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Aamir R. Mufti: Enlightenment in the Colony

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Prologue

TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF POSTCOLONIAL SECULARISM

THE IDEA FOR THIS PROJECT BEGAN to emerge in the weeks and months following the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in northern India on December 6, 1992. Communities across what was once North India—that is, the region now including Pakistan and Bangladesh—were in flames. Each day brought news of more and more towns and cities erupting in “communal” violence. The city of Bombay, long a symbol of a cosmopolitan Indian modernity, ground to a halt, as the reality took hold that, for the first time in its post-Partition history, middle-class and even elite Muslim families were not safe from their neighbors. From Lahore, which had been cleansed of its substantial Hindu and Sikh populations half a century earlier, we were treated to the extraordinary sight of a Hindu temple, abandoned and unused for almost fifty years, being razed with the help of municipal bulldozers, a startling reminder that the citizens of that city were still not free of their former neighbors. And if the destruction of the Babri mosque itself was a primitive and chaotic affair, all sledgehammers and pickaxes, its aftermath was brought up to date in Surat, in the form of videotapes of gang rapes of Muslim women which reportedly became popular entertainment in middle-class living rooms across the country. An outrage in one place brought out a worse response in another. It was as if the nation-state boundaries implemented in 1947 had ceased to exist. Once again communities all across the subcontinent seemed to be communicating with one another in the only language permitted by the postcolonial states, that of collective violence—violence now becoming the only act of communication that could not be interdicted at the borders of the nation-state. Whoever you spoke to, wherever you turned for comprehension, one perception repeated itself like a refrain: nothing like this had been seen since India’s Partition.¹

In the event, it proved to be a particularly clarifying moment, bringing into sharp relief the larger movements of India’s modernity. It made evident the fact that the crisis over Muslim identity, which first emerged in the decades following the great rebellion of 1857, continues to be one of

nority rights, uprooting, exile, and homelessness—and the dialectic within which they are produced. It is important therefore at the outset to establish at least an initial sense of the way I use such terms as “imperialism,” “capitalism,” “Enlightenment,” “citizenship,” and “nation-state.” Number and “equivalence,” Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno once argued, famously, are the rule and “canon” of bourgeois society.³ For the purposes of this project, I regard post-Industrial Revolution (and thus post-Enlightenment) imperialism to be a multifarious movement of expansionism whose ultimate goal—in the final instance, as it were—is the global establishment of the market, and thus of the rule of equivalence (but not equality). The reshaping, to this end, of the diverse and heterogeneous social formations that come under its grasp thus results in the creation of polities consisting of equivalent “values,” that is, citizens. That “the nation” (of supposedly equal citizens) in the colonized world emerges out of the very socioeconomic processes that it comes to oppose is now a well-known and well-understood story.⁴ It is the contradictory nature of this transition, and the resultant crisis of its structures in the form of minoritized social groups and cultural practices, that I am concerned with in this book.

I begin, therefore, by exploring the crises that have encircled the attributes of Jewishness in the process of elaboration of the structures, narratives, and forms of bourgeois culture and society in the West. Among these crises, of concern to us here, are the 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*) 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. It is in the eruption of such crises around the meaning of Jewishness that we get the earliest elaborations of minority cultural practice as a critique of dominant culture and its majoritarian affiliations. In recent years a growing number of literary scholars, including, inter alia, Sander Gilman, James Shapiro, Bryan Cheyette, Michael Ragussis, Ira Nadel, Irene Tucker, and Jonathan Freedman, have been charting this centrality of the question and crisis of Jewish difference to the literature of the liberal West.⁵ In this book I attempt to reinterpret this central role of the Jews to modern Western culture from perspectives made possible by the contemporary crisis of secularism in postcolonial societies and, in particular, the nation-states of the South Asian subcontinent. My aim is to resituate certain aspects of the larger problematic of Jewishness within an extra-European, global frame, and to clarify its location within the process of emergence, dispersion, and universalization of these liberal narratives

4 • Prologue

and forms by examining their reappearance in the crisis of minority in colonial and postcolonial India.

What this book offers, therefore, is, first, a distinctly Third World and postcolonial understanding of those forms of constitutive failure of the idea of Europe that come to us coded as the “Jewish Question,” bringing to the trajectories of Europe’s modernity modes of analysis that have emerged in recent years out of the critique of colonial culture and a globalized postcolonial modernity. One premise of this book is that the present moment in the history of postcolonial societies allows a unique vantage point on the particular trajectory of the modern that we call secularization. At the same time, the book is an attempt to make the cultural and critical legacies of the Jewish Question speak to debates and dilemmas that are distinctly postcolonial. This effort to revisit our understandings of the conditions and resources of that “minor,” exilic, or diasporic Jewish intellectual culture, as part of a larger endeavor to fashion a truly more planetary critique of contemporary forms of “settled” thinking and the social asymmetries they justify and often even help to produce, is all the more imperative today with the intensification of the political and economic oppression of the Palestinian people precisely in the name of that history of dispossession of the Jews. What is sought here, in other words, is, on the one hand, a specifically internationalist and postcolonial understanding of the scenarios of Jewish minoritization and exile, and an acknowledgment of affiliation with the modes of critique produced out of them; and, on the other, the conceptual and historical basis for a critique of the Zionist “solution” and its consequences for the Palestinians, for Arabs more generally, and for the global culture of decolonization as a whole. These are inseparable elements in a Third Worldist and postcolonial understanding of the Jewish Question, and, without the first, as Edward Said so tirelessly pointed out in his work as in his politics, the second risks collapsing into a reflex of resentment and revenge.

Finally, a word about the concept of “Enlightenment” as it is elaborated here. As standard narratives of the bourgeois Enlightenment would have it, to make public and political life secular was one of the most cherished goals of the Enlightenment, a claim I examine critically at some length in the following chapter. And whether or not the non-Western societies of the colonized world could move in that secular direction became the litmus test for their entry into modern civilization. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers, thinkers, and public figures of all stripes in the West and elsewhere speculated about the chances of Enlightenment in the colonies. This book addresses this central preoccupation of the bourgeois Enlightenment and its fate in a colonial and postcolonial setting. It examines the shifting relationship

between colonial culture, Indian nationalism, and the Enlightenment ideal of a public sphere cleansed of the signs of religious difference. Its particular stance on this question emerges out of a study of, and conversation with, two distinct discourses on the significance and legacy of the bourgeois Enlightenment for modern culture, namely, Frankfurt School critical theory and the critical historiographic project of Subaltern Studies. If this book aims, on the one hand, to reconsider the former's critique of Enlightenment from the perspective of subject positions that cannot be subsumed within the narrative of a seamless universalization of modern Western culture, it is, on the other, to nudge the latter away from an undialectical rejection of Enlightenment as colonial domination. In one sense, therefore, the book is an attempt to think about how and where to proceed beyond the powerful critical perception near the end of Partha Chatterjee's monumental work, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*: "That is the story of Enlightenment in the Colonies. It comes in the hands of the policeman, and the marriage is consummated in the station-house."⁶ It may be read as an extended argument for the view that this perception not be allowed to degenerate into the banality of the anti-secularist gesture but lead instead to a more difficult, and also more truthful, negotiation with the history of colonial domination and the political and cultural situations and legacies we call Enlightenment.

JEWES AND OTHERS: MINORITY AND THE FORMS OF MODERNITY

Observers of modern anti-Semitism, including Hannah Arendt, Horkheimer, and Adorno, have long recognized that the forms of organized violence, scapegoating and collective punishment, coerced and unfree labor, race theory and race thinking, and overall instrumentalization and destruction of human life that came to characterize the treatment of the Jews in Europe following the rise of the Nazis bear a striking resemblance to practices of governance and forms of culture that had been developed in the colonies. Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is, of course, an extended argument about the interconnections between the development of colonial racism and anti-Semitism since the nineteenth century. And scattered in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer are numerous insights, often expressed aphoristically rather than developed at length, about the commonality of powerlessness and "minority" status among "colonial natives," Jews, and even women. Such claims about the continuities or overlaps between colonial and Jewish experience have also long and repeatedly been made by those, like Nehru, whose internationalist and disinterested commitment to the

struggle against fascism was continually tested by their own oppression as colonial subjects by the European nation-states that claimed leadership of that struggle. Thus, for instance, writing in prison during the war, Nehru argued, in *The Discovery of India*, that “we in India have known racialism in all its forms ever since the commencement of British rule. The whole ideology of this rule was that of the *herrenvolk* [*sic*] and the master race, and the structure of government was based upon it.” Writing a decade later, Aimé Césaire infused his *Discourse on Colonialism* with the insight that the events of the previous two decades in Europe could only be understood as the continuation of Europe’s treatment of various non-European peoples over the previous several centuries: “[Hitler] applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa.” In the same spirit, Amílcar Cabral once referred to the Nazis as “the most tragic expression of imperialism and thirst for domination.”⁷

