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The intersections of postcolonialism, postsecularism, and literary studies: Potentials, limitations, bibliographies

Manav Ratti

Department of English, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD, USA

ABSTRACT
This article presents some features, potentials, limitations, and bibliographies of the intersection of postcolonialism, postsecularism, and literary studies. It examines literatures, cultures, religions, indigenous beliefs and practices, and political imaginaries from Africa, Europe, and South Asia. The religions discussed include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. The article shows how the institutional and discursive emergence of postcolonial postsecularism, including its intersection with literary studies, can draw lessons from similarly contestatory fields of study, such as postcolonial theory, postcolonial feminism, and intersectional feminism. The article includes bibliographies of literary works that address secularism and postsecularism, including their intersection with postcoloniality.

KEYWORDS
Postcolonial postsecularism; intersectional feminism; literary studies; Europe; Africa; South Asia

1. Introduction

This article stems from the symposium hosted by *Sikh Formations* on my book *The Post-secular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* (Routledge, 2013). I thank the chief editor of *Sikh Formations*, Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, for organizing this forum, and my colleagues Stanisław Obirek, Rebekah Cumpsty, and Rajgopal Saikumar for their excellent contributions. In their articles, Obirek (2022), Cumpsty (2022), and Saikumar (2022b) offer subtle and nuanced theorizations of the postsecular, demonstrating how formations of the secular and postsecular are shaped by the politics, postcolonial and otherwise, of location. I am grateful to them for the rich insights they draw from my work and the capacious theoretical and methodological possibilities that accrue from their scholarship. Obirek, Cumpsty, and Saikumar write about and from diverse locations: Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, South Africa, Nigeria, the US, and India. Their articles demonstrate that considering the postsecular as postcolonial shows the multiple ways in which the postsecular *is* postcolonial. Illuminating, textured, and provocative, their articles open multiple avenues for further research into religion, secularism, postcolonialism, postsecularism, and literary studies.

Building on the work of Obirek, Cumpsty, and Saikumar, I present in this article some features, potentials, and limitations of the intersections of postcolonialism, postsecularism, and literary studies. There can be numerous theoretical and methodological

CONTACT Manav Ratti manav.ratti@linacre.oxon.org
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permutations of the above three fields of study. I would like to begin with the intersection of postcolonialism with postsecularism, as they share conceptual and methodological parallels given their historical and contestatory dimensions, and their common prefix. Literature can fascinatingly serve as a domain, field, and site for the intersections of postcolonial and postsecular questions, concerns, and visions. The term postcolonial postsecularism signals the presence of at least two fields of inquiry: postcolonialism and postsecularism. What are their connections? To begin, neither term functions as simply a modification of the other. Postsecularism does not function only as an adjective to postcolonialism ('postsecular postcolonialism'), just as postcolonialism does not do so to postsecularism ('postcolonial postsecularism'). While distinct, these two theoretical, historical, and methodological formations are also connected with one another in ways that excitingly enable mutually productive research. The References section of this article includes two necessarily limited and overlapping bibliographies: (a) studies that examine secularism, aesthetics, and literature in combination with one another;[1] (b) studies that combine postsecularism and literary studies, featuring works that are diverse across genres, national literatures, languages, time periods, regions of the west and the Global South, and across varieties of scholarly output (including dissertations, journal special issues and forums, edited books and collections, and monographs).[2]

In its quality of simultaneous distinctiveness and connectedness, the early institutional and discursive formation of postcolonial feminism, as both a term and genealogy, can provide insights into the ongoing emergence of postcolonial postsecularism. One of the most interesting historical markers of institutional and discursive formation is how fields are represented in introductory collections, companions, and handbooks, given these volumes' influence in establishing and disseminating fields, including the pressure they face to be representative, inclusive, authoritative, and accessible by broad audiences. In 2000, Blackwell published *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by the US-based scholars Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz. In the volume's second chapter, 'Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism,' Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park argue:

> Postcolonial feminism cannot be regarded simply as a subset of postcolonial studies, or, alternatively, as another variety of feminism. Rather it is an intervention that is changing the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies. Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights. (Sunder Rajan and Park 2000, 53)

Similar to the above features of postcolonial feminism, postcolonial postsecularism intervenes to change both postcolonialism and postsecularism. It explores how postcolonial lives – in all the heterogeneous, lived experiences of race, gender, nation, class, caste, language, and sexuality – intersect with (post)secularism, religion, faith, indigenous traditions and practices, and state policies, including laws and rights. Just as postcolonial theory contests the practices, discourses, and epistemologies of colonialism (historical and ongoing), postcolonial postsecularism contests the practices, discourses, and epistemologies of (post)secularism, including the very distinction between secularism and religion. This is not to suggest that a theory of postcolonial postsecularism unproblematically represents and captures previously unrepresented phenomena. Here some of the limitations of postcolonial

feminism can be instructive. In critiquing Sunder Rajan's and Park's above chapter, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that 'even in so judicious an account … there is a sense that this peculiar brand of feminism is separated from the vicissitudes of local feminisms' (Spivak 2000, xv). By local feminisms, and with reference to Upendra Baxi's chapter 'Postcolonial Legality' (Baxi 2000, 540–555) in the same volume, Spivak argues that 'much greater attention to gender is paid in *actually existing* postcolonial constitutions than is allowed by postcolonial theorists' (Spivak 2000, xv; emphasis mine). It is these notions of the vicissitudes of the local and of actually existing constitutions that postcolonial postsecularism aspires to understand and represent. Part of the interest, but also limitation, of this theoretical and methodological apparatus is that it attempts to understand and represent that which seemingly resists representation – such as faith, (subaltern) belief, mystery, the miracle, the secret, the esoteric, the heterodoxical, the untranslatable, and the ineffable. This difference, faith, and belief, including subaltern faith, will have a local vicissitude and actually existing postcolonial constitution that might not be representable or understood. Contestations of secularism and religion exist, either explicitly or implicitly, in relation to particular conceptions of secularism and religion (e.g. see Rivera 2021). Again, these contestations will not necessarily represent the particularities or lifeworlds of what is actually happening. Such limits of representation and understanding are of course not new to postcolonial theory. Certainly one way forward is for autocritique and vigilance of scholarly frameworks, assumptions, and methods.

Given the above challenges, could a malleability of representation, as in literary fiction, rhetorically approximate the unrepresentable, or at least recognize the limits of its own representational capacities? Within the mutual distinctiveness and synergies of postcolonialism and postsecularism, the excitement for me of literary studies at this interface is as follows, from the Preface of my book:

> Literature is powerfully poised to demonstrate the undoing of the ideological oppositions between secularism and religion, for in its ability to represent a multiplicity of voices and in its acceptance and juxtaposition of contradictory and conflicting perspectives, it can represent, imagine, and pursue a rich array of possibilities. (Ratti 2013, xxi)

My experience of postcolonial, postsecular literary criticism has been routed through both close literary readings and a responsiveness to the foundational remains – and remaining – of the postcolonial (see Young 2012). As I was researching my book, the challenge was at least one of methodology: would the method be inductive, with a certain set of *a priori* presuppositions? Would the method be deductive, with any paradigm of postcolonial postsecularism always open, malleable, flexible, and responsive to the materiality and textures of the text? The answer, unsurprisingly, was that the peculiar 'logic' of literary postcolonial postsecularism asked for a combination of both the inductive and deductive. Inductively, my interest was in the overlooked affirmative gestures of postcolonial fiction, and equally in how writers experimented with representing that which resists representation, such as faith and belief. Deductively, the fiction showed that writers' postsecular searches and experiments go beyond the religious. Within the novels, movement through violence and catastrophe – which has also shaped the writers – allows construction of modes of affirmation, which I locate primarily in the aesthetic. The formal dimensions of the aesthetic can serve as a form of postsecular resolution. By this I mean that writers turn to aesthetic space to combine and decolonize elements of both the secular

and the religious. Aníbal González argues in his book *In Search of the Sacred Book: Religion and the Contemporary Latin American Novel* that the novel has been conspicuously secular since its inception, 'favoring that which can be seen and known, counted and measured, and contrasting the spheres of the ideal and the real, the sacred and the profane' (González 2018, 4). This is similar to Georg Lukács's familiar statement that 'the novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God' (Lukács 1974, 88). González, however, demonstrates how Latin American novelists, from the turn of the nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, have 'aspired to endow their works with the attributes of sacred texts' (González 2018, ix). Given the long association of Latin American writers with magical realism, it is fitting here to state that one form of postsecular resolution that my book argues for is how Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* (1988) experiments with magical realism as the secular equivalent of the religious miracle, connecting faith, reason, and fictional representation with one another.

