



***'SECULAR DIALECTIC' IN DEPICTIONS OF SEXUALITY OF PROPHET
MUHAMMAD IN SELECTED WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY WRITERS OF
MUSLIM DESCENT***

UMMI NADHIRAH BINTI MOHAMAD ROSLI

FBMK 2018 100



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By

UMMI NADHIRAH BINTI MOHAMAD ROSLI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2018

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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For a long time, Prophet Muhammad's (Sall Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam) marital affairs have been the centre of criticism in the Western discourse of Islam. His multiple marriages were criticised by medieval polemicists and his marriage with Ayesha (radiya Allahu 'anha) that only pervaded later in the discourse, painted an image of the Prophet (saw) as a leader driven by lust and sexual desires. It is with this particular concern of sexuality that Western writers inveigh against the merit of Muhammad (saw) as a moral figure and it is this particular concern that this study focuses on. The present study extends the research on the sexual representations in relation to the Prophet (saw) within the works of contemporary writers of Muslim descent. The works selected include the poems "The Woman who Said No" and "The Woman who Said Yes" by Malaysian poet Salleh Ben Joned, the novels *The Satanic Verses* by Indian writer Salman Rushdie and *Banquet of Lies* by Algerian author Amin Zaoui. The study is located in the bigger theoretical framework of secularisation where I situate the theoretical-methodological aspect of the research in the notion referred to as the 'secular dialectic'. The notion presents a dynamic in the relationship between Islam and secularisation that argues beyond their dichotomous categorisations, and instead, it demonstrates a process of mutuality between religious traditionalism and the secular discourse to produce alternative ideas of faith, ethics and identity. The notion is modelled from Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concept of 'Third Space' and Charles Taylor secular concept of 'cross-pressure'. These concepts share the view of a dialectical interaction between different cultural and religious systems and position postcolonial hybridity within the secular framework such as in the case of the selected writers who were born and raised in non-Western Muslim countries and whose exposures to the secular West contribute critically to the dialectical discourse. The analysis, therefore, examines the writers' dialectical views based on their perspectives of Islam in

modernity from their written prose as well as their aesthetic delivery of the dialectic through their depictions of the Prophet (saw) in light of sexuality. The study aims to investigate how a dominant Western imagery of Prophet Muhammad (saw) has infiltrated the works of the selected Muslim writers. The 'secular dialectic' suggests that sexual ideas associated to the Prophet (saw) are made possible through the concomitancy between the religious and secular discourses, but such process fundamentally panders to the predominance of Western secularisation that in the end questions the writers' works. By using the Prophet's (saw) image as a dialectical symbol, these works risk promoting a Western discourse that has dominated thoughts about Islam and the Prophet (saw), putting other Muslims in a position where their faith and identity are challenged in modern discourses while implicitly and continuously complicating the image of the last Prophet of Islam.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**GAMBARAN SEKSUALITI NABI MUHAMMAD MELALUI 'DIALEKTIK
SEKULAR' DALAM KARYA-KARYA TERPILIH PARA PENULIS
KONTEMPORARI BERKETURUNAN MUSLIM**

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Hal perkahwinan Rasulullah (*Sall Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) telah lama menjadi bahan kritikan oleh pihak barat terhadap Islam. Hubungan poligami Rasulullah (saw) dikritik oleh ahli polemik zaman pertengahan dan isu perkahwinannya dengan Ayesha (*radiya Allahu 'anha*) yang kemudiannya telah tersebar dalam wacana telah membentuk imej Nabi (saw) sebagai pemimpin yang dikaitkan dengan keinginan hawa nafsu dan seksual. Atas dasar seksualiti ini, merit Nabi Muhammad (saw) sebagai tokoh moral dipertikaikan oleh penulis Barat. Kajian ini memperluaskan lagi penyelidikan terhadap gambaran seksual berkaitan dengan Nabi (saw) dalam karya-karya terpilih penulis kontemporari berketurunan Muslim. Karya-karya yang dipilih termasuk puisi "The Woman Who Said No" dan "The Woman who Said Yes" oleh penyair Malaysia Salleh Ben Joned, novel-novel *The Satanic Verses* oleh penulis India Salman Rushdie dan *Banquet of Lies* oleh pengarang Algerian Amin Zaoui. Kajian ini terletak pada kerangka teori sekularisasi yang lebih besar di mana saya meletakkan aspek metodologi-teoretikal penyelidikan dalam tanggapan yang disebut sebagai 'dialektik sekular'. Tanggapan ini memaparkan dinamik di antara hubungan Islam dan sekularisasi yang membuat pertikaian di sebalik pengkategorian dikotomi mereka. Sebaliknya, ia memperlihatkan proses mutualisme antara tradisi agama dan wacana sekular yang menghasilkan ide-ide alternatif tentang iman, etika dan identiti. Tanggapan ini dimodelkan dari konsep pascakolonialisme Homi K.Bhabha mengenai '*Third Space*' dan konsep sekular Charles Taylor mengenai '*cross-pressure*'. Konsep-konsep ini berkongsi pandangan tentang interaksi dialektik antara sistem budaya dan agama yang berbeza, dan khususnya, meletakkan konsep hibrid pascakolonialisme dalam kerangka sekular seperti dalam hal penulis-penulis terpilih yang dilahirkan dan dibesarkan di negara-negara Islam bukan Barat dimana pendedahan mereka kepada unsur sekular Barat menyumbang secara kritis terhadap wacana

dialektik. Oleh itu, analisis mengkaji pandangan dialektik penulis-penulis berdasarkan perspektif mereka tentang kemodenan Islam yang diambil daripada prosa bertulis mereka serta penyebaran estetik melalui dialektik dalam gambaran Nabi (saw) terhadap seksualiti. Kajian ini menyiasat bagaimana citraan Barat yang dominan mengenai Nabi (saw) terus berkekalan dalam karya-karya penulis Islam terpilih ini. Tanggapan 'dialektik sekular' menunjukkan bahawa ide seksual yang dikaitkan dengan Nabi (saw) diperbolehkan melalui proses kesatuan antara wacana agama dan sekular, tetapi pada asasnya proses tersebut didorong oleh sekularisasi Barat dengan demikian mempersoalkan karya-karya para penulis. Dengan menggunakan imej Nabi (saw) sebagai simbol dialektik, ia mengalakkan wacana Barat yang telah menguasai pemikiran tentang Islam dan Nabi (saw), mencadangkan kepuasan dalam wacana Barat untuk terus mencabar Islam dan identiti umat Islam dalam wacana moden dan secara tersirat semakin merumitkan imej Nabi Islam yang terakhir.

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I want to dedicate this work to the best: the best parents who have given me so much but have asked for very little and to whom I am forever indebted to. I hope you will accept this work and my prayers as tokens of my gratitude. To my best friend and husband, I love you. Thank you for refusing to see me give up and for bracing me in bright and shrivelled days. To the best of companions who cheered me relentlessly. To the best supervisory committee, including Associate Professor Dr. Zariat Bin Abdul Rani and Professor Ibrahim Zein, who at times had more faith in this work than I did and reminded me to be brave in my writing. And to the best supervisor who I am extraordinarily blessed to work with, Associate Professor Dr. Noritah Omar, whose prayers, help and support are beyond inestimable value and whose brilliance, honesty and courage I tried to model in every page.

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Lastly, to Allah (swt) who granted me the best and deserves the best from each and every different one of us.

Thank you, sincerely.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary comprises of the terms commonly used in this research. Some are translated based on standardised definition, but specific definitions and details are gathered from works by Alparslan Açikgenç in *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History and Islamic Science: Towards a Definition*, Tariq Ramadan's *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernities*, Ziauddin Sardar's *What do Muslims Believe*, Umm Abdurrahman Sakina Hirschfelder's *Who is Allah* and from *Islamqa.com* supervised by Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid.

Ahadeeth Plural of *hadeeth*.

Allah The linguistic root for the name 'Allah' is *ilâh*, which means deity. The prefix 'Al' means 'the' and if added in front of *ilâh* (*Al-Ilâh*) can be translated as 'The God'. The name 'Allah' (swt) shares the same linguistic root as *ilâh* but specifically, 'Allah' means He who Deserves and is Worthy of worship. The highest reverence and absolute obedience belongs to Him (swt) and to no other humans, objects or concepts. Muslims worship Allah (swt) with the fundamental belief of His Oneness, His Lordship, His names and attributes strictly based on what Allah (swt) has revealed about Himself in the Qur'an and to Prophet Muhammad (saw). Therefore, believing in Allah (swt) necessarily includes believing in the Qur'an and the Prophethood of Muhammad (saw) as they are connected to Him and His Revelation, while challenging these fundamentals suggests questioning His Majesty, Wisdom and Mercy that are beyond individual's rationality. Allah is Exalted, He is the Creator and high above His creations.

a.s This is a form of prayer that invokes God's peace. The prayer reads as '*alayhis-salam*' (abbreviated to 'a.s'), meaning 'peace be upon him/her'. In the Islamic tradition, this supplication is made whenever Allah's Angels, Prophets and honourable individuals in the Qur'an are mentioned such as Maryam (a.s), Sarah (a.s) and Aasiyah (a.s), with the exception of Prophet Muhammad (saw), which Muslims are commanded to give full salutation of peace and blessings.

Hadeeth The approvals, decisions, actions or sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad (saw), which was narrated by his companions or by those who witnessed it. These are recorded and compiled in text in the form of *hadith/hadeeth*. There is an academic field in the study of Islam called the 'Science of *Hadeeth*' responsible for differentiating an authentic or sound *hadeeth* from the weak. This requires many years of experience for *hadeeth* scholars to seek reports, examine, verify, discern any faults with the narrations and finally convey the report on the level of their authenticity, thus implying that Islam does not

encourage arbitrariness in belief, but rather, the *Sunnah* of the Messenger (saw) as well as the Qur'an invites an examination of materials other than the evidences they present.

Fatwa A ruling in the Islamic law issued by an expert in the field (i.e. a mufti).

Fiqh In Arabic, the literal meaning is 'to comprehend'. *Fiqh* is generally translated as Islamic jurisprudence and has become a science of studying Islamic laws or the *shari'a*. The scientific approach to learning *fiqh* is from the interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadeeth* that is derived solely from knowledge about the Revelation, since it is known that personal theories (*ra'y*) of the Revelation are not allowed. The interpretation must be derived from qualified research or knowledge of the divine sources, but the principles of reaching that certain knowledge is through the person's effort of understanding.

Ijtihad In Arabic, the literal meaning is 'exerting all one's energy' or 'making an effort'. In legal term, it refers to independent reasoning or for the jurists to endeavour to find a solution to legal questions based on the closest scrutiny of the Qur'anic text and the *hadeeth*.

Imam Person who leads the congregational prayers or generally referring to religious personalities.

Jibreel The Arabic name for Gabriel (a.s), the archangel who transmitted messages from Allah (swt) to Prophets that were chosen. In the Islamic tradition, it was Jibreel (a.s) who transmitted the verses of the Qur'an orally to Prophet Muhammad (saw). Believing in Jibreel (a.s) and in the Angels is a necessary condition for belief in Allah (swt) whereas questioning Jibreel's (a.s) and other Angels' existence and the perfection of their creation is a negation of belief in God all together.

Qur'an The speech or the word of God (*Kalamullah*) spoken to Angel Jibreel (a.s) and sent down to Prophet Muhammad (saw) to be revealed to mankind. Hence the letters, words and meanings were sent down, not created by any person. In this sense, the Qur'an is revealed; it is absolute and cannot be changed. The Qur'an is the primary source of Revelation other than the *Sunnah* of the Messenger (saw), and studying or interpreting them requires the methodology, which the Qur'an and *Sunnah* have accorded. The Qur'an is a sign and a miracle to mankind concerning the Oneness and the absolute Authority of Allah (swt). It is a book that contains knowledge of Allah (swt); His names and attributes, a book of guidance, reminders,

legislation, morals, narrations of past, present and future events and matters of the unseen.

r.a This is a form of prayer that reads as *radiya Allahu ‘anhu* (abbreviated to ‘r.a’) and translated as ‘may Allah be pleased with him’ or *radiya Allahu ‘anha* (may Allah be pleased with her). In the Islamic tradition, this prayer is typically supplicated for the family members or the companions of the Prophet (saw) who Allah (swt) is pleased with. The present study uses the full invocation on the first mention of the Prophet’s (saw) family or companions such as Ayesha (r.a) and Khadijah (r.a) and the abbreviation ‘r.a’ thereafter, with the exception of the literary referencing of these names in the selected text for analysis.

saw This is a form of prayer that invokes God’s blessings and peace upon Prophet Muhammad, which in Arabic reads as *Sall Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam* (abbreviated to ‘saw’) meaning ‘may God send blessings and peace upon him’ (Prophet Muhammad (saw)). The prayer is translated to English as ‘peace be upon him’ (abbreviated to ‘pbuh’). It is highly recommended for Muslims to send their prayers to the Prophet (saw) as prescribed in the Qur’an (*The Holy Qur’an* 33:56) when his name is mentioned in print and in speech as a sign of salutation and respect. This is a privilege bestowed only on Prophet Muhammad (saw) and no other person, and one of the rights that the Prophet (saw) has over Muslims (though the same prayer can be offered to previous Prophets such as Nuh (saw), Ibraheem (saw), Musa (saw) and Jesus (saw)). The present study uses the full salutation on the first mention of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and the abbreviation ‘saw’ thereafter, with the exception of the literary referencing of the Prophet in the selected text for analysis.