More recently work within the emerging field of Jewish cultural studies has sometimes sought to compare and affiliate Jewish marginalization within dominant forms of European culture to colonial and postcolonial forms of alienation; perhaps exemplary in this regard is the work of Bryan Cheyette, Jonathan Boyarin, and Daniel Boyarin. To a certain extent, then, this recent scholarship has been attempting to dismantle the anti-comparatist impulse of much of Jewish studies since its founding in Germany in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the early nineteenth century.⁸ It is becoming increasingly clear, moreover, that many of the often contradictory facets of social and cultural life familiar to us from prewar Jewish experience in Europe—cultural mobility, adaptability, resolute attention to social life in the face of hostility from the “host” culture, intense separatism and religious revival, political radicalism, cosmopolitan elites, a cultural taste for transgression, irony, and the irreverent gesture—have reappeared in Europe in the experience of the “postcolonial” migrants, displaced people, and refugees who have largely replaced Europe’s annihilated Jews as the continent’s “Other within.”⁹ Comparative research in this direction is bound to shed new and defamiliarizing light on Europe’s internal life in the modern era, and this book allies itself with this effort. My overall purpose in this context is to contribute to the ongoing effort to explore the possibilities for the convergence of perspectives made possible by the problematic of “Jewish difference” with those emerging out of the forms of difference that mark the trajectories of colonial and postcolonial cultures and societies. In the final chapter of the book I turn to the metaphorical possibilities of Jewishness for contemporary postcolonial culture, through a reading of their elaboration in a number of recent Indian narrative works in

English. But my more proximate goal, in the first part of the book, is to locate the troubled and recurring question of Jewish emancipation-assimilation as an early, and *exemplary*, instance of the crisis of minority that has accompanied the development of liberal-secular state and society in numerous contexts around the world. As in the case of Europe and the Jews, the question of what it means to be Indian, I argue later in the book, has remained a cultural formation brought to crisis by the question of Muslim identity, in which at stake is the minoritization of language, culture, and memory. I am especially interested in the inflections that the question of minority existence undergoes between its early emergence in Europe and its reemergence in colonial India with the development of a nascent nation-state formation, the experience of citizenship and national belonging, and the cultural crisis and conflict that have centered ever since around the marks of “Muslim” particularity and difference.

In turning to the history of the Jewish Question in this manner, I am acutely aware of the pitfalls of appropriating Jewish existence for allegories of non-Jewish lives, a form of appropriation that has itself produced a sort of canonical tradition of conceptualizing Jewishness in the theoretical literature of the modern West. I fully share Arendt’s critique of Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew*, for instance, or Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin’s concern with that same work and with Lyotard’s *Heidegger and “the jews”*, namely, that these works reduce the Jews to a figment of the non-Jewish, and, in the case of Sartre at least, anti-Semitic, imagination.¹⁰ Whether and to what extent I succeed in not lapsing into such appropriative moves myself in what follows is for others to decide. But this form of critique of the dominant, and ultimately majoritarian, accounts of the meaning and place of Jewish experience is itself of central importance to the argument developed in this book. I am interested precisely in the effort to rethink European selfhood itself from positions marked by the dilemmas, vulnerabilities, and ethical and critical possibilities of Jewishness-minority. Explored specifically are aspects of the relationship between Jewish experience in Western Europe and secularism and *critique* as they have developed since the eighteenth century, and therefore the metaphorical (or rather, metonymic) possibilities of Jewishness for oppositional culture as a whole, including the ongoing project of decolonization and its critique of colonial and post-colonial culture and society. Therefore of interest to me here is what the Boyarins call the diasporic and exilic “ground of Jewish identity”—Jewishness as the very disruption and disaggregation of the categories of identity—and its relationship to secularism and critique.¹¹ From their earliest Enlightenment elaboration, the projects of secularism—secular citizenship, separation of church and state, national language, literature,

and culture, to name just a few—have circled around the question of the Jews. Thus a key concern here is the Jewish intellectual attachment to—and, as I shall argue, immanent critique of—the Enlightenment and its legacies, above all its secularist concepts, narratives, and values. Hence the emphasis in the book on the figure of the Jewish intellectual and the problematics surrounding it, such as the question of assimilation, whose dominant conception as the dissolution of a (minority) particularity by immersion in a constant and unchanging majority culture is repeatedly and consistently challenged and undermined by at least some of those individuals at whom it is directed. Arendt’s formulation of what she called the “hidden” Jewish tradition of the “conscious pariah,” derived from the fin de siècle polemics of Bernard Lazarre but which may also be read as a reinscription of Max Weber’s ultimately dismissive characterization of the Jews as a “pariah” people, was key in formulating my own conception of minority experience as a site for the critique of dominant conceptions and narratives of collective life.¹² I am interested, in other words, in the figure of the Jew as *subject*, not just object, of the processes we know as emancipation and assimilation. A larger purpose of the book as a whole, therefore, is to outline cultural possibilities for groups deemed minorities that take neither the form of assimilation in the official sense nor of separatism of the political sort, which, I shall try to show, is often the most complete form assimilation can take, despite being presented as its opposite. This approach to the question of modern culture—that is, its examination through the prism of minority experience—might appear quaint in the present moment, given the larger context of the utter domestication of (at least some) minority struggles within the official multicultural refashioning of contemporary U.S. culture, including and above all in the academy. However, what I am attempting here, by turning to the fraught histories of European Jews and Indian Muslims, is in part precisely to make the history of such struggles available once again as resources for critical practice.

Finally, if the theoretical presence of such figures as Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, Georg Lukács, and Edward Said looms large in this project, it is far from accidental. The modes of critique generated from the history of the Jewish Question and in response to it, with their deep exploration of the implications of marginality, homelessness, exile, and uprooting, resonate in a powerful and complex way for an examination of the dialectic of minoritization, displacement, and partitioning of language, culture, and memory in modern India. This book is concerned, to some extent, with exploring whether and how these European theoretical elaborations can be said to belong to the same *archive* as the textualities produced out of the trajectory of the Indian modern, and how our reading of the one may influence and alter our reading of the other.

It is this mutual alteration, this *translation*, that I attempt to facilitate here. It will, I hope, become evident as the argument develops that these mid-century Indian formulations have a great deal to contribute to contemporary global debates about culture, critique, and community.

Therefore, with respect as well to the history of Jewish assimilation-emancipation, my goal is to reexamine that history from the perspective of twentieth-century events and formulations. In the first part of the book I turn, in particular, to a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts and preoccupations in terms of the significance they acquire in their reflections on the Jewish Question for such twentieth-century (*émigré*) figures as Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, Lukács, Gershom Scholem, Erich Auerbach, and Isaiah Berlin. A number of these reflections were, of course, sometimes produced in dialogue with, and at other times at least with knowledge of, one another in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, that is, in the decades of the radical reorganization of European life and the final catastrophe of the dispersal and decimation of the Jews. Although these writers represent a wide range of political attitudes, theoretical and philosophical positions, aesthetic views, and personal identities, many of their reflections on the fate of culture in the modern world share an understanding of the late eighteenth century as a key moment and point of departure in the drama of (Jewish) difference and modernity, an understanding I take as my own starting point. The late eighteenth century is thus the exemplary moment for a number of developments: the elaboration of the philosophical problematic we call Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno); the transformation of the absolutist state and the emergence of the question of political emancipation (Arendt); the reformulation of the dialectic of reason and redemption, of Haskala and Hasidism (Scholem); the historicist critique of the extreme abstraction of Enlightenment thought (Auerbach and Berlin); and the emergence of the forms of historicism that bring about notions such as world literature and culture as ideals and points of arrival in the drama of human cultural development (Auerbach). This large and highly diffuse body of critical, philosophical, and scholarly writings contains some of the most profound reflections on culture produced in the modern era, and our understanding of them have become indispensable to how we think about culture and critique. But I wish to expand our understanding of this mid-century situation by relating it to the *fin de siècle* perspectives embodied in the work of Edward Said, which—and not just his history of the exploration of the Palestine question but also the entire critical project as it developed at least since *Beginnings*—may be read at one level as a complex engagement with this critical, cultural, and political legacy.¹³ The recurring turn in his work to such figures as Auerbach, Adorno, Lukács, and, to a lesser extent, Arendt

represents a detailed engagement with this tradition from perspectives made possible by the devastation of Palestinian life in the realization of the Zionist “solution” to the Jewish Question. It also marks his own perception of the continued imbrications of the figure of the modern intellectual, and of the vocation of critique, with the history of the Jewish Question. *All profoundly affected themselves by the history of the Jews in the modern era*, these intellectuals and their reflections on the historical past provide the context out of which I myself turn to those earlier moments and trajectories. In sum, my aim here is to understand the manner in which the Jews of Europe became a *question*, both for themselves and for others, and the implications this being put in question has for elaborating responses—literary, philosophical, popular-cultural, and political—to the crises and conflicts of the projects of modernity in European and non-European, specifically colonial and postcolonial, settings.