Intersecting such postsecular concerns with those of postcolonialism, I define the postcolonial, postsecular literary search as emerging from multiple crises: those of state secularism, those of organized, politicized religion, and those of the disenchantments of secular modernity and rationalization. While religion can foster inspiration and creativity, it can also lead to violence, civil war, partition, majoritarianism, and communalism, especially in the framework of the modern nation-state. Given these crises, how can the need for faith, awe, wonder, enchantment, and ethics that religion seeks to fulfill find expression and significance in secular contexts, 'without the political and ideological constraints of nationalism, secularism, and religion?' (Ratti 2013, xx). In defining the postcolonial postsecular, I argue that:

> Writers understandably seek some form of belief, however tenuous such a space of belief might be. The task then is to explore secular alternatives to secularism: ones that can gesture to the inspiring features of religious thought, without the violence that can attach itself to religion. The paradox thus becomes to find a non-secular secularism, a non-religious religion. (Ratti 2013, xx)
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> […]
>
> The postsecular possibilities that writers can gesture toward through literature are not anti-secular, nor are they abandoning secularism or turning to religion. The postsecular neither proselytizes secularism nor sentimentalizes religion. It can recognize that enchantment is not the provision of religion alone, and can tackle the hard questions of the political while acknowledging the dimensions of religion. (Ratti 2013, xxi)

The postcoloniality of this postsecular literary search, including its tentative affirmative values, is constituted in part by what I term the 'contingency – and urgency – of material and historical circumstance':

> The postsecular affirmative values that emerge for the writers I analyze include love, friendship, community, art, literature, music, nature, the migrant's eye-view, hybridity, and 'newness.' These in themselves might not seem particularly novel or 'new.' What interests me is how these affirmative values emerge, how they subsume and demonstrate the edge of the postcolonial, the national, the diasporic, the minority position. I am interested in how writers write through religion by invoking its great signifiers and great ethics, and then translate and secularize them within the contingency – and urgency – of material and historical circumstance. (Ratti 2013, xxiii)

My interest is also in how postsecular possibilities are *imagined* by writers, with such imagination enabled by literary space:

> The postsecular moments in the literature that I analyze contain decisions made out of human choices and human risks, without the fixity of the nation-state. Such moments will not result in immediate juridico-legal change, but they can gesture to an epistemic change, which is unpredictable, and the trajectories of which are unknown. The process of pursuing such possibilities will take an immense imaginative manoeuvre, and an immense form of 'belief' as well. This is where I am interested in how writers and individuals can radically imagine postsecularism. (Ratti 2013, xxiii)

For a writer such as Salman Rushdie, this imagination of the postsecular is informed by a diasporic consciousness of at least two seculars: the state secularism of India (searching for secular alternatives to its crises and limitations) and western philosophical secularism (working through its disenchantments). The diasporic 'post' thus oscillates imaginatively among political and philosophical seculars, searching through and combining them towards ethics and enchantment. Throughout my book, I argue for the retention of political secularity in the idea of the postsecular, for my version of the postcolonial postsecular does not 'advocate classical anarchism by turning to the affirmation of humanitarian feelings as a complete rejection of the "political"' (Ratti 2013, xxiv). Instead, by secularity I mean the hard-won values and practices of democracy and equality, especially legal protections for minority communities.

My work builds on the scholarship of writers such as Talal Asad (1990, 1993, 2003), Ashis Nandy (1983, 1998), Saba Mahmood (2005), and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992, 2000), who have challenged constructions of 'religion' and 'secularism,' including the opposition between the 'secular' and the 'religious,' by showing their connections with colonial histories and Euro-Christian political imaginaries. It might seem a provocation to state that formations of religion and secularism have long histories as components of European colonization and imperialism. Part of this provocation is that secularism is not only equated with reason but, more importantly, seen as religion's opposite, with religion thus excluded from reason and equated with irrationality (by religion I mean pre-Reformation Christianity, though some formulations remove Christianity *tout court* from reason; and non-Christian religions, especially Islam). Moreover, in the historical and ongoing semiotics of imperialism, this 'reason' is signified and consolidated through the structures and embodiments of at least westernness (western supremacy, with its cultural assemblages including Christianity, the English language, and English literature), whiteness (white supremacy), and maleness (the patriarchy), all bound in solidarity with one another through the discourses of 'progress,' 'liberalism,' 'reform,' 'superiority,' 'intelligence,' and 'civilization.' Robert Young offers the following contemporary example:

> in the West it is rarely acknowledged that, prior to the Canadian invention of multiculturalism in the 1970s, the major and historically by far the longest example of successful multiculturalism in Europe was the Islamic state of al-Andalus in the tenth century, during the eight hundred odd years of Muslim rule in Spain. This has never been adequately acknowledged in Western assumptions of the superiority of its recent political systems. (Young 2012, 32)

Arvind-Pal Mandair argues for:

> models of encounter that might be conducive to thinking cultural difference positively can be derived as much from non-Western as from Western cultural and intellectual sources (for example, the practice-concepts such as akal or hukam mentioned above). More important, far from being utopian ideas or wishful thinking … such models of encounter are already at work in the lived experiences of minorities who negotiate difference positively on a daily basis. (Mandair 2018, 450)

The weaponization of 'reason' (Enlightenment and otherwise) and 'civilization' as tools of ongoing imperialism and colonization creates diverse assemblages of domination. It is against such assemblages that searches that are simultaneously postcolonial, postsecular, and literary enact their contestations and experimentations, even with some hope – however minimal, fragmentary, incipient, or illusory – of survival and affirmation. Again, these searches are not unproblematic or without limitations. For example, for the diasporic writer, such searches can result in political and historical insensitivity to the local contexts of the postcolonial nation and its politicized religions and ethnic groups. I turn to the cautions signposted by Tomoko Masuzawa:

> Contemplating the postsecular in the abstract might lead to a wishful illusion of an exit from the present mire – much as the declaration of 'postmodern' at times functioned as an easy way out of the problem that is/was 'modern.' But, alternatively, we might respond to a call to do some strenuous thinking, in order to scramble these tenuous markers of periodization and territorialization, so that we may better understand the present. The former, a mere contemplation of 'post-secular,' may give us solace in a fantasy of escape and little else, but the latter, of necessity, would drive us toward scholarship. (Masuzawa 2012, 208)

In the spirit of thinking strenuously through the questions of the postsecular, in the sections that follow, I engage with the symposium articles by Stanisław Obirek, Rebekah Cumpsty, and Rajgopal Saikumar.

