# Islamization of English literary studies

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## My personal encounter

From madrasa education to the Department of English

# Muhammad Qutb on western education

They were taught European

- social system
- economic system
- constitutional government
- democracy
- French Revolution

#### Colonialism continues

Elleke Boehmer writes: "colonialism is not a thing of the past" (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 2005, p. 10).

Leela Gandhi thinks that "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (*Postcolonial Theory*, 1998, p. 17).

Robert Young believes, however, that "for the most part, the same (ex-)imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies" (*Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2003, p. 3).

#### How does colonialism continue?

• John McLeod states: "the teaching of English literature in the colonies must be understood as part of the many ways in which Western colonial powers such as Britain asserted their cultural and moral superiority while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural products" (Beginning Postcolonialism, 2000, p. 140).

## Colonising Islam

 The colonial period for Islam and Muslims could be one of the longest in time and one of the widest and most varied in terms of space.

# Educational and military (carrot and stick)

- 1. "By open speech and simple, An hundred times made plain"
- 2. "To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild--Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child."

"Take up the White Man's burden--The savage wars of peace"

## Napoleon Bonaparte (1798)

55,000 soldiers and sailors

a full shipload of 'savants' (pundits)

### East India Company (1612, 1757)

Military force

Anglicists and Orientalists

- "But I'm glad that I was not educated in literature and history and philosophy, which means that I did not have this Eurocentered thing driven into me, which I think is the single biggest hang-up Europe has got. It's almost impossible for anyone in the West not to see the West as the God-given gift to the world." (Doris Lessing, 1982)
- Edward Said: Imperialism is "an educational movement."
- Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)

#### Before 1917

Suitable only for "second- or third-rate minds" and "only as a pastime for lesser minds."

#### After WWI

"re-civilise the native savages," that is, the working class people.

Robert Eaglestone, Doing English: A Guide for Literature Students

# Why, when and where was the subject first introduced?

• "I have traveled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self esteem, their native culture, and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation." (Thomas Babington Macaulay, February 2, 1835)

## Thomas Babington Macaulay

• In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the [whole] body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

Archives of Empire Volume I: From East India Company to the Suez Canal, 232, 234, 235 & 237.

### Three-pronged motive

- English studies were introduced in the colonies chiefly
- to sustain imperial hegemony
- 2. to universalize western ideas (and to provincialize the education culture of the colony)
- to trigger mimicry of western models among the colonized.

"more supportive of the Company's colonial exploitation"

# Hegemony

Hegemony: an indirect form of imperial dominance through implied means of power rather than military force

#### Universalism

**Ania Loomba, Gender, race, Renaissance Drama** (Oxford University Press, 1992)

At Delhi University "everyone of whose 140,000 odd students must study English literature for at least one year during their undergraduation. There are over 700 lecturers in the subject" (p.28).

## Mimicry

"to mimic the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values"

Black Skin, White Masks (1952)

by Frantz Fanon (Frantz Omar Fanon [1925 -1961)

For Moore-Gilbert "Kureishi might be deemed vulnerable to the charge of being a 'coconut' – brown outside, white inside" (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p. 210).

## Muhammad Iqbal

"He is a slave, son of a slave, son of a slave, who dare not think of freedom; the school has drained him of love for religion;

all I can say about him is that he existed at one time; forgetful of himself and enamoured of the West, he begs bread of barley from the hands of the Franks.

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This hungry man bartered away his soul for a piece of bread and caused us great grief thereby.

He picks up grain from the ground like domestic birds and is unaware of the blue expanse of space.

The teacher, lacking intellectual equipment and insight, did not inform him of his real stature.

The fire of the Franks has melted him: this hell has totally transformed him. He is a believer and yet unaware of the secret of Death. His heart does not believe in the truth that None is supreme except Allah."

#### Mohd Kamal Hassan

"O Iqbal!

Sixty-four years after you returned to the mercy of al-Rahman,

The world of the Musalman is still in disarray.

As beggars, we wait for crumbs to fall from the Slave Master's plate."

"There are too many idiots in this world. And having said that, I have the burden of proving it."

Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks

"One evening I heard a Chinese family singing "Happy Birthday." It was weird. You would have thought that they'd have their own happy birthday song. Every dominant society in the world - whether it's French or British or American - imposes its culture on less developed societies."

(Doris Lessing, Qtd. in Jonah Raskin [1999] "Interview: Doris Lessing")

- "Thus parroting the ideas of their western teachers these people betray their own ignorance."
- their own free thinking or parroting?