Because it turns in this manner to the history of the Jews in modern Europe, this study of the crisis of secularism in contemporary South Asia is best viewed as a search for *beginnings* rather than *origins*, to use a distinction familiar to readers of Said.¹⁴ The book is an attempt to answer the question, What would the genealogy of a non-Western secularism look like? But since it is a genealogy that attempts to cross the treacherous and heavily policed oceans that separate the narratives and figures of modernity in Europe from their reappearance in the colonies—an unavoidable passage for students of colonized societies—it lends to the terms of genealogy itself a contingent or heuristic quality.¹⁵ The necessity for such a move lies in the paradoxical fact that the nation-state and its subsumption of culture can be understood not within the confines of a single and discrete national culture, or even by means of a comparison of such discrete entities, but only cross-nationally, by standing, at least partially and momentarily, outside national identification. This paradox seems not to have been fully understood even by such radical critics of the nationalization of culture and society as Benedict Anderson and Chatterjee. Radical historicism of the Foucauldian sort, which informs in various visible and invisible ways contemporary critiques of the national forms taken by politics and culture, continues to replicate these national configurations of literature and culture as well as the “contexts” appropriate to their production and relevant to their reading. As Wlad Godzich has pointed out, it remains very much the case that, “in spite of its global pretensions, discourse analysis accepts the dominant framework of the nation-state as its geographical boundary and generally follows the periodizations set in literary history.”¹⁶

The answers I offer in this book are based, first of all, on the assertion, which I elaborate and defend at different points in the book, that the crisis of secularism be examined from the point of view, and at the site, of

minority existence. Furthermore, I argue, 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. This argument is counterintuitive in some ways, but the discomfort produced by such a move, from which I myself am not entirely immune, is a sign of the presence of a notion of culture ultimately tied to an organic model of regeneration and descent. The charting of *this* particular genealogical route for the crisis of culture and community in India is a means of insisting that it be understood as arising out of the conflicts of modernity. The past, or rather the question of the past, plays a crucial role in this crisis, and part of my purpose here is precisely to document this role. But my aim here is also to advise caution against the tendency to view this crisis in terms of the interactions simply of “Islam” and “Hinduism” on Indian soil, as merely the latest phase in a “primordial,” that is, millennium-long religious, metaphysical, or cultural conflict.¹⁷ Hence the book’s emphasis on the *minoritization* of culture, language, community, and identity as irreducible processes inherent in the transition to modern forms of culture and society, both in the metropolitan and colonial settings. Minoritization is thus viewed here as a continuing process and recurring application of pressure at numerous points across the social field. My goal here, however, is not to suggest the existence of a straightforward historical route by which a European problematic may be said to have “arrived” in colonial India. On the contrary, this book stresses precisely the disjuncture, discontinuity, and lack of fit that are the basis of the Indian reinscription of the narratives and figures of secularism and minority experience.

Readers will not find in this book an inventory of “anti-Semitic” or, in the Indian context, “anti-Muslim” or “communalist” themes or representations in European and Indian literature, respectively. Nor am I concerned here with Zionism or Muslim separatism per se. Instead, this book targets those moments at which liberal culture attempts, *sincerely*, as it were, to resolve the question of the Jews—or, in India, of the Muslims. I am interested, in other words, in how liberalism historically has talked about the modes of apartness of the Jews and the history of their persecution in Western society, and the kinds of solution it has offered: “uniform” citizenship, religious “tolerance,” secular “national” literature and culture. Thus this book charts a number of ideological interactions between, on the one hand, modern political and social experience—citizenship, national belonging, minoritization, “partition,” uprooting, and exile—and, on the other, modern literature at the level of theme, form, and literary institution. Above all, it attempts to describe the dialectic out of which a certain kind of *minor critique* of modernity is

produced. I am concerned, in particular, with the formal qualities and affinities of minority as a cultural and literary location, and my intention is to explore the forms in which minority is inscribed within the larger problematic of the relationship of self to the world. But if, on the one hand, minority is to be understood in this book as a set of formal relationships within literature as a whole, the specifically literary, on the other hand, constitutes for it an exemplary site for the writing of the problematic of national culture, minority existence, and representative selfhood. The relationship of the individual consciousness to totality, which Lukács identified as the central problematic of narrative form, and which, at least in Adorno's handling, is also of significance with respect to modern lyric poetry, constitutes the ground on which the drama of minority is staged. The current renewal of interest in "minor" and "minority" literary practices owes a great deal conceptually to the exploration of this space in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975). In that milestone work, the authors suggest something like a definition of "minor literature": "it is . . . that which a minority constructs within a major language."¹⁸ They thus link the de-territorializing impulse of minor literature to displacements in the mutual relationships of language, literature, culture, place, and people. In a number of reworkings of Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, David Lloyd has introduced the concept of "state" as a mediating term between minority and literature.¹⁹ Lloyd conceives of the state as the locus of practices and narratives of representative ethical development against which, and in relationship to which, the disruptions of minority are produced. Similarly my aim throughout this book is to show the manner in which the *effects* of minority experience are produced. My real focus is therefore on the *process* of minoritization, the *pressures* exerted on language, literature, culture, and identity in the process of becoming minoritized. The significance of India in this examination of comparative minoritizations is that it allows a certain clarity of perception of the relationship between these pressures and the *partition* of a culture, a society, and a state out of which the minoritization of "the Muslims" was actualized. Thus the broader literary concern here is to raise some fundamental questions about how we read literature in terms of certain dominant models of social cohesion, namely, those that have been tied historically in varying ways in the modern era to the cultural forms of the nation-state. But instead of arguing for a *superceding* of these forms in the current global conjuncture of "transnational" flows, identifications, loyalties, affiliations, and forms of performance and consumption of culture and difference, I hope to point out some of the ways in which those "national" (and hence canonical) forms have *always* been open-ended, incomplete, and impossible to achieve.

Currently influential theoretical critiques of nationalism, such as Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, although divergent in many important respects, share the underlying assumption that the great historical achievement of the nation-form is its unifying project, its desire (even if not ability) to produce the one out of the many. This is to read nation and nationalism on their own terms, however, the terms in which they demand we read them. What these critics fail to account for fully is that nationalism has historically been a great *disrupter* of social and cultural relations, that its reconstitution of societies and populations in terms of distinct narratives of collective life always implies setting forth an entire dynamic of inclusion and exclusion within the very social formation that it claims as uniquely its own and with which it declares itself identical. Thus the great "accomplishment," we might say, of nationalism as a distinctly modern form of political and cultural identity is not that it is a great settling of peoples—"this place for this people." Rather, its distinguishing mark historically has been precisely that it makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled. More simply put, whenever a population is *minoritized*—a process inherent in the nationalization of peoples and cultural practices—it is also rendered potentially *movable*. Minority, in the sense in which I use this term, is always potentially exile, and exile is an actualization of the threat inherent to the condition of minority. This premise about the conditions and modalities of uprooting, which follows the spirit if not the letter of Arendt's understanding of citizenship and the nation-state in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, is the basis of my argument in this book, which I extend here into the literary and cultural domain: thus a possible uprooting of populations, and an "entire social texture,"²⁰ as Arendt puts it, but also, more precisely, of linguistic and cultural practices, and of narratives and memories of collective life. I should clarify, however, that the book does not see its task as one of identifying what Pierre Nora calls *les lieux de mémoire*, "places" or "sites" that become loci for the generation of shared memories of collective life, a conception which I consider a sort of updating of the Durkheimian *conscience collective*, and which therefore shares the latter's shortcomings.²¹ Where Nora attempts to make a stable distinction between memory and history, this book aims to recover minority as a place of disruption of that distinction and to affiliate critical practice itself to these disruptive forms of remembering.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I shall attempt to reopen the question of decolonization, postcolonial selfhood, and the legacies, broadly conceived, of the Enlightenment. The goal in this sense is to elaborate the terms of a secularist critique of modern secularism, a *critical secularism* whose affiliations are with the dilemmas of minority

existence.²² Such a critical practice does not claim for itself an external and uncontaminated position. Its critique of the categories of nation and state is a self-consciously immanent one, and seeks to dislodge their stability from within. It therefore confronts the *risk* of reproducing those categories as the only possible way to elude their reproduction. Criticism of the state of contemporary society and culture in South Asia can only begin with a keen sense of the enormity of what has taken place. The (secularist) critique of Partition, the religio-political event that is the material condition of nation-statehood in South Asia, and of the forms of “communal” consciousness and conflict in the twentieth century must avoid the temptation of explaining them away by simply pointing to the accidental twists and turns of political and diplomatic history—the Nehru Report, the Simla Conference, the Cabinet Mission; to the bad faith of various historical agents—the colonial state, the Congress, the Muslim League; or to the false consciousness of social collectivities—the Muslim *ashraf* elites or the Hindu-*savarna* elites. The historical process explored here is part of us, part of the very critical thought that seeks to comprehend it. On the other hand, the critique of state secularism is reduced to conceptual and practical incoherence, as I shortly argue at some length, if it fails to take stock of its own reliance on the secular culture of critique. In sum, this book is concerned with the fractures of modern experience, with the differing experience of modernity at majority and minority locations, and sees itself as contributing to an immanent critique of the forms of belonging in modern culture, whose great price has always been a great uprooting—of “other” peoples and other problematics.