2. The postcolonial, the postsecular, and the literary in Europe

Stanisław Obirek's article, 'Europe in Dialogue with Manav Ratti's *The Postsecular Imagination*' (Obirek 2022) shows through strikingly original formulations and comparisons how the European postsecular is inflected by its own postcolonial conditions, with writers searching through and representing such conditions. For over two decades, Obirek's writings, as some of the most profound theological scholarship, commentary, and public intellectual work in Poland and Europe, have pointed the way for scholarship on religion (especially Catholicism), secularism, and postsecularism (for the last, see Obirek 2018, 2019). In the process, some of Obirek's work has quietly questioned and decentred western European norms, as demonstrated in his symposium article. In that respect, I note the similiarity between Obirek's work and the following trenchant observation by Fredric Jameson, in reference to Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe* (2007): 'It would have been better to talk of provincializing Western Europe, for it is the latter that housed a cultural-imperialist centrality only later taken over by the United States' (Jameson 2015, 141).

Obirek makes numerous productive connections between Europe (primarily Eastern Europe) and the postcolonial, postsecular concerns in South Asia. Through the tropes of displacement and contesting nationality, Obirek draws a parallel between my examination of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and the work of the writer Witold Gombrowicz, exiled from Poland to Argentina, and for whom 'the microcosm

will only be his mind, which creates an interpersonal church that is in opposition to the Catholic church' (Obirek 2022, 2). Obirek's interest in how writers can resist and re-work elements of organized religion, in this case the Catholic church (including the latter's possibilities of reform), is reflected in two of his recent books. With Arno Tausch, he has authored *Global Catholicism, Tolerance and the Open Society: An Empirical Study of the Value Systems of Roman Catholics* (Tausch and Obirek 2020), the first chapter of which is 'The Failure of the Catholic Church in Postsecular Context?' With Artur Nowak, he has authored *Gomora: Pieniądze, Władza, i Strach w Polskim Kościele* [*Gomorrah: Money, Power, and Fear in the Polish Church*] (Nowak and Obirek 2021).

Obirek juxtaposes the work of Ondaatje – in terms of questioning nationalist geography and community – alongside that of Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz, insightfully noting that a 'postsecular attitude is not related to religious doctrine, but to the secular ways of experiencing the world' (Obirek 2022, 3). Obirek highlights the scholarship of the literary critic Karina Jarzyńska (2017), who has read Miłosz's poetry as postsecular, particularly after his migration from Poland to the US. Jarzyńska's article shows the fascinating ways in which the very form of Miłosz's poetry transforms and registers his postsecular searches. Like the postcolonial experiences, inheritances, and cultural memories of catastrophe, violence, and ruination through which writers in South Asia enact postsecular questioning, so too Miłosz's poetry searches for affirmation through the multiple catastrophes and suffering of Poland's and Europe's twentieth-century.

Obirek renders a fine, sensitive parallel between Shauna Singh Baldwin's Partition novel *What the Body Remembers* (2000) and Etty Hillesum, a 'Dutch Jew who "created her own God" in the borderline situation of the Holocaust' (Obirek 2022, 4), as noted by Ulrich Beck in his book *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence* (2010). The Holocaust and Partition are distinct from one another through their historically, politically, and culturally specific contexts, circumstances, and memories, and are similar to one another through the terror of large-scale violence. Baldwin's novel is set in India's state of Punjab, which suffered the greatest of Partition violence. It tells the story of three characters: Sardarji, who is an engineer that designs canals and dams for farmers, and his two wives, Satya (in Punjabi, 'satya' means truth) and the younger Roop (in Punjabi, 'roop' means body, form/shape, beauty). Sardarji marries Roop because Satya is unable to bear children. With the violence of Partition reaching a climax, Satya takes her life, on her terms:

> I grow stronger. I dig within me and when I clear away weeds and leaves and loose earth, I hit bedrock, smooth as the truth I am named for, elegant. Heart-solid, extent unknown. This is mine, this simple hardness that moves from life to next life, impervious to any man's whims. Because there is a higher law. (Baldwin 2000, 339; emphases original)

Similarly to Etty Hillesum, Satya creates her own kind of Sikhism, a 'higher law' that she searches for among the precarious borderlines of the patriarchy, colonialism, nation, and the unimaginable destructions of Partition. Even as Satya's body is no more, Baldwin with consummate literary dexterity has Satya's character live on in the novel, as voice and spirit that reincarnate Satya's woman-centred rectitude and strength. Both Satya, as a woman, and her individualized Sikhism, as practice, show an agency and dynamism outside distinctions such as immanent/transcendent and religion/secularism. This is because even as the Sikh Gurus 'tell how to reach the divine but offer her [Satya] no guidance for her pain'

(Baldwin 2000, 345), Satya aspires to the realms described by Guru Nanak, the *khands* (planes) of *dharam* (duty), *gian* (knowledge), *saram* (beauty), *karam* (actions), and *sach* (truth). Shauna Singh Baldwin, through the story of Satya – the truth, her truth, a living truth – paradoxically translates the untranslatable elements of Sikhism, her novel embodying its own *nām simaran* (name meditation), quietly proffering readers a Sikhism which otherwise in colonial models would remain 'religion' or 'world religion.' The theorist meets the novelist in their shared postsecular sensitivity when Ulrich Beck, meditating on the life of Etty Hillesum, writes that 'religious beliefs with their – relatively – autonomous force and reality, their vision of a different humanity and their power to make whole worlds tremble, are so rarely exposed in their full ambivalence to the gaze of sociology' (Beck 2010, 1). I suspect it is this power of personal belief, as a metonym of a force ungraspable by ordinary ways of knowing, that Obirek imagines when he remembers the borderline lives of those who perished in the Holocaust and Partition.

In comparison with Salman Rushdie's representation in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) of the Mughal emperor Akbar's support of a multireligious conviviality, Obirek refers to the multireligious and multiethnic polity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth created by the merger of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is within this context that Jakub Frank (1726–1791) experimented with Judaism – and Frank has re-entered cultural memory through Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk's novel *Księgi Jakubowe* (*The Books of Jacob*, 2022). Obirek's parallels and insights are persuasive and profound, leading Obirek to offer the following resonant definition of postsecular literature: it 'allows topics and characters that have been replaced by the dominant model of culture to be re-incorporated into religious and cultural discourses' (Obirek 2022, 6), adding that 'the postsecular perspective enables one-sided models to be negotiated by giving voice to marginalized groups' (Obirek 2022, 6).

In this spirit of negotiating models, Obirek identifies how Slavic cultures and literatures across Central and Eastern Europe and Russia are undergoing a revitalization of religion and metaphysics, requiring models of the secular and postsecular sensitive and responsive to these contexts. He discusses here the work of Ivo Pospíšil, based at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. Pospíšil has drawn upon my theorization of postcolonial postsecularism and has proposed a theory of the 'pre–post effect' for interpreting Slavic literatures, particularly Russian literature. Russian literature has always ('pre') had religious and metaphysical dimensions, ones suppressed by the communist regime. Since the political changes ('post') of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost*, these dimensions are re-emerging and given renewed interest across Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. This includes the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work is well-recognized in the western Euro-American academy, including his concept of heteroglossia, with which Obirek opens his article. As Obirek informs us:

> this new, postsecular sensitivity has also made it possible to integrate the achievements of Mikhail Bakhtin's school of thought into today's research, literary and otherwise. It is thus not without reason that Bakhtin's work is experiencing a renaissance also in Poland, where for decades it was underestimated precisely because of its metaphysical sensitivity. (Obirek 2022, 7)

Notable among Obirek's scholarship are his landmark books co-authored with the late sociologist Zygmunt Bauman: *Of God and Man* (Bauman and Obirek 2015a) and *On the*

World and Ourselves (Bauman and Obirek 2015b). The premise of both books showcases the openness that both scholars advocate: a collaboration between Bauman, an agnostic and former member of the Communist Party, and Obirek, a former Jesuit priest and now scholar of cultural anthropology at the University of Warsaw. In *Of God and Man*, Bauman and Obirek explore the ethics of co-existence as imagined by a range of religions and writers, including J. M. Coetzee, Pietro Citati, Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus. They argue that everyone has 'the right to possess their own God, as long as the rights of one do not intrude upon the rights of another, or require refusing or depriving the other of that right' (Bauman and Obirek 2015a, 21). With differing, especially monotheistic, religions increasingly co-existing in national spaces, Bauman and Obirek advocate not just acceptance, but an openness that resists divisions (such openness and fluidity inform Bauman's signature concept of 'liquid modernity'). As Bauman epigrammatically states: 'boundaries are not drawn in order to certify differences; differences are sought because boundaries are drawn' (Bauman and Obirek 2015a, 20). Bauman's following argument especially resonates with postcolonial nations, such as India and Nigeria, given their deeply multiethnic populations: '[since] the future of humanity is an irrevocably multicultural and multi-centric world, consent to dialogue is a matter of life and death' (Bauman and Obirek 2015b, 126).

