

[Novel] *The Girl Upstairs*

[Thesis] Fictive responsibility: Why all novelists are political writers (whether they like it or not)

Submitted by Lauren Amy Hayhurst to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This PhD is part novel and part thesis. The novel, *The Girl Upstairs (TGU)*, is in three parts. Parts one and two are included here in full. A synopsis of part three is included in the appendices. The thesis presents an original “action model” for Creative Writing (CW) called “fictive responsibility”. *TGU* can be treated as a case study, demonstrating the practical application of this new model.

TGU follows a Bengali-Muslim family as they confront the wayward behaviour of Kifah Rahman, a feisty sixteen-year-old. Set somewhere in south-west England, Kifah’s misadventures start when she discovers an envelope discarded in a drawer. The address is her mother’s childhood home across the city, but she’s never heard of the addressee, Zubi Rahman. Kifah sneaks off school to investigate. Kifah’s clandestine visits incite rumours and soon Kifah is accused of tarnishing the family’s reputation. *TGU* confronts the difficult subjects of “honour”-based-violence (HBV), domestic violence and “crimes-of-passion”. By exploring different types of violence-against-women (VAW), *TGU* shows how perceived differences in, for example, “culture”, religion, or heritage, rather than dividing us, can present new ways to connect across moral values or lifestyles, ultimately promoting togetherness and empathy between different cultures.

The thesis explores how the “political” relates to “literature” through the writer’s creative process, suggesting that all novelists are inherently politicised individuals and fictions are produced through an inherently politicised process. The significance of this is undermined by those who claim fiction writers just “make it up”. Failing to recognise the “politics of representation” that operates alongside invention in CW has contributed to the recent exacerbation around “cultural appropriation”. For some writers this presents a threat to “free” expression. For others, “free” expression must be treated with respect, especially when fictionalising characters that appear external to the writer’s own experience. Theoretical and conceptual analysis is drawn from cultural studies, ethnography, literary criticism and philosophy. Case studies include fictions with Muslim female characters in a post-9/11 setting. In addition to literary analysis, the thesis explores how “authenticity” interacts with an author’s perceived affiliation with characters or themes within the fiction.

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Fictive responsibility:
Why all novelists are political writers (whether they like it or not)

Lauren Hayhurst

Introduction: *The Creative Stalemate*

Fictional storytelling is a socially and culturally defined act, the accumulative project of knowledge, experience and imagination, but this is a recursive process. As Stuart Hall has pointed out; “a central feature of any society, fiction has been an object of public discussion almost since its production began” (1997, 344). Whilst the interdependence of fiction and reality has been espoused by many prominent writers and thinkers (Dick, Orwell, Chomsky), there has been scant dialogue concerning the role of dominance in the sociohistorical positions between the nexus of author, characters, and those they represent or representees. How can Creative Writing (CW) enlighten such debates in ways unavailable to a literary critical perspective? How do seemingly fundamental differences such as race, religion or class, influence a writer’s creative process? If this occurs unintentionally, how can such transactions become knowable? And what about the resultant impact on the reader? In his famous heuristic device, M. H. Abrams (1953) places the text at the centre of the universe, artist and audience to depict mimetic, expressive and didactic theories of literature, from Plato to modernism (Leitch et. al. 2001). Many theorists after this point have “focused in turn on the imitation of reality and its lessons, on inner truths and visions, on poetic techniques and their orchestrations, and on sociohistorical and political representations and their values” (Leitch et. al. 2001, 5). Whilst these developments in cultural literary critique are relevant to this thesis, perhaps yet another reframing of Abrams’ model is needed, to take into account what happens *before* the text appears. How do theories of CW – the *process* of literature – relate to existing theories of literature? What happens to Abrams’ model if we take away the text completely and replace it with “practice”? What happens to the “value” of the text when we scrutinise the motivations of the author? By shifting focus from product to process in this way, the finished text becomes just one piece of a vast and complex puzzle. Graeme Harper considers this pre-text space: “Creative writing involves

individual action and communities of action, a shared human belief in the communicative power of the writing arts, creatively charged in the physical acts of doing it” (2014, 63). Although CW is certainly the engine of literature, viewing its primary function as a producer of finished objects not only disregards an entire discipline of scholarship up until this material point, but also denies literature a new sphere of criticism drawn from what CW theory has to offer.

This thesis has evolved through an open-minded inquisitiveness towards creative writerly action and how this can be conceived through ways other than what the CW artefact, or literature as end-product, can offer. Harper and Jeri Kroll note the multifaceted ways the CW discipline spans both artistic and practical fields, and as such its research is “concerned with actions and well as outcomes, with the individual as well as the culture and, furthermore, with concepts and theories that illuminate these complex interrelationships” (2013, 2). In addition to literary criticism, CW intersects with methodologies and epistemologies found in the Arts such as music, drama, film, or design, and also with other disciplines where similar methods are employed, such as in “action research, educational research, and arts-based research in [...] the social sciences” (Kroll & Harper 2013, 2). CW research is fundamentally practice-led but also relies on “situational knowledge”ⁱ, so whilst there may be common correlative features between CW and other practice-led disciplines, such as Anthropology, creative practitioners will draw from the entire spectrum of accessible discourses to best support each unique project. In my own experience of writing *The Girl Upstairs* (TGU), I found the methodologies and theories of Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 1990, 1991, 2002, 2013) particularly useful. The “ethnographies of the particular” (1991), and the notion of writing *against* culture, enhanced my existing understanding of Donna Haraway (1988, 1991) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), whose theories champion transgressing boundaries and rejecting accepted categories on, for example, the “self” or gendered spaces. This insight coalesced with two key ideas from philosophy professor James Harold (2003, 2008); the moral capacity of the writer’s imagination, and how the aesthetic value of fiction correlates to its moral value. From here emerged “fictive responsibility”, which I describe as an “action model”ⁱⁱ for CW, and for which I hope to ultimately shape a methodology to be accessed and adapted by any writer.

The fictive responsibility model became infused with theories from other disciplines where representation and “othering” are prominent, such as cultural

studies (Mercer, Gilroy) and postcolonial literary criticism (Ahmed, Chambers, Morey & Yaqin), along with existing CW theory on the role of ethics (Cosgrove) and validating practice-led research as knowledge production (Brien & Webb). I also conducted vast “situational knowledge” research incorporating qualitative, conceptual and empirical methods, chiefly within Sociology, Psychology or Law. Including material from service providers and charities, such as the Forced Marriage Unit, Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, it covered such specialised subjects as honour-based-violenceⁱⁱⁱ (HBV), identity in Bangladeshi adolescents in Britain, and conflict resolution in collectivist societies. *TGU* thus provides a useful case study to discuss the writerly experience and practical application of the fictive responsibility model. Although theory and pedagogy exists specific to CW (Brien & Webb, Cosgrove, Harper), the discipline has yet to gain widespread recognition as a source for generating new knowledge, even though other disciplines already utilise fictional representations and narrative constructs.^{iv} Significantly, the debate lacks contributions outside what is dictated by the “free” expression and censorship dichotomy. This has become more pronounced since the issue of cultural appropriation was ridiculed by Lionel Shriver at the Brisbane festival in September 2016, and who branded it a threat to “free” expression. If writers continue to frame appropriation as synonymous with censorship, the lack of dialogic exchange around authenticity, representation, and especially publication will only aggravate this creative stalemate.

To grasp a sense of interdependence between a particular fiction and relevant aspects of reality, we might consider what societal events connect with the fictional themes. There have been numerous incidents in the past causing hostility towards Muslims in Britain, the earliest arguably being *The Satanic Verses* controversy, with 9/11 elevating “Islamist” terrorism to the number one priority, and 7/7 bringing Britain’s “multiculturalism” under renewed questioning (Morey & Yaqin 2011, 77). It is important to note at this early stage, how, according to Paul Gilroy, the “wars of recent years have made Muslim into a racial category” (2015, online). This implicates constructs of “Muslim” in debates about race, something we will return to in discussions on multiculturalism in Chapter III. In the context of *TGU*, then, we might look to the extremist attacks^v that took place in Manchester and London in May 2017, and also to the enduring issue of HBV. A complex phenomenon, I have experienced various dilemmas around how to define, approach and challenge HBV.

Rochelle L. Terman highlights the issue from a human rights context: “how to address issues of “honour killing” and domestic violence so that the state, justice, and legal systems provide for the specific needs of minority and/or immigrant women without singling them out for racist or xenophobic treatment.” (2010, 7) Sonya Fernandez, Professor of Law, shows how this is even more problematic when “addressing” becomes exoticising, as this “renders [HBV] as part of the racial, religious and cultural savagery of the Other, rather than as one of the cross-cultural sites of male violence against women” (2009, 280). HBV is consistently vilified above other forms of VAW, and has become another cipher, along with hijab and forced marriage (FM), for irreconcilable difference. Critic Rehana Ahmed shows how these issues, and the related imagery, create and sustain a negative stereotype of the figure of the “Muslim woman” due to “the Islamophobic context in which they are discussed, the prurience they engender in the media and the ways in which they can be constructed to corroborate neo-Orientalist stereotypes about Muslim communities” (2015, 157). The attack in Manchester on 22 May 2017 presented another opportunity to reinforce such negative stereotypes, demonstrated two days later in Radio 4’s broadcast of *The World Tonight*. Andrew Hoskins interviews two young men from the Libyan Youth Association. Since the bomber, a British-born Muslim man called Salman Abedi, was of Libyan descent, Hoskins wants to hear their reaction to the attack, which, he points out, “was carried out by a member of their own ‘close-knit’ community [...] Salman Abedi was originally from Libya and his parents were first generation Libyans, *how do you feel about that as someone whose own family originally is from Libya?*” (2017, emphasis added) Hoskins illustrates a tendency that can be termed “expected authenticity”; the assumption that people who share certain identity signifiers^{vi} must also share something else, some unknown thing particular to “them” that eludes “everyone else”. Madeline Clements highlights this drive to “illuminate the workings of ‘the Muslim’ ‘mind’” (2016, 22), amplified in the decade of the “war on terror”, with pressure mounting on “transnational and diasporic writers of South Asian [...] Muslim origin to ‘disclose’ to Western readers” (21) where their allegiances might lie. Hoskins is forcing his respondent into a group with the attackers, forcing an “expected authenticity”, and even though Hoskins does not mention the word “condemn” the implication is enough for the respondent to provide the acceptable reply: “I don’t think the focus should be on Salman’s nationality, he’s committed a very, very bad act, something

that which everyone condemns as human beings anyway.” (*The World Today*, 2017).

This answer exposes the flaws of the question: why would sharing something so broad and personal as nationality or religion equate to sharing other identity signifiers, this time “non-visible” like personality traits or moral values?^{vii} This exposes the futility of relying on one or two signifiers to assume authenticity at all^{viii}, and applied to works of fiction, this can lead to certain texts being disproportionately valued over others, rather than assessing authenticity based on evidence or merit^{ix}. Such data remains hidden *behind* the text, buried in the author’s own practice. Following this logic of looking beyond, perhaps it would be more useful to pay more attention to the correlation of any non-visible identity signifiers which may be less historically-entrenched in preconceptions of power. Hoskins’ respondent alludes to this when he states that violence is “something that which everyone condemns as human beings anyway” (*The World Today* 2017), showing how connecting over non-visible signifiers such as morality may actually prove more relevant to authenticity than relying on what visible signifiers seem to declare by default. Clearly authenticity is more complicated than that which can be assumed by what is visible, primarily because there always exists, as Spivak claims, an “internal line of cultural difference within the ‘same culture’” (2003, 96). With this comes the associated roles of dominance which, to use Kobena Mercer’s example, “has the effect of separating those who belong to ‘the black community’^x from those who do not.” (1990, 66)

Within CW, then, the roles of dominance between author, characters, and representees become significant when we consider the “political” in relation to literature. Discussions at the 2012-13 Edinburgh World Writers’ Conference provides useful insight to this end, with one theme holding particular significance: “Should literature be political?” Whilst debates surrounding this theme are diverse, there is one issue common to most speakers: a *struggle* to define what is meant by the “political” in relation to literature. Njabulo Ndebele considers “‘political literature’ in the sense of a literature that dramatises political activism” (2012, 112), “literature that ‘politicises’ by deepening of awareness” (114). Ahdaf Soueif sees the political in all writers; “[Writers] don’t choose the story: we’re drawn in where the feeling is deepest...A work of fiction lives by empathy. This itself is a political act” (2012, 105). The involvement of the writer in the political is more actively interpreted by John Burnside who claims the writer “has a duty one way or another to play a political role”

(2013). Three seemingly disparate elements connect literature and the political – activism, empathy and duty. Ndebele’s comment raises two points. The first is most clear-cut, and perhaps most obvious: the genre of Political Fiction, that is, literature as a product that *dramatizes* politics, the content of which is likely preoccupied with Politics. The second is characteristically vague: the “deepening of awareness”, which alludes to the deliberate transference of specific information from writer to reader through fiction. Soueif defines the political as the act of writing itself, an act driven by empathy; an instinct, perhaps, or emotional inclination. Burnside also assumes the political precedes the writer, in that it is a function of writing, part of the “role” that the writer undertakes.