THE AURA OF AUTHENTICITY

Colonialism is a form of human suffering, one of the historically determinate forms of suffering specific to the modern age. Frantz Fanon is one of the best-known cartographers of this experience and has left us a vocabulary, as much a revised psychoanalysis as a “stretched” Marxism, for tracing out its contours in the culture and politics of the colonial world.²³ Referring as much to the sufferings of the individual under colonial rule as of the sufferings of society as a whole, Fanon wrote that, “because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: ‘In reality, who am I?’”²⁴ In a remarkable essay on the phenomenology of colonial conquest, Ranajit Guha has reopened this question for the postcolonial moment, exploring its links to the narrative

traditions in which the ascendancy of Europe and its encounters with non-European cultures and peoples continue to be told and retold: “Whenever I read or hear the words *colonial India*, it hurts me. It hurts like an injury that has healed and yet has retained somehow a trace of the original pain linked to many different things—memories, values, sentiments.”²⁵ Guha produces a gestalt shift in our understanding of anti-colonial nationalism by pointing out that its principal affect is a desire to tell and retell this same painful story, although from the perspective not of the colonizers’ victory as such but rather of the defeat and subjugation of the colonized.

Modes of transition to modern forms of culture that have been mediated through the experience of colonial subjugation share the inability to produce narratives of cultural continuity that can absorb the dislocations of modernity. The breaker of tradition—the canonical figure of modernity—is in such contexts fully a *colonial* subject and becomes so precisely in that act of iconoclasm. This stain of treachery against one’s own people and of loyalty to the foreign rulers spreads throughout the cultural terrain, coloring even the most radical critiques of indigenous society. The question of tradition in such contexts thus takes a distinct form, with the past appearing not exactly to be dead and buried, even if present in ghostly form, but *murdered* (by or at the behest of an other) and still remaining inappropriately and insufficiently mourned.²⁶ Thus tradition, which is the realm in which a cultural object is restored its lost aura, here becomes imbued with a melancholy that attaches not to any single object but to the sense of the past as a whole. It appears as that which has become alien to the self, a marginal and threatened fragment of life, but a fragment out of whose lineaments one might attempt to recall what was once *all* of life. The task of a postcolonial literary criticism, therefore, as G. N. Devy has noted, is to attempt to think across the “epistemological stumbling block” represented by colonial culture. And no critical practice that underestimates the difficulty of this task can hope to evade reproducing the hierarchies of thought made possible by colonial rule. In India, as Devy suggests, modern critical consciousness is confronted by the mid-nineteenth century as a sort of cut-off point, “incapable of tracing [its] tradition backwards” beyond that moment. It is a profoundly significant perception, one that helps illuminate the aporia of a range of disciplines in the humanities, as of literary production itself.²⁷

To further explore and clarify the issues at stake here, I turn now to their elaboration in the school of Urdu criticism known as *jadīdiyyat* and, in particular, to the work of Muhammad Hasan Askari, its leading light and founder, and a widely influential and hugely controversial figure.²⁸ A magisterial intellect, a polyglot and polymath of staggering erudition, but

also deeply conservative in his cultural inclinations, Askari began writing criticism in the 1940s as an enthusiastic interpreter for the Urdu literary world of European modernism, of the entire series of formal developments from Baudelaire and the impressionists to Joyce, Eliot, and Lawrence. In a series of brief essays contributed to the literary magazine *Sāqī* during the late 1940s and 1950s, and in a large number of longer works, Askari explored the relationship of Urdu writing to the literature of the modern West and argued that the former could no longer find its way except insofar as it came to terms with the latter. Thus, in an essay on modernism titled “The Last Stage of Western Literature,” he argues that,

While living in *this* world, we cannot produce an Eastern literature of the traditional sort. Such a literature can only be produced in a society that has its foundation in a metaphysical tradition. For this reason it has become inescapable for our writers to accept Western influences. But we must be alert to which influences we accept and to their significance. My own opinion is this: that until the writers of the East absorb within themselves the literary process that began with Flaubert and Baudelaire, as well as Joyce, Pound, and Lawrence, they will not be able to produce a meaningful literature.²⁹

A great deal of Askari’s work of this period is an attempt to explore what this *absorption* would mean. The cultural fissure represented by British ascendancy in South Asia—usually located in Urdu literary culture in the Rebellion of 1857—and by the introduction and dominance of “modern” or “English” education is, for Askari, irreversible at this point. In Urdu literary culture in the last century and a half, 1857 has been the object of repeated and obsessive attention, with the revolt and its aftermath coming to mark the moment of catastrophe, and this obsessive reopening of the question of rupture has itself become the condition of possibility of creativity for successive literary generations. In Askari’s work, and in that of his leading disciple, Saleem Ahmed, it marks the moment at which the social order that was the world of classical Urdu literature is destroyed and human experience becomes a fragmented and alienated one. The horizon of Urdu writing in the twentieth century is provided by this fragmentation, and the writer’s task is to produce an adequate response to it. The literature of a period, movement, or school, or the oeuvre of an individual author, may thus be evaluated in terms of the kind of response it embodies and the social, cultural, and psychological implications of that response.

During the 1950s and 1960s Askari’s positions underwent a series of subtle shifts whose cumulative effect is dramatic. In a series of long essays he began to rethink the meaning of “tradition” (*rivāyat*), arguing

that it could not be reduced to convention, habit, or “culture.” Traditional ways of living are now seen not only in opposition to the modern West but as essentially the same everywhere. Thus at one point he speaks of the essential unity of all “Eastern civilizations,” which resides in their adherence to the principle that certain forms of Islamic thought have termed *wahdat al-wujūd* (the oneness of being, immanence) and that Hinduism has elaborated as the unitarian philosophy of *advaita* (non-duality, monism).³⁰ Even Europe before the Renaissance is absorbed in this notion of tradition, and Askari is able to make the following far-reaching claim: “The basic tradition is everywhere the same; the difference is one of outward appearance only.”³¹ But by the end of his life, his work was focused on the reconstruction of the tradition of Urdu literature—which he deemed “Islamic”—a hermeneutic effort across the break represented by British ascendancy in North India. And in his last work, *Jadīdyat*, published posthumously in 1979, Askari turned, in a new shift of emphasis, to an enumeration of the “errors” and misconceptions of “the West” concerning Islam and religion in general, errors that had been disseminated through “English education” among Muslims themselves.³² The very word that had designated the kind of critical practice he inaugurated was now seen as the sign of the destructiveness of the culture of the modern West towards the cultures of “the East” in general and Islam in particular. I do not contend, however, that these transformations are steps in the development—or, depending on one’s point of view, degeneration—of an individual career and critical project. I suggest instead that they are the results of a common underlying problematic and that Askari himself surely would not have seen his later views as an abandonment of his earlier ones. The incongruous presence in Askari’s work of Lawrence and Joyce, on the one hand, and Islamic exegesis, on the other, points to his perception of the paradoxical nature of the problem of Urdu literature. For modernism, in Askari’s reading, is the appropriate aesthetic response to inappropriate existence in modernity. Modernism makes available a kaleidoscopic perception of the fragmented reality of modern subjective experience, of modernity as a fallen condition. This perception allows the critic to begin the work of recovery both of tradition and of self through tradition. While the effort to recall and reproduce an auratic consciousness of the (precolonial) past and to reanimate it in the present must be alert to the plurality of the present, to the continued survival of “our” tradition, it can *begin* only by fully inhabiting and working through this (colonized) condition. Furthermore, the interpretation of tradition belongs to its traditional upholders, the *‘ulamā*, but their education prevents the *‘ulamā* from understanding “Europe” as it has arisen even in our midst, and so they are unable to comprehend fully our present. Therefore it is the critic’s

role to function as mediator, to interpret their exegeses to the larger national public sphere, on the one hand, and, on the other, to enable the *‘ulamā* to comprehend better the culture of the modern West so they can more effectively refute their Westernized and rationalist critics. Thus Askari’s larger project here is nothing less than a transformation of the modern public sphere into the domain of traditional disputation. However, we must not confuse this project with those of what has come to be called Islamic fundamentalism, as his less careful critics are wont to do, for the shattered totality his work struggles to reconstruct is not *sharī‘a* or Islamic law per se but the Sufi worldview (*taṣavvuf*) of the medieval Islamic world as interpreted in the work of such twentieth-century exegetes as Ashraf Ali Thanavi—a far cry, for instance, from the hyper-rationalist and hyper-literalist techno-Islamism of an increasingly global sort that now makes headlines worldwide.

