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The Persistence of Identity (Review Article)

AAMIR R. MUFTI. *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crises of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. 344 pp. HC \$64, SC \$23.95. ISBN 978-1-4008-2766-4.

~~Connecting~~ Disparate Field Imaginaries

THE WORLDS OF CONTEMPORARY THEORY and Urdu literature rarely intersect. An appendage to area studies programs in the U.S. academy often vulnerable to fiscal amputation, Urdu is generally foreign territory for the Euro-American and comparative literature and cultural studies programs where “theory,” as an established canon in its own right, is studied. Occasionally, in the more wide-ranging works of cultural studies, mention is made of Urdu’s legendary literary splendor. But the lights of Urdu literary fortune are, unfortunately, obscured in the firmament of intellectual stars celebrated in the departments of theory. (My own university’s Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature website shows images of books on or by Hegel, Kant, the Brothers Grimm, Rousseau, and Barthes, and photographs of Marx, Benjamin, and other such luminaries.) It is not uncommon for students of comparative or world literature (even those trained in postcolonial “theory”) to emerge with PhDs having never heard of Urdu, let alone the likes of Mir, Ghalib, or Sarshar, or in the postcolonial period, Chughtai, Faiz, or Masud. This kind of non-knowing is passed down from generation to generation in the Western academy for any number of bodies of knowledge, and what counts as knowledge in any particular moment will be defined against what is self-consciously known to be as yet unknown, and what is simply unconscious blindness as well. Theory as a field of knowledge takes definition vis-à-vis several voids among which Urdu and sometimes the larger Islamicate vernacular cultural spheres are but, let us say, two.

Nevertheless, Urdu's presence has attained weight and substance in the world of letters encompassing the intersecting orbits of both scholarship and literary markets. Since the middle of the twentieth century when it was slowly incorporated into the U.S. academy, Urdu studies has occasioned several estimable works of scholarship and numerous high-quality translations. These were added to the classic translations and occasional interpretations ventured by European Orientalists whenever the labor of producing critical editions of works in classical languages failed to fulfill. Contemporary Urdu literary studies has generally taken its cues from that previous era of European Orientalism. To this day, Urdu studies abides by the positivist legacy of area studies. It assembles and catalogues cultural fragments for general appreciation and for deposit in the library of universal knowledge, operating within epistemological frameworks established for the imperial ordering and absorption of non-Western sciences. These are not the only ways in which Urdu studies is practically enmeshed in the institutions of modern imperialism. Urdu also interacts in complex ways with the culturalism that reached high noon in the imperial era to cast a vast shadow on the postcolonial present. For instance, it is not uncommon to come across conjurations of theoretical categories from traditional Urdu connoisseurship. Thus terms such as *ma'ni āfirīnī* ("semantic development") or *mazmūn āfirīnī* ("thematic development") are, despite their vagueness, propped up to the status of conceptuality in the work of Frances Pritchett and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, as if what one requires to understand the tradition is initiation into the mystifications of authentic connoisseurship.¹ On the other side of the divide—that is, on the Subcontinent—it is easy to spot how diametrically opposed forms of authority are resorted to for validation: criticism in Urdu is often laden with the names of famous Western theorists and trendy coinages such as "postmodernity" are quickly given equivalents in Urdu (in this case, *mā-ba'd jadīdiyat*) but are rarely reflected internally in the interpretive form. Thus it is rare to find any work dealing with Urdu in any language which has contemporary theoretical categories immanently mediating the entire argument.

The publication of Aamir Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* is one such rare occasion. This sophisticated theoretical work interprets important figures in late colonial and postcolonial India—such as Abul Kalam Azad, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz—within an argument about minority identity in the modern world, contained here as "the Jewish Question."

¹For example, see the discussion in Pritchett (1994, 91–122).

Having charted skillfully across rifts in the contemporary organization of knowledge, Mufti has produced a work that may be difficult to appraise from the angle of either Urdu studies or comparative literature. Yet, in doing so, he has provided an occasion for analyzing the contact zone between different social and conceptual spaces: dominant and emergent, European and South Asian, imperial and colonial, Jewish and Muslim, national and minority. And all throughout, Mufti reveals the force that questions of identity in contemporary theory as well as in the contemporary world exert on criticism and interpretation. The question of identity certainly demands some careful consideration, for it is generally through the mediation of identity that works in languages such as Urdu enter into the metropolitan sphere of theory and criticism. Equally worthy of attention are the intimations of the kinds of questions which may not get answered when identity is taken as the sole point of reference, but which hang upon the horizon that the increasingly rigidified institutional discourse of cultural identity delineate, whether concerning the hegemonic or the subaltern, the central or the marginal, the majority or the minority.