Shahadah Generally translated as the testimony of faith. The *Shahadah* in Arabic is declared by uttering the words: *Ash-hadu anla ilaha illa-Allah wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulallah*, translated to English as: I bear witness that there is no deity (none Worthy of worship) but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. The testimony is divided in two parts: the first is the absolute belief in Allah (swt), which implies love, faith and submission to the Creator, and by default, believing in the Qur’an that was sent down by Him and striving to attain that love by understanding and committing to the fundamentals and the rulings He prescribed. The second part—the belief in Muhammad (saw) as the slave and the chosen Messenger of God—means striving to follow his way, his teachings and practices that are reflective of the Revelation, and it was Muhammad (saw), the best of all men that was chosen to complete this mission. The declaration of the

Shahadah is a requirement for individuals who want to become Muslims.

Shari'a In Arabic, the literal meaning is 'the way', and more precisely 'the way which leads to a source'. The term is generally translated to Islamic law. The *shari'a* refers to divine Law revealed by God and can be studied in more detail from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Messenger (saw).

Sunnah The term *Sunnah* is used in reference to Prophet Muhammad's (saw) words, approvals, decisions, actions or affairs, and more generally, the guidance, the path, the way and the methodology attributed to the Prophet (saw). The *Sunnah* of the Messenger (saw) offers specific description of the principles, rulings and practises in Islam that are mentioned more generally in the Qur'an, such as the taking of ablutions or the five daily prayers. In this light, Muslim scholars argue that the *Sunnah* represents the mission of the Prophet (saw) to clearly convey the Message of the Qur'an and that it is an attribution of Prophethood. The *Sunnah* is recorded in print and in orality, which may vary in wording or context and which may give rise to differences of opinions among scholars in regard to theoretical and practical issues. However, these differences must not allow spaces for doubts or disputes about the validity of the *Sunnah* so to seek its irrelevance or to claim that it is not sufficient as evidence. The Qur'an states that no words of the Prophet (saw) are uttered on a subjective basis and that the Prophet's (saw) speech and actions are divinely guided (*The Holy Qur'an* 53:3-4). Thus, it is critical to establish that the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (saw) is one of the two forms of Revelation while the other is the Qur'an. Scholars use the term *Sunnah* to essentially refer to the most correct way of understanding, practicing and adhering to Islam without innovating or adding to the religion since the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Messenger (saw) are already complete.

swt The name of Allah in writing is proceeded with the abbreviation 'swt', which in Arabic reads as *Subhanahu wa ta'ala*, and translated to English as 'Glorious and Exalted is He'. In the Islamic tradition, Muslims utter the full salutation when Allah's (swt) name is invoked as a form of devotion and reverence toward God.

'*Ulama* The term *ulama* mentioned in the Qur'an refers to scholars related to knowledge of the Revelations (*The Holy Qur'an* 35:28), but contemporary Muslim scholars have used this term to include theologians, mathematicians, philosophers, scientists, astronomers and scholars from other branches in academia who have contributed to knowledge, as opposed to referring to them as just Muslim clerics.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In 2012, the Obedient Wives Club (OWC), a splinter organisation of the Malaysian non-mainstream Islamic sect Al-Arqam, successfully launched a twelve-day campaign entitled “Rasulullah Tokoh Seks Suci Islam” (“The Prophet: Islam’s Sacred Sex Figure”; my trans.).¹ The club had earlier caused outrage with the publication of a sex manual for married couples on how to approach ‘Islamic sex’ spiritually and physically, with Prophet Muhammad (saw) as main reference. In an interview, the chair of the OWC, Fauziah Ariffin, defended the club’s position and maintained that their intention was to bring Muslims back to the true path of the Prophet (saw), even if this involved exploring sensitive aspects of his sexual life (“Kempen Rasulullah”). Although the adherents of this particular group constitute a fraction of the Muslim community in Malaysia and do not necessarily represent mainstream Islamic practices, the campaign is nevertheless reminiscent of the sexual images linked to Prophet Muhammad (saw) in the works of Western writers.

Take for example John Donne’s erotic elegy entitled *His Mistress Going to Bed*. Donne describes a woman undressing for her lover and the anticipation of the man’s carnal desires. The male gaze, the nubile woman, and the promiscuity of the act capture the fantastical vision of the “heaven-like Mahomet’s paradise” (line 21). In *The True Nature of Imposture*, Humphrey Prideaux claims that Mahomet “embraced an indulgence to all Sensual Delights” (13), married out of self-interest (53) and alleges a secret affair with a Jewish man named Caab (103), and Alphonse de Lamartine’s *Vie de Mahomet* states that Mahomet was inclined to “sexual voluptuousness” (qtd. in Gunny 190), judging by his attitude towards women. Recent media has failed to escape this stereotype, with a sketch by Danish newspaper *Jylland-Posten* in 2005 captioned ‘Muhammed’ that illustrates a bearded turbaned male halting a queue of martyrs from entering paradise because “they ran out of virgins”². Later, in 2012, the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* released a series of caricatures including images of a lookalike Prophet posing in racy postures, one naked and one inviting for anal

¹ This is the literal translation from the original title *Rasulullah Tokoh Seks Suci Islam* in Malay. The aim of the campaign was to garner the public interest and explore the intimate life and traditions of the Prophet (saw). Since Muslims consider the life and the actions of the Prophet (saw) as sacred, the OWC argued that his sexual life should be regarded as sacred too. The public, however, did not receive the campaign too well, with Dr Mashitah Ibrahim from the Malaysian Prime Minister’s Department even claiming that OWC had disrespected the status of the Messenger (saw) by reducing him to a sexual figure (Adawiyah).

² This saying is part of the cartoon uttered by the bearded male. It has been translated from the original Dutch language to English.

intercourse. Early to more modern representations of the Prophet (saw) in the West show that the discourse of sexuality attributed to the Messenger (saw) is still very potent, but if one recall, the Muslim OWC's claims of the Prophet (saw) as a sexual figure contain unusual resemblances. This study then asks: How did this subject positioning come to be dialectically affirmed by Muslims themselves? Put differently, how did the representation of Prophet Muhammad (saw) by Muslims come to be analogous to that of Western writers?

In response to the questions posed above, this research attempts to investigate the more dominant discourse that has invited Western concepts and images of sexuality in relation to the last Prophet of Islam within the works of contemporary writers of Muslim descent. The selected works in this study include the poems "The Woman Who Said No" and "The Woman Who Said Yes," published in *Sacred and Profane* by Malaysian poet Salleh Ben Joned, the novel *The Satanic Verses* by Indian writer Salman Rushdie and the translated novel *Banquet of Lies* by Algerian author Amin Zaoui. Each of these works contains either direct manifestations or implicit references that identify with 'sexuality', mainly in regard to the Prophet's (saw) marital status and his marriage with Ayesha (r.a) since these are the more common Western criticisms aimed at the Prophet (saw). The idea of the sensual paradise that was claimed to be a concoction from Prophet Muhammad (saw) has attracted equal attention, but because the selected works mention little of it, I have excluded this idea from the working definition of 'sexuality' in this study.

Notwithstanding, the selected works draw upon familiar sexual ideas ascribed to Prophet Muhammad (saw) by the West, and this research intends to investigate the subtle context that may have influenced these writers to contribute to the Western discourse. What this research discovered is that there is a distinct connection between the writers' depictions of the Prophet (saw) and the notion of secularisation. At this stage, it might suffice to say that due to the predominance of the Western secular framework, an unscrupulous image of the Prophet (saw) has pervaded the works by the selected Muslim writers.

Since the central concept or image in the present study revolves around allegations of sexuality made against Prophet Muhammad (saw), perhaps it will be efficient to understand where this image first emerged, the possible motives behind it and the progression of this image in modern discourses. Beginning with the earliest recorded criticism about sexuality in reference to the Prophet (saw), which can be found in the works of Byzantine historian Theophanes Confessor and "whose life of the Prophet was destined to be widely used by later writers" (Grunebaum 43). Theophanes discusses Mahomet—the name by which medieval scholars usually referred to Muhammad (saw)—and the paradise he promised his followers. For those who kill or are killed by the enemy, Mahomet promised a hereafter full of "carnal (joys), carousing, drinking and embracing women. . . . women other than those they now had whose embrace would be long-lasting pleasure" (Grunebaum 45). Theophanes accuses Mahomet of too

many fancies, and “he [Mahomet] alleged other fables, immoral and foolish” (45). The idea of Mahomet’s sexual fantasies was then carried into medieval Christian polemical works that contain similar derogatory ideas about the Prophet (saw) and his traditions. For instance, the life of the Messenger (saw) as scripted in the brief biography of *Gesta* by Guibert of Nogent describes the law of Mahomet as a carnival form of faith in juxtaposition with Christianity. To Guibert, the law of Mahomet allows “libidinous sexual relations not only with numerous wives and consorts but also with beasts” (Tolan 146).

The medieval Christian attitude towards Islam was generally antagonistic and antithetical, supposing the West as more “celibate, ascetic, reflective, heroic, sacerdotal, and hierarchical” compared to Islam as “indulgent, lax, sensual, extrovert, and worldly” (Southern 5). Much emphasis was laid on the moral laxity in Islam especially in sexual relationships, which Mahomet was often blamed for because it was thought that Mahomet’s laws licensed polygamy to both men and women (Daniel, *Islam and the West* 147), he made permissive the practice of divorce in Islam and propagated a sensual idea of Paradise immersed in material and bodily indulgence (Daniel, *Islam and the West* 36). But many of these arguments failed to differentiate the law from the lawmaker and it was often mistaken that Mahomet was the one who authorised and established Islamic jurisprudence. According to medieval historian Norman Daniel, the emphasis on Mahomet’s lewdness, or in large, the sexual discourse in Islam were primarily “Christian propaganda” (*Islam and the West* 271) to reduce the Prophet’s (saw) status as a moral figure (72); however, there is a more critical observation here. Daniel argues that the Prophet’s (saw) morality was inveighed then because, fundamentally, “the Christians would not accept that the Quran was truly revealed” (*The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe* 231). The question of ‘sexuality’ in relation to the Prophet (saw) that initially began as a theological issue and which was originally intended for the Christian audience, henceforth survived to become “an established canon” (Daniel, *Islam and the West* 271) in works by Western writers.

What then started as theological conflict was exacerbated to territorial wars over the years between the East and West. When Roman Christendom in Constantinople fell to the Muslim Ottoman Empire in 1453, the loss provoked implicit fear and loathing of the Prophet (saw), which had been harboured since the medieval era. The Prophet (saw) continued to appear in Western works as a licentious and lustful leader such as in John Cartwright’s *The Preacher’s Travels* that relates the Persians and their acts of “monstrous impiety” (115) back to Muhammad.³ He describes Muhammad’s practices as “indulgent to perjury, giving leave to have as many wives as a man will, to couple themselves not only with one of the same sex, but with brute beasts also” (124). In Orientalist

³ Associate Professor Dr. Noritah Omar and I have published an article concerning the sexual connotations associated to the Prophet (saw) in Orientalist travelogues. See “References of Sexuality in Relation to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in 17th-19th Century Selected French and English Orientalist Travelogues” published in *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies*, vol. 1, No. 4, Oct. 2017, pp. 68-82.

literature, the idea of the 'sexual prophet' became an allusion to the more curious and sensationalised tropes of the harem, slavery and the Mahometan Paradise. Lord Byron's *The Giaour* references the paradise when the giaour ascends to the heavens after he revenges the murderer of his beloved Leila. In paradise, the maids await: "Impatient to their halls invite, / And the dark Heaven of Houris's eyes / On him shall glance for ever bright; / They come their kerchiefs green they wave, / And welcome with a kiss the brave!" (line 738-743). The *houris*, or the maidens of paradise, were thought to be the virgins, whose embraces Theophanes states, "would be long-lasting and of enduring pleasure" (Grunebaum 45). Though these sexual images took on more exotic forms in portraying 'the Other' Orient, they nonetheless remind of the atavistic medieval concept of the lewd Prophet of Islam.