It is in the explication of the first-person plural, which stands at the center of his project, that Askari’s elaborate hermeneutic effort encounters its limit and makes visible its own reliance on the structures of modern state and society. For the attempt to contain the premodern past of Urdu in a coherent and self-contained structure of meaning—“tradition”—inexorably replicates the conflation of language, literature, and religious “community” that is an ongoing process in the development precisely of the modern nation-state formation in colonial and postcolonial South Asia. Thus, in a strong sense, the subject of Urdu writing is, for Askari, “Muslim,” which he spent the better part of his intellectual life elaborating. And the search for the traditional font of Urdu writing leads him exclusively to such Arabic and Persian sources as Ibn al-Arabi, Rumi, and Hafiz. It is a familiar gesture associated with the official historiography of Urdu literature but repudiated in the work of a number of writers who are Askari’s rough contemporaries, such as Intizar Husain, whose attachment to the Shia Muslim culture of Lucknow and its environs is simultaneously qualified and enriched by a sense of its deep rootedness in linguistic and cultural practices that quietly and unself-consciously create havoc for the categories of nationalized religious identity. In Askari’s work, the complex interplay of indigenous-popular and élite-Persian elements in the emergence and continued performance of Urdu as a spoken and literary register, as well as its fundamental homelessness throughout the modern era, in other words, its minoritization implicit in the nationalization of Indian culture and society, which is the context proper to his own effort at resettling and recovery, are erased from literary historical memory. So while Askari’s project is quite different from the conceptual framework that, for instance, is associated with Ashis Nandy, it manages to arrive at the same cul-de-sac as the latter, although from, as it were, the opposite direction: if Nandy’s

effort for the recovery of an authentic Indian self often leads him to forget the contested and conflicted history of Indianness, Askari's search for the "tradition" of Urdu requires a forgetting of the (ambivalent and problematic) Indianness of Urdu itself.³³ The auratic attempt to resolve the crisis of postcolonial culture can thus be taken in either a "Hindu" or "Muslim" direction. But at no point can either account of Indian reality open itself up adequately to the other. In such a context the central question of how these "traditions" are located within the national-cultural space we call India cannot even be formulated.

My critique of such "auratic" gestures in criticism is not animated by a desire to disavow or *defuse* the crisis of authenticity. It does not attempt to settle, once and for all, this question, which under no circumstances do I take to be a spurious or illusory one. The enormity of what has been ruined is not in doubt, and evidence of its destruction is everywhere to be seen. In this, as in so much else, the forms of postcolonial remembering evoke those "mass-graves for the forgotten" in which Arendt once placed the products of European Jewish creativity, contrasting them with the "enduring monuments" to those who are "remembered and cherished."³⁴ When we consider some of the South Asian and Islamic contexts at stake in the discussion of Askari, for example, an individual text from the medieval or premodern corpus—whether theological or poetic or both, as is often the case—cannot be approached except through the Orientalist archive. It comes to us already constituted as an object of (Orientalist) knowledge. The ("post-Orientalist") critical task is to undermine the inevitability of this circle, but this project cannot be conceived of as simply *reanimating* the text and claiming a living and unbroken connection to it. The authority of the Orientalist archive is not ultimately displaced by this posture of return to a reanimated past, whether this gesture is made in the context of literary criticism or of militantly politicized "Hinduism" or "Islam." A claim Abdallah Laroui once made for postcolonial Arab culture may be repeated for contemporary South Asian society: "In contemporary Arab ideology, no form of consciousness is authentic: no more so in the religious scholar than in the technophile; he reflects a different image of contact with the West, but the center of his thought is no more his own than that of the technophile belongs properly to him."³⁵ The premodern corpus can only be approached from a position of *exile* from it, that is, through a careful elaboration of the forms of displacement, distance, alienation—and, yes, remembrance, familiarity, and recognition—that characterize our contemporary relationship to it. (I shall return to these questions at some length in later chapters.)

I am concerned here, in other words, with the possibilities of living *with* the crisis of authenticity and coming to understand the social and

ethical stakes in that struggle to live. The wound cannot be healed by the attempt to resurrect an undifferentiated tradition. The equation of the modern with the Western, and of the non-modern with (contemporary) religiosity, seeks to settle the question once and for all in favor of the rejection of everything marked as modern (and Western) and the recuperation and strengthening of surviving, “lived” traditions, wherever they are to be found. In part this book is motivated by the desire to examine critically the casualness of these equations and to give substance to such concepts as “liberal,” “secular,” “modern,” “post-Enlightenment,” and “citizenship” as they appear in the critique of postcolonial culture—terms sometimes used in contemporary criticism with the utmost vagueness and abandonment of rigor. The tendency to look for an Archimedean point outside “modernity”—as embodied, for instance, in Nandy’s famous interpretation of the life of Gandhi or in Askari’s attempted recuperation of medieval *taṣavvuf*—marks a failure to recognize that there is now no *unmediated* recourse to an outside. To the gesture in criticism that would pretend to reanimate an auratic recollection of the past, we may counterpose what I call *vernacular modernities*, a formulation I shall return to shortly.³⁶ When a writer like Salman Rushdie, who is now almost iconically identified with the thematics of postcolonial secularism, is invoked in that context in either avowal or disavowal, it is not often understood, least of all by Rushdie himself, that a number of these secularist formulations are not unique to the postcolonial migrant, or Anglophone (or Francophone), contexts. Despite huge differences of impulse and emphasis from the latter, one may point in the Indian and Urdu context, for instance, to numerous precedents: to the unapologetic urbanism and irreverence of the fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto, to Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s immersion in, and secularization of, the language of Sufism in classical Urdu lyric, and to the *Islamic* polemic of Abul Kalam Azad (Abū al-Kalām Āzād) against the cultural claims of Muslim separatism, embodying a religious but *non-auratic* view of the space of national politics, to cite a handful of writers who reappear in subsequent chapters. Each of these writers opens up the question of relationship to the past in a manner consistent with his material: respectively, modern narrative and epic ambition, the modern lyric and its recollection of the polyvalence of love in *taṣavvuf*, and life-writing and its production of cultural memory for the staking of political claims. But each writer is alert in his own way to the ethical consequences of this reopening of the question of the past and views social space as inherently secular, as that which is always in excess of narrative claims about the past and must be shared with others. Later in the book I turn to each of these figures in order to situate them and their writings of the 1940s and 1950s, and Urdu literary production more generally, within the literary

landscape of late colonial and early postcolonial South Asia. It is with such vernacular projects for modern selfhood and collective life that criticism must affiliate itself in its struggle to point toward and perhaps even momentarily achieve authentic forms of culture and memory. Above all, my readings of these writers are meant to highlight that the anti-secularist position in debates about the crisis of postcolonial culture—by which I do *not* signify only the contemporary migrant intellectual context—is *majoritarian* in nature, to the extent that it places outside the bounds of critique and leaves intact normative notions of tradition and culture that have the nation-state as the historical horizon of their emergence and codification.

DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE COLONY

For a critique of the sort I attempt to elaborate here, it is not sufficient to make the historicist argument that all traditions are invented. What is needed, instead, is an immanent critique of the aura of authenticity itself, a critique that seeks to *displace* terms such as “tradition,” “culture,” and “homeland” in which the problematic of authenticity is produced. In outlining such a critique, I turn first to a seemingly unlikely figure, namely, Adorno, and to an unlikely Adornian text, namely, one of the fragments (no. 32) of *Minima Moralia*, which carries the aphoristic and famously provocative title, “Savages are not better humans.”³⁷ In the pious populism that is increasingly our common sense in the humanities, the title and text of the fragment can be easily dismissed as signs of the elitist Adorno, of a mandarinitis unable to see history as anything but the history of European man. That would be an incorrect reading, however, for these seemingly Eurocentric emphases must be read within Adorno’s larger concern here with a critique of historical agency as it has traditionally been conceived of in Western Marxism. This segment appears in part 1 of the book, marked by the author as compositions of 1944. It is part of a set of paragraphs that begin the transition from elaborations of the private experience of exile to larger cultural and political concerns, a transition which, according to the dedication, structures each of the parts of the book as a whole.³⁸ They chart a twin process: on the one hand, the decline of bourgeois liberal culture and society into administration but also, on the other, the containment of genuinely emancipatory politics in the cult of the commissar. Thus, in no. 30, “progress” and “barbarism,” as these terms apply to contemporary mass culture, are shown to be in a dialectical relation, “so matted together . . . that only barbaric asceticism towards the latter, and towards progress in technical means, could restore an unbarbaric condition.”³⁹ Progress in the productive means

available to society, although real in itself, is no guarantee of social and cultural progress as such, which now requires a critical relationship to the language and paraphernalia of progress itself. And in no. 31 Adorno marks the decline of solidarity, which had been the intersubjective dimension of progressive politics, into the ruthlessness and “cold shoulder” of “the organization men.”⁴⁰ Solidarity has turned into the “confidence that the Party has a thousand eyes,” and the psychic energies of individuals are now wasted in surviving the capriciousness of the bosses rather than in testing the weaknesses of the class enemy. It is this twin process—the descent of liberalism into administered mass society, and of organized political opposition into the psychology of totalitarianism—that opens up for Adorno the question of a newcomer on the world-historical stage constructed by “the conflicts of industrial society”: the non-Western, the underdeveloped, the primitive, the native.