Aside from Ndebele’s mention of genre, each speaker highlights the intrinsic, pre-existing nature of the political in relation to literature, foregrounding the *process* of how literature is produced, rather than the finished *product* itself, static, sealed and ready for judgement. This is a crucial revelation, as up until now fiction – the end-product – has been widely heralded as offering insight into social issues, as evidenced in the extent of its application which include such diverse areas as development studies, political think-tanks, education and nursing. But if the political in relation to literature can now be contextualised by process, rather than – or as well as – product, then the impetus is on CW, creative process and creative writerly action, and these areas therefore become significant for literary analysis. This realisation that the political in literature is pre-existing, and that it is shaped by the writer’s process, nullifies the conditional clause in the Edinburgh question – *should* all literature be political – and shifts focus away from literary criticism towards creative practice. Process is undeniably a part of “literature” but in such an overarching term perhaps it has become lost; perhaps literature’s established, renowned position, both as an academic discipline and in general utterance, is too entrenched in existing assumptions and expectations for a new angle of the “political” to be easily identified and communicated. As a relatively new discipline, and with its emphasis on practice rather than criticism, CW offers a new theoretical framework where current ambiguities of literature and the political can be interrogated, highlighting the processes and structures at work beyond, and behind, the evaluated end piece. To this end, a more appropriate question might be – *How does the novelist’s creative process engage with a politics of representation?* We can acknowledge that if the nature of the political is pre-existing, then all literature is

innately “political” – fiction is dependent on “real-life” as politics informs the creative process.

The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) refers, albeit indirectly, to this politics of representation in their benchmark statement for CW. They recognise a writer’s “essential liberty to invent what they need to create an aesthetic whole” (2008, 12). We can see how this “liberty to invent” applies to the real along with the imaginary, to representation along with invention, because successful fiction relies on capturing a sense of the “real” in a way that “rings true” for the reader. Hemingway encapsulates this writerly action: “to make the story so *real beyond any reality* that it will become a part of the reader’s experience and a part of his memory” (cited. Phillips (ed.) 1984, 5, emphasis added). This highlights how critical and multifaceted the concept of “truthfulness” is to writing fiction. Whether we are “inventing” or “representing”, there are different kinds of truth to which we must attend. There is the all-important *sensation of “truth”*, perceived by the reader as an *impression of “reality”*, and this is the “magic spell” essential to all successful fiction. We can term this truth the “truth-spell”, and this can be distinguished from other kinds of truth, as whilst all are essentially fluid and unpredictable constructs, we can see how the truth-spell exists in the mechanics of the prose. As Sam North explains: “we have to be able to suspend the disbelief of our readers, and in its place create belief, if we want to enchant them. If I am to create belief in the story, it should make sense” (2012, 59). Rushdie refers to “imaginative truth”, which is always subjective and partial; “ethical truth”, a term I use to refer to author intention, and; “documentary truth”, which relates to accuracy. Barbara Wallraff shows how truth concepts must incorporate accuracy: “If two policemen had recently stopped by my house to ask me to buy tickets to their annual party, and that was reported as ‘Police officers questioned Wallraff at her home,’ it would be an accurate statement but not true. [...] An accurate statement is factually correct; a true statement, besides being accurate, should mean what it seems to mean” (2005, 5). Whilst fiction has no obligation towards “documentary truth” – after all, the politics of representation for CW coexists with invention – we must nevertheless rely on a basic level of accuracy to maintain the truth-spell. Jean Saunders illustrates what happens when the truth-spell breaks, as when reading a novel that describes a long sandy beach at Sorrento, she *knows* there is no long, sandy beach at Sorrento: “There will be many writers who don’t know this [detail] –

but it was the writer's responsibility to get it right. [It] may not have affected the general romance tone of the novel, but it would have affected knowledgeable readers' enjoyment of it, causing them to pause instantly, and to mentally register: *that isn't right*" (1999, 63).

So, along with the everyday elements which constitute our basic impression of reality – general facts-of-life, common-sense assumptions, timings and continuity and, perhaps the most important, logic – we also have what is relatable, and what is unfamiliar.^{xi} We can call this the "truth-spell" model (see Appendix 2). To remain within the truth-spell, readers have to trust their writer, and this trust is built on the accuracy of the everyday elements. Relatable elements, which are common to most people, depending of course on your target audience, can then provide a bridge between the everyday and the unfamiliar. If readers remain within the truth-spell at the relatable stage, they are more likely to invest in the characters when dealing with situations and emotions of which they themselves may have no knowledge or experience. As the author, then, it is paramount that the everyday elements are accurate, and this is not only to ensure the integrity of the fiction, but also our credibility as a writer.

By emphasising a politics of representation in CW, we implicate fiction in the same transactions of other forms of representation, for example in ethnography. Melvin Burgess refers to this as "political significance and meaning coming across" (2012, 123) which, more plainly, involves the "real-world" and its inhabitants as inferred by the novelist, represented in writing, to be interpreted by the reader. Fictional representations must therefore be considered in relation to the ethical concerns of "positional superiority" which, as highlighted by Said, simultaneously permits and restricts certain authors' access to certain imaginary content by entertaining "the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (2003 [1978], 7). We will explore how such Orientalist tendencies persist within the infrastructure of literary and publishing arenas which allow, some might argue prioritise, the "imaginative examination of things Oriental [...] based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness." (Said 2003 [1978], 8)

Fiction involving Muslim characters, in particular Muslim women, in novels published after 9/11 presents a useful case study to explore these issues of representation. I will focus on Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Monica

Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), and Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007)^{xii}. Claire Chambers notes possible permutations for discussion: "Whereas non-Muslim writers tend to zero in on the figure of the terrorist, drawing upon a tradition in literature stretching back to Conrad, Muslim writers have often looked at Islam in complex, multifaceted ways" (2011, 13). She outlines a tendency to homogenise realities apparently different from one's own, so when representing "Muslim" characters one might conclude it is more urgent for non-Muslim rather than Muslim authors to be aware of ethical approaches. The problem with this is that not only is "Muslim" a multifaceted label used to indicate a range of identities – such as religion, heritage, "culture" – each of which contain their own nuanced and often acrimoniously fought over sub-categories, but surely "authenticity" cannot be guaranteed based on one signifier? I will approach the problem from the other direction by analysing first how the fiction interacts with stereotype – e.g. "Muslim-ness" equates to violence, or all Muslim women are oppressed – and then consider the signifiers between author, characters, and representees, and the role that dominance might play. Despite the likely variances in specificity, affiliation (see Clements 2016, 3) clearly exists through the "Muslim-ness" of the author and the "Muslim-ness" of the characters. Whilst acknowledging the validity of this signifier, I want to also ask: what power dynamics are at work other than religion; other than culture? Would authenticity based on a shared visible notion of religion, for example, be implicated by differences in non-visible markers, such as gender, class or economics? Rehana Ahmed et al. recognises the potential danger of "understanding culture as something fixed and static, thereafter looking for nugatory examples that are characteristic or 'authentic'" (2012, 2). What happens to authenticity when a writer shares the visible signifier of religion with their characters, but occupies a higher class position? Authenticity may be automatically awarded, but unacknowledged roles of dominance could still influence representations considering that, as Abu-Lughod highlights in the idea of "positionality" (1991), the "outsider never simply stands outside [as] what we call the outside is a position *within* a larger political-historical complex...every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere" (468). The chapters that follow seek to determine how an author's subjective beliefs can skew the impression of "truth" in this way and how we might investigate a writer's practice and contemplate how "unintentional bias" might operate.

Chapter I: *The evolution of a writer's practice*

My own creative practice prioritises an unceasing, self-reflexive and recursive holism which exists in, transgresses and circumnavigates the “borders”. The term “borderlands” derives from Gloria Anzaldúa, the cultural, gender, feminist and queer theorist who particularly inspired me during my Masters degree. Anzaldúa’s “new Mestiza consciousness” describes her own existence between identities, belonging to all categories and none, “a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. Its intense energy comes from continual creative motion...it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures [and] creat[es] a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave” (1987, 80). The addition of this third element, this “new mestiza”, helps us to envisage how CW can engage with agnostic research practices by “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity, [learning] to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning...to divergent thinking, characterised by movement” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79). My creative practice exists in this negative space, first coined by John Keats as “Negative Capability”, that is, “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1817). Reminiscent of Rushdie’s existing “at a slight angle to reality” (1995 [1983], 22), this negative space also speaks to the self-interrogatory and revisionary qualities of James Harold’s “fictive imagining” and the CW vision for hermeneutics.

I find the notions of “negative capability” and “borderlands” particularly resonant with my experiences of conducting fieldwork. According to Munizha Ahmad, “the role and methodologies of fieldwork in the literary sphere are far less clearly defined than in other disciplines, such as anthropology or history” (1999, online), a claim that I can corroborate through my experiences as a PhD researcher. Throughout the first half of my degree I straddled both the English and Anthropology departments, but felt I belonged to neither. I had two supervisors, one a novelist in CW, the other an ethnographer in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, and I frequently felt pulled in conflicting directions. Preliminary discussions surrounding my 2013 research trip to Bangladesh exposed stark differences between the practical application of fieldwork in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Testimony from Shalini Puri,

Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh, speaking on fieldwork in Grenada, captures the vulnerability and isolation I felt about my trip:

It was with a discomfiting awareness of my lack of training in field-based inquiry that I embarked upon this project, which an anthropologist colleague informed me consisted of “mixed methods qualitative research.” Even such a rudimentary summary characterization of what I was attempting was unavailable in my discipline. Fieldwork-based practices in literature and the humanities more generally have much to learn from anthropology’s own self-critique, rejection, and reinventions of practices of fieldwork and ethnography. (2016, 36)

I expressed comparable sentiments in a 2014 conference paper entitled “Fictionalising the ‘British Muslim experience’ – A writer’s perspective”, delivered to the *British Cultures after 9/11* conference at Teesside University. Speaking on my encounter with ethics clearances:

The main concern was misrepresentation. This is a key issue in Anthropology, but beyond personal consideration, I have not found this to be the case in Creative Writing. In critical English Studies, there are of course theories on ‘other-ing’ which crossover with the Social Sciences, but in my experience I have found little that bridges the gap between literary critique of the ‘other’ and creatively representing the ‘other’. (2014)

Whilst Puri is grounded firmly within literary criticism and my research centres specifically on CW, considering the latter remains in many institutions a subsection of English Studies – and considering the critical exegesis that accompanies CW research degrees – my focus can be seen as overlapping with but also extending beyond Puri’s discussions of “literary fieldwork”. This scholarly framework presents a valuable springboard towards what could be usefully termed “fictive fieldwork”. This is something that I began to practise through necessity, through lack of an existing model, constructed with information gleaned from my ethnographer supervisor and the Masters module – Gender and Politics in the Middle East – which I audited, and shaped through my own heuristic approach to what I learned to be “participant-observation” qualitative data collection.

To begin with I was not aware of these approaches, although I have found evidence of ethical thinking in my journal records as early as 2005, and which developed throughout 2006 during a year of travelling. In January 2010, whilst finishing my Masters, this thinking coalesced into a concern for the writer’s responsibility. Writing in my journal at the time:

There will be writers who care and writers who don't and the rewards for efforts will not be distributed by any rational or understandable method. The framing of the response will categorise writers once cultures have merged to discuss it, and only then can the extent of ignorance be revealed and amendments made, if the writer so wishes. Nothing can be enforced, and perhaps it shouldn't, for an act of respect isn't an act of respect without freewill, and unless a respectful representation is offered and accepted, the Other must represent themselves. (21 January 2010, private journal)

In this way, the idea of fictive responsibility is deeply rooted in the evolution of my own practice. However, when I first arrived at the Exeter mosque in 2011, I felt like a fraud. I was not entitled to tackle this subject. On one side I saw the "Muslim women" who I was paranoid about offending, and on the other side I saw myself. Without realising, I had automatically homogenised what I now understand to be a hugely diverse group.

I began researching HBV in 2008 as a result of a writing assignment on "fictionalising the real". I came across an Amnesty International report on "honour killings" in Pakistan, something I had never come across before but which quickly became a "specialist" area of interest. I began reading capriciously and extensively: first-person confessional pieces; research articles exploring location-specific issues and factors associated with HBV such as gender, mental health or infrastructure; policy documents published by public bodies such as the Forced Marriage Unit or charitable organisations such as Karma Nirvana; service-provider material from the Police, women's refuges, domestic violence services or local community groups. In parallel to this I was creating characters and planning plotlines that were infused with the information gleaned from this reading. Soon this coalesced with on-the-ground experiences of "fictive fieldwork" which involved attending various events and subsequently communicating with those interested, conducting informal face-to-face interviews over coffee or engaging in email discussions.

Meeting people on this professional level revealed "insider" information essential to the *accuracy* of my fiction, but it was the resulting micro-interactions, by which I mean intense engagement with individuals, which revealed the glimpses of *truth*. During this time, however, when I focussed solely on service providers and charity work, I see now how I developed an exaggerated picture of powerless victims, abused by heartless families and misunderstood by the authorities. It was only when I attended the BRISMES (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)

conference in June 2011 at the University of Exeter that I began to learn about, and went on to explore further, the theories and practices around the politics of representation, positionality and bias, and the ethnocentricity of feminism. This was essential in shaping the academic direction of FR and enabled me to engage critically with the networks I was establishing. The Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK); where I attended the AGM at the Houses of Parliament in 2012 and 2013, participated in critical debates – on topics such as child grooming and extremism in youths – and befriended fascinating women from A-level students to Members of Parliament. The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO); where I attended two conferences and a seminar, heard HBV and FM survivors share their stories, and became acquainted with the executive director, Diana Nammi, who enthusiastically supports my creative endeavours. I met with two Diverse Communities Officers at the Devon and Cornwall Police, and attended a police training conference on the Prevent strategy; trained and volunteered for a Devon domestic violence service, and volunteered for two years with a small action group supporting women categorised at "NRPF", or No Recourse to Public Funds. This included those who had arrived in the UK after marriage and were fleeing abuse, but without a status of "Indefinite Leave to Remain", would not be admitted to the women's refuge or supported financially or legally to escape their situation.