Identity and Non-identity

What needs to be immediately pointed out is just how ambitious, daring, and even exciting—especially for *Urdu-vale—Enlightenment in the Colony* is. Whether considered in light of its range of theoretical problems (secularism, modernity, minority, exile, and form), or its historical depth (late eighteenth century to late twentieth century), geographical complexity (Europe and Asia, imperial heartland and colonial periphery), linguistic and generic range (including English, Urdu, and German literature in novel, short story, critical essay, and lyric poetry), or the diversity of theorists that it brings on board (Marx, Adorno, Horkheimer, but also Arendt, Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the usual postcolonial mix of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak), this is an impressive work. Not least impressive is the usual challenge one confronts with such unlikely pairings and juxtapositions: discovering the underlying code. What is implied theoretically by comparing metropolitan and colonial contexts—or Jews and Muslims—through the lens of minority identity solely? What is the interpretive logic behind such commensurations? What is revealed about the disciplinary logic of comparative literature when identitarian readings are brought to bear on questions of such magnitude as the rise of Zionism, the Partition of the Subcontinent along largely religious lines, and the continuing fallout of these events on the present?

From Moses Mendelssohn's *Nathan the Wise* to Abul Kalam Azad's reflections on secular identity in *Ghubār-e Khāṭir* (Dust of the Spirit), from George Eliot's classic *Daniel Deronda* to Faiz Ahmad Faiz's national-popular ghazals: The focus falls primarily on the identity crisis produced by the nature of minority existence in the secular-liberal nation-state. Mufti provides the usual litany (but little sense of a connecting thread):

purported indifference of the liberal state and the troubling difference of the Jews; anxious and impossible claims about the autochthony of the people; the irrationality of bureaucratic rationalism; the uncanny (*unheimlich* [*sic*]) inflections of the mother tongue in "alien" hands; "mature" subjectivity and the force of tradition; patriotism and the terror of divided or ambiguous loyalties; and the recurrent specter of Hebraism in modern literature and culture.

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Mufti aims to follow the "inflections that the question of minority existence undergoes between its early emergence in Europe and its reemergence in colonial India" (7). He writes that "an account of the 'beginnings' of the crisis of Indian secularism around the identity of the Muslims must lead to the history of the involvement of European liberalism with the question of the Jews," for the Muslim minority question also arises out of "the conflicts of modernity" (11). Despite such gestures towards the common generative mechanism—the vast singular amalgam of transformations referred to with the shorthand "modernity"—behind both the Jewish and Muslim minority experiences, identity is not itself ever subsumed under any transsubjective historical process. Identity is simultaneously a particularity deeper than history yet a universally applicable category. Mufti writes: "[*The Enlightenment in the Colony's*] emphasis on the minoritization of culture, language, community, and identity" are the "irreducible processes inherent in the transition to modern forms of culture and society, both in the metropolitan and colonial settings" (*ibid.*). With no possibility of an *aufgehobene Identität* in sight, the irreducibility of identity threatens to sneak in an unreformed religiosity behind the guise of a Saidian "secular criticism" to which Mufti formally adheres. Indeed, the sly religiosity of contemporary postcoloniality creeps in center stage: "my own conception of minority experience," he writes, is "as a site for the critique of dominant conceptions and narratives of collective life" (8). Basing itself on a mysteriously given irreducibility—even if that of a "process"—the criticism, though overtly secular, is informed and supported by a peculiarly unreflective faith.

This curious paradox of a work that proclaims a secular spirit but which looks upon and internalizes identity as a fetish concentrates some

peculiarly contradictory energies of our times. For what is this identity looking into when it looks at identity which prevents the historical genesis of its own vaunted immediacy or irreducibility from ever becoming evident? Why does it turn an impasse into an article of faith? That opaqueness of a self that emerges in the self that identifies with a given identity-category gets reflected in Mufti's work as superficial transparency, as the necessity that others have identity in the way one imagines it to be given and irreducible. Considering the range of social position, the vast discrepancy of material force, and the deep differences between the historical production of minority experiences in metropolitan and colonial settings captured by the term "minority," do we not approach what appears like one of the central socially necessary illusions of late modern society: identity itself, which as it solidifies and gets embedded in institutions and disciplines, becomes interchangeable to the degree that it becomes distant from real social affect, experience, and even allegiances? (And what then is Critical Theory doing in this work? Do Adorno and Horkheimer, who emphasized non-identity over identity in their philosophical elaborations, really gibe with Mufti's agenda, or do citations of such thinkers merely amount to ornamental flourishes in postcolonial "theory"?)