The dominant and characteristic posture of Adorno’s text is a studied avoidance of and caution against political sentimentality. Adorno anticipates, in a remarkably prescient manner, the rise of the postwar figure of the anticolonial insurgent and warns against its romanticization within an ultimately unaltered and Eurocentric history of the realization of Man. A classic, even canonical, formulation of this romance is to be found in Sartre’s preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, where, in stark contrast with Fanon’s own studied hesitation in the face of precisely such a move, Sartre situates the native as the agent of a more comprehensive and universal humanism than that which had so far been achieved, in a world divided between “men” and “natives,” between colonizer and colonized. Sartre describes his own text as an attempt to take the argument further, beyond the point where “Fanon stops,” and, in the process, reinscribes the native as more European than the European (at present). In Sartre’s text, anticolonial insurgency cancels out a humanism tainted by colonial racism, a contradictory mode of “laying claim to and denying the human condition at the same time.” By inflicting violence on the settler, by murdering him, the native becomes “a different man; of higher quality.” The conclusion of this process is the final disappearance of racism, a “full-grown” humanity, and hence the “end of the dialectic.”⁴¹

Adorno, like Fanon, resists this resolution. For Fanon, the mere substitution of Third World for Europe, of native for European, is a ruse of the colonial status quo itself: “If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us.”⁴² Adorno points to the hard reality that the non-Western and anticolonial renewal of humanism and Enlightenment is in itself no guarantee against the mode of domestication of critical

rationality whose most visible theoretical expression for him is modern positivism. The allusive reference in the fragment to “Carnap-worshippers in India”⁴³ is itself a remarkable anticipation, and an imaging in condensed form, of the complex of relations between “positivism” and the rationalities of the postcolonial, developmentalist nation-state. But in concluding the fragment, Adorno opens up a constellation even more complex and paradoxical than Fanon’s: “There is some reason to fear that the involvement of non-Western peoples in the conflicts of industrial society, long overdue in itself, will be less to the benefit of the liberated peoples than to that of rationally improved production and communications, and a modestly raised standard of living.”⁴⁴ This remarkable passage, each of its phrases opening up a prospect onto the problematic of decolonization and modernity, will recall for readers Adorno’s better-known critique of jazz.⁴⁵ In both cases the real emphasis is not on the thing itself—jazz or decolonization—but on the ability of an increasingly integrated world to *administer* it. Faced with the prospect of the “involvement of non-Western peoples in the conflicts of industrial society,” Adorno opens up the question: involvement on what basis, in what terms, in whose interest? Unlike Sartre, for whom the native simply takes us to a higher, more complete humanism, Adorno’s skepticism leads us to ask the question of the fate of humanism itself: How will “the non-Western peoples” narrate their humanity out of their struggle against colonialism? Adorno’s answer to these questions is, of course, cautionary. It calls, above all, for the recognition that the system can absorb and work over that which claims to be unequivocally *outside* it. *Effective* critique of capitalist modernity, and of Enlightenment as such, therefore cannot take the form of a gesture merely of self-distancing and disavowal: “It presupposes experience, a historical memory, a fastidious intellect and above all an ample measure of satiety.”⁴⁶ As is well known, the social equivalent of this critical posture for Adorno is the experience of exile, the indeterminate, threatened, and threatening location at the cusp of outside and inside. That Adorno could not anticipate the “weariness” or “satiety” (and therefore “experience”) of the *colonized* with Western culture, that he could not recognize the emergence of an antagonistic and exilic “historical memory” not reducible to that of the principled *Western* critic of the West, marks the limit of his own comprehension of the dialectic of Enlightenment in a decolonizing world. We might even say that today a comprehensive critique of “Western” modernity is not possible without an intimate experience of the imperialization of the world, from one side or the other of the imperial divide. But Adorno’s skepticism is also salutary, a refusal to speak in the name of the colonized, a refusal to append their struggles to a narrative of the self-realization of a Euro-centered humanity.

Adorno and Horkheimer's most far-reaching contribution to a rethinking of the dominant narrative of secularization is, of course, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the opening paragraph signals this concern with the narrative of the emergence and fate of secular consciousness. The first (and unmarked) textual reference in "The Concept of Enlightenment" is to Max Weber, the most significant early-twentieth-century theorist of secularization, and precedes the explicit reference to Bacon: "Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world."⁴⁷ Notoriously the term "enlightenment" undergoes a recurring, almost cyclical, expansion and contraction of designation in Adorno and Horkheimer's text, from being a category in modern intellectual history to its most expansive use as the concept of a philosophical anthropology, as in the essay's very first sentence: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (*DE*, 1). Knowledge and power are one; hence the cataclysmic dangers (and utopian possibilities) that accompany any movements in knowledge and culture. One conceptual consequence of this philosophical anthropology, this understanding of "enlightenment" as a *human* phenomenon—and, beyond the Greek and Jewish materials, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* makes repeated references to Egyptian and Indian ones, in addition to numerous "primitive" cultures as documented and codified in modern Western ethnography—is that the bourgeois Enlightenment also be considered, momentarily at least, as simply an event and process in human history rather than in Western history alone.⁴⁸

Whether or to what extent Horkheimer and Adorno's argument is able to coexist with, if not actually encourage, a concern with Enlightenment in the colonies is a discussion for another day, although below I attempt to show its relevance for such analysis by performing one. It is no longer possible, however, to give a critical account of the modern Enlightenment's global career except through a careful examination of its deep involvement in the history of colonialism, from ideologies of the civilizing mission to the very structure of state and society to emerge in the colonies. Far from being suspended or dissolved, therefore, the question of the Enlightenment's Western provenance currently stands at the heart of this critical enterprise. A *comprehensive* understanding of modernity today requires that it be treated as an articulation of metropolitan and colonial constellations and forms, and no attempt to rearticulate the mutual relations of "tradition" and "modernity" in postcolonial societies themselves can simply bypass this question. But it is a false perception to view the colonial reenactment of the modern, bourgeois Enlightenment as entirely the imposition of an external form, whose removal is synonymous with the end of the sovereignty of colonial

rationality. In fact, this reappearance does not lack its own dialectic. Those among the colonized who propagated it misperceived this themselves when they trumpeted their “enlightened” and secularizing projects under the sign of the discovery of universal and immutable principles. That these were, properly speaking, *élite* projects, hardly settles the question in favor of the critics of their purported alienness, such as Askari, Nandy, and Devy. As Adorno and Horkheimer so painstakingly demonstrate, most pointedly in their allegorical reading of Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens, Enlightenment in its “widest sense” is always inextricably linked with power and proceeds with asymmetrical consequences for rulers and ruled. The trajectory of the modern in colonial and postcolonial India is marked by the fact, which imbues this trajectory with both an innocence and an unrelenting melancholy, that the “nature”—“external” and “internal”—which is sought to be mastered, as it were, anew within the conceptual antinomies (and techniques) of industrial civilization is a long manipulated and devastated one, reflecting a far longer civilizational history than the one Horkheimer and Adorno draw upon for their speculative history of knowledge in the West. The perceived gulf that separates the *élite*’s modernizing slogans and projects from the culture of the Indian masses is thus itself a feature of indigenous society at the moment of its encounter with the forces of colonial modernity.

The larger paradox of Enlightenment in the colony is that it brings to an auratically hierarchized social space, to an “enchanted” world, a dialectic whose context proper in the metropolis is precisely the dissolution of heterogeneous subjectivities and the social spaces they inhabit. The objective substratum here is not an unfinished or incomplete progress, however, but rather the distinct articulation of power and knowledge under conditions of colonial capitalism, whose logic Ranajit Guha has identified, in a succinct formulation, as “dominance without hegemony.”⁴⁹ As a form of knowledge, this domination—of human beings as of nature—arises at the “coalescence” and “divergence,” Guha argues, of two conceptual systems, the one post-Enlightenment and European, the other traditional and indigenous. Guha’s account of colonial power stresses the preeminence within it of *coercion over persuasion*, and therefore the absence of hegemony, properly speaking, in the relation of rulers to ruled. In the exercise of this coercive domination, the articulation of these “alien” and “indigenous” logics makes possible forms of knowledge of dominated groups and society whose claims correspond to the interests of the *élite* groups in society. Guha, perhaps the most rigorous and un-sentimental contemporary theorist of “*élitism*” as it pertains to the production of knowledge, makes clear what the critique of the *élitism* of (colonial) knowledge entails: a *displacement* of the categories of such

knowledge from the perspective of those heterogeneous subjectivities, which he designates “subaltern,” that the knowledge claims attempt to domesticate or even annihilate.⁵⁰ There is undoubtedly a partial convergence here with Adorno’s conception (which he attributes to Benjamin) of the necessity for knowledge to attend to the “waste products” of history that have fallen “by the wayside,” materials which have not been fully taken over by the production of history as a succession of “victory and defeat.”⁵¹ The procedure of such critique for Adorno is not the *substitution* of a purportedly true idea for a false one but, rather, “to read from [the latter’s] features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth” (*DE*, 18).