It was through this action group that I first met N who works as a translator for those with NRPF, runs "cultural" training on HBV and FM for the Police, and sits on the board at Exeter mosque. N became my creative and intellectual ally. It was she who invited me to Bangladesh where we stayed for six weeks. Visiting relatives or receiving visitors almost every day, I met people from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and means, and many of these encounters infused my writing. For example, N introduced me to someone she described as "the freedom-fighter's son", whose experiences of struggle and destitution since the Liberation War in 1971^{xiii} came to form the backstory of my character Ariq. Another example is how the kindness of many different men that I met came to inform my character of Ahmad, Kifah's father. In particular was one elderly man, an ex-cricketer for Bangladesh, who gave me an unexpected gift on what happened to be my birthday. It was a book entitled *Rising from the Ashes: Women's Narratives of 1971* and inside the cover, he wrote: "Lauren, be among the best ones with your creative pen. The sweetest of birthday wishes for you from Bangladesh." It was the more personal, emotional encounters

like this that made me feel less of an outsider, or to use Nisi Shawl's analogy, less of a "Tourist", and more like a "Guest". Shawl suggests three descriptors for cross-cultural interaction:

Invaders arrive without warning, take whatever they want for use in whatever way they see fit. [...] Theirs is a position of entitlement without allegiance. Tourists are expected. [...] [They] may be ignorant, but they can be intelligent as well, and are therefore educable. Guests are invited. Their relationships with their hosts can become long-term commitments and are often reciprocal. (2005, 87)

Shawl's analogy helped me to appreciate my position in relation to those I met. Whilst I felt like a "Guest" with N and her family, I remained a "Tourist" with some people, for example those I interviewed as part of my ethnographic-infused "fictive fieldwork". Before departing for Bangladesh I set up several meetings with key individuals including a human right's lawyer, women's rights campaigners and several English professors at Dhaka University. It was with this latter group that I felt most affinity, both as a writer and as a creative practitioner in a university setting. Shawl suggests that in terms of "authenticity", the best "transcultural writers can hope for is understanding and acceptance by readers in general and by individual members of the culture they're attempting to represent in particular" (2005, 89). I felt like the English professors accepted my work, and I felt encouraged by their reactions, as I recounted in my journal:

"Finally, someone is trying to bust these stereotypes." "Don't get her on her hobby-horse," said Tahmina, the chairperson. "How can I not get on my hobby-horse," she threw her arms up in the air, then gestured to me, "she IS my hobby-horse." Then they had a discussion about how I was filling in a gap. How plenty of people talk about the warped stereotypes, and no-one writes to try and challenge them. (19 August 2013, private journal)

Whilst this group of professors may have accepted me as a Guest, it still remained within a *professional* capacity. There was another, more intimate situation, where I felt that I arrived as a Tourist but departed a Guest. It was at an Iftar party (we visited Bangladesh during Ramadan) where I met a girl called Rumaisa who was twelve years old. I recounted some of our conversation in my journal: "Rumaisa leaned in close and said – 'Are you a tourist?' I said, 'What does a tourist look like?' She shrugged and said, 'Someone from another country.' 'Well, I am from another country, do you think I'm a tourist?' 'No,' she said, shaking her head. 'You're friends with us.'" (2 August 2013, Private journal)

Throughout my trip, I tried to conduct myself as Shawl suggests; “like the best of all possible Tourists: to stay alert and observant, to watch for the ways our own background influences how we interpret our surroundings.” (2005, 88) As part of my developing practice, after any “fictive fieldwork” activity, I would then engage in a re-writing pattern whereby I would assess passages, whether in my journal or in novel drafts, for evidence of assumptions or generalisations, and meet with N to discuss and revise. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was counteracting for “unintentional bias”. Psychologist Patricia Devine notes the tendency for members of a relative majority group to exercise bias unintentionally, which, “even if people don’t believe racist stereotypes are true, those stereotypes, once absorbed, can influence people’s behavior without their awareness or intent” (cited in Nordell 2017). This exposes the unreliability of assuming authenticity based on one or two visible signifiers; other roles of dominance are at play even if the individual claims otherwise. Social psychologist, Evelyn Carter, explains that individuals can intuit situations differently depending on whether they align with a majority or minority group: “While people in the majority may only see intentional acts of discrimination, people in the minority may register both those acts and unintended ones. White people, for instance, might only hear a racist remark, while people of color might register subtler actions, like someone scooting away slightly on a bus—behaviors the majority may not even be aware they’re doing” (Nordell 2017). According to this logic, if “Muslim-ness” is shared between writer and characters, unintentional bias may still operate through other contrasting visible or non-visible signifiers, such as class, gender, or political views. Equally, then, although the *non*-Muslim-ness of a writer could present a dominant role over the Muslim-ness of the characters, affiliation might yet be found through other visible or non-visible signifiers where dominance is *not* at play. And yet this underlying dominant role does not simply disappear when alternative affiliation is found. Will Cox, colleague of Devine, outlines ways to remain mindful of how such dominance might be operating: “Observe your own stereotypes and replace them [...] Look for situational reasons for a person’s behavior, rather than stereotypes about that person’s group. Seek out people who belong to groups unlike your own” (Nordell 2017).

This resonates keenly with James Harold’s concept of “fictive imagining” (2003), that is, “imagin[ing] what it would be like to have some of a character’s qualities and experiences, or what it would be like to be in the kinds of circumstances

that character faces, or both.” (248) Harold suggests this can actually *improve* the imagination, as by using analogous connections to bridge differences between oneself, one’s characters, and those they represent, the capacity for empathy is increased. When we introduce roles of dominance into this kind of imagining, trying to perceive what Haraway terms “the vantage points of the subjugated” (1988, 583), whilst an urgent task, for Harold presents a moral concern: “the cases we worry about most often...tend to concern differences of race, gender, or other politically salient differences where the member of the more powerful group imagines a character who is a member of a less powerful group” (2003, 252). One may question, due to the historically-entrenched positions of power, whether this is even possible at all. This is explored in Said’s *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]), where he shows how the subjective experience of “White Men” became embedded as a system of knowledge through a project of homogenising, dehumanising and disempowering the “Oriental”. Ownership and control was asserted, in part, by claiming taxonomic “truths” which were “not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation” (2003, 227). Rushdie contemplates the inescapable partiality of “imaginative truth” in his 1982 essay, “Imaginary Homelands”; how the truth of distant memory is *his* truth, his India, “a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect...” (2010, 10) Simultaneously real and questionable, truth is tainted with the subjective, never at once absolute; it is inherently unreliable, intangible, contradictory and susceptible to manipulation. Considering this partiality of truth, it would be wise for writers to promote new communication pathways where other disciplines, such as Development Studies^{xiv} as discussed in the next chapter, are already utilising fiction as a source of knowledge.

Chapter II: Dealing in knowledge

David Lewis, Professor of Social Policy and Development at LSE, advocates the use of fiction alongside other relevant academic and policy documents challenging what he recognises as a “hierarchy of authority” (2014, 20). Similarly, Donna Haraway outlines “the knowledge and power game” (1988, 577) which shows how the “objectivity” of scientific knowledge is falsely privileged and obscures the “rhetorical nature of truth, including scientific truth” (577). In acknowledging the difficulty of defining a process of making meaning which simultaneously meets a desire for attaining an objective stance, whilst recognising the unavoidable “conquering gaze” that renders objectivity, in positivistic terms, impossible, Haraway calls for a “doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*” (1988, 581). Ideas of “objectivity” are no longer confined to attaining an ultimate detachment, but rather are concerned with practising a level of objectivity that is *transparent about its flaws*. Haraway suggests the restrictive gaze is replaced by a notion of “vision” that is fundamentally unreliable and incomplete, as according to Haraway, “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (583). In development methodologies, Lewis et al. note the persistence of positivist approaches which venerate a “high level of scientific rigor, openness to accepting the verdict of the data, and focus on specific concrete questions of relevance to the lives of the poor” (2014, 6). According to Lewis, these current approaches still require supplementing with additional contexts and processes, and so he advocates a more humanising methodology that emphasises face-to-face, two-way communication and “recognises multiple voices, history and complexity, and prefers to see evidence more modestly in terms of ‘inkling’ rather than ‘proof.’” (2014, 6) This could be seen as a practical effort towards Haraway’s notion of “eyes”, organic and digital, cosmic and miniscule, which she posits as a way to envisage versions of reality that are outside of one’s own; with “vision” comprising “active perceptual systems...specific ways of seeing...highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds” (1988, 583). Haraway rejects a presentation of “truth” that insists on entirety, suggesting that this only leads to expectations of totality of perspectives and intolerance of difference, and so to counter this tendency we must embrace our

“elaborate specificity...and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view” (583).

Even though there is an indication of seeking to operate outside of one’s own position, Lewis’ drive towards a “humanising” methodology may not do enough to confront the “serious danger” highlighted by Haraway of “romanticising and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (1988, 584). Doubt in this regard emerges from a claim Lewis makes in relation to Said’s observations that contextualise literature within a particular historicity of colonialism and empire:

Along with Said, we very much recognise the fact that “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them”, but our focus is on literature in general as an alternative representational genre through which to understand development processes and phenomena. (Lewis et al. 2014, 25)

This is problematic because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the fictional representation of phenomena can easily become influenced by the socio-political position of a writer in relation to characters and those represented; what is left out can obscure interpretations of what is included. I applaud this cross-disciplinary use of fiction as a source of knowledge, and agree with Lewis’ suggestion that fiction offers insights “without compromising either complexity, politics or readability in the way that academic literature is often accused of doing” (30). However, there arises concern about what is happening to this fictionally-supplied knowledge if development researchers are content to focus on “literature in general”, rather than acknowledging that literature cannot exist in isolation from the power structures in which it is produced. Considering Lewis et al. seek to situate fiction as knowledge, and considering that there *is* reference to Foucault’s literary discourse in this paper, that there is no recognition of the relational dialectic between power, knowledge and truth that is so central to Foucault’s work sits incongruously. If international development policies are being shaped by knowledge gained through fictional representations, considering the “free” expression demanded by the fiction writer and the vulnerability to unintentional bias, surely it is essential for researchers to have oversight of the specific contexts in which such literature is generated? If policies are in any way influenced by poorly-informed fiction that reinforces damaging stereotypes such as those outlined in Chapter IV, what is to prevent these

misconceptions from being transformed into correlative damaging action on-the-ground?

Donna Lee Brien and Jen Webb present a way for CW to enter this “knowledge debate” by showcasing an “agnostic” theory of knowledge production; one that prioritises interpretation, perceptual phenomena and the idea that knowledge is contingent rather than “true”: “History is filled with knowledge that has emerged out of creative practice [but] that knowledge is gleaned subsequent to the work and is attributed not to the artist, but to...the critics” (2008, online). If research and artefacts of CW only become authorised as knowledge *a posteriori* once they have undergone external analysis by a scholar trained in literary critique, then, does this not undermine the artist’s integrity and credibility? Whilst James Harold looks towards the value of the work itself – that the artwork’s epistemic value impacts the aesthetic value, to be discussed later in this thesis – Brien and Webb trace the problem to the contested position of CW within the academy, where the artist-academic must satisfy the seemingly conflicting logics of creative *and* knowledge production. To dissolve this dichotomy of research versus practice, creative production must be validated as knowledge production, and to do this we must disrupt the accepted “truths” upon which knowledge is constituted. Brien and Webb outline these existing paradigms to “rely on a kind of theological structure: that there exists what is knowable, and worth knowing; that there exists what is testable and worth testing; that there exists something that at least accords with ‘the truth’; and, of course, that there is a source for all this work, all this knowledge, all these interpretations” (2008). It is when we look for this “source” that the logic of discussion runs out, ensnared in a concept of ethereality that resonates throughout this thesis. It is that unknowable *something* rejected by Poe as a writer’s “ecstatic intuition” (1846); it is the *thing* that writers “do” whenever they are “making it up”; it is the gap between the “political” and literature, the struggle to define what connects them; it is the “god trick”, the view of “infinite vision”, that Haraway warns against. Whilst, as Brien and Webb note, “creative outputs can convince as artwork, but less easily convince as knowledge work,” this is not to say that “creative knowledge” does not exist. Rather, the onus lies with the artist-academic and their “limits of interpretation [and] limited efforts to unpack, unpick and above all communicate what it is we have found” (Brien & Webb 2008). Overplaying the “making it up” or “inventiveness” parts of our processes only conceals the intricate alchemy we all perform; honing artistic finesse

and fine-tuning the mechanics of the craft, all whilst conducting research and analysis that is no less scholarly and critical than that found in the rest of Humanities.