Not much of the Western narrative of the Prophet (saw) has changed in contemporary times. *Au contraire*, popular writers and politicians have called the Prophet (saw) a pervert⁴ and a paedophile⁵ based on his marital life and his nuptials with Ayesha (r.a), which have become the more common lens in which Prophet Muhammad's (saw) characteristic and his leadership are evaluated.

This study brings to attention the problematic nature of writing about the Prophet (saw) in works of contemporary writers of Muslim descent depicting similar populist ideas of sexuality found in Western works. The challenge is to locate the current dominating discourse that has infiltrated the Muslim framework and which continues to shape and influence ideas of the Prophet's (saw) intimate life. This study argues that the underlying discourse has distinct connections to secularisation. Given the large debate surrounding the secularisation discourse, I find it necessary here to provide an overview of the main theoretical framework before introducing the notion of the 'secular dialectic' within the dialogue of Islam and secularisation.

Over the course of years, secularisation theory has developed different premises and concepts to study the religious conditions of modern times. Scholars have disputed about the veracity of the theory because from a definitional point of view, the exact meaning of 'secularisation' is still undecided; scholars have only conceptualised in generic terms what the word 'secular' refers to. Hence, generically, they argue that the 'secular' is attributed to the marginalisation of religion from social institutions and the public sphere in the Western context. The Church was once the central political authority, but its power gradually diminished when sciences and philosophies during the Enlightenment era began

⁴ Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali made this claim in an interview with Gerald Traufetter for Spiegel Online. See <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-ayaan-hirsi-ali-everyone-is-afraid-to-criticize-islam-a-399263.html>.

⁵ The leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders describes the Prophet Muhammad (saw) as an "insane, paedophile, rapist murder." England's *The Telegraph* newspaper published an article on this claim. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/netherlands/8419643/Geert-Wilders-steps-up-anti-Islam-rhetoric.html>.

to receive more public interest. Brown et al. explain that secularism targets two objectives: on one hand, it aims to supplant “the religious, the ideal, the unreal, the speculative and the divine” (13) with “the rational, material, real, scientific, and human” (13); on the other, it aspires for individual freedom, to be “free from all forms of coercion, including those potentially entailed in religion, commerce, love, belief, and comportment” (15). Based on these arguments, secularisation can be understood as a process that leads to an empirical and liberal world, whereas religion aims for a hierarchical authority built on the belief in the sublime. Thus, religion and secularisation have always been framed to contradict each other, where if one ascends, the other will decline. Earlier scholars of secularisation were convinced by this paradigm and admitted to a view where religion will finally disappear in modernity.

This argument, more commonly referred to as the ‘decline of faith’ idea, has been heavily criticised since research has failed to prove the receding movements of religious activities in modern societies. Contrasting with these findings, current studies have given evidences for an increase in religious presencing that is perhaps not as apparent in the West as it is noticeable worldwide. Sociologist José Casanova’s *Public Religions in the Modern World* offers one of the most contributive insights to the paradigm shift. Through events such as the Iranian Revolution and the growth of Pentecostalism in South America, Casanova argues that the concept of the ‘privitisation’ of religion can no longer describe the current state of religion; instead he proposes the idea of the ‘deprivitisation’ of religion. Simply put, religion has not disappeared. Its presence still thrives in modernity.

An increasing number of scholars have supported this view: Talal Asad, David Martin and Vincent Pecora, to name a few, have refined some of the earlier ideas concerning the relationship between religion and the secular. Their works, overall, have established two critical advances in the secularisation discourse. Firstly, they contest the previous assumption of a religious decline by arguing beyond the opposition of the religious and secular categories. In other words, they argue that the relationship between religion and the secular is dependant, inseparable and dialectical, whereby the presence of both categories is required for each to prosper in modernity. These scholars have also extended the theory to include the developments of secular patterns in religions around the world. They argue that it is impossible to ignore the immense impact of globalisation in the spread of secular influences within the global framework. This does not mean that secular processes elsewhere need to imitate Western secular history, but they evolve according to their cultural and religious contexts. These arguments have not only given the theory a contemporary outlook but they offer different dynamics to the secularisation discourse that resist oversimplifying and overgeneralising the relationship between religion and secularisation in the modern age.

What I have discussed above essentially relates to the debate between the classical/traditional and contemporary premise of the secularisation discourse, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. In adopting the more contemporary perspective, this research observes that even Muslim scholars have argued beyond the linear narrative of secularisation and urged for a dialectical line of thinking that can possibly bridge the differences in politics and ethics between Islam and the secular framework; they claim that religion and the secular do not function in dichotomy, and instead, considers the dialectic as a viable and alternative process in building the relationship between Islam and secularisation.

Yet, early Muslim intellectuals had never considered Islam and secularisation to function as one category. The Enlightenment era in the West that succeeded to exclude religion from sciences and empirical knowledge and which has become the reference point of secular progress in Western history does not have equal historical significance in the Islamic discourse. The progressive era in Islam that was exemplified as early as in the revelation of the Qur'an during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (saw) viewed no possible contradiction between religion and science, but rather, religion became central to the progression of knowledge. The centrality of religion in the Islamic tradition as opposed to the marginalisation of religion associated to the 'Enlightenment' in the West does not reflect the same history of what Western academicians have labelled 'secular', 'medieval', 'Enlightenment' or 'modern' (Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy* xxiii).

The other form of opposition between Islam and secularisation is suggested in the term 'secular' itself, which is essentially Eurocentric and singular. The embedded division between 'modern' and 'premodern'; religion and modernity in the term 'secular' argues that because Muslims are committed to divine law over human law, they will reject the idea of secularisation all together (Marranci 2). Another view, according to Brown et al., states that since the term 'secular' is derived from the West, its definition suggests "an imagined opposite in Islam and as such, veils the religious shape and content of Western public life and its imperial designs" (10). By extension of this argument, academician Azzam Tamimi explains that the word 'secularism' does not appear in the Arabic language⁶ and argues that the term and its related concepts have been "used in different contexts to describe a process aimed at the marginalisation of Islam, or its exclusion from the process of re-structuring society" (13). The dialogue between Islam and secularisation, as it seems, failed to move beyond the methodological implication of the West and 'the Other', and as such, they have assumed opposite positions with few attempts by Western and Muslim scholars to explore shifting frameworks that can put Islam and secularisation in concomitancy.

⁶ The language Muslims believe was chosen by God in delivering the message of the Qur'an. See *The Holy Quran* 12:2.

However, this research is aware that there have been an increasing number of Muslim scholars and writers who argue for coexistence between Islam and the secular discourse. The process of mutuality between religious traditionalism and secularisation can be generally understood as the 'dialectic', and often, the issues that trigger the dialectical thinking in the Muslim discourse revolve around ethical matters. With rising influences from Western democracy and humanitarian politics, Muslim intellectuals have shown concern with the applicability of the Islamic *shari'a* and urge for a modern contextualisation of Islamic laws. Works such as by Muslim scholar and human rights activist Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im⁷, call for compromise in Islam on the level of jurisprudence to democratic politics, while on the other extreme, Muslim figures such as Irshad Manji⁸ insist on a complete revision in the traditional interpretation of the Revelations—the Qur'an and the *ahadeeth* of the Prophet (saw)—in preference for a rational and individualist framework. In large part, the dialogue of Islam and secularisation not only introduces the concept of the dialectic but different dynamics in the dialectical thinking of Muslim intellectuals, writers and public figures. I have identified these nuances by three separate trajectories, which can be referred to as the 'passive', 'negotiative' and the 'extreme' dialectics. I pursue this discussion in the Literature Review, but it is critical to note that the last two trajectories in particular are mostly projected in the aesthetics and in the dialectical thoughts of the selected writers.

Among the three selected writers, there is a distinguishing trait that sets them apart. This study argues that a contributing aspect of Salleh's, Rushdie's and Zaoui's dialectical thinking can be ascribed to the conditions of hybridity, meaning that these writers were raised in both East and West and in Western and non-Western cultures. The cultural shifts between local traditions and secular environments are inclined to problematise the writers' religious and cultural positions and identities, by which they have responded through the dialectic.

Within the dialectical space, these writers argue that Islam and secular modernity can coalesce; they see the possibility of a negotiation, a type of merging between religious traditionalism and secular values where alternative ideas about ethics and identity can be created. Equally, they attempt to generate a space where the secular and the sacred operate alongside each other; where they do not function in opposite but in apposite, not in collision but in collusion and not by replacements but by displacements. Other scholars have identified a concept similar to the dialectic in the secular framework, but they address it differently: Homi K. Bhabha, for example, describes the dialectic as "going beyond" where "newness" is created ('The Third Space' 5), Charles Taylor refers to it as the "middle realm" (*Secular Age* 360) and Manav Ratti calls the fusion

⁷ I explore more of An-Naim's dialectical position in Chapter 2. See pg. 92.

⁸ Irshad Manji is a Canadian Muslim author whose works include *The Trouble with Islam Today* and *Allah, Liberty and Love*, which was initially banned in Malaysia. She is a firm critic of the Islamic tradition and its interpretation of the Qur'an. I explore more of Manji's dialectical position in the dialogue of Islam and secularisation. See pg.95.

between religion and the secular a “brave new imagination” (18). In this study, this process is referred to as the notion of the ‘secular dialectic’, and I use this concept to analyse the sexual depictions regarding Prophet Muhammad (saw) through the selected writers’ dialectical ideas of Islam.

A large portion of this study is dedicated to conceptualising the ‘secular dialectic’. The notion itself is modelled after Bhabha’s postcolonial concept of ‘Third Space’ in his work *The Location of Culture* and Taylor’s phenomenological concept of ‘cross-pressure’ in *The Secular Age*. Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’ helps to situate individuals with hybrid conditions, whereas Taylor’s ‘cross-pressure’ describes a phase in Western secular history called the ‘middle realm’ where individuals were in a quandary between their commitments to the Divine and the material world. Bhabha’s and Taylor’s concepts enjoin a common view of an existing dialectical interaction between different cultures and belief systems. More importantly, they help to locate postcolonial hybridity within the secular framework such as in the case of the selected writers who were born and raised in non-Western Muslim countries and whose exposures to the secular West help advance their dialectical views.

Given the significant effects of cultural mobilisation to the dialectical discourse and the Muslim identity, this study argues that a textual evaluation of literary devices is not sufficient to understand how the selected Muslim writers develop their dialectical thinking, but their individual upraising and perspectives on Islam are imperative to the construction of the dialectic. For this reason, the methodological theoretical aspect of this study necessitates an assessment of each selected writers’ thoughts and attitudes toward Islam in modernity that can be accessed through interviews, essays and newspaper articles. By combining both prose and textual examinations in the analysis, what is divulged is a shared narrative of religious and social ostracism due to the writers’ dialectical ideas of Islam. All three selected writers have been labelled ‘apostates’ of the religion, their works stigmatised as blasphemy and their professional careers marginalised from the local aesthetic spheres. One of their most controversial works involves the depictions of sexuality attached to Prophet Muhammad (saw), which presents an example of the dialectical concept in their attempt to unite Islam and secularisation, and which this study further explores.

This research explores how Muslims respond to the question of locating Islam and their Muslim identity in the bigger framework of secularisation. It examines the various aesthetic techniques the selected writers employ to convey the dialectical concept between Islam and secularisation in their literature and how the Prophet (saw) becomes a symbol of their dialectical thoughts. Most crucially, this study examines the dominance of the Western discourse that persistently shapes ideas about the Prophet (saw), which has influenced Muslim writers to perpetuate similar ideas. The images of Prophet Muhammad (saw) immersed in sexual desires and carnal indulgence in the selected texts are not only evocative of the medieval narrative of the lustful Prophet, but in the context of

secularisation, it represents a product of dialectical thought driven by a heavier commitment to the secular ideals of aesthetic and individual freedom. The study is written from the perspective of a Muslim writer and researcher, and I argue that the selected Muslim writers have inadvertently contributed to the Western discourse on Prophet Muhammad (saw).

I begin this research with definitions of several key terms. Since the focus is on secularisation in the context of Islam and Muslims, the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims' are explained below.

1.1.1 Islam and Muslims

Though the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims' are interrelated, they can be confused to mean the same thing. This section offers a terse theological review as pre-empt to understand the significance of Prophet Muhammad's (saw) position in Islam, in addition to highlighting the dynamics that constitute the term 'Muslims'. Here, I draw attention to the myriads of Muslims in respect to cultures, sects and racial heterogeneity so as to specify that the selection of writers who are considered 'Muslims' in this study correspond to this plurality. In fact, they are selected based on this plurality and not for their piety. Further clarification on the statement 'writers of Muslim descent' is offered under Limitations of the Study (section 1.5), but first, the word 'Islam' is delineated below.