3. The postcolonial, the postsecular, and the literary in Africa

Rebekah Cumpsty's article, 'Manav Ratti's *The Postsecular Imagination* in the Context of African Literatures' (Cumpsty 2022) demonstrates the many sensitivities and flexibilities required of a theory and criticism of postsecularism within highly diverse postcolonial African nations, including Nigeria. Cumpsty's scholarship has performed a laudable service to the study of the secular, the sacred, and the postsecular in African literatures (see Cumpsty 2017, 2021, 2023). Chief among this work is Cumpsty's pathbreaking book *Postsecular Poetics: Negotiating the Sacred and Secular in Contemporary African Fiction* (Cumpsty 2023), the first book-length study of postsecularism in African literatures. This monograph examines a range of religious, cultural, and indigenous epistemologies and practices across novels and poetry from Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. It is doubtless this consideration of diverse literatures and cultures that informs Cumpsty's characterization of the form and content of postsecular literature emerging from Africa:

> The characteristics of postsecular literature include texts which expose the false binary between religious and secular experiences and spheres; present the secular and religion not as oppositional concepts, but instead as terms in dialectical mediation; include a character or characters that are seen to be negotiating their spiritual or secular condition; and demonstrate a postsecular engagement with terms, such as, sacred, ritual and sublime. (Cumpsty 2022, 4)

The above description could hold true for literatures in a range of postcolonial contexts, as in Cumpsty's observation that my book 'provides a conceptual vocabulary with which to explore the heterodoxies birthed by the entanglement of colonialism, monotheistic, and indigenous religions' (Cumpsty 2022, 5).

The above entanglement is conveyed through Cumpsty's reference to Nigeria's 'hundreds of distinct cultural, religious, ethnic and political identities' (Cumpsty 2022, 2); conveyed implicitly here are the limitations of any secularism that would homogenize

such differences. Among a population of 373 ethnic groups, the two dominant religions are Christianity and Islam, with Christians supporting separation of church and state and Muslims favouring governance by Shari'a law (Cumpsty 2022, 2). Like the constitution of India, the Nigerian constitution is secular in prohibiting the government and state from adopting a religion, while the state must also provide facilities for religious life (Cumpsty 2022, 2). This last feature of the state providing for religious life is somewhat similar to Rajeev Bhargava's concept of the 'principled distance' of Indian state secularism, that the state can intervene selectively in religions, as for the aim of reform, such as introducing the right to divorce (Bhargava 2010, 28; Ratti 2018a, 313). As another parallel with India, Cumpsty describes some of the particularly postcolonial challenges in Nigeria: 'while pluralism is a founding principle of the kind of political secularism evinced in the constitution, religious beliefs and affiliations are a powerful source of identification that can either bolster or undermine national belonging' (Cumpsty 2022, 2).

It is in response to such political precarity that postcolonial literature can serve as an aesthetic domain for imagining, accepting, and accommodating differences, including epistemological and mystical ones different from modern, secular, colonial rationalisms. Cumpsty argues that 'the representational capacities of literature provide fertile ground within which to explore the limitations of religious and secular dogmatism' (Cumpsty 2022, 4). With respect to contemporary African literatures, a postsecular analysis 'challenges the teleology of secular modernity and decentres Christianity, understanding it as one of many local religions' (Cumpsty 2022, 4); it foregrounds 'the cross-pressures of the secular and sacred in varying and sometimes competitive forms' (Cumpsty 2022, 4); and it 'redress[es] the epistemic and ontological violence of colonialism by centreing African mediations of colonial modernity' (Cumpsty 2023, 141). The similarities across postcolonial contexts speak for themselves: writers turn to the malleability of literary form to work through and decolonize binary structures, hegemonies, and logics.

As a further connection across postcolonial African and Indian literatures, Cumpsty argues that the Nigerian writer Okey Ndibe's fiction offers 'a sanctioned space for enchantment, but also contributes to imagining a world in which magic, enchantment and wonder operate in the same realm as modernity, skepticism, and secularism' (Cumpsty 2022, 5). This is similar to the story of Ayesha in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) (for my analysis, see Ratti 2013, 162–173). These two chapters rewrite the historical Hawkes Bay case. In 1983 in a village in Pakistan, Naseem Fatima claimed to receive messages from the twelfth Imam of Islam. The Imam instructed the villagers to head to the Arabian Sea, which would part and allow them to walk to the sacred cities of Iraq. Not only did Fatima and the villagers undertake this journey – many of them drowned. Rushdie fictionalizes Fatima as Ayesha, the name of Muhammad's youngest wife. Rushdie incorporates imagery from Hindu bhakti poetry by having Ayesha walk naked; in his magical realist rewriting, she is covered by butterflies that form a sari around her. Ayesha has a vocal critic in the form of her skeptical, secular, rationalist landlord. Although Ayesha repeatedly states, 'Greatness has come among us. Everything will be required of us, and everything will be given to us also' (Rushdie 1988, 225), she and her fellow pilgrim-villagers all drown. The Hawkes Bay case and Rushdie's postsecular re-writing of it are similar to South African writer Zakes Mda's novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Mda rewrites the nineteenth-century account of the prophet Nongqawuse and the Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–1857 in the Eastern Cape of

South Africa. Nongqawuse instructed her fellow Xhosa to slaughter their cattle on the promise that their ancestral spirits would liberate them from the English colonizers, driving them into the sea. Many of her fellow Xhosa did so (named 'Believers' in Mda's novel), whereas the ones that did not ('Unbelievers') ensured the survival of the Xhosa people. David Attwell has assessed Zda's experimental writing as 'a process of epistemological recovery and revision' (Attwell 2006, 177), and Itumeleng Mahabane has heralded Mda's novel as 'the first step towards a richness of structure that may lead towards our own Okri, Salman Rushdie or Marquez' (Mahabane 2001, 80).