For a representative, perhaps even canonical, elaboration of the themes of Enlightenment, disenchantment, and domination in colonial India, we turn to a passage in Nehru’s *Discovery of India* (1946), the famous section in chapter 3 titled “Bharat Mata” (Mother India). Nehru describes his travels across the length and breadth of India during the electoral campaign of 1936–37:

Often, as I wandered from meeting to meeting, I spoke to my audience of this India of ours, of Hindustan and of *Bharata*, the old Sanskrit name derived from the mythical founder of the race. I seldom do so in the cities, for there the audiences were more sophisticated and wanted stronger fare. But to the peasant, with his limited outlook, I spoke of this great country for whose freedom we were struggling . . . Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome would greet me: *Bharat Mata ki jai*—“Victory to Mother India.” I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted in my questioning. At last a vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, would say that it was the dharti, the good earth of India, that they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in all of India? And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it. I would endeavour to do so and explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this *Bharat Mata*, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves

Bharat Mata, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery.⁵²

All the elements of the dialectic I attempt to describe here are present in this passage. In it we encounter a nationalist pedagogy whose aim is the disenchantment of the (peasants') world, and the moment of their recognition of *themselves* as "Mother India" is that moment of Enlightenment, which, in other words, consists of, and is identical with, entering a sense of national belonging. I have a great deal more to say about the gendered nature of this resolution in chapter 4. Here suffice it to note that what is defeated in this moment is myth, namely, the inchoate association of the nation with the mythical ancestor. But further revealing is the role assigned in Nehru's text to the élite male subject. The urban, "sophisticated" consciousness that is the nationalist has transcended its reliance on the modes of thought implicit in veneration of the nation as cosmic Mother, which comes to appear to him as a species of superstition. His use of it is entirely self-conscious and instrumental: it is the language he must speak when he addresses the masses, even as his goal is to shake its hold over their minds, to lead them to a secular and rational sense of themselves as the nation. Moreover, the negation enacted here is a determinate one (in the Adornian-Hegelian sense)—a negation not of "myth" in general but of a concrete historical form it takes in the history of nationalism and of modern Indian culture, which in its own turn had marked a progressive or enlightening moment, namely, the "rebirth" or "renaissance" of the Indian nation. Negated here, in other words, is the elaboration of this master trope in the culture of anticolonial nationalism since the late nineteenth century; also negated, in terms of *Discovery's* own textual prehistory, is the history of figurations of Bharat Mata from Bankimchandra Chatterjee's novel *Ānandamath* (1888) to Bipin Chandra Pal's *Soul of India* (1923), a trajectory Partha Chatterjee has characterized as nationalism's "moment of departure," just as he has situated Nehru and *The Discovery of India* as exemplary of its "moment of arrival."⁵³ In Nehru's text, "Bharat Mata" is the means not to the interpellation of the nationalist subject, as it is in Bankim's novel, but of its manipulation of the collectivized object that is the peasant masses. At work here is an instrumental rationality, a consciousness to whose relation to the masses Guha has attributed the implicit slogan "discipline and mobilize."

The political logic at work in this relationship of the nationalist to the masses is therefore not one of representation per se but of *exemplarity*. The urban and "sophisticated" consciousness that is the "secular" nationalist claims to represent the nation, to act in its interest, not because it is representative of the people, that is, because it belongs to the world

of the people, but because it exemplifies the *highest form of consciousness* one can attain in this colonial society. Hence its sense of isolation in Indian society, and its peculiar reliance, so brilliantly analyzed by Chatterjee, upon the thought and practice of Gandhian politics and on the figure of Gandhi himself, whom it considers a true representative of the masses, with their irrationalism and non-modern worldview—he “almost is peasant India.”⁵⁴ Chatterjee has conceived of the trajectory of nationalist thought in terms of three “moments,” a schema which has led to the misreading that he is proposing a stagist narrative of development. As Chatterjee explicitly states at numerous points in his study, his aim is precisely to attempt to dislodge the self-representation of Nehruvian nationalism as the end point of a natural national development.⁵⁵ At its “moment of departure,” nationalist thought takes the form of a project of “national-cultural regeneration” for the new middle class that seeks to synthesize the “material” superiority of the modern West with the “spiritual” greatness of “Indian” culture, a synthesis to be achieved through (Hindu) religious reform—an engagement, in other words, with modern culture as Enlightenment. The colonial obstacles in the development of the nationalist middle class, then, produce the necessity of taking nationalism to the subaltern classes, and this moment of “maneuver” requires the incorporation of the culture of the rural masses into the culture of middle-class nationalism itself, a historical task whose most visible facilitator is Gandhi. At its “moment of arrival,” Chatterjee argues, nationalism takes the form of secular statecraft, an ideology whose most consistent elaborator and proponent is Nehru. Nehruvian *étatisme* and governance by expertise do not represent a canceling or transcending of the Gandhian critique of modernity. Their mutual contradiction at the level of content conceals their articulation or “imbrication” at the level of function.⁵⁶ “Maneuver” and “arrival” therefore represent not *successive* “moments” here but an articulation of non-synchronous ones: the populism and indigenism of Gandhian politics allows the hyper-élitism and Anglocentrism of Nehruvian thought to clothe itself in the garb of the popular and the indigenous, while the securing of the “leadership” role of the “expert” élites at the helm of the state-to-come allows for the (Gandhian) gesture of inclusion towards the culture and ethos of the peasant masses. Thus the paradox of Nehruvian Enlightenment is its reliance on social forces and modes of thought that it considers premodern and even reactionary, which lends to the Nehruvian persona its characteristic and melancholic sense of its own (élite) isolation and hence vulnerability. Nowhere perhaps is this paradox more poignantly visible than in Nehru’s personal identity itself, and may be read in the seemingly trivial fact that this untiring proponent of egalitarianism and rationalism, who writes of the institution of caste that “in

the social organization of today it has no place,” was universally referred to and addressed in the public realm, often even by colonial officials, as Pandit Nehru (*DI*, 620).

A critical secularism in South Asia today must confront the contradictions of its own genealogy, even as it challenges the accusation of its purported alienness to Indian (and South Asian) society. A critique of culture and society in contemporary South Asia must produce the conceptual resources necessary to put “Hindu” and “Muslim” (and “Indian” and “Pakistani”) in question, to make visible the dialectic of majority and minority within which they are produced, which in itself constitutes the larger part of the movement of Indian modernity. The main lines of development of Subaltern Studies, despite the best and repeatedly expressed intentions of its leading practitioners, have failed to take up this constellation of issues with the seriousness it deserves.⁵⁷ I am not suggesting, however, that “Hindu” and “Muslim” have no meaning in pre-colonial South Asia; on the contrary, the aim here is, in part, precisely to excavate those buried meanings. As Muzaffar Alam has recently shown in his work, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800*, there was no single overarching principle of the governance of its subjects in the political culture of either the Sultanate or the Mughal Empire but rather a shifting ground of negotiation between local forms and traditions and those with Central Asian or other foreign lineage, elaborated and formalized to various extents in the *tahzīb*, *aḳhlāq*, and Sufi literatures, with the latter, in what became a characteristic of Sufism in India, attempting the convergence of Indian-Hindu and Islamic theosophical concerns.⁵⁸ Unique to modern society is our contemporary political experience of religion as political identity, in which identification within a “world” community, the will to cultural uniformity, and political interest are fused together as if in a seamless whole, and the emergence of this experience converges with the rise of a modern middle class, of its chief mode of political and cultural expression (nationalism), and the political structure it characteristically seeks to build for the protection of its interests as a class (the nation-state). A considerable body of scholarship in recent years indicates that this process still remains incomplete, and this more than two centuries after colonial rule emerged for the first time on a mass scale, with the ongoing pervasiveness of forms of social and cultural differentiation (and non-differentiation) that make a daily mockery of the homogenizing machinery of the state and the arenas of politics defined by the state.⁵⁹ The present study therefore takes its lead from *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas Dirks’s monumental investigation of the colonial invention of the uniform language of “caste” for the comprehension of a vast tapestry of social differentiation.⁶⁰ Dirks provides a detailed history of the