The term 'Islam' in Arabic means submission, obedience to commands without objection, sincerity in the worshiping of Allah (swt) alone, belief in His words and His legislations and having faith in Him ("Meaning of the word Islam"). 'Islam' is the name of the religion revealed by Allah (swt) in the Qur'an for the whole of mankind, as recited in the verse: "This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (*Holy Quran* 5:3). The belief in this religion must include obeying all the chosen Prophets and Messengers until Prophet Muhammad (saw) who finalised their mission in the teaching and spreading of *tawheed* (roughly translated as the Oneness of Allah (swt)). Thus the path of Islam is only confined to what was sent down in the Qur'an by Allah (swt) and through the Prophet (saw). These are the two complete Divine sources of Islamic knowledge with their purpose to guide individuals in all aspects of life. These elements embody "the essence[s] of faith" (Sardar 3) affirmed in the pronouncement of the *Shahadah*, which is the declaration that, 'there is no God (none Worthy of worship) but Allah; and Muhammad is the slave and the Messenger of Allah' (1).

Dr. Muhammad ibn 'Abd-Allaah ibn Saalih al-Suhaym adds an insightful point about the term 'Islam'. According to him, other religions are named after a specific man or a group of people. For instance, Christianity is named after Christ, Buddhism from the founder, the Buddha, and Judaism from the tribe

known as Yehudah (Judah). 'Islam' is the only name of a religion that has no association or attribution to a place, people or figure, but the term is derived from the meaning of the word 'Islam' that namely denotes submission. This indicates several aspects: that the religion was not founded or established by a specific individual and neither is it revealed to a specific audience. Instead, Islam accepts plurality; it is for every individual who submits to the meanings and attributes of 'Islam', and accordingly, those who submit with no defiance in their hearts in the belief of Allah (swt) and all His names and attributes, and in the Prophethood of Muhammad (saw), are called 'Muslims' ("Meaning of the word Islam").

Muslims are universally united by the declaration of the *Shahadah*. The population extends across borders into miscellaneous socio-political and cultural settings that may impact religious thoughts, practices and even their belief.

According to the Pew Research Center on the demography of Muslims around the world in the 21st century, Islam ranks as the second biggest religion after Christianity, and it is currently the fastest growing religion in the world. Indonesia has the highest population of Muslims, and while the majority come from the Asia-Pacific region, i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Malaysia, fewer are settled in the Middle East and in the North Africa region (Lipka "Muslims and Islam").

In the wider spectrum, Muslims around the world form a gamut of cultural and racial diversity, thus an overgeneralisation of Muslims into one single identity is not possible. In relation to the selected Muslim writers, this study argues that each socio-cultural, political and even familial context is a critical aspect that influences their dialectical thinking. Another common factor they share is in their representations of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his personal married life, which merges as the central focus of this research.

1.1.2 Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his Marital Relationships

Prophet Muhammad (saw) is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood figures in history for non-Muslims and Muslims in general. British scholar on comparative religion, Karen Armstrong argues that one reason why writers are misled by the medieval framing of Muhammad (saw) as a heretical, barbaric and sexual man is that little effort is given to investigating the Prophet's (saw) life (20). Not only is there a lack of understanding about his history, but his characteristics and the full extent of his achievements are equally misunderstood (20). Lesley Hazleton, in her biography of Muhammad (saw), is then correct to ask: "Why him? Why Muhammad, in the seventh century, in Arabia?" (18).

Before discussing the Prophet's (saw) marriages or issues that the West perceive as controversial in regard to his intimate life, it is better to begin by first situating the Messenger (saw) in his socio-historical context. By no means does this grant a detailed history of the Prophet (saw), but it will lead into the topic of his marriages. The conditions following Muhammad's (saw) Prophethood and several of his prominent characteristics are briefly presented before exploring the debate about his marital relationships and his nuptials with Ayesha (r.a). Works by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars are referenced for a more balanced assessment of the Prophet's (saw) life and in acknowledgement of the sentimental value Muslims hold in respect to their Prophet and Messenger.

Muhammad bin Abdullah (saw), the last Prophet of Islam, was born and raised in the most renowned city of Arabia, Mecca, under challenging conditions: the city was short of a government, the land was filled with traditions of buried daughters and tribal warfare, the social system overtly honoured the rich and exploited the slaves and the poor, prostitution among men and women was rampant and the marriage institution (or the lack thereof) practiced unrestricted polygamy. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba explains that in a polygamous relationship, ten spouses or more if desired was culturally acceptable (188).

Yet, Mecca was a thriving economic hub. In the heart of the city was a structure called the Kaa'ba, which was the site considered holy to locals and foreigners. Every year, an influx of pilgrims would travel from afar to worship their gods represented by the more than three hundred statues of deities surrounding the structure. Traditions narrate that for rituals, the pilgrims would circumambulate the Kaa'bah and they did so naked, singing and clapping in homage to their Gods.

At its worst, Mecca was a society immersed in idolatry and ignorance.

Muhammad (saw) stood in stark contrast against the nebulous social and moral conditions of his time. He belonged to the lineage of Hashmi, named after his great grandfather, Hashim. Since the majority of the Quraysh (the ruling tribe) were merchants, Hashim was in charge of arranging trade journeys for them (Mubarakpuri 17-18). The progeny of Hashim was also responsible for hosting the pilgrims of the Kaa'ba by preparing food and drinks (18). Business and generosity were therefore two qualities Muhammad (saw) inherited, but though he was a merchant and from a noble tribe, wealth was scarce. His parents died when he was still a tender age and was fostered by his relatives who themselves had little to spend. He grew up as a shepherd then a merchant while continuing to support the cause of the poor and the orphans. He was different in the most honest and charitable ways that even the society developed a liking for this young man, so much that they proffered him the title *Al-Amin*, or the trustworthy; if there was a man among them who held his promises and did not lie, it was him, Muhammad (saw).

Muhammad (saw) later married Khadijah (r.a) in what would be considered a non-conventional marriage for many reasons. She was fifteen years his senior, a thriving business woman and was the first who approached and proposed to him, showing that age and social caste did not seem to be a problem for Khadijah (r.a). Furthermore, they raised four daughters, which was a rare practice in a culture that heavily practiced female infanticide, and in a culture where polygamy among men and women was common, Muhammad (saw) and Khadijah (r.a) remained together for twenty-five years, until she died in her relentless support for her husband and his cause during the Quraysh boycott against the Muslims.

Muhammad (saw) was also different for practicing yet another unusual tradition. He was a monotheist. Following the legacy of previous Prophets, he believed that there was only one God and this continued well into his Prophethood.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) received the first revelation from the Qur'an in these tumultuous socio-political and religious landscapes. Allah (swt) states in the Qur'an that Prophet Muhammad (saw) was chosen as the last Prophet and Messenger of Islam, a bringer of glad tidings, a witness and a warner, as recited in the verses: "Muhammad (saw) is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the last (end) of the Prophets. And Allah is Ever All-Aware of everything" (*Holy Quran* 33:40) and "O Prophet (Muhammad saw)! Verily, We have sent you as witness, and a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner (*Holy Quran* 33:45). Prophet Muhammad (saw) was sent to teach and spread the Revelation of the Qur'an to people who were only accustomed to their own traditions. In other words, they were not prepared to change. The Qur'an informs that the anti-sentiments against the Prophet (saw) were neither because of his characteristics nor his Prophethood since society admired him, but it was the revelation which they could not accept (*The Holy Quran* 6:33).

The leader of the Quraysh, Abu Sufyan, who was a relative of the Prophet (saw) and one of his sternest nemeses before he accepted Islam, admitted that there was nothing to doubt about Muhammad's (saw) Prophethood: Muhammad (saw) is not a king, he has no ties to kingships but he belongs to a noble family. He never tells lies and never breaks his promises, which are all the traits of previous Prophets. The majority of his followers are poor but they never betray their new faith, rather, they have only increased in number. Abu Sufyan informed that the Prophet's (saw) message is only that people worship One God called Allah and not to place anything greater or equal to Him, to perform prayers, to speak the truth, to be chaste and keep good relations with family and relatives (Al-Bukhari).⁹

⁹ These characteristics are informed in a *sahih* (authentic) *hadith* narrated by Abdullah Bin 'Abbas and compiled by Bukhari. See *sunnah.com* under the Book of Revelation, hadith no.6.

The Prophethood of Muhammad (saw) spanned in the course of twenty-three years. Armstrong argues that the Prophet (saw) was there “to change people’s hearts and minds” (19). The Arabian Peninsula needed an immense reform and it was through Muhammad (saw) that such reform was “humanly possible” (Hazleton 20). Hazleton claims that it is precisely because Muhammad (saw) is human, that his actual life befits the word “legendary” (20).

Given the calibre of his achievements, Muslim scholars find little need to entertain discussions on moral issues in his marriage. For example, Professor Nasser Al-Taei observes that in the famous biography entitled *Al-sira Al Nabawwiyah* by Ibn Hisham, the writer reserves a little more than four pages to discuss the Prophet’s (saw) wives. Ibn Hisham provides glimpses into the wives’ backgrounds and offers short commentaries on the circumstances of his marriages before discussing the Prophet’s (saw) death. Al-Taei argues that this does not “minimize the importance” (48) of the Prophet’s (saw) intimate relationships but in the Islamic tradition, such issues are not important; there are other matters and events in the life of the Prophet (saw) that identify more with his characteristics and Prophethood.

Albeit little interest on the Prophet’s (saw) marriage, this subject has become the narrow lens from which the Western discourse has evaluated his characteristics. In examining biographies of Muhammad (saw) by non-Muslim writers, Kecia Ali claims that for the most part of the twentieth century, “monogamy and polygamy were the poles that defined Muhammad’s marital conduct and therefore character” (*The Lives of Muhammad* 138). It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the focus shifted to the Prophet’s (saw) marriage with Ayesha (r.a) (Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* 133).

Critics often question the Prophet’s (saw) motives behind his multiple marriages. His monogamous relationship with Khadijah (r.a) is described less aggressively compared to other marriages that are attributed to “pity, protection, or politics” (Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* 138). Contemporary Muslim scholar Omar Suleiman, however, offers a different perspective on the subject of polygamy. He explains that before Muhammad (saw) became a Prophet, other Prophets, cultures and nations were allowed to marry an unlimited number of wives. Islam was the first religion to restrict the number of wives to four. Although Islam allows polygyny, the Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet (saw) do not commend it, and instead, the reward is stressed on marrying widows, female orphans and captives whose husbands have been martyred for the intention of taking care of them. The Qur’an admonishes that if marrying another woman is burdensome, then the husband should remain exclusively with one (Bayyinah Institute).

Contemporary Western scholars of Islam have also attempted to respond to the debate. John L. Esposito argues the Prophet’s (saw) marriages in light of ethics. He explains that after the death of his first wife Khadijah (r.a):

Muhammad started to contract other marriages, all but one of them to widows. As was customary for Arab chiefs, some of these marriages were contracted to cement political alliances. Others were marriages to wives of his companions who had fallen in combat, women who were in need of protection. Remarriage for widows was difficult in a society that placed a high value on a bride's virginity. However, talk of the political and social motives behind many of Muhammad's marriages should not obscure the fact that Muhammad was attracted to and enjoyed the company of women as friends as well as spouses. His life reflects the Islamic outlook on marriage and sexuality, found in both revelation and Prophetic traditions, which emphasizes the importance of family and views sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed within the bonds of marriage. (*What Everyone Needs to Know* 14-15)

Esposito identifies a balance between socio-political reasons and the general admiration and love of women's company in the Prophet's (saw) attitude towards marriage. While the ethical aspects involve observing responsibilities for the women and upholding family values, loving the spouse and being sexually open with them in matrimony are critical to understanding how the Prophet (saw) treated his wives.

As for the age difference between the Prophet (saw) and Ayesha (r.a) when he married her, Islamic scholars frequently argue on the basis of revelation above culture ("The reason why the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) married 'Aa'ishah"). But Armstrong opines a political and cultural view. She argues:

There was no impropriety in Muhammad's betrothal to 'A'isha. Marriages conducted in absentia to seal an alliance were often contracted at this time between adults and minors who were even younger than 'A'isha. This practice continued in Europe well into the early modern period. There was no question of consummating the marriage until 'A'isha reached puberty, when she would have been married off like any other girl. Muhammad's marriage usually had a political aim. He was starting to establish an entirely different kind of clan, based on ideology rather than kinship, but the blood tie was still a sacred value and helped to cement this experimental community. (105)

The tradition of wedding minors was not only an Arabic custom, but Armstrong observes that the practice existed in Europe and proceeded "well into the early modern period" (105). Apart from culture, politics and familial allegiance also inform about the Prophet's (saw) decision to marry Ayesha (r.a). Overall, Armstrong and Esposito agree that Muhammad's humanity towards women and his leadership are reflective of his marital life.