To make the ethereal tangible, writers must affiliate themselves with the intricacies of cultural production in their own discipline, and engage more actively in the socio-political arenas to which their fiction contributes. We must announce our work as Poe did of “The Raven”: it “is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition” (1846). In this way we can make creation knowable by bringing our processes into the public sphere. As Brien and Webb state: “all the knowledge in the world does no-one any good until it is made public...interpretation is an act of community, an act of communication...an act of making, and of matter” (2008). This means artists would be held accountable to their art *after* publication,^{xv} not something that would appeal to all. Marguerite MacRobert recounts how one academic responded to her research: “Sacrilege [...] how could anyone conduct an academic study on something as individual and precious as a creative process” (2013, 73). Similarly Nadeem Aslam seems to uphold Poe’s “ecstatic intuition” (1846), ascribing his writerly abilities to a “novelist’s great gift” (Chambers, 2011, 151). Whilst claims to privacy must be respected, for fully-informed decisions to be made the benefits of such transparent dialogue must be more widely communicated. Some writers may act differently if they have chance to consider the self-deprecating effects of maintaining the unknowability of CW. But whether or not it receives recognition in the public sphere, creative knowledge is still being produced; artists themselves are actualising knowledge production through their own interpretative operations.

Brien and Webb suggest the logic of such interpretations can be communicated through the model of hermeneutics which “takes into account the individual parts of a work, context, event or idea, and considers how those parts relate to each other and to the whole.” (2008, online) As Brien and Webb further state:

...hermeneutics has no pretensions to the production of unequivocal meanings. Rather it provides a space for thoughtful, intelligent, reflective conversation. It involves cultivating the ability to understand from someone else’s point of view, and to appreciate the cultural and social forces that may have influenced another’s outlook. It is, in short, based on the logic of triangulation, and on building a situation where there is not only shared understanding, but also a common language for making sense of a work. (2008)

This seems to be an appropriate interpretative model for CW as it allows for the indeterminate nature of the fictional form, accommodating the fluctuating and serendipitous nature of CW as a function within an “agnostic” research system, not dependent “upon a single model, but can operate in a number of places and ways, and for a number of users” (Brien & Webb, 2008). In its concern with “cultural and social forces”, and with a collaborative outlook that prioritises “reflective conversation” and “shared understanding”, the hermeneutics model acknowledges the importance of historicising and locating contexts in relation to systems of power. In relation to Harold’s ideas on “moral motive”, this model would seem to move towards an “internal” motive. Whilst an “external” motive operates when “the reason for the imagining is *external* to the object being imagined” (2003, 253), an internal motive is the “one motive that can satisfy the moral concern [...] that does not see the imagined object solely as a means to an end, but that takes an interest in the object itself” (2003, 253). Thus, hermeneutics provides the essential grounding for practising the fictive responsibility model which relies on ethically-informed processes, self-reflexivity and an open artist-public exchange. In this respect then, it must be clarified that in the drive towards cultivating a “common language”, “common” specifically indicates shared and resilient communication pathways, rather than any universalised linguist ambition, as Haraway notes: “This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (1991, 181).

One objective when establishing such a space must be to cultivate the skills needed to address unintentional bias. Psychologists Will Cox and Patricia Devine, introduced above, conduct the “Madison” workshop. This “zeroes in on people’s beliefs about bias [...] Avoiding blame is key. The resulting message is carefully balanced: Bias is normal, but it’s not acceptable. You must change, but you’re not a bad person” (Nordell 2017). Jessica Nordell attended a Madison workshop and highlights the challenges around engendering a safe space:

On the day I attended, almost all the students in the audience were women or people of color, some seeking a way to combat bias directed *at them*. One student with shoulder-length blond hair confided in me that she cared a lot about these topics, but had hoped the workshop would address what to do about experiencing bias. The absence of white men in the group was conspicuous. (2017, online) [My emphasis]

In order for such complex and sensitive ideas to be openly discussed, a receptive environment where there is no fear of blame needs to be created. Before expecting individuals to actively scrutinise their own predisposition towards bias, perhaps a non-judgemental openness towards bias needs to be embedded on a structural or institutional level. As psychologist Glenn Adams suggests, focus needs to shift “from the task of changing individual hearts and minds to changing the sociocultural worlds in which those hearts and minds are immersed” (Nordell, 2017). But this could form a priority for writers applying the fictive responsibility model, to help initiate such change by willingly addressing their own habitual preconceptions and communicating such activity across an open network. Brien and Webb situate this ability to practise open and non-judgemental self-reflexivity as *the* central quality essential to embedding CW works and research as valid knowledge production: the “capacity to turn the analytical gaze on the self, to incorporate within the research project process and its outcomes an investigation and interpretation of the practitioner” (2008). Such apparent closeness to the work presents one counter-argument to this approach, as we have seen above in the awarding of knowledge to the trained scholar *a posteriori*. However, by ensuring a *transparency of flaws* in our self-analytical gaze, we can practise Haraway’s feminist objectivity and challenge the rhetoric of literary studies which relies on “an understanding that such investigation is a practice carried on by someone who is not the maker of the work” (Brien & Webb, 2008).

This imperative to locate creative-knowledge-production within the process and with the artist is recognised by Kim Lasky in her concept of poetics for CW. This poetics is “instigated during the compositional process as an integral part of that process, which makes for a critical perspective that is ongoing, rather than something to be addressed after the event, an afterthought” (2013, 25). This concept helps to consolidate the overall framework that I have outlined above, by recognising a production of knowledge that incorporates flaws, partiality, inconsistencies and agnosticism. It allows for:

...failed experimentation to be critically evaluated and the important knowledge gained to be shared, rather than denied. Rather than pointing out flaws to be negatively judged, this allows the writer to demonstrate the value of taking risks that advance knowledge even if they might not achieve the initial aims – a crucial aspect of practice-led research, in which understanding emerges during the act of writing and reflection,

and in which it should be recognised that as much, if not more, is often learnt when things do not work as expected. (Lasky, 2013, 25-26)

This sense of perpetuity is found in action research, as explored in Donald Schön's "reflection-in-action" theory (1983). Action research recognises the importance of inclusive active/reflective application, described by Schön as reflexivity, and suggests that the dynamistic combining of writing/reflection has knowledge value based on its spontaneity: "...reflection-in-action will be enacted rather than applied...taking place *within* the activity, in the form of a "non-rational intuitive artistry." (Gale, 2001, 109 [my emphasis]) Also featuring in Lasky's poetics of CW is the point of "developing ethics and testing beliefs" (2013, 21), something which Shady Cosgrove highlights as a priority in response to students' dismissal of research as an important part of the creative process. If university CW programmes seek to train students to a successful publication standard – which we can assume will seek to engage readers in a morally rich and reflective response (Harold, 2008) – without raising awareness of unintentional bias or ethical practice in the classroom, how do we, Cosgrove asks, "as writers and academics ensure [students] can thoughtfully negotiate issues of representation?" (2009, 134) For Cosgrove, it is because of "literary history's privileging of realism [that] it is imperative to the craft that students consider an ethics of representation" (134). CW must operate within the conventions of realism. Even in the surrealist or speculative forms the constructed world functions within a consistent set of beliefs, and whilst characters as subjects may not be "real" in the material sense, we can determine how they comprise and therefore represent aspects of real individuals or groups. In addition, the process of imagining *what it is like* (Harold 2003) to be another person – the process of empathising – is, according to the late Professor of Philosophy Ted Cohen, "the same achievement when we appreciate a fictional narrative by identifying with its characters [...] and engage in genuine moral exchange" (1999, 408).

The intricacies of improving the capacity for empathy are discussed by Raymond Mar *et al.* who suggest that "reading about complex social interactions such as those commonly described in narrative fiction [...] can result in changes of belief and attitude" (2005, 696).^{xvi} Steven Pinker (2011) discusses this study amongst others detailing participants' responses to experiments that test the "empathy-altruism hypothesis [...] based on the 'projection' and 'perspective-taking'

senses of empathy. According to this hypothesis, adopting someone's viewpoint [...] by imagining what it is like to be that person, induces a state of sympathy^{xvii} for that person" (704). Not only did experiments find that participants sympathised with specific characters who were experiencing problems and that this extended "to the group that the character represents" (2011, 708), but they also showed this sympathy to endure over a period of time: "...even when a stranger belongs to a group that people are strongly inclined to dislike, listening to his story while taking his perspective can genuinely expand their sympathy for him and for the group he represents, and not just during the few minutes after hearing the story" (2011, 710). In this case the delay was two weeks after the initial experiment, which significantly, for Pinker, constituted a "change of heart" (710). Whilst these experiments involved characters presented in live-action, rather than in fiction, Pinker suggests that "in the hands of a skilled narrator, a fictitious victim can elicit even *more* sympathy than a real one," (2011, 712) and cites an experiment by Frank Hakemulder (2000) where participants read either a novel or a non-fiction text. Hakemulder found, supporting the result of Mar et al., that "a narrative presentation causes stronger effects on our beliefs about the emotions and thoughts of others (social perception) than a non-narrative presentation with approximately the same contents" (2000, 107).^{xviii}

The correlation between experiencing empathy for fictive or "real" material situations certainly supports the need for ethical considerations in CW, which relies on creation becoming knowable. If fiction is to be exalted beyond something ethereal then the politics of representation, along with imagination and experience, must be showcased as an integral part of the creative process. As Cosgrove suggests, it is "the representations that are created, the way the 'data' have been written up that can affect readers" (2009, 136), and so in the classroom teachers "would focus on student work not solely as a final 'product', but also as a platform to focus on social responsibility that would emphasise ideas of process and representation" (138). In practice, this shift from product to process empowers writers with the intention to produce knowledge, rather than maintaining the unknowable "magic" of creativity, as Cosgrove notes, by incorporating reflection on representation into the CW workshop, this teacher-peer space can be used to develop "students' articulations of self and situatedness...and ensure that students contemplate the narrative choices they have made and the ensuing representational implications" (138).^{xix} By improving students' awareness of how narrative techniques are intended and interpreted, this also

strengthens ethical intelligence by cultivating students' ability to *reinterpret* their own acts of representation. Since "language use constitutes an ethically charged act calling for responsible choices" (Cosgrove, 2009, 140), students need to be trained in self-reflexivity, in identifying unintentional bias and to become alert to when, during the processes of author interpretation and creative representation, this bias is manifesting. This presents another argument against the "ethereality" of the creative process, as rather than idealising and defending it in this way, there is more to be gained from locating the creative process, from interrogating and showcasing it. Of course, when conceiving of what we are "doing" when dealing in knowledge, we are not necessarily restricted to "representation". Stephen Tyler offers a rather more playful alternative in the idea of "evoking": "The whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography from *mimesis* and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric" (1986, 130). Additionally, Tyler sees "knowledge" as existing *within* such evoking, in the "functional interaction of text-author-reader" (132), and this usefully reflects our quest to assign knowledge production both to the artist and the process of fiction writing. It also helps us envisage a notion of "motion" when thinking about how CW can interact with the contested concept of multiculturalism as it is experienced "on-the-ground". This elicits a welcome sense of resilience and "mending" in response to the rigid anti-multicultural sentiment expressed by some state officials, as discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III: “Owning” spaces and stories

After the Manchester incident on 22 May 2017, Ben Wallace, Minister for State Security, announced: “They are all terrorists. We have to be unequivocal that no amount of excuses, no amount of twisted reasoning about a foreign policy here or a foreign policy there can be an excuse... These people hate our values” (Boyle 2017). This illustrates how anti-multicultural sentiment persists as the core reason given for extremist attacks on UK soil. Similarly, Britain’s previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, has been reiterating his brand of “muscular liberalism” since he declared the failure of “state” multiculturalism in his Munich speech in 2011:

Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We’ve failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We’ve even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values (online).^{xx}

In this way, the homogenised figure of the “British Muslim” has been positioned as the antithesis of British liberalism or, as Rehana Ahmed suggests, as “a cipher for the excess of multiculturalism” (2015, 8). As an already marginalised group in Britain, “Muslims” are further persecuted by the view espoused by “hardline secularist liberals that religion, unlike race or sex, is chosen, and therefore [...] cannot be part of equality as recognition” (Ahmed 2015, 10). This logic weakens, however, when we consider how Cameron’s “unidirectional racialisation of extremism [works to] exclude Muslims from the fading prestige of whiteness” (Gilroy 2012, 394), and so in this recalibrated taxonomy, the homogenised category of the figure of “Muslim” can indeed be the target of “racial” discrimination. Colin Dayan explores this idea of “culturist racism” in her detailed analysis of the work of Haitian academic and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot. For Dayan, Trouillot was haunted by the word “culture” and by “what he saw as its uses, replacing the experience of racism with what he called ‘the conjure of culture’” (2014, 138). Dayan continues:

Why does Trouillot’s critique matter now? We are living in a time of extinctions: a systematic disposal of creatures deemed threatening or unfit. How easy it is for fear and dogma to allow us to demonize others, to deny them a common humanity, to do unspeakable things to them. In a disenchanted world, daily cruelty and casual

violence accompany the call for order, the need for security. (2014, 138)

It seems “security” is an enduringly powerful lure used to justify the dissection and demarcation of spaces, as Cameron’s prescriptive and dictatorial vitriol demonstrates, closing down any in-between or overlapping spaces where groups or individuals may exist as both, or neither, “we” and “they”. As Paul Gilroy notes, “clos[ing] down the space previously taken up by sojourners, denizens and benefit-seeking freeloaders” (2012, 388) is branded as necessary if Britain is to remain “secure”.