Cumpsty connects my work with Gauri Viswanathan's theorization that a contestation is not so much between reason and religion as it is between belief and imagination, namely, religious belief and 'the alternative (even heterodox) knowledge systems it had suppressed or marginalized' (Viswanathan 2008, 468; quoted in Cumpsty 2022, 5). Similarly to Viswanathan, Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* writes that the opposite of faith is not disbelief, but doubt (Rushdie 1988, 92). I see this 'doubt' as particularly amenable to the postcolonial, postsecular literary imagination, which I strived to understand in my book; it is thus gratifying to read that Cumpsty finds in my book 'a conceptual vocabulary with which to explore the heterodoxies birthed by the entanglement of colonialism, monotheistic, and indigenous religions' (Cumpsty 2022, 5). In my monograph I examine Mahasweta Devi's representation of the indigenous belief systems of tribals, as in her novella 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha' (Devi 1995), and the challenge such subaltern faith poses not only for majoritarian religious formations in India but scholarly work as well, testing the limits of knowability itself. This is captured in the following remarks by Okey Ndibe, from Cumpsty's interview with him:

> our 'modern,' 'secular' spaces are not entirely exempt from the intimation or intrusion of the mystical. The modern mind is likely to reach for a rationalist explanation. And that's not to be rejected, by any means. However, fiction – my fictive vision – is capacious enough to accommodate a different, mystical economy of explanation or signification. (Cumpsty 2021, 30; quoted in Cumpsty 2022, 5)

It is with Ndibe's capaciousness in mind that I would like to address Cumpsty's interest in how my conception of a postsecular humanist ethic would compare with Jürgen Habermas's notion of religio-cultural translation, John McClure's concept of open dwelling, and how it would work beyond national boundaries. In some senses, writers of fiction and poetry have been exploring and experimenting with postsecular languages and possibilities *avant la lettre* of critical scholarship. Thus Habermas' and McClure's ideas converge not only with mine but also with those of creative writers. For Habermas, religio-cultural translation involves secularists and religious believers conversing and working together to translate religious ideas into secular ones, for the goal of peaceful co-existence. According to Habermas, 'the outcome is not disagreement, nor is it strict translation either, but lifting for [the] wider public semantic potentials [that] would otherwise remain sunken in the idiom of particular religious communities' (Butler et al. 2011, 115). Habermas offers the example of the Biblical 'man in the image of God' becoming 'identical dignity of all men' (Habermas and Ratzinger 2007, 45). I agree with Habermas's ethic of mutual recognition, conversation, and understanding – fortuitously demonstrated in Stanisław Obirek's dialogue with Zygmunt Bauman, and in Bauman's dialogue with Pope Francis (Obirek 2022, 6–7). I also share postcolonial

theorists' scepticism about the mechanisms of such religio-cultural translation, not least given untranslatability, including of religious beliefs and ideas. Religious ideas extend beyond 'semantic potentials,' and are embedded and actualized in habits of practice shared by peoples and communities (for western political models' and Indian state secularism's inability to see the multiple selves of such religious belief and practice, see Nandy 1998; for the politics of translation and untranslatability, see Spivak 1993, 179–200 and Mandair 2009, 422–431). Who would perform the translation, and with what degree of competence, trust, privilege, inclusiveness, and openness? Literary space allows writers to 'translate' between the religious and the secular, and to themselves, as in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (2000). The expansive and complicated significances, meanings, and interpretations of religious belief, however, are inextricable from communities – as Rushdie almost fatally experienced in 1989 and 2022. These writers' aesthetic translations are embedded in the fraught politics of the postcolonial, quite separate from their adherence to an aesthetic manifesto as an alibi against political responsibility (Ratti 2013, 66).

McClure's concept of 'open dwelling' builds on Robert Wuthnow's concept of 'spirituality of dwelling' (McClure 2007, 192), which means inhabiting 'a well-mapped religious cosmos, a well-established and organized religious community, richly symbolic religious structures, and a round of rituals that consecrate time' (McClure 2007, 192), leading to 'social and spiritual security, personal equanimity and strength' (McClure 2007, 192). The 'open' in open dwelling is a commendable openness to difference, whether religious or other worldviews, represented in literature through literal openings and seekings, as in windows, doors, light, and roadways. I locate a similar openness in my theorization of the postcolonial postsecular, especially in resistance to religious inflexibility and the colonial and postcolonial histories of ethno-religious divisiveness, as in communalism in India and the civil war in Sri Lanka. For a postsecularism centred in postcoloniality, dwelling is almost always precarious. My work foregrounds postcolonial lives and conditions, central to which are the instabilities of disaster, catastrophe, violence, Partition, civil war, and destruction, as in Ondaatje's and Rushdie's fiction. Thus even literal dwelling, let alone the dwelling of nation, is a privilege. And while it was conceived of in the west, it is in India that we find the first built panopticon, a visual perversion of open dwelling. As another point of convergence between McClure's work and mine, the literary critic Christopher Hobson argues that my characterization of the paradoxical features of the postsecular as a 'non-secular secularism, a non-religious religion' (Ratti 2013, xx) is similar to McClure's concept of 'weak religiosity' (Hobson 2018, 194).

When Cumpsty asks how a postsecular humanist ethic would operate beyond national boundaries, I think of the diasporic consciousness of Ondaatje's and Rushdie's fiction as it negotiates among the secularisms of South Asia, the UK, Canada, and the US. Certainly both authors enjoy visibility on a global scale, informed by their literary success. Whether their postsecular visions and models will decentre dominant global models (such as of religion, secularism, multiculturalism, political systems) returns us to the long-established systems of gatekeeping, power, and privilege. This raises the question of what would be the postsecular imaginaries, subjectivities, precarities, and risks of 'world literature,' the very idea of which, according to Baidik Bhattacharya, 'has always and already been embedded in colonial/postcolonial histories' (Bhattacharya 2018, 1).

4. The postcolonial, the postsecular, and the literary in South Asia

Rajgopal Saikumar's article 'Reading in the Absolute Night: Rethinking Secularism in Illiberal Democracies' (Saikumar 2022b) is a brilliant and sober analysis of the potentials and perils of postsecular thought and writing in India, especially in the contemporary moment. Saikumar's incisive grasp of my book's theoretical apparatus and commitments reflects his scholarly and public intellectual work as some of the most theoretically innovative writing today intersecting law, global Anglophone literatures, and political thought, in the process re-thinking conceptions of human rights and justice, including in India (see, for example, Saikumar 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2022a, 2022c, 2023). It is through this alertness to the ever-changing sociopolitical imaginaries and lifeworlds of India that Saikumar historicizes my book within two phases. He designates these as 1989–2014 (when the book was first published) and post-2014, when India's current ruling party, the Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came into power. Since 2014, there have been numerous crises of secularism and democracy in India. Saikumar is thus vigilant to how closely postcolonial, postsecular thought and writing are shaped by historical and political conditions full of risks. The main title of Saikumar's article, 'Reading in the Absolute Night,' echoes Derrida's phrase 'through the risks of absolute night' from his book *Acts of Religion* (Derrida 2002, 57). Derrida uses this phrase to describe the risky journeys undertaken by a faith unaccompanied by dogma, a faith that 'cannot be contained in any traditional opposition' (Derrida 2002, 57), as between reason and mysticism. I quote Derrida's phrase in my book's conclusion (Ratti 2013, 207) to signal the risks of postcolonial postsecularism as it negotiates between traditional oppositions, not least among them religion and secularism, under the edge of the political. Saikumar historicizes, and even predicts, the risks of my project through his analyses of the political faultlines in India since 2014.

Such political ruptures can also be informed by the populist manifestations of enchantment, and here Saikumar states that 'enchantment in populism might be more in tension with pluralism and civil peace' (Saikumar 2022a, 2022b, 2) rather than, as my book primarily argues, as an antidote to the disenchantments of rationality. I agree with Saikumar. It is here that we see one of the limitations and vulnerabilities of postcolonial, postsecular literary searches for enchantment, namely, the ramifications of such 'enchantment' into political divisiveness. The rhetorical proximity between the postsecular enchantment of a literary search and the enchantments undergirding political mobilization – a sort of enjambment of enchantment 'from' the literary 'to' the political – is sufficient to warrant caution in postcolonial contexts where even the faintest connotation can hurt sentiments, incite violence, and trigger generational antagonisms. For example, critics charged Ondaatje with such political insensitivity in his representations of Buddhism and violence in *Anil's Ghost* (2000), including the novel's closing image of a large reconstructed Buddha statue (see Abeysekara 2008; Goldman 2004; Ismail 2000). While the statue could symbolize hope and regeneration – and while it incorporates elements of Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, away from state-sanctioned Theravada Buddhism, as noted by Minoli Salgado (Salgado 2007, 137–146) – it could also be a prenational symbol of Sinhala hegemony and political domination in Sri Lanka. In a sense, Saikumar in his article decolonizes enchantment by arguing that it is not necessarily the province of only religion, postsecularism, or literary searches. Writers are liable to

becoming enchanted with enchantment, especially when they occupy privileged positions that remove them from the vicissitudes of actually existing constitutions, not least of lives subalternized by such divisions as class, caste, race, religion, and gender. Such privilege could also reflect the bourgeois origins of the novel. Who has access, as writer, reader, or critic, to the pleasures of aesthetic enchantment?