Muhammad Qutb, Islam the Misunderstood Religion

## Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-)

"You can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools."

**Gikuyu** 

## **Chinua Achebe (1930-2013)**

"[...] while Ngugi now believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both* [...]." (Achebe, 2006: 268)

"I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience."

"bear the burden of another experience"

## **Abrogation**

"... offers a counter to the theory that use of the colonialist's language inescapably imprisons the colonized within the colonizer's conceptual paradigms – the view that 'you can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools."

# Appropriation

 Using "aspects of the imperial culture – language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis – that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities."

#### counter-colonisation of English

'the widest possible audience'

• "surrogate Englishman"

• "regional surrogates"

- Is the Islamization of knowledge (or English studies) undertaking a paradox or a strange academic pursuit?
- Decolonization of education (235/56,100)
- Decolonizing Education (1,030/22,300)
- Indigenization of education (104/43,900)
- Indigenizing education (141/5,920)

22 October 2018

Marie Battiste (2017) Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit. Vancouver: UBC Press:

"mirror" "fragmented existence" (p. 24)

"Eurocentric knowledge operates as if it is a depoliticized process of intellectual refinement" (p. 105).

cognitive imperialism of Eurocentrism: "a form of manipulation used in Eurocentric educational systems" (p. 161).

reclamation of identity

What is the underlying idea of the pan-African Negritude movement?

Resistance to the imposition of western values and cultural hegemony in Africa.

What is literature all about?

The fundamental message of Islam consists of what is good and what is bad for human beings, their wellbeing, meaningful existence, and responsibilities as God's vicegerents on Earth. The most important source of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an, constitutes a divine message addressed exclusively to humanity. (21:10)

#### Harmony of opinion on two matters

1. Comprehensiveness of Islamic teachings and their potential applicability in all aspects of life

2. Didactic, as opposed to the belletristic, approach

#### Chinua Acheba

• "Some time ago, in a very testy mood, I began a lecture with these words: Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorised dog-shit. Today ... I should be quite prepared to modify my language if not my opinion. In other words I will still insist that art is, and was always, in the service of man."

### **Doris Lessing**

 "I see no reason why good writers should not ... write angry protest novels about economic injustice. Many good writers have. Dickens, for instance, was often inspired by poverty and injustice."

### Marmaduke Pickthall

• aid and refreshment

#### Three ways of Islamizing English Literature

- 1. Inculcating Islamic values
- 2. Looking at English literary texts from Islamic perspectives

Carpe diem poems are John Donne's 'The Flea' (1633) and 'The Sun Rising' (1633), Robert Herrick's 'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time' (1648), Andrew Marvell's 'To his Coy Mistress' (1681)

- D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing
- 3. Reforming the curriculum

#### Edward Said on English literature syllabus

Edward Said's review of English departments' syllabi at Arab universities suggests that they do not reflect the "relationship between English and the colonial processes that brought the language and its literature" to the region.

In my opinion: While formulating English literature syllabus, two important features of the subject need to be considered:

- the colonial origin of the subject and its rootedness in western/(neo)European values and cultural assumptions
- 2. "a huge influx of new ideas into the discipline of English."

# Incorporating new neglected authors

• "I wanted to contribute to the social discourse about gender and equality, but Muslim women who wore the veil by choice, and by extension who embraced Islam as a positive force, were not allowed to have a say. Only Muslim women who had openly rejected Islam were allowed to be part of the discussion." (Janmohamed, 2009)

### Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936)

- A graduate of Harrow School
- One of the regular contributors of *The New Age*, some others being Arnold Bennett, Katherine Mansfield, Edwin Muir, Ezra Pound, H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw

## List of works

1900: All Fools

1903: Said the Fisherman

1904: Enid

1905: Brendle

1906: The House of Islam

1907: The Myopes

1908: The Children of the Nile

1909: The Valley of the Kings

1911: Pot au Feu

1912: Larkmeadow

1913: The Black Crusade

1913: Veiled Women

1914: With the Turk in Wartime

1915: Tales from Five Chimneys

1916: The House of War

1917: Knights of Araby

1918: Oriental Encounters

1919: War and Religion

1919: Friday Sermons

1919: Sir Limpidus

1920: Islam and Progress

1921: The Early Hours

1922: As Others See Us

1927: The Cultural Side of Islam

1930: The Meaning of the Glorious Koran

### Self Portrait Martin Lings (1909-2005)

When half a thousand years and more Had passed, and men allegiance swore To the Arab Prophet, beneath the tree, My willing hand was still not free From bonds of time and space to be Between his hands in fealty.