Answers to these overarching sets of inquiries will be ventured throughout this essay, especially towards the end. But first a more thorough recapitulation of the arguments and contents of the work is in order.

Postulates and Positions

Embodying a disposition that presumes the "irreducibility" of identity—which is to say, its givenness and inevitability—*Enlightenment in the Colony* is a work held together by overlapping axiomatic strands, which sometimes thematically or affectively overlap, but which philosophically diverge. An unevenness between the manner in which the work addresses identity and its general secular orientation slowly comes to light.

Though they are not so clearly and systematically laid out, the main postulates which the work puts into play are:

1. Minority identity is necessarily brought to crisis by the rise of majoritarian liberal-secular nation-states, or, as is the case in colonial India, by nationalist movements and their imagination of the future community. In Mufti's view, identity crisis is perennial for the minority, but never so critical as to bring the

mysterious givenness of identity into crisis. For whatever the crisis, the same identity—or identity as sameness—persists.

2. Minority status is produced by modern modes of governance generally, and these modes of governance are unable to resolve the minority (or “Jewish”) question without resorting to exceptional means—such as the deportation of the minority populace, or the partition of the state. (It is unclear if the impasse is one of the literary narratives Mufti reads or whether he believes it to have been the concrete historical inevitability of modern forms of rule.)
3. Literary forms, especially narrative, play an important role in spelling out the ideological limits which define the crisis of minority identity. This involves any number of discursive turns, but for Mufti, there are two general points that are emphasized: either endless deferral of resolution, or total displacement, whether by exile or death.

The conclusion reached through the reading of the ghazals of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Anita Desai’s novel *Baumgartner’s Bombay* is a hopeful one: it tries to spell out the immanent possibilities of transcending the antinomic logic of the self and other in majority/minority relations in these works, but in considering the transcendence to be fulfilled in literary writing, Mufti seems to suggest that the problem, which is social and political, can adequately be overcome in subjective states, in subjective preferences, self-conceptions, values, and ethical responses towards the other, whether of the majority or the minority, whether on this or the other side of the capitalist relations of production on a transnational scale. “[E]xilic thinking is a recommendation not about *where* to live . . . but rather *how* to live wherever one happens to be . . .” (257, his italics). Facing the problems of “the modern period as a whole” requires, according to Mufti, that “we renounce the certainties of ‘home’” and that “we resist the apotheosis of the nation-state as the only proper dwelling place of culture and self” (261). The presumptions about the “we” in these lines—a “we” that is presumed to have the luxury of moral choices or a “home” to renounce in the first place, as if mobility and choice in such regards is necessarily the case—provide clues about the ideological scope of the interpretive method at hand. Such a set of assumptions are merely symptomatic of deeper conflicting moves and distracted ambivalences of the work, which in turn, as we will see, help to explain the presumptions

of such a subjective idealist conclusion to the deep social and political contradictions mediating, as Marx saw, the *Schicksalsfrage des Judens*.

We return then to the core contradiction of Mufti's book, captured in the focus on identity as not merely an immediate given, but as a quasi-religious or ethical standpoint, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of secularity, on the other. And, as a reading of Marx's classic 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question," what is at stake are the different ways in which particularity and universality get encoded in the handling of minorities in modernity, or, in other words, within the general dispensation of social life characterized by immersion in commodification. If the particular blockages in the unfolding of immanent critique in Mufti's work are overcome, as I will try to show, the degree of the socially necessary fetishism required for the comparability of identity can itself come under criticism.

Decoding Capital and Identity

At the crux of Mufti's literary interpretations is Marx's own engagement with the Jewish Question. Understanding Marx's take on the liberal emancipation of the Jews in the wake of Napoleon's conquests in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the implementation of the *Code Napoléon* in Marx's own Rhineland as well as other parts of the German confederacy, including eventually Prussia, is essential. How Mufti reads Marx will impact both what Mufti understands to be at the core of the minority problematic in liberal-secular states and how he then interprets literary works from the vantage point of minority identity. "To formulate a question," Marx wrote in the famous 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question," "is to resolve it" (in Tucker 1978, 28).² That is, how one formulates the problem is already a step in the attempt of resolving it. Thus, the way in which Mufti comprehends the question is key to seeing how he deploys it as a model for the consideration of Urdu as well as other works.