emerging discourse of caste in the course of the nineteenth century, its relationship to what he calls the “ethnographic state,” the numerous paths by which it entered a “nationalist sociology” and, more important, came to reshape large sectors of Indian society and stamp it with the (now) uniform institution of caste. A critical history of colonial conceptions of religious community that would parallel Dirks’s account of caste remains to be written. Partly for reasons of disciplinary location, the present book moves in a decidedly different manner, although in basic agreement with Dirks’s critical account of the emergence of social and cultural technologies for the fixing of identities in colonial India. Through a close engagement with a range of texts, mostly but not exclusively literary, the aim is to provide a critique—which I see as inevitably an immanent one—of a wide terrain of secularist culture in modern and contemporary South Asia, a critique which, as already discussed at some length above, is not to be confused with the anti-secularist gesture. Such a critique confronts Nehruvian secularism with the demand that it radicalize and, in fact, *secularize* itself. As I previously noted, the “postcolonial” critique of Nehruvian nationalism that has emerged in recent years—and I am thinking here primarily of Chatterjee’s work, which remains the most compelling and influential move in this direction—has been directed primarily at what is taken to be the élitism of its thought and practice, the distance from the masses inherent in its secularizing and rationalizing worldview, while leaving untouched Nehru’s reputation as the figure of “tolerance” and the champion of Muslim-minority “rights.” The basic veracity of this reputation notwithstanding—and the liberal champion of minority rights from a majority position will be a recurring figure in this book—this championing itself must be opened up to a reading as an essential element in the middle-class culture associated with the figure of Nehru. Nationalism’s cult of statecraft, technocracy, and expertise, on the one hand, which implies relegating the life-worlds of the masses to the realm of the unverifiable and hence of ritual and mythology, as well as its claim, on the other, to encompass all of society irrespective of denominational or linguistic heterogeneity, are equally signs of the *positivism* of the modes of thought associated with it. It is the social and cultural residue of this positivist concept of the nation that concerns me in this book.

That such polarities as universal and particular or cosmopolitan and vernacular figure decisively today in debates about the crisis of post-colonial culture in numerous sites across the globe is as sure a sign as any that, to paraphrase Adorno, non-Western societies have now entered fully into “the conflicts of industrial society.”⁶¹ To say this, however, is in no way to prejudge the exact nature of this entry and its consequences for societies on either side of the imperial divide or for our

understanding of those conflicts themselves. I fully share the skepticism, voiced by, among others, Fredric Jameson recently, that the “formula” of “alternate” or “alternative” modernities seems hardly adequate to giving a critical account of the emergence of global society over the last several centuries; furthermore, as Slavoj Žižek has noted, given the cultural logic of the global market system today, “multiplication functions as the disavowal of the antagonism that inheres to the notion of modernity as such.”⁶² The answer, however, does not seem to me to be the postulation of an undifferentiated and “singular” modernity whose concept is derived largely from the canonical sites and formulations of the modern—France, Britain, Germany—a portable template into which we may fit any social and cultural contents from anywhere across the globe. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted, the “problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition . . . but as a problem of translation as well.”⁶³ Thus, if the critical thrust of this book is directed, in the first instance, against the fetishization of the local and the particular, it is at the same time pointed at too uncritical an acceptance of the system’s claims concerning its own efficacies. It is with this purpose that I deploy the seemingly oxymoronic term “vernacular modernity” here in order to signify those responses to the pressures of the expanding liberal order—the pressures of Jewish assimilation into the emerging national societies in Europe, in the first instance, and of Muslim minoritization within colonial-national modernity, in the second—that do not simply reproduce its governing antinomies.

In the first part of this book I begin with the emergence and dissemination of the question of minority existence, whose early and exemplary form I chart in the dialectic of Jewishness as minority in post-Enlightenment European culture. The larger aim in chapters 1 and 2, which comprise part 1, is to describe the dialectic of abstract citizenship and national belonging, and to delineate the meanings of Jewishness within each moment of this dialectic. In the first chapter I trace the tension between the universalism of late Enlightenment formulations of emancipation and citizen subjectivity and the particularism and historicism of emergent “nation-thinking,” as I call it, in a trajectory that leads from the late works of Gotthold Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn (1780s) to Walter Scott and Heinrich Heine (1810s to 1840s). My aim here is to construct a *European* stage for the literary elaboration of Jewishness as crisis for modern, liberal subjectivity. Chapter 2 brings this exploration of liberalism’s Jewish “question” to the end of the so-called era of emancipation, in a reading of the moment, and the text, of George Eliot’s last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, the canonical and, as I shall argue, pan-European text of the Jewish Question for the late nineteenth

century, in which this persistent question of post-Enlightenment culture and society is offered up for a resolution made possible by the imaginative geographies of modern imperialism. I then turn to an account of how the figures and forms of minority are reinscribed, in Britain's late imperial culture, into an exploration of the nature and meaning of its Indian colony. This chapter traces, to be more precise, a possible trajectory of the problematic of minority from the figure of the Jew in *Deronda* to that of the Muslim in Kipling's Indian stories and Forster's *A Passage to India*.

Part 2 of this book takes as its starting point *The Discovery of India* as a canonical nationalist elaboration of the question of identity in late colonial India, in which Nehru seeks, in the classic liberal manner, to comprehend the crisis surrounding "Muslim" difference within the rubric of "the problem of minorities." What follows in chapters 3, 4, and 5, which comprise part 2, is a discussion of Urdu as a literary-linguistic formation at odds with the cultural geometry of the nation-state, examined here in the work of three mid-century writers who, we might say, are "on the verge of India": that is, individuals whose writings are an elaboration of forms of individual and collective selfhood that cannot be entirely contained within the categories of the emerging nation-state system. Azad, Manto, and Faiz reject the narrowness and political and cultural poverty of Muslim separatism, and yet their oeuvres, together so utterly defining of Urdu writing in the mid-twentieth century, cannot be said simply to affirm in an unmediated form the antinomial terms—majority and minority, indigenous and alien, tradition and modernity—of the nationalist resolution of the question of culture and identity. It is these mediations that the chapters in part 2 attempt to elaborate, with a view to highlighting the always unfinished nature of the nation-state project and the persistence of forms of consciousness that point to hitherto unrealized and utopian possibilities for individual and collective existence. The epilogue brings the argument of the book full circle—to the question of Jewishness—but, as it were, by ending up in a different place. It attempts to read the significance of the thematics of Jewishness that have emerged—and apparently so seamlessly—in a number of recent works of Indo-English fiction, particularly in major novels by Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie.

A final word on the use of the term "postcolonial" in this book. A small industry has appeared in recent years that allows individuals to make a tidy living within the increasingly institutionalized terrain of postcolonial studies by denouncing this terrain and its problematics, and by claiming piously to refrain from the use of the concept itself. I myself deplore this institutionalization and the inevitable academic ghettoization, however privileged, it clearly indicates as well as the stultification of

critical thinking it obviously has produced. And, as I have argued elsewhere, modes of analysis associated with categories like postcolonial literature have failed so far to facilitate an adequate response from the literary discipline in the United States at least to the challenge of undoing the Eurocentric structure of its knowledge forms and incorporating non-Western literary traditions on something like an equal footing.⁶⁴ One impetus of this book is precisely to suggest ways to resist this ghettoization of concern with the nature of culture in colonial and postcolonial societies and to suggest one possible means of bringing a modern non-Western literature into comparative literary studies in a way that poses productive challenges to its core practices. This effort is thus meant to contribute to the emergence of what Gayatri Spivak has called “planetary” forms of critical practice.⁶⁵ But I also reject the dishonest piety of the anti-postcolonialist gesture, made from any number of political positions, including sometimes Marxism, but always in the name of being, as it were, more radical than thou, although entirely limited at the same time to the academic terrain. The concept and its constellation are with us for now, for better and for worse, and the critical task is to disturb their certainties, to prevent their reification, and to reclaim and reanimate their radical energies, rather than this anxious and dishonest claim to having been free from them from the beginning or to have transcended them once and for all.

Permit me to end on a personal note: the skeptical yet engaged critical practice I attempt to outline here has been formed in significant ways by the history of my own family. My parents, in their twenties and thirties, went from being colonial subjects of one of the last great classical empires of the modern era to being citizens of an at least nominally sovereign postcolonial state—a historical shift that defined intergenerational relations within hundreds of millions of families worldwide. That political decolonization as a global process has resulted in the emergence of a new system for the production and management of global inequality—whether it is called neo-colonialism, dependency, globalization, or simply Empire—does not vitiate the fact that it nevertheless represented a real and dramatic change in lived experience on a global scale. Critique of contemporary, postcolonial globality does not require that we not recognize and pay tribute to what was historically achieved by those who struggled in and against the colonial world; in fact, it requires it. We have all been shaped by that achievement, and to fail to recognize this in the name of an anti-systemic politics is to betray that politics itself. Finally, the distinctness of the process of decolonization experienced by millions of my parents’ generation in South Asia—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, and Christians—is that, within this process, they became not just physically displaced from, but also radically alien to, the places and

practices of their origins. It is the larger story of colonial rule and de-colonization, national sovereignty and displacement, and the settling and unsettling of peoples and cultures in the modern era, reflected in my parents' individual journey, that I attempt to tell in this book, as a means of paying belated and insufficient homage to it.