (105). In short, theirs is a dystopian consciousness: schizophrenic and multi-faceted.

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