Perhaps we need to resuscitate Gilroy’s *demotic* multiculturalism, “that [which] is not the outcome of governmental drift and institutional indifference, but of concrete oppositional work: political, aesthetic, cultural, scholarly” (2004, 108). It is this version of multiculturalism that Sarah Song speaks to when she raises awareness of vulnerable internal minorities, highlighting the importance of democratic deliberation to draw “on the voices of affected parties and giving special weight to the voice of women at the centre of gendered cultural conflicts” (2010, online). Such vernacular interaction is also championed by Humayun Ansari, as he sees a multiculturalism that “stresses active dialogue between cultural groups, active attempts at creating community cohesion, and the acceptance of over-arching identity” (2014, 173). This emphasis towards on-the-ground communication and movement between spaces is comparable to the kinds of empathetic objectives practised by creative writers, as outlined in the previous chapter.

In thinking about the idea of “specific” spaces, Kobena Mercer discusses the power contingent intricacies that affect the types of spaces available, how they are accessed and who can access them. There are hidden restrictions that come from both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the community. Internal hierarchies concerned with sensitivities to association assert roles of dominance over the relatively reduced agency of the artist, and Mercer describes this as “ideological policing” (1990, 64) and “cultural insiderism” (68) which “has the effect of separating those who belong to [for example] ‘the black community’ from those who do not” (66). Mercer discusses how this can be exacerbated according to the artist’s intended audience, as one view considers black “artists whose work is taken up by white audiences have no basis in ‘the black community’ [and this] turns on the hierarchical distinctions between vernacular and literate culture [...] which is a hierarchy structured by relations of

class" (1990, 67). On top of these complex stipulations, an external homogenising tendency also assumes individual artistic expression to be demonstrative of the *entire* community/race/culture. This duplicitous burden is imposed on artists "positioned in the margins of the institutional spaces of cultural production [who] are burdened with the impossible role of speaking as 'representatives' in the sense that they are expected to 'speak for' the black communities from which they come" (Mercer 1990, 62). Criticism is more likely to produce a racial reading which can overshadow discussion of aesthetic impact, or halt discussion altogether, and this is evident in Mercer's example of the 1989 museum exhibition *The Other Story*, where the overriding focus – from both "sides" – was not on "the actual work in the exhibition, but more on the curatorial principles on which it was based." (1990, 61) One critic, Peter Fuller, dismisses it specifically because it was "racial" at all. Whilst Mercer admits complaints were not without basis – it was "an overcrowded and overly chaotic narrative" (62) – criticism failed to acknowledge the surrounding contexts which contributed to these problems; both the structural and institutional context which regulates access to the artistic platform, and the politico-historic context which reproduces and conceals the racial differences leading to such regulation. As such, *The Other Story* had to do more than any other exhibition – and within a more confined space – since the escalatory pressure transformed it into a "corrective inclusion to counteract the historical exclusion of black artists from the official versions of the modernist narrative... a single exhibition had to 'stand for' the totality of everything that could fall within the category of black art" (Mercer 1990, 62).

The extent of this pressure and the resultant stifling of criticism can be seen as a serious consequence of what Mercer terms the "unhappy legacy of historical marginalisation" (1990, 64). This is even further exacerbated when judgments are then made by a powerful, prominent "insider" figure, such as Rushdie. His criticism of the film *Handsworth Songs* (1987) produced by Black Audio asserted that acclaim was based purely on the fact that a black film, any black film, had actually "got made". Mercer highlights how this dismissiveness amounts to "a kind of authoritarian policing in which criticism is reduced to rivalrous macho posturing which only further inhibits the open expression of differences" (1990, 64). Here, Rushdie's comments gain authenticity due to the entitlement afforded to him by his position as an "insider", but when more nuanced differences are exposed – class, education, public image –

such “entitlement” becomes questionable, so not only does this result in the suppressing of critical debate, but it also conceals those who are already less visible. This is evidence of suppressing Sarah Song’s “vulnerable internal minorities” (2010, online) and highlights the need for “demographic deliberation” as in ignoring these “internal” differences we are “negating the voices and viewpoints of [for example] black women and black gay men” (Mercer, 1990, 71) along with every other marginalised “insider” group. Ultimately, if an artwork by a marginalised artist manages to gain access to that “special” platform, and is then judged to have “no base or context...in the [specific] community” (66) or is dismissed because its artistic excellence was not “consistent with the normative values of traditional British anti-intellectualism” (64), or if judgement is conditional to the type of audience, then the artist is forced into some shadowy space that is both and neither “inside” and/or “outside” their perceived or felt identity.

Enterprises such as the Muslim Writers Award and the Last Word Festival, the *Guardian* and 4th Estate BAME prize and the Jhalak prize, have positive outcomes. Not only do they offer inroads into an industry that is, as Kavita Das claims, “even more daunting for writers of color and other underrepresented writers” (2015) but they also support those who may begin at a disadvantage. Considering that, “in the UK, the academic achievements of children from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds are lower than that of their counterparts. These children tend to belong to the Muslim faith.” (Qureshi, 2015) However, the provision of a “Muslim only” literary space seen as a “special” space *only* for marginal people, can present more restrictions. Whilst on the surface such spaces seem to celebrate voices and enable access to mainstream audiences, there is an underlying problematic revealed by Mercer, that “after many years of struggle, you arrive at the threshold of enunciation and are 'given' the right-to-speak and a limited space in which to tell your story” (1990, 62). Then such spaces have the ostracising effect of reproducing the “them/us” divide, in that the space has been allowed or “given” to the marginal artist, from the majority-owned arena.

Such issues suggest there is an “institutionalised whiteness” at work. This is evident in Claire Vaye Watkins’ essay ‘On Pandering’ (2015), the responses to which – from, amongst others, Marlon James, Kavita Das, Paula Young Lee – highlight the complex and multifaceted barriers to publication faced by marginalised writers, or writers of colour. Marlon James identifies a “cultural tone”, set by a readership

majority of white women, that dictates what is accepted for publication; “we writers of colour spend way too much time pandering to the white woman [...] the male editors will only accept one type of story. Everyone knows what a New Yorker story will look like... If I pandered to a cultural tone set by white women, particularly older white female critics, I would have had 10 stories published by now” (cited in Cian, 2015, online). These mandates have led to writers of colour modifying characters to meet the appeal of a white audience, or even restricting subject-material. According to Danuta Kean, writers of colour are being “advised by agents and editors to make their manuscripts marketable in this country by upping the sari count, dealing with gang culture or some other image that conforms to White preconceptions” (2015, online).

Such prescriptions show that despite offering a “special” platform, restrictions still apply. In designating certain issues “Muslim only”, agents and publishers are reinforcing divisions by fixing parameters on what Muslim writers *can* write about, forcing this diverse group even deeper into the realm of the “other”. From my experience as a “non-Muslim” writer, the idea that HBV was a “Muslim issue” consolidated the paranoia I felt in appropriating something that did not belong to me. Fadia Faqir highlights a related dilemma: “How do you criticise the Arab and Muslim world, without your texts being used by Orientalists to justify dropping bombs on Baghdad, or continuing the war in Palestine?” (Chambers 2011, 59) Whilst this preoccupation also exacerbated my “imposter-syndrome”^{xxi} and most certainly inhibited writerly action, it also facilitated development of a self-aware practice. As such, I am able to expose the futility of “issue-ownership” by communicating how HBV is not solely a “Muslim” issue. Faqir again demonstrates: “A parallel value system ... which is, in action, not Islamic... The protection of honour now takes priority over Islamic teachings. Societal and political structures conspire to form [this] parallel value system, which is stronger than the Islamic religion” (2001, 74). In attempting to revive my writerly action, I engaged in the following self-reflection:

Even though I am representing Muslim characters, am I, in fact, criticising the “Muslim world” at all? Surely I am criticising political extremists, the misappropriation of religion, patriarchal domination, violence-against-women...? And are these solely issues for the Muslim world? No. Surely the way to criticise these issues is to disassociate them from “Muslim”, and expose corresponding issues within the Orientalist world? (2014, conference paper, unpublished)

I attempted to embody this in *TGU* in the parallels drawn across the experiences of both Kifah and Tallie, as Faqir says; ‘Don’t think you’re superior, you’ve got your own problems in Britain.’ (Chambers 2011, 64)

Rushdie discusses this problem of owning issues or stories, or as I experienced it, a lack of entitlement to speak, when the narrator in his 1983 novel *Shame* speculates over telling a friend’s story and anticipates meeting resistance:

Maybe my friend should be telling this story, or another one, his own [...] *Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! . . .* I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. *Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?* I reply with more questions: is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories? Can only the dead speak? (1995 [1983], 21)

The conflict expressed here is not the narrator doubting whether or not he is entitled to speak, as it may first appear, but rather it is an assertion that entitlement and story-telling are oxymoronic; language is not an entrapment of nationality and subjects cannot be contained. “Shame, dear reader, is not the exclusive property on the East” (Rushdie, 1995 [1983], 22). Whilst this is certainly the case in principle, it does not manifest in practice, evidenced by the fact that the narrator feels obliged to raise the point at all. I share the narrator’s predilections for a simultaneously real and fictional space – what might be considered a “nowhere” space, intersecting with Keats’ “negative capability” – that does not have to be defined, reliable or knowable, that exists “at a slight angle to reality” (Rushdie, 1995 [1983], 22). However it is not the inventiveness of CW, or the “essential liberty” (NAWE, 2008) attached to this, that should be celebrated for giving rise to this indispensable nowhere space, as the emphasis of “made-up-ness” might lead us to believe. It is precisely fiction’s preoccupation with “truth” – and the alchemy of representation, accuracy and honesty that comprises this “truth” – that enables the nowhere space to exist; “making it up” is what happens when writers manage to occupy this space. To emphasise it as a tenet of CW only confines the complex processes to the realm of the ethereal, as discussed in Chapter II, and provides ammunition to criers of “*Outsider! Trespasser!*” which, in turn, fuels further scepticism about fiction writers’ recourse to certain stories and enervates their capacity for virtuous engagement with “truth”.

It is, ultimately, irrelevant whether writers agree or disagree with the idea of entitlement or permission or ownership. After all, there already exists a social precedent that preaches caution concerning the motive and authenticity of fictional works, or indeed, concerning the perceived identity of writers before a work is granted publication. This is especially so for subject material that disrupts hierarchies and includes representations of marginalised or vulnerable groups or individuals, whether defined across perceived divides of racial, cultural, gender or disability, and this is even further exacerbated by a lack of awarding authenticity based on non-visible signifiers. Since this social precedent around appropriation is not going away, it is unhelpful to maintain Shriver's attitude which sees it as "part of a larger climate of super-sensitivity, giving rise to proliferating prohibitions supposedly in the interest of social justice that constrain fiction writers and prospectively makes our work impossible" (Shriver 2016). Rather than it being an attempt to stifle our creativity, we could consider such trepidation, suspicion and scepticism around "ownership" as symptomatic of an artist-public dialogue deficient in transparent exchange. Nurturing the artist-public dialogue would be a priority for those ethically-motivated writers interested in incorporating the fictive responsibility model. Fictive responsibility does not promote censorship and oppose "free" expression, as we might anticipate from a counter-argument. Rather it presents a possible way to challenge the appropriation stalemate, in line with Rehana Ahmed *et al.* (2012), who explain that highlighting the

material context is not to advocate censorship but to deconstruct reductive representations of literary controversies involving minority groups in terms of a clash between religious or cultural dogma and censorship, on the one hand, and secular creative freedom on the other. [...] ...a censorship-free speech dichotomy is premised on a highly problematic perception of the right to free speech as absolute and inviolable, regardless of the social consequences, and obscures the asymmetries of the public domain in which some people are more free and able to speak than others. (Ahmed *et al.* 2012, 13)

In this way, if we appreciate that the reasons for raising concerns about appropriation are connected to an inequality of material constructs *external* to an individual writer's action, we can see that the writer's creativity is not, in fact, under threat. What *is* in question is the way writers conduct their processes of "truth-making" in view of roles of dominance between themselves and the vulnerable individuals or groups represented. This interaction is what shows us the "ethical truth" in a fiction; how closely author intention aligns with representee interpretation,

which, for the truth-spell to be maintained, suggests both ethical and aesthetic dimensions must be satisfied, rather than just the latter. In this way, fictive responsibility can enable transparent artist-public exchange by providing a critical framework with which to interrogate cultural appropriation whilst, crucially, respecting it as a necessary and legitimate issue.

This mission has become much trickier since Shriver's speech (*The Guardian* 2016), which sparked "an international row about censorship, artistic licence and respect for minorities after she delivered a scathing attack on the concept of 'cultural appropriation'" (Alexander 2016). In the speech, Shriver describes the fiction writer's process: "We make things up, we chance our arms, sometimes we do a little research, but in the end it's still about what we can get away with – what we can put over on our readers" (2016). We recognise here that same concept of ethereality, of "making it up", espoused by Aslam and rejected by Poe. Phrases like "get away with" and "put over" might be dismissed as playful and provocative, however they betray an underlying intonation of arrogance and entitlement; certainly there is a sense of expectation, which suggests the writer considers herself in a dominant role over the character and/or those represented. This is confirmed when Shriver asks: "are we fiction writers to seek 'permission' to use a character from another race or culture...Do we set up a stand on the corner and approach passers-by with a clipboard" (2016). In envisaging the nexus of author-character-representee, how might the position of reader intersect here? How might the reader and/or representee respond to such derision?