With occasional cryptic flourish but consistent penetrating irony, Marx discusses the nature of liberal-secular society in ways that may displease and put off an American liberal multiculturalism accustomed to expelling prematurely those moments of thought which grate against culturalist sensibilities or whose vehemence and uncompromising nature

²Page numbers of all further citations from Marx's essay in Tucker will be given internally after "JQ."

seem damaging to an irrationalist American public civility. The latter has been marked in recent years by the regular invocations of belief of high elected officials and policy agendas which seek to compromise the integrity of scientific method. These are paralleled by a consumerist media sphere that warps and distracts intuitions about the concrete realities of existence. None of the above is countered by the normative division of the social and historical totality into manageable units of disciplined learning, among which the humanities are generally meant to provide ideal-poetic, if not irrationalist, counterbalances to the hard empiricism of the natural sciences. For that reason, lest the essential points of Marx's analysis get missed by an indisposition towards an antinomian lexicon within the dominant culture or lost in the distracted whirl of political correctness, one must ~~hone in on~~ ^{align closely to} Marx's language, abiding by its stridency. Fathomable beneath a legal edifice fraught with the contradictions of state and civil society, the public and the private, atheism and religion, religious prerogatives and enlightened emancipation are the social dynamics of capital. This is all the more important in the present analysis since Mufti, despite all the invocations of Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question," does not follow to the end the implications of Marx's reading for his audience. And though Mufti's interpretive moves are occasionally dressed up with Marxist terminology—"immanent critique" for instance—it will become apparent that the position adopted by Mufti is at some distance from that advanced by Marx.

The latter is driven forward by a variety of determinate practical and conceptual reversals which require retracing. Marx sees that the liberal-secular reforms in post-revolutionary Europe—symbolized as the emancipation and political enfranchisement of Jews—were the culmination of a general social transformation and the expression of the internal contradictions of capital itself as a social form. On the ideological plane, these internal contradictions take the form of the division between state and civil society, public and private interest, abstract citizenship and concrete subjectivity. Marx would eventually consummate his analysis of the contradictions of bourgeois society by grounding them in the nature of the commodity, which contains at its core both the concrete logic of value production—abstract labor power—as well as the socially necessary illusion—the exchange value of commodities—by which the underlying social processes are obscured. (The exchange value appears to be merely a relationship between commodities when in all actuality it is the expression of the social relations behind the commodity form.) The young Marx writing "On the Jewish Question" was on his way to discovering the essentiality of the commodity form by turning his attention to the social

bedrock underwriting the entire legal edifice of the liberal-secular state: civil society. "This revolution regards civil society, the sphere of human needs, labour, private interests, and civil law, as the basis of its own existence, as self-subsistent precondition, and thus as its natural basis" (JQ 46). As Marx nears the determinate source of the social and political transformations in his midst—"the *frenzied* movement of the cultural and material elements which form the content of ... life" especially that "god of *practical need* and *self-interest*"; money—he begins to reflect ironically on the chimerical nature of the political emancipation of liberal-secular reforms (JQ 45, 50, his italics). "[M]an was not liberated from religion; he received religious liberty. He was not liberated from property; he received the liberty to own property. He was not liberated from the egoism of business; he received the liberty to engage in business" (JQ 45). To the degree that religion has become a private affair, religion becomes the expression of self-interest. Whereas the state is neutral in religious terms, civil society enshrines egoistic man, driven by practical need with self-interest as his overriding imperative, entitled to his faith as a measure of generalized subjectivism. The social logic to which Jews were restricted in medieval and early modern Europe—finance—comes to symbolize the norm by which liberal-secular society as a whole functions. The ironies, as Marx notes, go even deeper. The civil society which grew on account of the financial instruments of the Jews has absorbed "Judaism" to such a degree that the Jews can be liberated. What is most powerfully determining the shape of society—money—is what the political system effaces. "Politics is in principle superior to the power of money, but in practice it has become its bondsmen" (JQ 50). To the extent that Judaism was related to the making of money, all of society has now become Jewish. The Jewish Question is illusory. "The *chimerical* nationality of the Jew is the nationality of the trader, and above all of the financier" (JQ 51, his italics). "Christianity issued from Judaism. It has now been re-absorbed into Judaism" (JQ 52). What seemed to have been an issue particularly concerning a minority population reveals itself within the contradictions of the liberal-secular state to be nothing other than the reverse: the universal dispensation.