In *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, Esposito attests that “[f]or Islam, no aspect of life is outside the realm of religion” (11), and for the same reason, “Muslims look to Muhammad’s example for guidance in all aspects of life” (11). Generally, Muslims’ faith and respect for Prophet Muhammad (saw) extend beyond his achievements. Muhammad’s (saw) unrelenting faith in God and his untiring sacrifices are unforgotten. The Prophet (saw) bled, teared, tired and lost for a religion he believed in and the followers he stood up for. As a husband to his wives, as a father to his children, as a leader and friend to his people, as a businessman to his partners and as a slave of God, Muhammad (saw) remains a timeless and universal model for Muslims around the world. Ernst explains that it is of no wonder, then, “[w]hen Christians refer to Muhammad as a fraud and worse, it is extremely hurtful to Muslims because of the deep affection and reverence in which they hold him” (15).

It is equally confusing when the Prophet (saw) is described as nothing more than a sexual man by Western critics. Even till today, the issue of ‘sexuality’ linked to the Prophet’s (saw) image has driven countless criticisms and questions about Islam and Muhammad’s (saw) tradition.

But what exactly does ‘sexuality’ refer to? The next section offers the working definition of ‘sexuality’ as applied in this study.

1.1.3 Sexuality

This study uses the term ‘sexuality’ in relation to Prophet Muhammad (saw) with regard to how the word has been made provocative in the Western discourse, especially in reference to the Prophet’s (saw) marital relationships. Earlier in the Introduction, I mentioned that the affairs surrounding the Prophet’s (saw) multiple marriages and especially with Ayesha (r.a) have attracted a lot of criticisms among Western critics. Based on the historical religious polemic against Islam, matters of ‘sexuality’ were constantly under attack on theological and ethical grounds in order to refute the veracity of the Qur’an and to inveigh against the merit of the Prophet (saw) as a moral figure. What is critical here is that the idea of ‘sexuality’ attached to the name of the Prophet (saw) represents a Western-constructed terminology born from the Western medieval historical polemical context, which Western critics still refer to today.

On the other hand, the word ‘sexuality’ is not recognised in the linguistic or in the historical frameworks of Islam. Muslim scholars who have studied the life of the Prophet (saw) use this term instead to deliberate on jurisprudence matters such as the legal terms of marriages or issues of individual cleanliness. Akande offers a clear explanation of how Muslims apply this term. He states that “sexuality, like all aspects of human life, is a religious matter that is regulated by the Sacred Law (Shari’a). . . . the sacred law is a legal and ethical framework

governing creed, behaviour and etiquette” (Akande 4). In the context of the Prophet’s (saw) marriage, issues of *haram* (forbidden) and *halal* (permissible) as well as *mandub* (recommended) and *makruh* (reprehensible) are brought to light (Akande 4).

To relate the term back to the present study, this research examines the ‘sexuality’ of Prophet Muhammad (saw) based on how Western critics have spread derogatory ideas concerning the Prophet’s (saw) marriage. I explore the depictions of ‘sexuality’ in relation to the Prophet (saw) within the selected texts with the aim of investigating the question of the predominance of discourse that has complicated the narrative of the Prophet (saw) and how the selected Muslim writers, have to an extent, contributed to the narrative of ‘sexuality’ in their works. As such, this study uses the term ‘sexuality’ in reference to the Western-dominated term, and furthermore, its use throughout this article will reflect this populist approach and does by no means advocate the notion that Prophet Muhammad (saw) is sexual.

1.1.4 Secular, Secularisation, Secularism, Secularity

This research is located in the bigger theoretical framework of secularisation, but the terms ‘secular’, ‘secularism’ and ‘secularity’ are also referred to in this study. These terms are related even though they are used “very differently in various academic-disciplinary and sociopolitical and cultural contexts” (Casanova, “The Secular and Secularisms” 1049). Instead of providing fixed definitions for each concept, I find it more applicable to differentiate their trajectories since scholars have yet to determine exact definitions for these terms (Martin, *General Theory* 7-8). In regard to the word ‘secularisation’, I reference Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* to offer the analytical distinction, but not without taking into account the limitations of his work. Cox was a strong supporter of Weber’s dichotomous view of religion and the secular, meaning that Cox advocated an absolute secular worldview that rejected religious presencing in modernity. However, in recent works, Cox admits that his views have shifted and a complete secularisation of the world is not possible after all (Cox and Ikeda, “The Persistence of Religion” vii). Despite the change in premise, Cox’s definition of ‘secularisation’ presents critical insights to the discourse, which will help provide for the definitions to the concept ‘secularisation’, while more discussion on the linguistic, historical and social developments of ‘secularisation’ are provided in the Literature Review.

This section commences with the etymological definition of the term ‘secular’ to mark on several built-in paradigms into the notion of ‘secularisation’, proceeding with brief explanations of the terms ‘secularism’ and ‘secularity’.

I refer to Casanova, who describes the 'secular' as a "central modern epistemic category" ("The Secular and Secularisms" 1049). 'Secular' is a general concept "to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from 'the religious'" (1049). An immediate implication of the 'secular' from this description is that the 'secular' concept is connected to 'religion', indicating that its emergence and progression occurs vis-à-vis religious existence.

A common link identified among scholars is between the origins of the 'secular' with Western Christianity. Cox explained that the 'secular' derives from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning "this age" (*The Secular City* 18), and the word *mundus*, meaning 'world'. Both of these ideas were inculcated in medieval Christianity. He explained:

Saeculum is a time word, used frequently to translate the Greek word *aeon*, which also means age or epoch. *Mundus*, on the other hand is a space-word, used most frequently to translate the Greek word *cosmos*, meaning the universe or the created order . . . It traces back to the crucial difference between the Greek spatial view of reality and the Hebrew time view. For the Greeks, the world was a place, a location . . . For the Hebrews, on the other hand, the world was *essentially* history, a series of events beginning with Creation and heading towards a Consummation. Thus the Greeks perceived existence spatially, the Hebrews perceived it temporally. The tension between the two has plagued Christian theology since its outset. (18)

There is a dual concept in the term *saeculum*, one for which the emphasis is the Hebrew's worldview of spatial (space) and the other is the Greek view of temporal (time) in relation to the question of existence. Understanding that these ideas presented opposing perspectives of existence in the Bible, medieval Christianity later infused them into their doctrine, but by doing so, it created another set of problematic notions. The merging of time and space in the philosophy of life essentially claims that meanings of existence can only be captured in the present time and within a specific context. Because time and space are constantly altering, the meanings of life can be altered too.

This argument motivates two ideas about the 'secular'. The first is that the concept of the 'secular' is inherently a Western-constructed discourse stemmed from an unresolved theological difference in Christianity. Secondly, that the 'secular' enabled the idea of moral relativism, which is a state where morals, truth and knowledge do not have a universal or absolute place. In this context, even religion cannot reveal the absolute truth, making it possible to question the reliability of religious systems and its absolute authority. With this implication, the 'secular' process eventually led to a "liberating development" (Cox, *The Secular City* 20) in politics, society and for individuals from the orders of religion.

Cox identified the liberating aspect of the 'secular' in the term 'secularisation'. There are critical ideas in Cox's argument regarding the concept of secularisation, which deserve to be referenced in length. Cox explained:

More recently, secularization has been used to describe a process on the cultural level which is paralleled to the political one. It denotes the disappearance of religious determination of the symbols of cultural integration. Cultural secularization is an inevitable concomitant of a political and social secularization . . . Secularization implies a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views. We have argued that it is basically a liberating development (*The Secular City* 20)

The above explanation will help to develop the understanding of the term 'secularisation' as used in this study. In this study, 'secularisation' is (a) a Western historico-empirical process linked to European history, (b) "a liberating development" (20) with the objective to attain complete freedom "from all forms of coercion, including those potentially entailed in relation, commerce, love, belief, and comportment" (Brown et al. 15), and (c) a religious condition from the primeval "sacred" to the modern "secular" societies (Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms" 1050). In general, these ideas uphold a dualistic view of religion and secularisation, and although this binary perspective has been highly criticised,¹⁰ it is sufficient at this stage to argue that the discourse of 'secularisation' framed in this study represents the ideas above-mentioned.

On the other hand, the word 'secularism' denotes an ideology linked to power and is usually studied in the socio-political matrix. Cox described it as "a new closed world-view which functions very much like a new religion (*The Secular City* 21). This study refers to 'secularism' to mean a worldview set that is totalising and absolute.

Lastly, the term 'secularity' is used in reference to Taylor's philosophical concept of 'secularity', which introduces the aspect of spirituality in the discourse. Taylor argues that it is not enough to study secularisation as just a "subtraction" theory of a religious decline (*Secular Age* 22), but insists that to investigate the secular phenomenon of modern times, the discourse must involve examining how individuals construct their own forms of spirituality, however distant those forms are from God. The seeking for an alternative spiritual source by studying the lived-experience of modern individuals presents a critical method to comprehend both the religious and secular conditions in the modern world. 'Secularity' in

¹⁰ I elaborate on the debate of the secularisation discourse in the Literature Review. See pg. 68.

respect to Taylor's concept is frequently cited in this study since the notion of the 'secular dialectic' is modelled from Taylor's theoretical methodology.

In sum, 'secularisation' as the main theoretical framework can be described as a historical and liberal process that is positioned in binary to religion. Although the dualistic functioning between religion and the secular has long represented the core paradigm of the secularisation discourse, recent studies have given increasing attention to the concept similarly known as the 'dialectic' to explain the contemporary conditions of religion and the secular. Before I can locate or explain more of the dialectical concept in the secular framework, the next section offers the general definition for the term 'dialectic'.

1.1.5 The 'Dialectic'

The notion of the 'secular dialectic' as the main conceptual framework used to examine the depictions of sexuality in relation to Prophet Muhammad (saw) within the selected writings of contemporary writers of Muslim descent in this study, is largely influenced by the concept of the 'dialectic'. Kim O'Connor explains the 'dialectic' as "the **medium** that helps us comprehend a world that is racked by paradox" and "through which contradiction becomes a starting point (rather than a dead end) for contemplation" (O'Connor). Similarly, the 'dialectic' operates on an "adversary basis" (De Bono 67) when two opposing ideas merge to reach a certain meaning or a resolution. According to Nicholas F. Gier, in his article *Dialectic: East and West*, the word 'dialectic' originates from the Greek prefix *dia-* and the Greek verb *lego*, taken from the more popularised verbal noun *logos*. "*Dia-* means "across, apart, or thoroughly" (207), whereas *logos* contains two root words: one is 'leg', meaning "to gather, to collect, to pick up, to put together" (207), while the other root word, 'lech', means "to lay" (207). From a linguistic perspective, 'dialectic' can be defined as "laying down and joining together" (207) units that are 'apart'. The idea of opposites colluding or two dichotomised objects/ideas infusing is reinforced in the etymological definition of the 'dialectic'.

Anthony Mansueto explains that the 'dialectical tradition' first emerged in Ancient Greek philosophies to help re-instate ethics marred by the city's growing capitalism. Like other philosophical ideas, it was moral concept intended to offer a dais of criteria and doctrines from which people can judge and bring order to human society (Mansueto). But how exactly is combining oppositional movements of nature an ethical proposal? Pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, responded to this problem by introducing the dialectic through a term called *logos*.

In *The Great Philosopher*, Karl Jaspers explains that Heraclitus used *logos* interchangeably among other words to mean “word, discourse, content of discourse, meaning; reason, truth; law; even Being,” and at times, his usage would carry all these meanings together (17). However, there was one idea of *logos* which Heraclitus emphasised relating to “the unity of opposites” (17). The process of this unity is described as “[w]hole and not whole -drawing together and drawing apart, concord and discord” (17), in short, the unity represents coexistence between two sets of contrasts. Heraclitus believed that changes or “the flux of the world” (23) is perquisite to life, but these changes require looking at this world through the dialectic, which was then referred to as *logos*.

Jaspers argues that the *logos* formed a thinking that allowed men to arrive at wisdom (23). The wisdom Heraclitus spoke of was not of the sciences of the cosmos but of the wisdom that “put men in the right path” (23); of truth, ethics (good and evil) and justice.