We see this scenario played out when Shriver describes the reception of her 2013 novel *Big Brother*:

...fat is now one of those issues where you either have to be one of us, or you're the enemy. I verified this when I had a long email correspondence with a "Healthy at Any Size" activist [...] No amount of explaining...could overcome the scrawny author's photo on the flap. She and her colleagues in the fat rights movement did not want my advocacy. I could not *weigh-in* on this material because I did not belong to the club. I found this an artistic, political, and even commercial disappointment – because [...] if only skinny-minnies will buy your book, you've evaporated the pool of prospective consumers to a puddle. (2016)

These comments reveal an adolescent-like demand to be recognised by the group she has just belittled, followed by indignation when this did not materialise. Then the

concerns turn towards the detrimental result on book sales. Whilst Shriver cites her reasons for writing *Big Brother* (2013) as grief and sympathy for her own brother who “died from the complications of morbid obesity” (2016), her sincerity dissolves as this is delivered with such derisive cadence. Not only does this undermine her professed desire to be taken seriously by her marginalised readership, but it also demonstrates Harold’s “external” motive, failing to meet the moral concern to “not treat the character, or the world the character is drawn from, disrespectfully.” (2003, 253) And there is yet another discrepancy, found in Shriver’s failure to grasp character as a device capable of symbolising *actual people*. First she claims characters to be the writer’s “creatures” to “exploit the hell out of”, and is then incensed when rejected by the *actual people* she identifies as relating to her characters. Claiming to “put one over” on one’s readers is not the most effective way to win allegiances, and as such it seems bizarre to expect recognition from a marginalised group whilst belittling their cause. Where is the space for marginal objections to dominant representations? Unless such a space is made, marginal voices will remain suppressed by the dominant writer’s recourse to an unimpeded, and arguably self-serving, “free’ expression”, where marginal characters or representees are vulnerable to manipulation in what Mercer terms “the political and ethical violence inherent in ‘the indignity of speaking for others’” (1990, 72).

Considering this power of fiction to influence readers, we cannot expect authenticity to be handed out arbitrarily, as Shriver seems to demand. Is it not unreasonable and alarming for white/dominant writers to expect this? For Madeline Clements this is a *liberal* construction of free expression positioned by some writers to represent “the reason, modernity and secularity for which they claim to stand against the evils of an irrational, encroaching religious extremism” (2016, 5). We have discussed the social tendency to homogenise the diversity of “Muslims” into one anonymous whole. So by positioning “free” expression as antithetical to “Muslims” and Islam, this now becomes a liberal privilege denied to members of those groups. Such a totalising, prescriptive attitude is reminiscent of something dictatorial and persecutory, especially as Muslims in Britain are a minority group, and Muslim women in Britain comprise a “vulnerable internal minority” as described previously by Sarah Song (2010). It is this reluctance towards objective discussion that has further reinforced, according to Clements, the “binary oppositions between Islam and the West, rather than seeking to understand why they occur” (2016, 6),

and this also results in obscuring and underplaying the significance of dominance and unintentional bias as a whole. Perhaps one answer could be to forge a way to recognise authenticity through non-visible signifiers. Some vital steps towards this might be for writers to discard existing preconceptions about their right to “free” speech, confront the ethics of cultural appropriation and seriously dissect the power dynamics informing their position in relation to the people and issues they are writing about. After displaying such elitist tendencies, Shriver does not seem wholly incapable of recognising these steps, as she shows an awareness of the importance of “truth” in fictional representations in highlighting that the “spirit of good fiction is one of exploration, generosity, curiosity, audacity, and compassion” (2016). It would undoubtedly be more compelling to embody that compassionate sentiment in one’s overall approach, rather than asserting a rigid sense of entitlement in spite of this.

The consequences of failing to respect our audience, both readers and those our characters represent, and the danger of isolating – or preventing access between – artist from audience, have been exhibited here in the miscommunication, bitterness and hostility displayed between Shriver and her own audience. These consequences were also demonstrated by Kobena Mercer in relation to black communities’ judgement and rejection of black artists who attract white audiences, and by Marlon James, who criticised the restrictions placed on writers of colour according to preconceptions of audience by agents and publishers. This amplifies the urgent need for increased dialogue and improved transparency between artistic and public realms, as without such consideration the “needs” of readers will continue to be determined for them. Based on what? How are agents and publishers making these decisions? What about critics? What about the audience speaking for itself? There is an issue here regarding the “value” of different responses to fiction. The verdicts given by venerated audiences – such as literary critics, novelist peers or awards panels – are clearly privileged over the responses of the actual individuals or communities seen as living within the fictional reality represented.

To endear writers to this cause, we can consider James Harold’s suggestion that the value of fiction is connected to the value of reader-response, because the way fictional content can transfer knowledge to the reader affects the moral and aesthetic values of art. As Harold explains; “The moral value of the work is relevant to aesthetic value because of its cognitive value” (2008, 63). Harold discusses the following questions: What sorts of perspectives are readers encouraged to imagine?

Are they morally questionable, as in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1997)? How are readers asked to respond to such perspectives? Are we asked to sympathise with something as deplorable as Humbert Humbert's paedophilic desires? Harold concedes that there are some perspectives that are morally defective, but even if readers are led by the narrative to not only approve of, but to enjoy imagining these perspectives, "unless those responses change our actions or our characters when we deal with real events, there is nothing morally wrong with them" (2008, 53). The moral flaw in an artwork, for Harold, lies in the *type* of response invited, as in whether it is rich and reflective, or not, and he asserts that those eliciting "sparse, unreflective responses to defective moral perspectives, even if they appear to be the 'right' ones, will have little or no intrinsic moral worth, and might even be morally bad" (62). This is corroborated by Elif Shafak who states that "knowledge that takes you not beyond yourself is far worse than ignorance... knowledge that does not take us beyond it makes us elitist, distant, disconnected" (2010). In this way, knowledge can become false knowledge, misinformation leading to assumed stereotypes and prejudice. It is therefore the failure to provide cognitive stimulation around morally complex issues that affects the aesthetic value, and although it is not clear whether the aesthetic value *decreases*, based on Harold's supposition that cognitive rewards increase aesthetic merit, we can discern it is beneficial for the fiction to challenge what readers think they know or believe in moral terms, in that this constitutes *knowledge*; the emphasis being on knowledge about morality, rather than what might be considered "morally-sound" knowledge. Perhaps it is no longer enough for novelists, and by extension the discipline of CW, to be concerned with producing fiction for aesthetic value alone, considering that moral value, comprising a commitment to enriching readers' interpretive experience, plays an essentially influencing role. In the next chapter we will consider how interaction with audience corresponds to author motive.

Chapter IV: The value of fiction

The inconsistencies between different types of audience are usefully demonstrated in the responses to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). The novel was received with critical acclaim and shortlisted for two prestigious prizes, and yet, after the proposed film adaptation caught the attention of the media, the actual communities (specifically Tower Hamlets, east London, more broadly Sylheti, Bangladeshi or Muslim) represented in the film and the novel, contested and protested against how they were depicted. Rehana Ahmed highlights these differences: "In stark contrast to this positive reception by the literary establishment and the reading public was the antagonistic response to the novel and its subsequent filming by some members of Tower Hamlets' Bangladeshi community." (2010, 26) So far, we have seen how an authentic voice has been connected to whether or not certain signifiers are shared. For Hoskins, the "authenticity" of his interview respondent was assumed due to his sharing "Muslim" and "Libyan" signifiers with the extremist Salman Abedi. For the readers/representees of Shriver's novel *Big Brother* (2013), since she did not share a signifier of what could be described as "physical health" or "body image", she could not speak "authentically" on their behalf. However, this idea of sharing / not sharing does not correlate with the authenticity of Ali's audience. Ali herself, as posited by Chambers, is awarded authenticity^{xxii} through sharing a "Muslim civilizational heritage" (2011, 10) with her characters and representees. However, it is the responses of the literary establishment and reading public – an arguably elite group which likely dominate Ali's characters/representees across signifiers of education, class, wealth, and are unlikely to share geographical location – that are valued above the *actual members* of the Tower Hamlets' Bangladeshi community. Why are the responses of this vernacular group not valued? Why are their protests not listened to? Despite sharing *more* of the relevant signifiers with Ali's characters – that of "Muslim", whether religious or cultural etc., geographical location, affiliated signifiers of class, wealth or education – why is the authenticity of the Tower Hamlets community denied?

If we look back to Kobena Mercer we can draw parallels with his point about black audiences being considered vernacular and therefore valued differently to white audiences. Ahmed et al. also contextualises these reactions: "Ali's [protesters]

were speaking from one of the most disadvantaged communities in Britain against the background of the increased Islamophobia that followed the 9/11 attacks” (2012, 13). The notion of being “disadvantaged” exposes a hitherto unacknowledged role of dominance between Ali that of “a specific community that occupies a subordinate class position in Britain and rarely has access to cultural discourse or self-representation” (Ahmed 2010, 37). The fictional representation of Song’s “vulnerable internal minorities” (2010) is still a moral concern to Harold in this case, as Ali is still a “member of the more powerful group imagin[ing] a character who is a member of a less powerful group” (2003, 252). Whilst Ali may share the signifier of a “Muslim civilizational heritage”, she does not share with her characters/representees the signifiers of class, education or geographical location. These roles of dominance highlight areas where unintentional bias might operate. James Harold considers the difference between “respectful or praiseworthy imagining and disrespectful or offensive imagining [to lie] partly in the accuracy of the depiction but also partly in the *motives* of the imaginer” (2003, 252). So whilst, according to the vernacular audience, Ali’s representation fails on accuracy, Harold would also consider her to fail in motive. In Ali’s own dismissal (Ahmed, 2010, 26) of her protesters, and in the pronounced distance isolating artist from audience, the lack of moral motive is demonstrated, as Ahmed notes:

The limits of a liberal multiculturalism are materialised in the contiguity of poor street vendors to a venue [Truman’s Brewery buildings], marketable because of its multicultural location, housing the launch of a book marketed through the multicultural label. [...] This division can also be applied to the reception of the novel: the discursive area within which its legitimate critics are located is comfortably ‘inside’ the limits of multiculturalism, while the community members are not considered to be legitimate participants in a discourse that is, at least to some extent, engaged with them. Just as the community within the novel is detached from its context, so the novel as social fact occupies a middle-class liberal domain that must be kept discrete. (2010, 37)

Such marked difference implies some demographics are entitled to a reaction, and some are not, and this exposes liberal multiculturalism as susceptible to ethical and moral inconsistencies. It is for this reason that the fictive responsibility model must incorporate consideration of the sensibilities of actual individuals or groups that are represented in the fiction, particularly when roles of dominance outweigh what is shared, and additionally when vulnerable characters are involved. This could be explored either by the fictively responsible writer^{xxiii} before, during or after

the creative process, or by the literary critic as well as other writers when reflecting on the meaning and value of a text. As we have seen, the current situation seems to attach little significance to “illegitimate” audiences, such as Mercer’s “black communities” or Ali’s from *Tower Hamlets*. However, due to the undeniable importance and impact of empathy within fiction writing, perhaps there is a future where writers and readers, agents, publishers and critics, and even the industry at large, are capable of evolving to the point of engendering an ethos where initial observations are not rigid. Or, indeed, writers and critics could actively seek out these responses before declaring a verdict, which would align with the revised view of “culture” outlined by Rehana Ahmed et al. as an “evolving lived experience” (2012, 3). This is something already being practised by some writers, those who utilise “sensitivity readers” (see Waldman 2017), those who participate in Shawl’s “Writing the Other” workshops (2005) and those who pertain to the idea of “cultural sharing” (Page 2017). Cross-collaboration with these enterprises will be essential for my development of fictive responsibility.

The wider question of audience and reader response requires a closer consideration of the fictions of Fadia Faqir and Nadeem Aslam and how they work with a particular stereotype. I will consider three main assumptions: “Muslimness” equates to violence; irreconcilable cultural differences (between “Muslim” and non-Muslim groups), and; “Muslim” women are oppressed victims. Claire Chambers highlights how “stereotypical views of groups designated as Other damage the mainstream community as well as the marginalised, in that they ‘lower empathetic ability, dim perceptual awareness, maintain false illusions, and lessen compassion for others’” (2010, 15). For these reasons, such an analysis should prove useful to our discussion.

In *My Name is Salma* (2007) Fadia Faqir complicates the image of the figure of the “Muslim woman as oppressed victim” in her character of Salma. She is a complex but resilient woman who is as much the victim of the British immigration system, as she is the honour-system in her village. In situating Salma’s family in a rural area with little recourse to upward mobility, this does risk perpetuating the stereotype that HBV is confined to rural or uneducated communities, whereas, as Amir Jafri points out, “the pattern of family honour and its redemption does not seem to be confined to any particular type of society or to any consistent stratum” (2008, 19). However, there are other details that work to counter this, such as Salma’s

father encouraging her education – calling her “this clever girl” (Faqir 2007a, 43) – and the prison officers who wish to protect Salma and aid her escape: “May God guard you and protect you” (2007a, 65). This attempts to bridge the “irreconcilable difference” between “their/our” way of life by denying the simplification of HBV as a widely condoned “Muslim” concept. Outside of the fictional text, Faqir also challenges assumed differences between “Muslim” and “non-Muslim” communities by exposing hierarchical tensions within Britain, and between Britons, based on geographical stereotypes as a reframing of “race”:

Racism has nothing to do with education or its lack, or how far you’ve travelled; I think it comes from other sources. I wanted to reproduce that in *My Name is Salma*...to show some north-south tension. People think such rivalries only involve foreigners against natives. But there is tension between natives themselves, and there is a hierarchy within Britain, and I wanted to show that these other tensions also exist. (Chambers 2011, 62)

Faqir makes an important point here in that “non-Muslim” communities are not exempt from social disharmony and that this is not confined to differences of nationality, but also occurs within the boundaries of the UK context, giving the example of the north/south divide. Other examples could include discrimination of disabled people (Pepper 2017), stigmatisation of mental illnesses (Scott 2017), and the university-access gap which exerts class-based disadvantages (Havergal 2017) which also affect BAME students^{xxiv} regardless of nationality. These inequalities, in addition to the racial, cultural and ethnic differences populating arguments of appropriation discussed so far, raise ethical concerns where fiction writers might just as easily occupy a dominant position. As James Harold outlines, “race is [not] the only, or the most, significant barrier to the imagination; gender, culture, age, language and especially time can also make a difference.” (2003, 250) It is across all such instances of potential vulnerability that the nexus of author-character-representee must be interrogated.