It is because the essence of the Jew was universally realized and secularized in civil society, that civil society could not convince the Jew of the *unreality* of his *religious* essence, which is precisely the ideal representation of practical need. It is not only, therefore, in the Pentateuch and the Talmud, but also in contemporary society, that we find the essence of the present-day Jew; not as an abstract essence, but as one which is supremely empirical, not only as a limitation of the Jew, but as the Jewish narrowness

of society.

(JQ 52)

The challenges such a mode of analysis presents for contemporary identity-thinking will be addressed below, but for now it is instructive to read what Mufti makes of Marx and the Jewish Question in general. Immediately, what is remarkable is how much Mufti, despite showing a consistent yet tendentious engagement with Marx on the Jewish Question, concentrates just on that ideological plane that Marx had sought to displace and yet keep in view as the determinate illusion produced by the obfuscating exterior of liberal-secular institutions, legal codes, and ideological norms. These are the irreducible particularity of the minority, the special nature of the crisis of minority populations in general, and the specific role that they play in upsetting the boundaries of contemporary identity by holding out the promise of a new dispensation through “the disruption of the categories of identity” and raising “questions about deracination, homelessness, abstraction, supra-national identifications, and divided loyalties” (39, 38). Whereas Marx seeks to show that the question of the Jews cannot be resolved by the terms in which it is posed, but rather requires reformulation through a careful decoding of its determinate contradictions in the division of public and private, whose own resolution will simultaneously dissolve the Jewish Question, Mufti has the opposite in mind: the minorities mysteriously solve the riddles of the liberal-secular state through their preoccupation with identity. Thus, as we have already seen, exilic and minority perspectives, according to Mufti, hold the key to different elaborations of the “constitutive narratives of modern life” (37), a notion attributed mysteriously to Marx, but which is difficult to anchor to this or any of his writings. Whereas Marx considers questions of identity in contemporary society to be mediated by the larger social contradictions, for Mufti the social contradictions can be potentially resolved by the vexed ethical offerings of minority identity. Though sometimes the language of mediation is used, the overall tack taken by Mufti is that these identities are not reducible to any other problem. Instead, they are immediate, persistent, and unassimilable to any other set of objective social relations. Rather than seeing the language of exceptionalism that Mufti speaks of as the reflection of universally relevant social and political contradictions, as Marx might, he instead takes them at face value. In brief, all that Marx wished to annihilate yet preserve at a lower level of conceptual necessity—as necessary social illusion—become the building blocks of Mufti’s minoritarian readings. The conse-

quences of this reading—if it can even be called that³—are heavy. They bear upon the kinds of literary readings Mufti ventures and serve as the context for the sorts of subjective idealist solutions that he offers to the problems that he encounters.

Minority Readings

At the core of *Enlightenment in the Colony* is a compelling question: What ramifications, if any, does minority social and political status have for aesthetic form as well as modes of political and social address? Yet, rather than thinking through this question as a heuristic device or considering the ways in which it may open up an inquiry about the relations between social position, political conflict, and their interconnections with the varieties of experience and discourse of minority belonging, what we have in Mufti is a committed belief that minority experience deeply impacts and shapes forms of aesthetic expression. This is merely taken for granted. Evidence is marshaled accordingly and readings move in a tendentious direction. For Mufti, “minoritization” means different things at different points in the argument: the carving out of smaller cohesive worlds as alternatives to the wider fabric of social life in which the majority is dominant; the ambivalent, even antinomian reconfigurations of majoritarian symbols; a particular inassimilable “excess” which disturbs and is often expelled from the majoritarian state; and the embodiment of the abstract principles of unity of the liberally constructed political community. Minority status thus embodies the gambit of the contradiction between universality and particularity in modern society. Yet this central contradiction of modern liberal society—between the concrete subject and abstract citizen—is not encompassed by minority status, as I will argue. Instead, the play of minority identity across the universal-particular divide can itself provide clues for how “identity”—minority or otherwise—has become a fetishistic abstraction in its own right, obscuring and displacing the differentials of social and political power in our contemporary neo-imperial world.