When Saikumar argues that my book provides a 'capacious and emancipatory conception of secularism' (Saikumar 2022b, 2), he himself provides capacious conceptions of the secular and postsecular, ones that serve as important illustrations and theorizations from postcolonial India, helping me see how my conception of the postsecular can post multiple seculars. According to Saikumar, my work on secularism suggests capaciousness because it 'detranscendentalizes categories such as reason, nation, and religion by turning its attention to this world, here and now, and finds in it the enchantment and awe one otherwise yearns for in their transcendental forms' (Saikumar 2022b, 4). It is emancipatory because it detranscendentalizes the mythologies of 'reason' (e.g. Enlightenment reason as the only form of reason), nation (e.g. a narrative of 'India' that does not recognize or include minorities), and religion (e.g. 'Hindutva' or Hinduness, as a cover for Hindu majoritarianism and populism). When Saikumar asks to what extent the Shaheen Bagh protestors are secular or postsecular, his question provides its own answer – the protestors are both, because they seek what I term 'secular alternatives to secularism' (Saikumar 2022b, 4). Their protests are a contestatory 'post' to the 'secularism' of the BJP that consecrates its Hindutva as the 'true secularism' and terms the Congress Party's state secularism as 'pseudosecularism' (because it is seen to appease religious minorities). The protestors are holding the government accountable to the hard-won policies and rules of governance developed long before India's current ruling party came into power. They use 'constitutionalist, rights-based, Ambedkarite discourse' (Saikumar 2022b, 4) to appeal to 'liberalism, the Indian constitution, and most importantly, secularism' (Saikumar 2022b, 4). Such contestatory 'posting' of the secular is perhaps what Saikumar reads as an emancipatory feature of my work's secularism, which he finds 'particularly productive for this 'post-2014 phase' we inhabit' (Saikumar 2022b, 2).

Saikumar refers to secularism as capacious because it contains 'the enchantment and awe one otherwise yearns for in their transcendental forms' (Saikumar 2022b, 4). This formulation helps me see some ways that secularism is made capacious by incorporating the enchantment and awe traditionally viewed as enabled by transcendental forms. As an example, Saikumar cites my reading of the Golden Temple in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). I argue that Ondaatje's aesthetic representation, which emphasizes the beauty of the Temple, secularizes the religious meaning of the Temple, with beauty becoming 'a kind of religion, provoking religion-like feelings such as awe and enchantment' (Ratti 2013, 53). Saikumar asks, 'beauty can be secularized such that it can provoke awe and enchantment, but why does such enchantment have to be a 'religion-like feeling'?' (Saikumar 2022b, 5). I postulate this as a 'religion-like feeling' not exclusively as religious, but because Ondaatje's secularizing gesture works explicitly through the form of religion, *a* religion – Sikhism. It is a postsecular search for a 'non–religious religion' (Ratti 2013, xx), to affirm some of this religious practice's affective dimensions of awe and enchantment away from the conflict and violence attached, including ideologically, to Sikhism in both India (1984) and Canada (the 1985 Air India bombing). Saikumar's question is itself capacious, generative, and powerful: he decolonizes enchantment from the domain of

religion and broadens it to that of the secular, the 'ordinary, human, finite' (Saikumar 2022b, 5), such that 'enchantment neither is lost nor invokes religion' (Saikumar 2022b, 5).

Saikumar's insights demonstrate how we can read postcolonial postsecularism as containing a palimpsest of seculars. The more deeply embedded meaning of the 'secular' would be that of the familiar European secularism, or state secularism in postcolonial India. The theoretical and critical term 'postsecular' has a layered quality: it transforms seculars, akin to the multiple textures afforded to postsecular representations within literature. One representation of this transformation could be as follows:

postsecular = secular + ~~secular~~ + postcolonial secular + contested secular + enchanted secular = capacious secular = postsecular

An example of the above transformation is what Saikumar cites as Sudipta Kaviraj's concept of a 'lateral elaboration,' which is not an emulation but a transformation of a western political concept (Cooper et al. 2017, 165 cited in Saikumar 2022b, 4). As a discursive parallel to the above, we can consider Saikumar's assessment that my work

> deepens and nuances 'secularism' rather than simply state[s] that secularism needs to be overcome. But for this same reason, the prefix 'post' suggests an impatient urge to go 'beyond' secularism such that the latter's capaciousness and enchantments might not be noticed by readers. (Saikumar 2022b, 5)

Saikumar cogently analyzes some of the conceptual and methodological aspects of my project. The prefix 'post' in 'postsecularism' might lead some readers to question: does postsecularism reject secularism? If not, what does 'post' signify? Is postsecularism a return to religion? I hope to have addressed these questions in this article. Certainly there are no simple 'answers' to these questions, inextricable as they are from the politics of postcolonial societies where religion so often combines with violence. In place of answers, Saikumar affirms that my book 'yields multiple interpretations' (Saikumar 2022b, 4), partially because 'its arguments are open-ended, non-dogmatic, and enabling' (Saikumar 2022b, 4). Here Saikumar identifies the emergence of key aspects of my own language, theory, and methodology, even as I analyze how postcolonial writers *themselves* are searching for creative and generative ways to combine and represent the most inspirational features of both secularism and religion.

At the end of his article, Rajgopal Saikumar raises an important topic: what is the position toward postsecularism of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) – the architect of India's constitution, a Dalit, and someone who converted to Buddhism? Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism is postsecular in that this 'post' is contestatory and emancipatory, and offers lessons for the crises of Indian state secularism in its inability to ensure equality, democracy, and the fair, just treatment of all peoples, including minorities. Ambedkar contests the ritual hierarchies (informed by *dharma*) of Brahmanical Hinduism and the subaltern position into which it oppresses Dalits. Buddhism has emancipatory potential because Ambedkar finds within it an ethics and rationality against subalternity, the caste order, and superstitious beliefs. Saikumar argues that the Dalit 'invocation of rationalism is full of enchantment: a kind of enchantment that comes from a yearning for emancipation. Maybe rationality of this kind is not always the other of enchantment?' (Saikumar 2022b, 5). The enchantment informing yearning

can be seen as one component of a wider mobilization, a political inspiration – an enthusiasm driven by and toward rationality. And justice. In Saikumar's own words: 'a jurisdiction is not just ontological, as territory, land, *Bhumi* [Hindi for land, earth, soil]. But also, as diction, it is a promise for a messianic justice to come' (Saikumar 2019b, 47). This rationality and justice are inspired and mobilized against superstition, oppression, and caste ideology. Where do they lead? Ambedkar turned to Buddhism and reconstructed it for his own needs, emphasizing its secular ethics:

> I prefer Buddhism … because it gives three principles in combination that no other religion does. Buddhism teaches *Pradnya* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karuna* (love, compassion), and *Samata* (equality). Neither God nor soul can save society. (Kamble 1979, 211)