Faqir’s self-affinity with a “Muslim” identity is evidenced within with a political interpretation (Chambers 2011, 71). But what about other roles of dominance based on other signifiers? In interview with Lindsey Moore, Faqir talks about prisons and imprisonment which strongly echo Salma’s experiences and emotional trauma in the novel, for example, in discussing her work with Palestinian ex-prisoners she admits how the “interviews shocked me, opened my eyes to the injustice” (Moore 2011, 2),

and she relates to the sensation of entrapment due to her father strict rules “like praying five times a day, a 7 p.m. curfew... [...] I felt like we were in a camp, a confined space, an army, and that our father treated us like cadets” (1). The emotional connection manifests most notably in Salma’s discomfort with kindness: “He should have shouted at me, called me a foreign tart, kicked me in the stomach until I blacked out. Kindness I did not deserve” (Faqir 2007a, 178). Such self-deprecating thoughts are reflected in Faqir’s own experience: “I went to university but if people spoke to me, I would consider myself as not worthy of their greeting [...] I felt such a failure; I was riddled with guilt.” (Moore 2011, 2) This stems from a shared experience of loss through having a child taken away, as Faqir explains how she “lost custody of [her] son as a condition of the divorce. I broke down after that, after they took away my son” (Moore 2011, 2). And for Salma, who gives birth in a prison and whose daughter is taken away, is told by a doctor once she has relocated to the UK: “You have to cut your ties with the past, you are here now, so try to get on with it” (Faqir 2007a, 17). Whilst it is not unusual to find the autobiographical in fiction writing – as Jonathan Franzen puts it; “My conception of a novel is that it ought to be a personal struggle, a direct and total engagement with the author’s story of his or her own life” (2012, 3) – there seems to be a deeper, more intense sense of interconnectedness between Faqir and Salma, considering the post-writing synergy that Faqir describes:

Because honour crimes persist, it would not be politically accurate for Salma to walk free into the sunset. [...] And there was the unresolved issue of having left her daughter behind. Actually, I approached my son after I finished the novel. Over the years I had tried again and again to reconcile with him. I decided once again to go back for him, to reclaim him as my flesh and blood, and this time it worked. [...] Fiction teaches you lessons. Salma couldn’t not go back; she didn’t have that option. (Moore 2011, 8)

Judging by the similarities we have discussed, it is a fair estimation to say that in creating the character of Salma, Faqir has not had to employ James Harold’s “fictive imagining”, which entails “imagin[ing] someone whose experiences are very different than one’s own” (2003, 249), to a high degree. But whilst Salma reflects Faqir in terms of significant life experience, she does not share the same class background or upbringing. This is indicated in Salma’s rural home-life and in her family’s lack of education, as shown, for example, in her mother saying; “Put on your madraqa and run to school! I don’t want you to be illiterate like me” (Faqir 2007, 86). In contrast,

Faqir grew up in Amman, attended university and worked as a journalist before moving to the UK to complete an MA and PhD (Faqir 2007b; Moore 2011). Whilst this certainly presents an intersection of dominance, the “danger” of the discrepancy can be assessed by considering how Faqir might have gone about identifying with Salma over this difference. James Harold suggests that in order to successfully identify with a person “it is not sufficient merely to know certain facts [...]; one must also know *what it is like to be* a person about whom those facts are true and this involves [...] draw[ing] either on experiences we actually share with that person or on experiences we have that are analogous with theirs, close enough for our imaginations to bridge the gap.”^{xxv} (2003, 249) Faqir shares that her father is an Arab Bedouin, but whilst he “wears a suit and tie and [...] is urban” (Chambers 2011, 61), Faqir continues: “it’s my mother [...] who loves the Bedouins, and adores their nomadic lifestyle. She used to take me to lives with the Bedouins, and I’m lucky to have observed the semi-nomadic period in Jordan before it ended, because I lived with my tribe for a long time” (61). There is clearly a degree of “fictive imagining” at work here, in that Faqir is drawing on experiences that are analogous with Salma’s, but there remains a power imbalance around class and background differences; how can we discern whether or not Faqir is operating under unintentional bias, and how “truthful” – in terms of imaginative truth *and* ethical truth – the fiction is as a result? As previously discussed, we must look not only towards the “accuracy” of the depiction, where there is “some obligation to the actual person or group being fictionally imagined that the imagination be true to life” (Harold 2003, 250), but also towards the “*motives* of the imager” (252). Considering Faqir’s academic work around HBV, I posit that her motives are “internal” or for the ends themselves, rather than a means to an end, and this is further strengthened in her 2001 paper “Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour” where she renounces the connection between Islam and honour. From this assessment we can see that beyond the visible “Muslim” identity signifier, Faqir also shares non-visible signifiers in varied and significant life-experiences, and this, combined with the overall focus on subverting homogenised stereotypes, satisfies my criteria for a sense of authenticity that is self-interrogatory and not simply arbitrarily assigned, therefore presenting a useful example of fictive responsibility in practice.

In contrast, Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) works to reinforce “irreconcilable differences” and the notion of “Muslimness equating with violence”.

This is seen in the total isolation of the fictional Muslim community and that the characters are consistently presented as simple stereotypes, as Sara Upstone notes: “a community willing to kill for its faith – however misguided... the association of Islam with strict values, against Western freedom of expression.” (2010a, 40) The view of HBV as inherent to Muslim communities is supported in Kaukab’s condoning the murders, and for Upstone this only “further[s] Orientalist stereotypes of irrationality” (2010b, 108) and denies the “potential for the possibility for alternatives to violence *within* strong religious faith [...] the only alternative is to accept a secular western viewpoint” (2010b, 105). Even though Aslam, like Ali, might share a “Muslim civilizational heritage” (Chambers 2011, 10) with his characters/representees, there are other roles of dominance at work across the signifiers of gender, class and life-experiences.

With a family made up of what Clements describes as “communists and rightwingers, religious nuts and atheists” (2016, 91), and an upbringing influenced by “Zia’s ‘Islamised’ Pakistan and [...] Thatcher’s Britain” (91), it is perhaps this diverse heritage that creates an impression of intimacy between Aslam and the Pakistani, British and Muslim worlds framed within his fictions. However, there is an issue of over-individualisation in Aslam’s writing which Clements describes as “a highly personal approach to ‘honest’ realist representation” (2016, 93). Aslam makes two references that raise suspicions. The assumption that “if something is true of [him], then there is every likelihood that it is true of billions of others”, and that his own abstract priorities of love, loneliness and grief are “common to all” (Clements 2016, 94). Such a reductive representation of Muslim communities and their faith is enough cause for concern, but given that fictionalising HBV involves the representation of vulnerable and minority peoples, this increases the imperative for a morally praiseworthy imagining. A highly-personalised imagining could not be further from this.

Amina Yaqin illustrates just how concerning it is for a morally questionable imagining to be framed as authentic by the media: “Such representative positionality is, of course, highly problematic and there is a danger that an ethnographic dimension, in which Aslam and [others] feature as native informants, is at work in the media’s repeated recourse to such ‘expert’ voices” (2012, 103). Furthermore, some criticism has seemed to applaud Aslam for refusing the “burden of representation”, as described above by Mercer, or, as described by Upstone, “the ‘representation

game' into which British Asian authors, like their black British and postcolonial counterparts, are often lured" (2010b, 110). However, this seems to be missing a key point. Of course there should be no "burden of representation" for those writers seen to identify as "Muslim". The onus lies in the subject matter. It is Aslam's fictionalising of HBV that, if we follow the fictive responsibility model, demands artist-public dialogue, not his identifying, or not, with "Muslim". In answer to Chambers' interview question regarding negative media representations, Aslam states that he would not "do PR for Islam, or Pakistan, or US imperialisms" (2010, 140), but as we have seen, bias can be *unintentional*. In the very act of writing fiction, Aslam *is* playing the "representation game", whether he wants to or not. It is for this reason that it is so important for writers to become aware of fictive responsibility, so even for those who may choose *not* to act on it, this is at least based on the knowledge that regardless of whether or not they are willing to "do PR", "PR" can still happen.

The problem with an unwillingness to engage in artist-public dialogue does not centre on whether or not "Muslim" writers want to talk about Islam, or account for being "Muslim", for example. The problem lies in an overall unwillingness to be transparent about potential flaws. Considering it is within this writerly action, as we have discussed with Haraway and Brien & Webb above, that an alternative objectivity for CW can be practised, an ability to confront flaws as part of self-reflexivity is an important skill for any fiction writer. This relates to Harold's ideas around "value", as if we are to succeed in cultivating a rich and reflective reader-response, there must be a move away from over-individualisation towards self-actualisation. Gaining an understanding of over-individualisation and how it operates is therefore a useful exercise for fiction writers, and this is made possible if we look towards teacher-learning theories (Rogers 1989; Maslow 1970; Kolb 1984). These show that individualised aspects of the creative process are most effective when activated in tandem or alternating with those activities that employ external engagement. If we apply this logic to the observations of Faqir and Aslam above, we can consider, albeit simplistically, whether each successfully "expand[s] our view of moral possibility" (Harold 2008, 61) by encouraging rich and reflective responses in the reader. Faqir's academic engagement provides evidence of an ability to conduct outward-facing exercises, from which we can hypothesise that Faqir might be amenable to practising a transparency of flaws and likely to elicit a rich reader response. In contrast, Aslam's tendency towards individualisation suggests

resistance towards external engagement, and combined with what we have observed in the generalisation of HBV, we may posit that the reader response to this morally-dense issue is not rich or reflective enough. However, to provide a more satisfactory answer, we would need to assess in turn how each morally-questionable imagining – those that fail to address roles of dominance or engage with bias – contributes to either a rich and reflective, or scant and insubstantial reader-response. Such a detailed study is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it demands urgent attention for such exploration would certainly highlight important lessons for the development of CW, both in the cross-disciplinary potential of the subject, and in the scope for the platform of fiction to become more reliable as social commentary and as a valid source of knowledge production.

Conclusion: Rethinking “authenticity”

We have already seen how HBV is manipulated and sensationalised by the media to validate “irreconcilable cultural difference”, and as Lila Abu-Lughod notes, the “category stigmatises not particular acts of violence but entire cultures or communities” (2013, 114). Abu-Lughod also recognises that the real danger of this “culturalisation is that it will produce more animosity and violence. Women will be no safer.” (115) This resonates with the problems discussed above around “issue ownership”; to defuse its power as an ostracising tool, HBV must be brought out of the “Muslim”-only sphere.

In writing *TGU*, I have attempted to do just this. Beyond the support I have already received from my “vernacular” audience, such as N, Diana Nammi at IKWRO, the university lectures in Dhaka, I have also received positive feedback from the literary sphere. After sending out to a handful of agents, these are some of the comments I received:

I like the 'voice' and can see clearly that the author is very familiar with the Muslim world and the British Bangladeshi community in particular... I did enjoy a lot about this book, which feels real and authentic, and throws up the layers and dilemmas in these young people's lives...

Kifah’s characterization as a precocious and spirited young girl stifled by her somewhat nefarious family was wonderful to read, and utterly heartbreaking to see her crushed by almost everyone around her. I enjoyed watching her relationship with her father grow from cautious to trustworthy; conversely, how her brother cruelly pushes her aside when her honour is questioned.

Lauren’s writing is excellent – there were repeated moments of brilliance and I could tell she had Kifah’s world incredibly strong in her mind.

(2017, personal emails)

Despite such praise, all the agents rejected it, giving various reasons. One claimed it was Young Adult fiction, another said there was a “hard sell on modern stories about British Asian families at the moment...” another one said “it felt a bit rushed,” while

another said “it took a while to get going”. Only the final rejection I received felt honest:

I did have concerns about how this might be viewed by a publisher as she herself is not from the same ethnic background. These sort of issue-led books rely on a publicity campaign that will get the author out there and noticed and listened-to by all interested parties and what one doesn't want is for the publicity to be around cultural appropriation or 'what right has this author got to write about this subject'... I do think it would need the authenticity of an author from the same ethnic background to promote and endorse the book. It is sad that we're not all able to write, whatever our background, on issues which are so important, but that is where we are. (2017, personal email)

It is time to revolutionise what we think we know about identity boundaries, “ownership” of spaces and stories, and entitlement to represent. Rather than obtusely reiterating one’s right to “free” expression, writers could instead invigorate an artist-public dialogue by conducting intimate assessments of their own moral conscience and offering candid discussion around this. In this way, we can facilitate the recognition of certain fictional works, such as *TGU*, as “truer” than certain others, such as *Brick Lane* or *Maps*, which might have been generated through “free” but isolated expression. “Truer” in that through a collaborative artist-public dialogue, such as I have conducted, expression moves closer to an “ethical truth” which is more likely to be aesthetically superior due to engaging reader and representees in a morally rich and reflective way. I may not share the “Muslim” visible signifier with my characters, readers or representees, however, this discrepancy is outshone by the non-visible signifiers that we *do* share, such as life experiences, morality and political views. Until there is recognition for authenticity based on non-visible signifiers, then ideas around appropriation are likely to remain highly contested. In response to this, other than incensed defence, writers like myself, and others who choose to incorporate the fictive responsibility model, may decide to take into account reader responses, either before or after publication, and adjust portrayals of characters and situations to reflect a more mutually-meaningful representation. Whilst this approach may be considered by some to be self-censorship, it does highlight the writerly action of “truthfulness” and situates responsibility as something relevant beyond attempted infringements. Philip Hensher sees responsibility as an underhand attempt at control: “No wonder they prefer us to censor ourselves; no wonder, from China to Peru, they

encourage us to talk in a pretend grown-up manner about ‘responsibility’” (Appignanesi 2005, 76). But responsibility may be utilised to *enhance* imaginative capacities, as Henry James reminds us:

...there are degrees of feeling the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense, the complete, in a word the power to be finely aware and richly responsible. It is those moved in this latter fashion who "get most" out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get most. (1934, 62)

Thinking about responsibility can help writers to “get the most” out of their experiences, to cultivate morally-praiseworthy imaginings and thoughtful “internal” motives, and practice self-reflexivity across processes of invention and representation. Thinking about responsibility can also be a way to engage with the debates around appropriation.