Whereas the works Mufti reads in the first part of the book, “Emergence: Europe and its Others” are well known for the discussion of

³Mufti’s citations of Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” do away with the italics, and thus seem to lose sight of exactly all that Marx sought to emphasize. Compare the citation of Marx on page 37 of Mufti with the original passages in Tucker (35–36).

European Jewry, those in the second part, "Displacements: On the Verge of India," occasion a more serious contribution to the world of literary studies. These readings of Urdu writers in colonial and postcolonial South Asia pose compelling questions, assess for new audiences the history of Indian literary traditions, and confer on literary giants such as Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Abul Kalam Azad, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz the attention they have long deserved. Mufti's queries vis-à-vis such figures help to address how these thinkers and their expressive idioms related to the general dispensation of modernity as well as the particularities of the colonial situation itself. Questions concerning Enlightenment, religious belonging, belief, selfhood, and community are provoked by Mufti's readings, for these are so laden with the imperative to "minoritize" that more often than not they seem forced. The lens of "identity" through which Mufti is compelled to see and read everything indicates the conditions by which Urdu literature appears in the metropolitan academic world. But the conditions of an identity politics that have become de rigueur in the American neo-liberal imperium and oftentimes the sole grounds for mediating a wider world—including that which is at odds with liberal multiculturalism—leave one wondering what less forced readings of a non-Western canon such as Urdu's might become.

The curious thing about the identity-logic of Mufti's readings is that they fly in the face of figures who sought deeply and sometimes effectively to escape the prison house of ascribed identity. For Azad, this involved reformulating the religious inheritance of Islam, affirming profane pleasures, and creating an idiom of modern spiritual reflection appropriate for the "rational civil theology" imagined for a future independent India.⁴ It is in this light that his reflections in his classic *Ghubār-e Khāṭir* on such sacrilegious enjoyments as music can and should be read. As attested by italicized modifiers such as "Islamic," the only possibilities Azad represents for Mufti are those of religious identity, and "the counter-possibilities within *sharif* culture" are not secular or civil-social self-fashioning, but a vague set of religious or culturalist inclinations (171). As for Manto, it is curious that a figure who had distanced himself so concertedly from his religious inheritance through the breaking of religious taboos, let alone through self-exile from orthodox family life and idiosyncratic secularist self-fashioning, is made the agent of Muslim "minoritization" of liter-

⁴This elegant phrase is, of course, Vico's (1984, para 342). I bring it up here for several aspects of Azad's work and the wider tendencies within late colonial Islamic thought can be construed as providing parallel rational conceptions as the foundation for future society.

ary form.⁵ Though the subtitle of the chapter affirms Manto's conceit that he is "a greater story writer than God," in the end he and the entire secular domain of literary Urdu become the marker of some kind of god-given difference: Muslimness. Rather than considering the processes leading to Partition to be one that made of Urdu a "Muslim" language, it is considered to be just that already for it internalizes "Muslimness" by making "minor" forms such as the short story imperative. (Why the short story form is the dominant genre of twentieth-century Hindi as well is something that Mufti's scheme cannot explain or even acknowledge.) Similar sorts of questions arise with respect to Faiz. Here again we have nationalist and identitarian allegories imposed upon a poetic oeuvre that often succeeded in universalizing proletarian suffering and longing within the idiom of classical forms such as the ghazal and extending the scope of internationalist revolutionary politics. There are certainly several complexities which characterize Faiz's poetry, but Mufti seems to think they can all be contained within the categories and logics of national and identitarian belonging, exilic, minoritarian, or otherwise. As far as Mufti is concerned then, there is no possible, even momentary, relief from identity, no matter what one's political, religious, or ideological commitments and inclinations might be.

What the Jewish Question and the articulations of, by, or about Jewishness in the long nineteenth century of Europe amounts to for Mufti as it is replayed in the South Asian world of Urdu literature is simply that ascribed identity trumps all other forms of identification, affiliation, or commitment. Despite its variegated inheritances, this seems to be the overriding message of mainstream postcolonial thought in American institutions of learning, and those which follow its lead, ever since the sixties came to a close. As identity became the dominant theoretical basis for postcolonial thinking in the American academy, it gave authority to those ascribed with such identities, especially as seen from the angle of American multiculturalism. And thus it is almost solely through the mediation of American multicultural articulations of identity that marginal fields such as Urdu literature are able to be incorporated into the domains of criticism and theory. What one sees as "difference" is the reflection of American liberal ideology's protection of irrational private prerogatives, beliefs, and preferences—exactly all that which Marx understood ironically to be the "natural basis" of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. It is to that

⁵The most informative and nuanced life sketch is to be found in 'Alvi (2003, 9–29). None of the reasons given for Manto's decision to move to Pakistan after Partition have anything to do with religious self-identification (see 24 passim).

quasi-unreasonable—or, in the jargon of postcolonial “theory,” “irreducible”—domain to which movements that sought non-ascriptive forms of affiliation and commitment—such as the communism of Faiz—were reduced and domesticated with the ascendance of neo-liberal imperialism under the stewardship of American power.