Like most of the pre-Socratics, Heraclitus did not believe in the Gods as the Originators. He argued that humans are capable of ascending and transcending beyond the Gods by having a ‘higher identity’ and that through *logos*, men can become the ‘absolute other’ (20). Heraclitus was one of the earliest Western scholars to suggest the “distance between God and man” (20) by encouraging the individual logic in the construction of philosophies and ethics. At its core, *logos*, or similarly, the ‘dialectic’ was a concept that centred individuality and rationality to produce subjective ideas of ethics and philosophies through the reversion of dichotomies.

In later centuries, German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's publication of *The Science of Logic* elaborated more specifically the meanings and processes of the dialectic. Hegel explains that the dialectic is produced after three stages, involving (a) a thesis (b) an antithesis and (c) a synthesis of these two by means of reconciliation, that in the end, presents a ‘whole’ (Taylor, *Hegel* 105). To Hegel, the dialectic can usher new social conditions, allowing individuals to be more expressive and morally autonomous. Hegel was determined to show that the outcome of the dialectic was the “rational and free agent” (Taylor, *Hegel* 76) made possible by the rationalisation of “higher reconciliation” (76). On the other hand, Taylor describes Hegel's dialectic as a “mediate” (*Hegel* 105), “that of over-coming opposition” (*Hegel* 76) and an “interpretive vision” (*Hegel* 5) that encourages individual rationality and the ‘self’ agent to make sense of the world.

The dialectic remains one of the oldest concepts in Western philosophy, but despite this, critiques have been fierce towards this self-interpretive approach. G. R. G Mure in *Introduction to Hegel* calls the dialectic an empirical thought both “arbitrary” and “limited” (126), thus “the necessity of its movement is hypothetical and contingent” (126). Immanuel Kant was a sceptic of the dialectic

and questioned its credibility as the foundational philosophy of rational metaphysics (Mansueto). In 1937, Karl Popper, along with postmodernist thinkers, accused the dialectic of being responsible for totalitarian terror (De Bono 67), while other philosophers rejected the dialectic and perceived it as a collection of “language games” (Mansueto).

From this cursory overview of the definition, history, philosophy and the conceptual limitations of the dialectic, there are critical ideas which this study adopts to further examine secularisation. This research models from the dialectic to demonstrate the shift from the traditional perspective of secularisation, which claims that the religious and secular categories operate in dichotomy, to the contemporary premise that views religion and the secular operating in the dialectic. Scholars such as Casanova, Martin and Pecora argue that the ‘dialectic’, or notions similar to the dialectic, represents the contemporary state of religion and secularisation. This study argues that the discourse between Islam and secularisation has also witnessed a crystallisation of the dialectal concept. Muslim intellectuals who have approached the question of Islam and secularisation argue for the prospect of reconciling the differences in epistemology and ethics between Islamic and secular frameworks¹¹. Their treatment of the discourse resonates with the concept of the ‘dialectic’, which this study more precisely refers to as the notion of the ‘secular dialectic’.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The question concerning sexuality in regard to Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) marital life has long been a controversy among Western critics. In the Introduction of this chapter, I mentioned that medieval Christian polemics drew upon an image of the Prophet (saw) as licentious because he married multiple women. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that the focus shifted to the Prophet’s (saw) marriage with Ayesha (r.a) (Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* 133), and although this is a rather new debate, political figures such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders have started to accuse the Prophet (saw) of perversion and paedophilia¹². One factor that pervaded the concept of sexuality was the theological conflicts between Christianity and Islam during the Middle Ages and which evolved to territorial wars during the European colonisation of the Ottoman lands. Other than religious and political factors, Western writers have also given much attention to the Prophet (saw) in matters relating to sexuality in literature. For instance, Montesquieu in *Lettres persanes* indicated that multiple marriages in Islam is an act of despotism (Konrad), while 17th-19th century English and French Orientalist travelogues are replete with negative tropes and references of Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) tradition of marrying women.¹³ Vital to this assessment is that ill conceptions of sexuality in relation to the Prophet’s (saw)

¹¹ The section under ‘Islam and Secularisation’ in the next chapter discusses the dialectical views of Muslim scholars and writers in more length. See pg. 82.

¹² Refer to footnote 4 and 5 for references.

¹³ Refer to footnote 3 for reference.

marital life presents a discourse that is uniquely born from the West, connotatively expressed through years of conflicts between the West and Muslims, hyperbolised throughout history and sensationalised in literature.

This narrative has not changed much in current times. The Danish newspaper *Jylland-Posten* and the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published comics that express similar medieval prejudices and ideas against the Messenger (saw), which from a discursive point of view, demonstrates that the Western discourse on Prophet Muhammad (saw) still remains dominant. These portrayals have enabled a skewed image of the Prophet (saw) to circulate in popular thinking, while Muslims have become the subject of inquiry in which their identity and their beliefs are continuously challenged by the West.

The predominance of the Western discourse has roused yet another problem. Over the course of years, Muslim writers have begun to depict similar imagery reminiscent of how Western medieval and Orientalist writers portray the Prophet (saw) in light of sexuality. In this study, I analyse the works by Salleh Ben Joned, Salman Rushdie and Amin Zaoui, where each selected text contains either clear representations or references of Muhammad (saw) in the imagery of sexuality. The research examines the subtle context that corresponds to how Western ideas of sexuality in relation to the Prophet (saw) have infiltrated the selected works of contemporary writers of Muslim descent, which have further complicated the Prophet's (saw) image.

The research proposes that in order to examine the sexual depictions linked to Prophet Muhammad (saw), a study into the current Western discourse can help explain the underlying framework that is dominantly shaping the narrative on Islam and sexuality. On this ground, most of the readings I collected reveal a link to the concept of secularisation.

As far as the selected works are concerned, the ideas of sexuality and religion are closely associated to secular liberal calls. The writers are committed to the idea of freedom in their aesthetic and insist that Islam does not contradict this principle. In their opinion, Islamic and secular values do not oppose each other, but they can coexist in modernity. Similarly, when the writers refer to the relationship between Islam and secularisation, they do not refer to it in terms of binaries but in the dialectic, hence the motivation behind the notion I call the 'secular dialectic'. The notion models from two main concepts: Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concept of 'Third Space', and Charles Taylor secular concept of 'cross-pressure', both of which argue for a dialectical interaction between different cultures and religious systems. From 'Third Space', the study is able to identify conditions of hybridity in relation to issues of cultural and religious identity. From Taylor's 'cross-pressure', the study argues the imperativeness of the spiritual and moral aspects of the secularisation discourse. These ideas are incorporated into the 'secular dialectic' to examine works of Muslim writers who

have encountered conditions of hybridity in the framework of secularisation and who engage with the dialectical concept to create alternative ideas about spirituality, ethics and identity in the modern world. The notion assesses the writers' dialectical views of Islam in modernity from their written prose and analyses the different literary techniques that convey the writers' dialectical ideas of religion through their depictions of sexuality in regard to Prophet Muhammad (saw).

1.3 Scope of Study

The present study investigates the sexual representations in relation to Prophet Muhammad (saw) within the works of contemporary Muslim writers. The selection of works includes the poems "The Woman Who Said No" and "The Woman Who Said Yes," published in *Sacred and Profane* by Malaysian poet Salleh Ben Joned. Selected novels include *The Satanic Verses* by Indian writer Salman Rushdie and the translated novel *Banquet of Lies* by Algerian author Amin Zaoui. Each analysis incorporates an examination of the writers' perspectives on Islam in the modern world, which involves a reading of their autobiographies, interviews, essays and newspaper articles.

1.4 Justification of Selected Texts

There are a couple of criteria that inform the selection of works for the analysis. The works were chosen based on the idea of sexuality in relation to Prophet Muhammad (saw) that is clearly presented or referenced in the selected literary texts by contemporary Muslim writers. To illustrate this point, the poem "The Woman who Said Yes" by Salleh paints a picture of the Messenger having sex with his wife after he receives the first revelation. In Zaoui's *Banquet of Lies*, the author references the Prophet (saw) through a young Muslim boy lusting over older women and making love to them, and in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie paints the Prophet as a patriarchal tyrant who weds all the women he pleases. It is the image of sexuality linked to Muhammad (saw) that instructs the selection of writers and their works and not on the basis of the writers' genders or where they are from.

The selected literature constitutes works written as early as the late 80s, which is a different period frame compared to Manav Ratti's *Postsecular Imagination* that argues: "the literature of the 1990's could perhaps be part of the historical force shaping contemporary paradigms about nation, secularism, and religion" (xxii). Ratti recognises that non-Western secular literature began to emerge in the 1990s, unlike the selection of works in this study, for instance, Salleh's poems "The Woman Who Said No" and "The Woman Who Said Yes" that were published in 1987 and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* that was published in 1988. Although the period gap is not huge, this study proposes that non-Western

literature published in the 80s could as well be part of the historical force of secularisation that Ratti earlier notes.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Despite the controversies surrounding the subject matter of sexuality associated to Prophet Muhammad (saw), this research treats 'sexuality' as the central concept or image for investigation. Another contentious idea that has been related to Muhammad (saw), mainly from inherited ideas of medieval narration, is violence. Violence and sexuality connected to the Prophet (saw) have ignited immense curiosity and criticism in the Western discourse, but this study focuses on sexuality for several reasons. Within the selected works, sexuality in the image of the Messenger (saw) represents a symbol of the dialectic between Islam and the secular discourse. What is observable is that ideas relating to sexuality are mainly derived from Western perspectives, more specifically, from Western secular ideas that put emphasis on the humanitarian appeal of individual and sexual freedom (further discussion on 'modern sexuality' is provided in the Literature Review, section 2.6). When the selected works purport the idea of 'sexuality' in Islam, they suggest that Islam can tolerate and adopt Western philosophies of liberalism, at the same time, encourage religiousness. One way which the selected writers promulgate this dialectical thought is through Muhammad (saw)—a man who symbolises the pinnacle of patience and piety—whose image is sexually portrayed to connotatively communicate philosophies of tolerance and aesthetic freedom in Islam. This study examines the consummation between the concept of sexuality, a Western secular notion, and the depictions of the Prophet (saw) to demonstrate how the dialectic functions, and essentially, to show the dominance of the Western discourse in interpreting ideas about Islam and Prophet Muhammad (saw).

The selection of the writers is based on several criteria, one of which is their identity as 'Muslims'. The term 'Muslim' has been generally explained earlier in the chapter (section 1.1.3), but to attribute this term to the selected poet and authors, a critical aspect concerns their descent of Muslim cultural heritage. Each writer was born and raised in a Muslim environment with their initial faith in Islam, including Rushdie, who presents an exceptional case since his 'Muslim' identity has been a subject of inquiry after the publication of *Verses*. The first time Rushdie made a public declaration of his faith was two years after *Verses* was published, in December 1990, and in the presence of six Egyptian Muslim scholars (Ahsan and Kidawi 45). Four days after the ceremony, Rushdie openly stated in his article "Now I Can Say, I am a Muslim" in the *New York Times*, that: "I am a Muslim; it is a source of happiness to say that I am now inside, and a part of, the community" and that "religion for me has always been Islam." However, five years later, Rushdie confessed in an interview with *The Times* that that his 'embrace' of Islam during the 1990 ceremony was, as he describes: "the biggest mistake of my life" (qtd. in Ahmed 143), and called himself a "hard-line atheist" in 2006 during an interview with Bill Moyers (Moyers). The oscillation

of his claims between faith and apostasy and his repeated declaration and retractions in regard to his Islamic faith and Muslim identity show that his statements are unreliable. Notwithstanding how spiritually distant he could have been from Islam, Rushdie was still attached to his religious identity and the Muslim culture in which he was raised. Thus, the categorisation of Rushdie as a Muslim writer still applies in this study.

Apart from their 'Muslim' identity are the conditions of hybridity due to transcultural upbringing or exchanges between the local and Western secular countries, which all of the selected writers have experienced. The writers' direct contact with secular cultures sets them apart from other local Muslim writers, not only because of geographical shifts but because of the cultural movements, issues of their identity become problematised. To respond to cultural and religious conflicts, the writers adopt the dialectic, an approach they espouse to help overcome struggles with identity through merging different cultural and traditional values. Their dialectical thinking is conveyed through the image of the Prophet (saw) immersed in sexuality and other unconventional ideas they indicate of Islam. As a result, these writers have been marginalised with the label of 'apostate' attached to them by local societies and the religious communities who find little tolerance for their perspectives. The conditions of hybridity in these cases do not only involve the dialectical worldviews but the resulting social and religious ostracisation as part of the challenges of the 'hybrid' individual.