Such blessings missed, time was when I Within myself would wonder why, Half quarrelling with the book of fate For having writ me down so late.

But now I no longer my lot Can question, and of what was not. No more I say: Would it had been! For I have seen what I have seen, And I have heard what I have heard. So if to tears ye see me stirred, Presume not that they spring from woe: In thankful wonderment they flow. Praise be to Him, the Lord, the King, Who gives beyond all reckoning.

- British: Ziauddin Sardar (1951 –), Qaisra Shahraz (1958 –), Leila Abulela (1964–), Mohsin Hamid (1971 –), Rabina Khan (1972 –), Rekha Waheed (1975 –), Shelina Zahra Janmohamed (1976 –) and Na'ima B. Robert (1977–) Robin Yassin-Kassab, Zahid Hussain, and Rageh Omaar
- Muslim Writers Award
- Tariq Ali (1943 ), Abdulrazak Gurnah (1948-), Aamer Hussein (1955 –), Suhayl Saadi (1961 )
- Salman Rushdie (1947-), Hanif Kureishi (1954 ), Nadeen Aslam (1966-), Monica Ali (1967 –), Roopa Farooki (1974 -), Tahmima Anam (1975-), Kia Abdullah (1982-)
- North American: Michael Wolfe, Daniel Moore, Huda Khattab (1963? – ),

# Mary Wollstonecraft

"EARLY marriages are, in my opinion, a stop to improvement. If we were born only "to draw nutrition, propagate and rot," the sooner the end of creation was answered the better; but as women are here allowed to have souls, the soul ought to be attended to." (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*)

Fordyce's idea that "there is a sex in minds"

Qur'an 4:1; 32:9

# Virginia Woolf

"... what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it---she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel." ("Professions for Women")

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- John Gregory

Conduct book

Doris Lessing: "For untold centuries, women have endured bad marriages and male infidelity – never forget that the suffragist slogan was **Votes for Women and Chastity for Men**."

# "telling the truth about my own experiences as a body"

 anti-pornography feminists and anti-censorship feminists

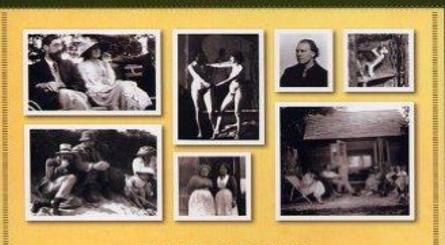
• Robin Morgan (1980): "pornography is the theory and rape is the practice"



#### SNAPSHOTS of BLOOMSBURY

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The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell



MAGGIE HUMM

- John Stuart Mill "defines liberty as the right of the individual to think and act as they wish, providing that they harm no one else by doing so."
- John Milton wanted the commonwealth to "have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors" (578).
- Areopagitica (1644)
- absolute free speech may be a suspect virtue

#### **Doris Lessing**

- "I see no reason why good writers should not, if they have a bent that way, write angry protest novels about economic injustice. Many good writers have. Dickens, for instance, was often inspired by poverty and injustice." (Lessing, "A Small Personal Voice")
- "an architect of the soul" with "a feeling of responsibility, as a human being, for the other human beings he influences ... and must feel himself as an instrument of change for good or for bad."

# Lessing's anti-racist stance

"It was a vision of a society where every individual was immensely important, where there was no emphasis on colour, class or creed, there was no hurting each other. Every person had a chance and the right to develop himself. This was the dream, and it's why people are socialists, why I was." (Lessing)

# V S Naipaul

• "... I thought as we drove through the town that I saw signs of the new Muslim aggressiveness: in the new Muslim school, with the girls in white head dresses that emphasised their Mongoloid appearance denied them individuality, and made them, when they were in groups, look like little shoals of blanched big-headed tadpoles." (Naipaul, 1998: 84)

### **Martin Amis**

- "I don't think that we can accommodate cultures and ideologies that make life very difficult for half the human race: women." – Martin Amis
- "I feel an intellectual distance to Islam. There are great problems with Islam. The Koran recommends the beating of women. The anti-Semites, the psychotic misogynists and the homophobes are the Islamists." – Martin Amis

## A very important book

Islamic Perspectives on Twentieth-Century English Literature (2017)