What must be considered, in the light of such deformations produced by the emphasis on identity is whether other mediations of non-Western bodies of knowledge may have greater purchase, or at the very least, allow for less distortion. And, in any case, how are identities as vastly discrepant in terms of social power as Jews and Muslims interchangeable or exchangeable as “minority identities?” Are both equally subaltern on account of mere minority status? What is the real concrete difference that such equations of sameness occlude? The idea that the processes that led to the minoritization of Jews in Europe were essentially the same as those that led to the minoritization of Muslims in South Asia—that is, the processes of modernization—is never fully substantiated or worked out. But even if we were to grant validity to such an assertion, the larger question is whether minority-status ought to be correlated always and necessarily with subaltern status, for that is precisely what is suggested in Mufti’s “conception of minority experience,” as noted above. It is worth asking whether such correlations may not reveal—through all that they obscure—the oracular character of “minority”—and thus, to drive the logic even further—“identity” as a whole. One might ask if the socially necessary ideology of late modern society demands the extension of the commodity fetish for new conceptions of commensurability to become possible. To the degree that such ideological operations are codified and put into effect within the field of comparative literature, disciplinary and institutional formations become implicated. Is it the case that in our contemporary cultural morass, disciplinary formations such as comparative literature work according to the logic of fundamental fetishes, such as that of exchange value itself?

Exile from Identity

By way of conclusion, it is worth comparing the logic of identity that Mufti espouses with that of non-identity articulated by thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer. Though Mufti cites these thinkers all throughout *Enlightenment in the Colony*, little, it appears, is reflected of how much their approach on questions of identity differs from his own, and though the edges of the distinction are smoothed over with rhetoric of difference,

displacement, minority, exile and “postcoloniality,” ultimately the dialectical underpinnings of Frankfurt School figures remain ill-digested and consequently unabsorbed by the lines of Mufti’s argument. What results is incoherence and confusion, for what these thinkers sought to negate was the very notion of “irreducibility” taken for granted by Mufti, and the general fetishism and reification resulting from the processes of accumulation characteristic of capitalist society.

Among the Frankfurt School thinkers Adorno is most relevant here, for certain paragraphs of his fragmentary “reflections from damaged life,” *Minima Moralia*, are often misleadingly extracted and invoked for affirmation of the identitarian and exilic perspective of American postcolonialism.⁶ But the notion of identity promoted by Mufti and other garden variety postcolonialists would have to engage with how Adorno positions himself with respect to the commodity fetish and the reification of capitalist social relations as the givenness of possessive individualism, the administrative categories of the bureaucratic state, the objective dimension of the immediate world, including “identity” itself. That is, to the extent that Mufti’s notion of minority identity is exchangeable and interchangeable despite the vast social and political inequalities that it may embody, Adorno would consider them to be unlivable. Identity as spoken of by Mufti sullies the autonomy that Adorno wishes to maintain in any way possible. In contemporary conditions, private or particularistic identification with the kinds of identities mainstream postcolonialism takes for granted and enshrines as given would bear all the features that undermine the life of radical autonomy. “Private life asserts itself unduly, hectically, vampire-like, trying convulsively, because it really no longer exists, to prove it is alive. Public life is reduced to an unspoken oath of allegiance to the platform” (Adorno 1951, 33). Such an unspoken oath of allegiance is what is demanded by a public life increasingly reduced to identity talk today. It is true that Adorno wrote that “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home,” but that “home” might as well now include minority, exile, or subalternity as understood by American postcolonialism (*ibid.*, 39). In any case, out of context this does not convey Adorno’s vexed feelings about morality and ethics in the first place, both of which coincide with and abet the unlivable yet unavoidable evil of contemporary society. □

⁶Perhaps the most egregious example of this is to be found in Said (1994, 54–60).

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