1.6 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are: (i) to analyse the depictions of sexuality in relation to Prophet Muhammad (saw) in the selected works within the contemporary discourse, (ii) to explore Western secularisation with references to the nuances of the dialectic in the dialogue on Islam (iii) to examine the concept of sexuality from the secular and Islamic point of views, and (iv) to conceptualise the 'secular dialectic' by modelling from Bhabha's postcolonial concept of the 'Third Space' and Taylor's secular concept of the 'cross-pressure'.

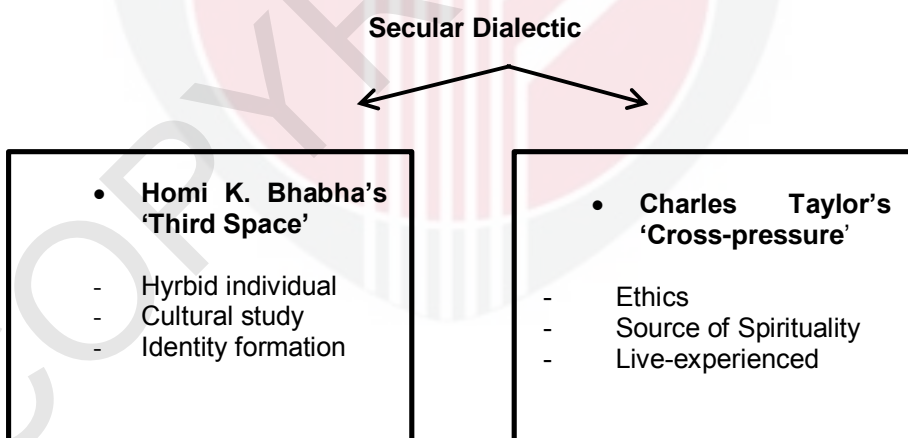
1.7 Significance of Study

This study extends the secular dialogue in the global framework to explore the relationship between Islam and secularisation in the selected literature, and by extension, how Muslims respond to issues of identity and religion within the larger secularisation discourse. The significance of the study lies, firstly, in its examination of an 'in-between' concept that seeks meanings of identity and religion through the union of binaries between the Islamic and secular frameworks. The dialectic in the selected literature presents one of the trajectories engaged by Muslim writers and scholars to locate Islam in

secularisation, which would have otherwise been located in fixed dichotomous categories. However, the study also demonstrates that the aesthetic delivery of the concept of the dialectic by depicting the Prophet (saw) in sexual images is questionable. These sexual depictions in the selected works by Muslim contemporary writers risk contributing to the Western dominated discourse that has persistently challenged the Prophet's (saw) tradition, putting Muslims in a position where their identity and their faith in Islam are questioned in modern discourses, and at the expense of perpetuating a dishonest image of the last Prophet of Islam.

1.8 Conceptual Theory

The forthcoming sections expound on two different but interrelated conceptual frameworks that help model the notion of the 'secular dialectic'. The first is Taylor's concept of 'cross-pressure', located in the framework of secularisation, and the other is Bhabha's postcolonial concept of 'Third Space'. While 'cross-pressure' investigates the secular discourse in the West and argues for secularisation as a spiritual and moral condition, the 'Third Space' concentrates on the development of cultural identity among individuals with cultural exchanges between local and secular environments, and who Bhabha refers to as 'hybrids'. In diagram, the combination of Bhabha's and Taylor's ideas in the conceptualisation of the 'secular dialectic' looks as follow:



By combining critical ideas from these concepts, the notion of the 'secular dialectic', therefore, examines how meanings of identity, religion (spirituality) and ethics are formed in the dialectical space, among Muslim writers who have encountered conditions of hybridity, and by assessing the selected writers' perspectives of Islam from the cultures they are exposed to as part of their 'lived-experience'.

On the conceptual level, the 'secular dialectic' demonstrates the process of fusion between Islamic and secular ideas as a way to respond to the encroaching secular framework in Muslim cultures. Furthermore, the notion invites a theoretical extension of secularisation to include studying secular patterns outside of the West while arguing for a more plural and diverse historical narrative of secularisation globally, as opposed to studying secularisation as merely a Western historical phenomenon. These arguments are part of the contemporary premise of the secularisation discourse, which is critical in situating the notion in the bigger framework of secularisation. However, I argue that the conceptual framing of the 'secular dialectic' must involve studying the cultural, spiritual and moral aspects to further understand the secularisation discourse. Taylor's concept of 'cross-pressure' reinforces the dimensions of spirituality and morality in secularisation as explained in the next section.

1.8.1 Taylor's Concept of 'Cross-pressure'

The concept of 'cross-pressure' is framed specifically under Taylor's theory of secularity.¹⁴ It focuses on Western history and describes a particular spiritual condition before the advent of "modern unbelief" (*Secular Age* 3). In this spiritual state, the individual is overcome by a religious dilemma—whether to believe in God or not. At one end, he/she is pulled "towards unbelief while on the other, feeling solicitations of the spiritual" (360). Eventually, meanings of faith and one's identity get defined in relation to these polar extremes of orthodoxy and unbelief (677). Taylor argues that because the individual is caught in the dialectic between religion and secularisation, which he refers to as the "third way" (302) or the "middle realm" (360), interpretations of the sacred and ethics become uncertain and meanings become "fuzzy" (39).

Discussing the concept of 'cross-pressure' requires taking into account another crucial notion called the 'buffered-self' as both ideas operate vis-à-vis. The 'buffered-self' represents the individual state that allows, possibility, and in this case, it allows the possibility of detaching oneself from religion (Taylor, *Secular Age* 600). When both of these notions exist in relation, they allow religious distancing and permeate individualism to construct meanings of spirituality and morality. Meanings are channelled through the engagement between religious faith and secular influences, even though these meanings are potentially more complicated and insignificant (303).

¹⁴ The theoretical definition of 'secularity' is given under section 1.1.4 of Chapter One. I am aware that Taylor's secularity only focuses on the secular history of the West, the Christian faith and its modern reformation in the North Atlantic world (Taylor, *Secular Age* 1). However, Taylor explained earlier in his work that secularity can be refined and re-contextualised to examine secularisation in other religions and geographies since the theory is interested in the individual condition of spirituality, and this is changeable according to its context.

The state of the 'cross-pressure' first initiated in Western history when individuals were given the choice to not believe in God, whereas during earlier eras, "going against God [was] not an option in the enchanted world" (Taylor, *Secular Age* 41). The idea of disbelief became easier for several reasons. Taylor states the "Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, the rise of the 'police state', the Reformation" (61) all facilitated the process, but the "Reform", that is, "the profound dissatisfaction in the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and renunciative vocation" (61) had the most effect in the religious divide between the Church and the public. Taylor argues that it "opened the way to the kind of disengagement from cosmos and God which made exclusive humanism a possibility" (41). The spiritual condition that realised this distant from God, however slight it was, is captured in the concept of the 'cross-pressure'.

The 'cross-pressure' describes a condition of being suspended between the two extremes of religious orthodoxy and materialist atheism (Taylor, *Secular Age* 301) or the "free and neutral space between religious commitment and materialism" (360). In this spiritual state, individuals start to question religious theology and practices not because they despised their own beliefs, but according to Taylor, religious orthodoxy carried a negative reputation; it denoted "authoritarianism, the placing conformity before well-being, the sense of human guilt and evil, damnation and so on" (307). The Church's teachings and practices provoked distancing, or a spiritual withdrawal, where individuals felt "motives not to go back to the earlier established faiths, and on the other (among other things), a sense of malaise, emptiness, a need for meaning" (301). The 'cross-pressure' describes the spiritual distancing from religion in seek for other sources of fulfilment and relief without abandoning one's commitments to God.

The 'buffered-self' assists the process of the 'cross-pressure'. As the individual slowly departs from the enchanted world—from demons, magic, spirits and God—he/she becomes more aware of the possibility of not believing (Taylor, *Secular Age* 33). To replace the progressive lost of religious belief, the individual begins to interpret meanings of spirituality, ethics, truth and the philosophies of the world (38); the self is deemed capable of situating his/her "powers of moral ordering" (57) and is inspired to "see itself as invulnerable, as master of meanings of things for it" (38). Given the choice to depart from religion, the individual forms alternative views of ethics and spirituality, even if their ideas have little in relation to the Divine. Individualism, rationality and the centralisation of the self become the sources of 'spirituality' in answering the questions of life, while religion becomes secondary, or else, slowly absent from philosophical and scientific discourses. The dialectic through the lens of the 'buffered-self' and the 'cross-pressure' argues for subjective ideas of spirituality while still being religiously committed.

However, Taylor cautions the limits of subjective meanings built by the 'cross-pressure'. He argues that the meanings have "no long term movement towards a resolution of whatever kind" (Taylor, *Secular Age* 301) and "in which people

can wander between and around all these options without having to land clearly and definitively in any one” (351). In sum, the ‘cross-pressure’ is a “spiritually unstable” (301) process where “nothing significant will stand out of it” (302).

The concept of the ‘secular dialectic’ is modelled from the ‘cross-pressure’ in the suggested dialectical interaction between religion and materialism and the centralisation of the self in relation to the construction of religious meanings. The context in which the ‘cross-pressure’ developed was during the rise of empirical and scientific knowledge that questioned the authority of the church and the essentialism of religious beliefs. However, as a spiritual and moral condition, the ‘cross-pressure’ is treated as a Western experience of secularisation rather than a global effect, thus the concept is not sufficient to address the secularisation discourse in other cultures and religions. Because of this limitation, this study then turns to Bhabha’s concept of the ‘Third Space’ to address issues relating to secular and religious conditions in non-Western countries and especially among postcolonised hybrid individuals.

1.8.2 Bhabha’s Postcolonial Concept of ‘Third Space’

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces the concept of the ‘Third Space’ to address the issues of cultural identity in the events of migration, exile or diaspora for individuals from postcolonised countries to nations that once colonised theirs. Due to exchanges between cultures, languages and traditions, the development of one’s identity gets supervened. Thus, the ‘Third Space’ focuses on the postcolonised identity and cultural re-contextualisation in the narrative of crossings. This section explains the dialectical elements of the ‘Third Space’ in the creation of cultural and identity meanings among individuals who Bhabha calls ‘hybrid’.

It is first crucial to clarify the term ‘hybrids’. In his review of Bhabha’s work, Paul Meredith explains that the word ‘hybrid’ was used in the colonial discourse to describe people “who are products of miscegenation, mixed-breeds. It is imbued in nineteenth-century eugenicist and scientific-racist thought” (Meredith). Despite the racist connotation embedded in ‘hybrid’, Bhabha applies the word for its emancipative value and its potential to challenge oversimplified views of how meanings of identity are constructed through cultural and language interrelations. The word ‘hybrid’ in the postcolonial context describes a group of people who have lived locally and abroad (mostly in Western lands), with accounts of geographical and cultural mobilisation that patterns new postcolonised identity where a new ‘self’ emerges within the “cultural contemporaneity” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 7). From this cultural movement, a possible issue that ‘hybrids’ may encounter is identity conflict since they have been exposed to two different cultures. To overcome this challenge, some individuals position their identity beyond the bipolarity of the colonisers vs colonised cultures. This positioning is more complex and dynamic than the

dichotomous narrative of opposite cultures. It aims to deconstruct archaic dualities that have universalised the postcolonised identity by offering a different perspective of the subject-position beyond the totalising of experience; it is a process of self-actualisation, and for some individuals, it is a position of emancipative values. This 'in-between' space of cultural dichotomy, or similarly understood as the concept of the 'Third Space', is where the 'hybrids' position themselves (*The Location of Culture* 5).

The 'Third Space' argues that by entering into new cultural boundaries, the process of negotiation, overlapping and sharing takes place between cultural differences. This space generates a cultural representation where “*something begins its presencing*”; a realm of 'newness' articulated in the beyond” (*The Location of Culture* 5). Bhabha also describes it as the “liminal” space that “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (“The Third Space” 211). He explains:

Once again, it is the space of intervention merging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative intervention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration. (*The Location of Culture* 9)

The words “merge”, “iteration”, “recreation” and “intervention” synonymously describe the processes that take place when two opposing cultures meet, but the term 'negotiation' or the word 'dialectic' are also used in the descriptive analyses of the 'Third Space'. Bhabha elucidates:

When I talk of *negotiation* rather than *negation*, it is to convey a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements: a dialectic without the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History . . . in such a discursive temporality, the event of theory becomes the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason. (*The Location of Culture* 25)

The negotiating of cultural differences suggests successive displacements rather than replacements, collusion rather than collisions and transference of paradigms as opposed to a complete negation of foreign influences in positioning the 'self'. The dialectical relationship forms anew, an apposite and an atypical 'self' characterised by differentiation. These processes are reflective of the conditions of the 'hybrid'.