This is somewhat similar to Rosi Braidotti's argument that postsecular feminism believes that 'agency, or political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety' (Braidotti 2008, 1), one that is critical of the 'dogmatic and patriarchal attitude of the Catholic Church' (Braidotti 2008, 4). Braidotti argues against 'oppositional consciousness' (Braidotti 2008, 2), since it would reactively (and thus negatively) work within the logic of the patriarchy and the Church (for a recent volume on postsecular feminisms, see Deo 2020). Instead, Braidotti argues for a non-oppositional ethics of becoming, which I see as a becoming *for-itself*:

> This subject is looking for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilizes and allows for the affirmation of what is not contained in the present conditions. This is the core of postsecular subjectivity defined as the *ethics of becoming*: the quest for new creative alternatives and sustainable futures. (Braidotti 2008, 19; emphasis mine)

I end with the closing lines of the poem 'Avva's Stack of Grief,' by the Telugu Dalit feminist and activist poet Jupaka Subhadra. 'Avva' is grandmother in the Telugu language. The title of this poem in Telugu, transliterated to English, is 'mā avva dukkhālni dunni pōsukunna tokkudubanda.' 'Phallu' is the loose end of a sari:

> My avva, she's a coarse-slab at the doorway that
> heaped sorrow as a stack of history
> tightening the phallu round her waist,
> my avva is a question,
> flashing a sickle in her hand.
> May the languages be doomed! They never accessed
> the brinks where my avva wandered.
> (Purushotham 2013, 38)

5. Conclusion: speculations for postcolonial postsecularism and the literary

The symposium articles by Stanislaw Obirek (2022), Rebekah Cumpsty (2022), and Rajgopal Saikumar (2022b) provide rich, compelling, and timely theorizations – both individually and intersectionally – of the postsecular, the postcolonial, and the literary, opening many possibilities for future scholarly and public work. It is a privilege to have had my book read so closely by these distinguished scholars. *Sikh Formations* is to be commended for the range and diversity of disciplines, voices, regions, religions, secularisms, nations, cultures, political imaginaries, and texts the journal has brought

together in this book symposium, demonstrating the constitutive multifacetedness of the postcolonial postsecular. I undertake in this final section some speculations and reflections on the intersections of postcolonialism, postsecularism, and literary studies.

We may view postcolonial postsecularism as contestatory – it challenges a range of dominant norms, including those of secularism, religion, and elite state practices. In this spirit, the institutional and discursive emergence and practice of a range of contestatory fields of study – postcolonial theory, intersectional feminism, subaltern studies, queer theory – can provide lessons on both the potentials and perils of scholarship. As with the emergence of postcolonial theory, there can be a distinction between a postsecularism that emerges in metropolitan western contexts, such as those of the US, western Europe, and Canada, and a postsecularism that emerges in the postcolonial, racialized contexts of the Global South. Arvind-Pal Mandair in part addresses this distinction in his chapter 'Decolonizing Postsecular Theory' in his book *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (Mandair 2009, 379–431), which along with my book and Debjani Ganguly's *Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity: Notes on a Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Caste* (2006), Graham Huggan has marked as signalling 'a "post-secular" turn in postcolonial theory and criticism' (Huggan 2010, 751). This marking is echoed by Abdelaziz El Amrani (2022) and Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu (2021), given their interests in postcolonial postsecularism. We also see the postcoloniality of the postsecular in the work of Latin Americanists, who have not only theorized a postsecularism grounded in Latin American cultural and political contexts, but have also rejected the terms 'postsecularism' and 'postcolonialism' (in favour of decolonial and decoloniality), because they reproduce (as indicated by 'post') the temporality of colonization, colonial religion, and colonial secularism (including the very distinction between religion and secularism; see Dussel 2003; Maldonado-Torres 2008, 2011, 2014; Mignolo 2012; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Quijano 2000).

Despite critical differences in terminology, there are also important convergences in the postcolonial postsecular across regions of the Global South, as when Arvind-Pal Mandair argues that secularity "induc[es] us to believe that no reasonable alternative to it could exist or that any opposition can only be permitted from within its theoretical constraints" (Mandair 2018, 450). Similarly to Mandair, Ashis Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983) asserts that even the terms of resistance are prefigured and domesticated by colonialism:

> Colonialism created a domain of discourse where the standard mode of transgressing such stereotypes was to reverse them: superstitious but spiritual, uneducated but wise, womanly but pacific, and so on and so forth. No colonialism could be complete unless it 'universalized' and enriched its ethnic stereotypes by appropriating the language of defiance of its victims. That was why the cry of the victims of colonialism was ultimately the cry to be heard in another language – unknown to the colonizer and to the anti-colonial movements that he had bred and then domesticated. (Nandy 1983, 72)

Mandair's and Nandy's theorizations cohere with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the 'image of thought' from his book *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2004, 164–213), providing further conceptual ground for theorizing the postcolonial postsecular. Deleuze argues that the image of thought is 'dogmatic' in that it views difference as bound to the notion of identity, so that difference is 'subordinated to identity, reduced to the negative, incarcerated within analogy' (Deleuze 2004, 50). Difference, however, also has an

uncontainable difference, and here I turn to Davide Panagia's reading of Deleuze. According to Panagia, difference for Deleuze 'is not inherently nihilistic, that there is such a thing as difference in itself (rather than merely the quality of diversity), and that this difference is a generative force that creates relations' (Panagia 2006, 46). Panagia's phrasing of a 'generative force' is significant, for I believe this is what postcolonial, postsecular literary searches are both driven by and seek. This seeking can resist and contest the secularity which, according to Mandair, is 'a logic of representation (or non-contradiction) whose purpose is to manage difference by reducing its object to an identity, which can then be permanently identified in any repetition of the encounter with another body' (Mandair 2018, 450). What are examples of difference that are, in Deleuze's words, 'subordinated to identity, reduced to the negative, incarcerated with analogy' (Deleuze 2004, 50)? Mandair offers the following: religious traditions, persons, and texts (Mandair 2018, 450). I agree with Mandair's theorization that:

> the key to developing frameworks for peaceful coexistence between religions, concepts, texts, and persons is to develop new models of encounter that refuse the grip of this dogmatic image of thought, refuse recognition, and reverse the effects of negativity secreted by the fields of secularity and political secularism. (Mandair 2018, 450)

One of the strengths of literary space and representation is that they can represent these models of encounter including difference for-itself and the processes – contradictory, non-linear, layered – of what Rosi Braidotti terms the 'ethics of becoming' (Braidotti 2008, 19), as seen in Dalit feminist writing in India. There are of course varieties of political secularism, with some more enabling than others, returning us to the representational challenges of capturing multiple seculars and their different postings. For example, secular laws in India afford some legal protections for women (although not always for minority women) against discriminatory religious and cultural practices. At the same time, and as Ratna Kapur has recently argued, 'Hindu majoritarianism and essentialist assumptions about gender are shaping the content and contours of equality, secularism, and faith in law' (Kapur 2020, 431). These essentialist assumptions and Hindu majoritarianism are akin to Deleuze's 'image of thought,' as dogmatic ways of subordinating (if not eliminating) difference into a Hindutva identity. For Kapur, feminist secular law and politics require 'a complex and nuanced understanding of the work that gender and faith do *in and through* these discourses, rather than assuming that a commitment to gender per se amounts to doing progressive work' (Kapur 2020, 431; emphasis mine; for a similar argument by Kapur in an earlier piece, see Kapur 1999).