ⁱ A term posited by Harper to refer to information a writer seeks out “to provide solutions to epistemological problems or needs relating to writerly content, structure, voice or tone, and a great deal more, each learning experience being based on the *situation* faced by the creative writer.” (2014, 54) As such, we can envisage how CW research areas will vary greatly depending on the content, themes and characters each writer is choosing to explore through their fiction.

ⁱⁱ Fictive responsibility first emerged as a kind of space. Projecting a virtual arena of unfixed and permeable space allowed me to simulate how a particular creative decision may interact with potential ethical implications, enabling me to play out new concerns as they appeared with various permutations of creative and narrative options. Drawing on both hermeneutics and ethnography, and guided by how the nexus of author-character-representee evolves and interacts with roles of dominance, I describe fictive responsibility as an “action model”, comprising methods for both interpretation and representation, whilst engendering space for ethical thinking. The term “action” not only takes into account the “doing” activities undertaken throughout the creative process, but crucially it celebrates the *in-flux* nature of CW. Foregrounding “motion” in this way echoes a number of related imperatives such as the notion of culture as evolving lived experience (Ahmed et. al. 2012), Elif Shafak’s likening stories to “whirling dervishes” (2010), and understanding practice-led research as “agnostic” research (Brien & Webb).

ⁱⁱⁱ This refers to the particular framing of violence-against-women (VAW) with the assumption towards Muslim communities, even though murder in the name of “honour” occurs regardless of any identifying feature. The defining stipulation of “honour” gained prominence after the murder of Heshu Jones in 2002. It can also be termed honour-based-crime, honour-killings, or the honour-shame complex.

^{iv} For example, researchers in Futures Studies have drawn on “narrative structure and rhetorics [...] in shaping the final outputs or deliverables of a futures project” (Raven & Elahi 2015, 49). In Development Studies

practitioners are being encouraged to consider “fictional representations of development issues [as] ‘proper’ forms of development knowledge” (Lewis et.al. 2014, 20).

^v I choose the term “extremist” over “terrorist”, as whether the attacker claims to be “Islamist”, or not, any reference to the word “terror” has become synonymous with Islam, a concept captured insightfully by Hamid Dabashi: “the most troubling problem with this term “terrorism” is that it has become a sponge word. It absorbs a spectrum of social malaise with multiple causes and files them under Islamic and Muslim acts only.” (2015, online)

^{vi} This term cannot be used without mention of its structuralist/poststructuralist origins and context. However, my employment of it is to emphasise the intense capacity of visual imagery to make meaning, especially in relation to preconceptions of identity categories and the network of assumptions that become associated to these. So the function of “signifier”, in this thesis, is specifically to illuminate the different facets of an individual’s identity, and show how images and the absence of images control whether or not certain facets are deemed to be authentic. Stuart Hall highlights the significance of “absence”: “a language consists of signifiers, but in order to produce meaning, [they] have to be organised into a ‘system of differences’. It is the differences between signifiers which signify.” (1990, 32) I use the qualifiers “visible” and “non-visible” to navigate this concept of difference. Deviations into Saussure and Foucault would add a fascinating depth to this element of discussion, and further development of the fictive responsibility model would be enhanced by such future study.

^{vii} Expecting such generalised identity traits as nationality and religion to somehow provide insight to an individual’s propensity for murder might appear more obviously preposterous if “white folks [were] collectively suspected of condoning the actions of [...] Anders Behring Breivik, who slaughtered 77 people, mostly children, in Norway in defence of white Christian Europe against brown and black Muslims.” (Mogahed 2017, online)

^{viii} Clements notes a similar problem with arbitrary assumptions when authors are either implicated or implicate themselves “in the complex cultural and (geo) political contexts about which they write.” (2016, 22) Although in reference to works tending towards autobiography, we will see the same essence applied to authors, such as Monica Ali and Nadeem Aslam, discussed in due course; ““subjective experience is taken to validate the [literary] text’s representation of a social phenomenon ([such as] Islamism).”” (2016, 22)

^{ix} Merit, like value, remains subject to parameters as agreed by known parties, as Clements notes, citing Terry Eagleton: ““value is a transitive term...it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes.”” (2016, 21) However, assessing merit requires active investigation into the demonstration of such criteria, and so it makes sense that deliberation around authenticity is conducted analytically than assigned automatically. Clements discusses ideas of affiliation and affinity as ways to express identification to Islam. (2016, 3) This may prove a useful alternative to the more problematic “authenticity”.

^x In the context of Mercer’s paper, he is referring to a rhetorical “black community” to which black artists are considered to belong, or not, depending on the audience of their art, rather than the merits of the art itself. This highlights how the notion of belonging is influenced by factors external to the self. BME, or BAME, Black, (Asian), Minority Ethnic, is the most recent term referring to minority groups and individuals, and although it is intended to include white minorities such as Romany gypsies, it is more often used to discern white from non-white. Acronyms are essentially reductive and dehumanising, and fail to capture any sense of identity. As such I do not use this term in the thesis and whilst “black” and “Muslim” are clearly not interchangeable, in this instance the rhetorical trope in Mercer’s example may be seen to apply to “Muslim communities” in that Muslim writers, just as Black artists, may or may not be judged as “authentic” depending on factors external to their fiction.

^{xi} I first shared this “truth-spell” model at the Great Writing conference in 2014, and have since developed a visual aid to illustrate how the “everyday / relatable / unfamiliar” components interact with the writer’s application of accuracy, experience and imagination within the creative process. I have included this diagram in Appendix 2.

^{xii} Whilst these works have received a great deal of analysis already, I hope to offer an original angle by scrutinising *behind* the text. My next study will include Sherry Jones' *The Jewel of the Medina* (2008) and Nell Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds* (2012), as these texts will offer insight into non-Muslim "authenticity", and although here I do draw on some of Elif Shafak's critical thoughts, this next study will analyse her novel *Honour* (2012) to consider how Shafak navigates a "Muslim" heritage shared with her characters, with discrepant signifiers in, for example, class, education, wealth and agency.

^{xiii} The 1971 Liberation War in Bangladesh is largely invisible either in Western mainstream media, or in literary spheres, receiving even less attention than the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. However, when Partition *is* discussed, the Liberation War still remains absent. Bengalis comprise the second largest Muslim demographic in the UK, after those from Pakistan, and both countries share histories of violence and migratory pathways. A discussion that considers a more holistic view of conflicts would therefore seem to make logical sense, and also present a compassionate move towards connecting Muslims communities within Britain. A recent Radio 4 programme, *Partition Voices*, shared stories about Partition, and one respondent, a teacher, described how one of her six-year-old pupils believed that only Muslims not Hindus could be from the Punjab. This raises serious concerns about the assumptions being passed on to children, as presenter, Kavita Puri, asked; "Where are the responsible stories?" (2017) To address this gap in scholarly and literary circles, I aim to explore this important issue in the sequel to *TGU*, whilst in future academic studies I wish to explore "Muslims" and the nature of "taboo" (see Osman 2013; Idris 2012). This is inspired by those I have met through the Inclusive Mosque, and would explore issues of LGBTQI in Muslim communities, and also "cross-boundary" relationships, such as those between Bengali and Pakistani individuals, for example.

^{xiv} This is a discipline that is, according to the London School of Economics, interested in "the causes of poverty, social exclusion, economic stagnation, humanitarian crises and human security, [and] understanding [...] why and how some late developing countries have [...] seen their progress derailed by disasters and conflicts" (2016, online).

^{xv} Haraway suggests we can achieve this through feminist objectivity which "is about limited location and situated knowledge [and] allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see." (1988, 583)

^{xvi} Whilst the study is not widely definitive, it is somewhat conclusive in that, when compared to exposure to non-fiction, narrative fiction is more positively related to measures of social ability and to empathetic processes (Mar et al. 2005, 705), and "the possibility that social skills may be improved as a result of exposure to social narratives remains a compelling one." (708)

^{xvii} Interestingly, there seems to be some inconsistencies surrounding empathy and sympathy, as to which state elicits a more involved response. James Harold would agree with Pinker that "empathy often leads to sympathy" (Harold 2000, 352), however, he stipulates that sympathy "connotes pity, whereas 'empathy' does not" (2000, 323). If sympathy is restricted to a particular kind of situation, does this therefore make empathy a more complex, more remarkable sensation to elicit in a reader? Another point of discussion is whether it is empathy or sympathy that involves "sharing" and /or "understanding" the emotions of another person, and whether each of these are imagined or "direct". Harold might agree with Pinker that empathy comprises the imaginative exercise and yields sympathy as the direct response, but whereas Pinker seems to prioritise the "real-ness" of sympathy, Harold places more emphasis on the complexity of the empathy process: "... all I need to know about a friend is that they are frightened, or in pain, or sad, and I can sympathize with them. If I am to empathize with her, however, I need to know more: I need to know what she is upset about, and why she finds it upsetting, and then I need to imagine her experience." (Harold, 2000, 343) Whilst sympathy might be possible with fewer details, if it is produced through an intense imaginative experience we can logically expect the degree of sympathy to also be deeper. That these issues are also explored across health and social care – see Professor Gary Rolfe (2002) "Research, Truth and Fiction in the Helping Professions" – suggests the relevance of further cross-disciplinary investigations in this area.

^{xviii} It is significant to this thesis that the specific texts Hakemulder used centre around the issue of HBV - *The Forbidden Woman* (1998) by Malika Mokeddem, and *The Price of Honour* (1995) by Jan Goodwin. This suggests that, in line with the research results regarding the effectiveness of role-taking, it is more pressing to focus on

amplifying “truths” about complex and socially divisive issues in the novelistic format, over those that prioritise, for example, a non-narrative, academic or statistical methodology.

^{xix} I have championed a similar focus in CW seminars to nurture students’ awareness and inquisitiveness around the aligning of author intention and reader interpretation. This involves an exercise where narrative techniques are collated on the board, along with the expected effect – for example, long sentences of heavy description to slow down the pace, or use of ambiguity to create sense of vulnerability in the reader – and students must employ a limited number of techniques in a piece of writing. This is then shared with a peer-group member who must ascertain the techniques used from the effects they experience as the reader.

^{xx} More recently, in January 2016, Cameron asserted that Muslim women, rather than migrants as a whole, needed to learn more English, as we “will never truly build One Nation unless we are more assertive about our liberal values...and more generous in the work we do to break down barriers” (Payton 2016). This, after Cameron’s government had cut funding to language centres in 2011.

^{xxi} Initially identified in the 70’s, “imposter-syndrome” is a disabling affliction with connections to depression and anxiety disorders. It is common in academic and educational settings and typically affects more women than men due to the impact of gender stereotypes. As Gina Gibson-Beverly and Jonathan P. Schwartz note: such individuals “are unable to view accomplishments as a result of their own competence but instead attribute them to external factors, such as luck and chance. Characteristics include an inability to internalize positive feedback, fear of evaluation and failure, guilt about success, and underestimating oneself while overestimating others.” (2008, 119) See also Cope Watson & Smith Betts (2010)

^{xxii} Ahmed suggests that due to the rarity of fictional representations of the Bangladeshi community, it is not surprising that “the majority reading public read [*Brick Lane*] as an ‘authentic’ reflection” (2010, 37), and also confirms Ali’s “insider” status.

^{xxiii} As stated previously, some writers are private and will not be interested in expanding the artist-public dialogue, nevertheless I believe it is still helpful to extol the benefits and enable a more informed choice.

^{xxiv} Mel Larsen, in the *Writing the Future* report, shows how such restrictions to BAME students can continue even after securing a place at university, as she recounts what one tutor said: “The thing I have to deal with most is cultural capital (...) our BAME students don’t have families and friends who work at the BBC or in the business [...] You can’t do a six month unpaid internship unless you’ve got a family that will support you [...] So it’s economics and class.” (2015, online)

^{xxv} This speaks to how Mikhail Bakhtin views the author’s expression of “social heteroglossia”, as Andrew Robinson observes: “One can situate oneself socially by relating one’s own perspective to those of others. This process should occur as a process of self-actualisation. It is the peculiar standpoint of ‘outsideness’ which makes something new of the other’s perspective by merging it with one’s own.” (2011, online)