Yet, Bhabha identifies several limits of the 'Third Space'. He warns of the disjunctions and ambivalence of meanings due to the transitional movements from one culture to the next (*The Location of Culture* 23). When the 'self' is in a constant state of 'becoming', meanings have no "primordial unity or fixity" (*The Location of Culture* 37).

Bhabha also describes the 'Third Space' as "objectives for struggle" (*The Location of Culture* 25). The word 'struggle' has several implications, namely the challenges of constructing one's identity through differences of cultural exposures. This requires reclaiming the past, or "asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories" (*The Location of Culture* 9), which entails resisting any attachment to one specific culture over the other.

The other implication of 'struggle' relates to cultural conflicts on the local ground. Being a hybrid or being 'in-between' is uniquely characterised by his/her non-normative worldviews. This position is bound to incite clashes or misunderstandings not only against people of different traditions or cultures, but as Fredrik Fahlander (2007) argues, "they also characterise much interaction between individuals *within* the same nation or ethnic collective" (23).

Rushdie is an exemplar of Bhabha's 'Third Space'. As a hybrid (ex)Muslim who was born and raised in India and later settled in the West, Rushdie struggled with "double belonging" (Rushdie, *Anton* 54), and he expressed the complexities of the hybrid conditions through art. *The Satanic Verses* was an attempt to perform 'newness' that enabled the writer to coalesce his different exposures, upbringings, beliefs and thoughts aesthetically. Rushdie presented the dialectic through the Orientalist imagery of Prophet Muhammad (saw), which provoked global resentment, protest and violence among Muslims in his country and worldwide. Such 'struggle', as demonstrated in Rushdie's case, has led Bhabha to claim that for the Muslim fundamentalists, "[h]ybridity is a heresy" (*The Location of Culture* 225), suggesting the problematic of the hybrid identity in the face of religious and local traditions. On the other hand with Zaoui, his decision to write in both the French and Arabic languages presents challenges of hybridity, which has provoked local controversies and a cause for him to further highlight the issue of situating the Muslim and Arab identity in modernity.

Overall, the 'Third Space' has opened new perspectives about the subject-position of individuals with hybrid conditions within the postcolonial dialogue, where by integrating cultures of the coloniser-colonised can produce new narratives of selfhood. The concept, which is very similar to the general idea of the dialectic or the negotiation between binary sets of values and traditional systems, provides insights into studying secular influences among individuals from postcolonised countries. This study models from the 'Third Space' to help build the notion of the 'secular dialectic', in turn, to conduct an analysis on

Muslim writers identified by conditions of the hybrid and to investigate how differences of religious and cultural ideas have crafted their dialectical thoughts into their aesthetics.

However, there is one critical idea that the 'secular dialectic' reinforces which the 'Third Space' does not. Bhabha has been criticised for not recognising acts of power. For instance, Britta Kalscheuer points out that the Third Space does not resolve the problem of cultural hierarchy for it does not mention the issue of imbalances of powers or consider dominant margins in the production of "powerful representatives" (37). Kalscheuer explains:

[A]lthough Bhabha aims to point out ways, which allow marginals to become more powerful, he paradoxically fails to consider aspects of power. Marginals do not have the same chances to articulate their interests and the powerful representatives surely have an interest to keep their powerful position. It is to be expected that they do everything to break down the resistance of the marginals who would then remain ineffective. (39)

Kalscheuer identifies inequitable movements of power in developing meanings within the 'Third Space'. The 'secular dialectic', on the other hand, does not emphasise power trajectories, but it identifies a more dominant influence in capturing "powerful representatives" (39) in the writers' depictions about the Prophet (saw). The analysis shows that the selected works are driven by the powerful influence of secularisation, and this ultimately inspires their views about Islam.

I will discuss more about the imbalance of power and influences in generating meanings within the dialectical space in the Literature Review (Chapter 2, section 2.4). But this chapter proceeds with the methodological framework of the analysis.

1.9 Methodology

The theoretical methodology addresses the general idea of the dialectic to further develop the notion of the 'secular dialectic', catered to examining the influences of the secularisation discourse within the selected texts. The notion essentially argues for compromise between religious and secular values that results to alternative ideas of faith, ethics and identity. Furthermore, the 'secular dialectic' positions the postcolonial hybridity within the secular framework, which is pertinent to investigating the dialectical views of the selected writers who have encountered conditions of hybridity and whose literary works will be examined in the scope of the secularisation discourse. Given the significance of the writers'

lived-experience, their cultures and their religious backgrounds in shaping their dialectical thoughts, the analysis first explores secondary references, including newspaper articles, essays and interviews which will help to assess their perspectives of Islam in modernity. This will be followed by a textual evaluation of literary devices in light of how the writers depict Prophet Muhammad (saw) in sexual images through the 'secular dialectic'.

To do this, I refer to certain concepts to determine the techniques used to exemplify the dialectic in each text. For example in the analysis of Salleh's poems, I examine the concept of the 'religious imagination' by Francesca Bugliani Knox that discusses the dialectical interaction between the sacred and secular/material world in poetry, similar to how the dialectical functions in Salleh's selected works. For Rushdie's *Verses*, I refer to the concept of 'leveling' by John D. Erickson to further investigate how the dialectic operates through certain devices in Rushdie's representation of the Prophet (saw) in sexual images. Lastly, I look at several ideas that emerged during the Romantic era such as 'sexuality' and the figure of the 'Byronic Hero' as referential concepts to examine the dialectical interaction between Islam and secularisation in Zaoui's work, through Nems/ Koussaïla who carries the tradition of the Prophet (saw). The two components of the analysis—the prose and the textual evaluation—will not only grant a better idea of the writers' dialectical views but how the dialectic manifests aesthetically in literature when Islamic faith and ethics are positioned in tandem with the discourse of secularisation in the writers' fictitious portrayals of Prophet Muhammad (saw).

1.10 Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter 1 discusses the motivation behind this study by centralising the core issue, which is the image of Prophet Muhammad (saw) with regards to his marital life in the Western discourse, furthermore, how this discourse has influenced the literary works of the selected Muslim writers in their depictions of Islam and the Prophet (saw). Understanding the nature of the present study, the chapter then provides a general outline of the main theoretical framework of secularisation and locates the concept of the 'secular dialectic' in the discourse of secularisation and Islam. Several key terms are explained and how they are applied throughout the research.

The Literature Review in Chapter 2 is divided into two parts: Part A and B. Part A is structured to help frame the 'secular dialectic' in sections by locating, conceptualising and contextualising the notion in Western secularisation. The last section of Part A involves a lengthy dialogue on the nuances of the dialectical thinking of Muslim scholars, intellectuals and writers in their attempts to position Islam in the secular framework. This discussion signals three trajectories of the dialectic, which I have identified under the descriptions 'passive', 'negotiative' and 'extreme'. I will then incorporate these trajectories

into the 'secular dialectic' to examine which of these approaches best represent the dialectical thinking of the selected writers and their texts. Part B of Chapter 2 explores the concept of sexuality from the secular and Islamic point of views. These sections highlight the differences of opinions between two different frameworks so as to enable the analysis to detect the dialectical points between secularisation and Islam in matters of sexuality through the representation of Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Chapters 3 to 5 analyse the selected texts by the selected Muslim writers. Chapter 3 focuses on Salleh Ben Joned's poems "The Woman Who Said No" and "The Woman Who Said Yes," specifically concerning the idea of sexuality through the image of the Prophet's father and the woman in his harem having intercourse, and later, the sexual act between the Prophet and his wife, Khatijah. Chapter 4 examines Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the writer's descriptions of the Prophet's devious behaviours, the issue of marrying multiple women and sexual depictions of other historical religious figures such as Ayesha. Chapter 5 analyses the concept of sexuality and liberal ideas of Islam in *Banquet of Lies* by Amin Zaoui as reflected through a young Muslim boy, Koussaïla, whose love for the Prophet (saw), for secular knowledge and for having sexual relations with older women put him in limbo in locating his identity and his faith in secularisation. Besides the textual evaluation, each chapter is dedicated to exploring the writers' socio-religious environments and the writer's perspectives on Islam in the secular framework. The examination of the writers' opinions on the position of Islam in modernity and the analysis of the literary texts are executed as part of the methodology of the 'secular dialectic' to assess the writers' dialectical views and to explore the various literary techniques employed as part of the dialectical fusion between Islam and the secular discourse through the sexual images associated to the Prophet (saw).

Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the research by rearticulating the fundamental problematisation of Muslim writers writing about Islam in contemporary times. The chapter discusses more elaborately about the literary techniques the writers' use to convey the dialectic and the effects of the writers' dialectical approach on the representations of Muslims, Islam and Prophet Muhammad (saw). In addition, I devote a brief portion of the chapter to apprise the challenges I have personally encountered as an individual with accounts of cultural hybridity and how the dialectic is integral to response to struggles of identity between committing to Islam and dealing with secular influences.

1.11 Conclusion

Chapter 1 provides the general outline of the study and introduces the notion of the 'secular dialectic' to examine the secular influences in the works of the selected contemporary writers of Muslim descent in regard to their depiction of Prophet Muhammad (saw) in sexual images. The notion invites a look at the

secularisation discourse that focuses on how Muslims respond to the bigger dialogue of Islam and secularisation, and more specifically, the question of writing about Islam and the Prophet (saw) in contemporary times. The 'secular dialectic' essentially escapes from the dyad of the sacred and the profane, and argues for a space where both the religious and the secular worlds collude and coexist, in the end, to generate meanings of spirituality, ethics and identity in Islam that are possibly distant from traditional interpretations. Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' and Taylor's concept of 'cross-pressure' are explained as part of conceptualising the 'secular dialectic' to demonstrate the link between the selected writers' hybrid position and their secular exposures, which contribute significantly to their writings about Prophet Muhammad (saw). Most importantly, this chapter brings to attention the central problem of the study, that is, the influence of the Western discourse that connects to medieval ideas of the Prophet's (saw) marriages, and that has penetrated the works of the selected Muslim contemporary writers, affecting their concept of sexuality and their depiction of the last Prophet of Islam.

1.12 Definitions of Terms

Dialectic When two opposing ideas merge to reach a certain meaning or a resolution. The existence and the fusion of two bipolar ideas are necessary for the process of the dialectic to occur. The epistemology and conceptual evolution are explained in section 1.1.5 of this chapter.

Hybrid Used in reference to Homi K. Bhabha's application of the word. He applies it in the context of postcolonialism to describe a group of individuals with dual cultural upbringings: in the local and Western countries. The exposures to two different cultures may lead to the encounter of hybrid conditions or conditions of hybridity, most often dealing with identity conflict. But this cultural mobilisation is also where a new postcolonised 'self' identity can be discovered. 'Hybrid' individuals position their identity 'in-between' cultural dichotomies, creating a new subject-position beyond the totalising experience of the colonisers vs colonised bipolarity. More details in section 1.8.2.

Muslim The term 'Muslim' as in the statement 'contemporary writers of Muslim descent' draws specifically to the selected writers' Muslim cultural heritage, meaning that the writers were born and raised in a Muslim environment with their initial faith in Islam. There are a lot of controversies surrounding Rushdie's 'Muslim' identity, which I have given much attention to in the Limitations of the Study (section 1.5), but based on the meaning of 'Muslim' attributed here, this study argues that the categorisation of Rushdie's religious identity fits. A more general understanding of the term is provided under 'Islam and Muslim' (section 1.1.2).

*Secular
Dialectic*

The main concept used to analyse the selected literary texts in this study. The 'secular dialectic' is situated in the bigger theoretical framework of secularisation and constructed specifically to examine the relationship between Islam and the secular discourse. The notion is constructed by modelling from Bhabha's concept of 'Third Space' and Taylor's 'cross-pressure'. When applied as methodological framework for the textual evaluation, the notion explores how meanings of identity, religion and ethics are formed in the dialectical space among hybrid individuals (the selected Muslim writers) through assessments of the writers' perspectives of Islam that are derived from the cultures they are exposed to, in addition to an evaluation of the literary devices in the writers' selected works. More detail on this notion is provided in sections 1.8, 1.8.1 and 1.8.2 of this chapter.

*Secularis-
ation*

The main theory selected for this research. Secularisation generally refers to the study of religious condition in the modern times. The nuances in meanings between the terms secular/secularisation/secularism are elaborated in section 1.1.5 of this chapter.

Sexuality

'Sexuality' in this study refers to the application of the word used in the Western discourse in regard to Prophet Muhammad's (saw) marital relationship. Labels such as paedophile and pervert against the Prophet (saw) based on his multiple relationships and his marriage with Ayesha (r.a) (see footnote no.5) are included in the derogatory ideas that make up the term 'sexuality' associated to the last Prophet of Islam.

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