As another insight into the nuanced relationship between the (post)secular and the religious in postcolonial contexts, Bruce Robbins in his article 'Is the Postcolonial also Postsecular?' concludes that postcolonial studies 'would be better served either by shunning the secular/religious binary altogether or by returning to its initial ambivalence' (Robbins 2013, 262). In considering Homi Bhabha's views on secularism, Robbins notes that while Bhabha recognizes secularism as part of 'the colonial and imperial enterprise which was an integral part of [the] Enlightenment' (Robbins 2013, 247), he does not disavow secularism. Instead, Bhabha calls for a 'subaltern secularism,' one which 'emerges from the limitations of 'liberal' secularism and *keeps faith* with those communities and individuals who have been denied, and excluded, from the egalitarian and tolerant values of liberal individualism' (Robbins 2013, 247; emphasis mine). One example of shunning the secular/religious

binary is Lata Mani's term SacredSecular, which for Mani signifies 'the inextricability of the sacred and secular realms of existence, the interconnectedness of the sentient and the apparently non-sentient, and the inseparability of spiritual philosophy from the practice of everyday life' (Mani 2009, 1). The postcolonial is postsecular. As it emerges from its subalternization by western colonialism and western models, the postcolonial postsecular is strengthened by listening to and recognizing its own subaltern lives.

In keeping faith with subaltern lives, and as with the emergence of intersectional feminism, a postcolonial postsecularism can be vigilant to not reproducing norms and dominations. These include the interconnected and mutually reinforcing norms and solidarities of secularism, religious majoritarianism, the west, race, the patriarchy, caste, class, capitalism, and heteronormativity – and their attendant politics of privilege, oppression, appropriation, exclusion, and erasure. Who is speaking, who is heard? Which postseculars are centred, which ones are marginalized? Which postseculars matter, which ones do not? Spivak has argued that 'postcoloniality queers the norm' (Spivak 2000, xvi). In this respect, postcolonial postsecularism can be alert, autocritically, to its own gatekeeping and master narratives.

Difference, the secret, the unknowable, the untranslatable – the very existences of such unknowability and inaccessibility resist and frustrate colonial power, just as they frustrate majoritarian power and majoritarian images of thought and rationality (whether secular, religious, gendered, casteized, racialized, or otherwise). Writers in and about the Global South can represent the limits of such unknowability – as encounter, as ethics of becoming, as dialogue, as being for-itself, as difference for-itself – through the experimentations of literary space, as in the writings of Mahasweta Devi about tribal peoples in India and Zakes Mda about the Xhosa people in South Africa. Yet we cannot expect writers and the possibilities – and impossibilities – of their literary representations to embody forms and promises of secular prophecy or to entirely, unproblematically represent and deliver justice. In the ephemerality and evanescence of the postcolonial, postsecular literary search, I remember Michael Ondaatje's lines from *The English Patient* (1992): 'there was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could only be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. [. . .] *A song of snail light*' (Ondaatje 1992, 269; emphasis mine). I also remember that there will always be – as Jacques Derrida (2002, 57) so presciently and perspicaciously foretells – the risks of absolute night.

Notes

1. As a necessarily limited sample of studies that examine secularism, aesthetics, and literature in combination with one another, see: Allan (2013), Asad (1990), Chambers and Herbert (2015), During (2002), Fessenden (2007), Franke (2015), Göknar (2013), González (2018), Haque (2019), Jager (2007, 2015), Jussawalla (1996), Kahn (2009), Kaufmann (2007), Kimmel (2013), Kumar (2008), Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1988), Lebovic (2008), Lecourt (2018), Mahmood (2013), Masuzawa (2013), McNamara (2015, 2017, 2018), Mirmotahari (2022), Mondal (2013), Mufti (2004), Mutter (2017), Neuman (2014), New and Reedy (2012), Pecora (2015), Pollock (2006), Raz-Krakotzkin (2013), Said (1984), Schachter (2013), Seidel (2021), Sen (2013), Singh (2006), Srivastava (2008), Stein (2013), Stein and Murison (2010), Taylor (1989), Taylor, Jager, and Mahmood (2006), Viswanathan (1998, 2008), Ziolkowski (2007).

2. There is a tremendous diversity of scholarship combining postsecularism and literary studies across genres, national literatures, languages, time periods, regions of the west and the Global South, and across varieties of scholarly output (including dissertations, journal special issues, journal forums, edited books and collections, and monographs). As a necessarily limited sample of these studies, see: Abeysekara (2008), Abram (2010), Abrams (1973), Ali et al. (2022), Anidjar (2006), Anzaldúa (2002), Asad (2003), Ashcroft (2009), Ashcroft et al. (2005, 2009), Baird (2000), Bauman (1992), Beck (2010), Beckford (2012), Berger (1999), Bloom (1989), Bowyer (2020), Braidotti (2008), Branch (2006, 2014, 2016), Branch and Knight (2018), Carruthers (2011), Carruthers and Tate (2010), Casanova (1994), Christie (2013), Connolly (1999), Conway and Harol (2015), Corrigan (2015a, 2015b), Coviello and Hickman (2014), Cumpsty (2017, 2021, 2022, 2023), Dalferth (2010), De Capitani (2022), Derrida (1998), Diamond (2004), Di Tullio (2018), Donoghue (2001), Dressler and Mandair (2011), Dudley (2017), Dunn (2010), During (2005, 2010), El Amrani (2022), Elie (2012), Esty-Burtt (2021), Faber (2009), Fessenden (2014), Finkelstein (2010), Franke (2009, 2015), Franklin (2008), Friedman (2021), Frohlich (2007), Ganguly (2006), Garcia-Donoso (2018), Genzale (2021), Goh (2014), Gorski et al. (2012), Graham (2012), Grall (2020), Grosu-Rădulescu (2021), Habermas (2008, 2010), Hadden (1987), Halpern (2003), Hamner (2009), Hadot (1995), Haque (2014), Harris-Birtill (2019), Haught (1986), Hodkinson and Horstkotte (2020), Huggan (2010), Hungerford (2010), Jackson and Surh-Sytsma (2017), Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2008), James (1994), Jarman (1998), Jarzyńska (2017, 2020), Johnston (2002), Jones (2007, 2018), Jussawalla (2022), Jussawalla and Omran (2021), Kaufmann (2009), Kerrigan (2018), King (2005, 2009), Knight (2009), Kyrlezhev (2008), Ladin (2000), Laird (2011), Lane (1998), Lee (2022), Levitt (2009), Ludwig (2009, 2018), Mączyńska (2009), Mahmood (2005, 2013), Mandair (2009, 2018), Marty (1998), McClure (1995, 2007), McLennan (2010), Mehta (2020), Merlini (2011), Mitek-Dziemba (2018a, 2018b), Mohamed (2011), Morozov (2008), Morrissey (2009), Mufti (2013), Ni (2015, 2016), Norris and Inglehart (2011), Nowak and Obirek (2021), Obirek (2018, 2019, 2022), Opengart (2003), Paranjape (2009), Pecora (2018), Pospíšil (2018, 2019), Qadiri (2014, 2018, 2022), Ratti (2013, 2014, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2021), Richardson Duke (2021), Rivera (2021), Roberts (2008), Roupakia and Sideri (2021), Rosati and Stoeckl (2012), Saikumar (2015, 2022b), Schneiders (2003), Schwartz (1997), Skórczewski (2020), Smith (2014), Smith (2015), Sobhani (2014, 2015), Solle (2001), Sorvari (2016), Sosnowska and Drzewiecka (2018), Steiner (2021), Stoeckl (2012), Tacey (2019), Tate (2018), Tausch and Obirek (2020), Taylor (2007, 2011), Thakur (2021), Watt (2009), VanBladel (2019a, 2019b), Vendler (1995), Vizcaíno (2020, 2022), Walker (1998a, 1998b, 2005), Wasserstrom (1999), Werner and Wiehl (2021), Wolfe (2013), Wood (2000), Wuthnow (1988, 1998), Zheng (2018), Ziser (2010), Žižek (1999), Ziolkowski (2007). Some of the references in this list have been drawn from Corrigan (2015a).

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ORCID

Manav Ratti http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2641-1679

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