

REHANA AHMED. *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. Pp. 246. \$100.00 (cloth).
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Since the 1988 *Satanic Verses* affair, a rather simplistic dichotomy of secular liberalism and freedom of speech versus religious authoritarianism has pervaded discussions of Muslims in Britain. Rehana Ahmed's *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* aims to critique this polarization and subsequently to offer a more nuanced—specifically materialist—perspective on how literary writers understand and represent the lives of Muslims in Britain. Ahmed builds on the work of experts in South Asian migration to Britain, such as Susheila Nasta and Ruvani Ranasinha, and of scholars in the fields of black and Asian writing, such as Sara Upstone and Dave Gunning. With a particular focus on Muslim South Asian identities, she also makes use of key scholars in the field of Muslim literary and cultural studies, such as Geoffrey Nash, Claire Chambers, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin.

Ahmed, paying particular attention to the criticism levied against multiculturalism in recent years, elucidates the inaccuracies and prejudices that are exposed when blaming multicultural policies for a society supposedly divided by the “cultural excess” of Muslims (8). By calling on the work of key multicultural scholars, such as Tariq Modood, Charles Taylor, and Bhikhu Parekh, Ahmed aims to “complicate and challenge” (9) criticisms of multiculturalism as damaging to secular liberalism by analyzing a number of texts that allow her to elucidate “the centrality of class to multicultural politics in Britain” (10). Through adopting a materialist lens, Ahmed manages to present a unique and highly convincing case for the recognition of “capitalist structures of power and oppression” (11) in our understanding of Muslims in multicultural Britain. Moving chronologically, Ahmed begins with a historical exploration into South Asian Muslims in Britain and freedom of speech controversies, and she uses this contextual grounding to move into a discussion of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

Reading *The Satanic Verses* “alongside and against” (21) the protests that it caused, Ahmed questions the binary of Islam versus British secular liberalism that has been perpetuated by the right-wing media, secular left-wing liberals, and Rushdie himself. The antiracist rhetoric that the novelist prides himself on, she shows, was used as a way to try and bring people together: the protestors were either framed as “misguided, ignorant or even barbaric,” or as disrupting possibilities for antiracist activism by mistakenly focusing their grievances on Rushdie (67). Both responses, Ahmed explains, demonstrate “a simultaneous failure to allow a minority group to define their oppression according to how they experienced it” (67). Ahmed deftly draws our attention to the misconception that it was only Rushdie's artistic expression that demonstrated true boundary crossing and a challenge to dogma. Rather, she explains, it was in fact the Bradford protestors who pushed the boundaries by making their voices heard as economically deprived minorities within a secular, capitalist social structure (87). While much has been written on *The Satanic Verses* since its publication, particularly its Mahound narrative, Ahmed offers a fresh perspective that cleverly integrates the novel with both its contemporaneous context and its aftermath.

Using *The Satanic Verses* as a point of departure, Ahmed considers a number of Hanif Kureishi's works as a “valorisation of a secularist liberal discourse” (22) before moving on to a discussion of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004) in the context of struggles for recognition by disadvantaged, minority communities. Ahmed's fifth chapter, in which she considers Nadeem Aslam's 2004 novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*, is particularly convincing. A novel that considers the difficult subject of “honor killings,” it has been received, on the one hand, as a divulgence into South Asian and Islamic cultural brutality, and on the other hand, as a rather sensationalist and unfair portrayal of Britain's northern, Pakistani communities. Ahmed argues that while *Maps for Lost Lovers* gives a voice to a minority community and allows the inhabitants of the fictional town Dasht-e-Tanhaii to explore various issues surrounding

Muslim identity, the novel finds itself unable to move beyond the binary of “minority communitarianism against individual freedom” (177). As a result, and similarly to the other texts that Ahmed explores, little room is allowed for an exploration into the possibilities of a political Muslim (but not Islamist) identity. From the perspective of gender, in particular, Ahmed shows how although the novel narrates the lives of Muslim women, the only roles offered to them are victimhood, “complicity with the oppressive misogynistic practices of the community” (171), or withdrawal from the culture and community itself, meaning that the possibility for a collective, Muslim femininity that works against oppression is not considered. Ahmed’s final chapter on Muslim memoir addresses a number of texts that have so far received little critical attention and explores the complexities of Muslim self-representation and the burden of authority on the Muslim writer.

In *Writing British Muslims* Ahmed takes an overused and simplistic understanding of Islam as inherently oppressive and restrictive in contrast with the supposedly liberating force of Western secularism and offers a new and critical perspective. While much has been written on the intersections between race, culture, religion, and gender in multicultural Britain, there has often been a lack of recognition for the role that class plays. In her thoroughly well-researched and elegantly written monograph, Ahmed addresses this significant lack and shows the role that fiction by Muslim authors plays in addressing secular liberalism’s resistance to political, faith-based identities.

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AMANDA ANDERSON. *Bleak Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. 171. \$75.00 (cloth).
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Though written before the British referendum on whether or not to leave the European Union and the 2016 United States presidential election, Amanda Anderson’s *Bleak Liberalism* reminds us that liberalism, as a political and philosophical project, has long conceived of itself as having limited appeal and little hope of success. By highlighting liberalism’s bleakness, Anderson is defending liberalism as a complex lived practice that, in her view, is unjustly associated with naïve ideas of “human perfectibility and assured progressivism” (1). In a wide-ranging argument that spans the liberalisms of Victorian Britain and the Cold War United States, Anderson shows how novelists as diverse as Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, E. M. Forster, Lionel Trilling, Ralph Ellison, and Doris Lessing all variously emphasized liberalism’s “bleak prospects and reduced expectations, on the one hand, and the absolute necessity of defending basic liberal principles, programs, and institutions, on the other” (25). For Anderson, the payoff for attending to liberalism’s bleakness is that once we see the liberal life as genuinely vexed, we might better imagine living a commitment to its ideals when they seem most under attack. Whether one is looking to defend, critique, or investigate “liberalism,” Anderson’s admirably concise monograph (weighing in at a trim 171 pages) is worth engaging.

Bleak Liberalism begins with two introductory chapters where Anderson surveys the critical landscape in which “liberal” has become a term of derision for both conservative and radical critics. She writes, “philosophical liberalism is often contrasted not only with radical philosophies that call for wholesale transformation, but also with a conservative tradition that claims a monopoly on tragic, pessimistic, and “realistic” conceptions of humanity. From this