Chambers, Claire. *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*. **London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 302 pp.**

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In the period following the Rushdie affair, British Muslim literature came to prominence as a compelling contemporary literary tradition. Claire Chambers's previous publications, among which *British Muslim Fictions* (2011), *Britain through Muslim Eyes* (2015), and *Rivers of Ink* (2017) are the best known, established her as a leading voice in Muslim literary studies. In *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*, a follow-up to *Britain through Muslim Eyes*, Chambers continues her project of examining the novelistic representation of the senses (touch, smell, taste, and hearing) in a rich fictional output by British Muslim authors. Chambers's work is a groundbreaking monograph, for it adds a novel and valuable contribution to the exploration of British Muslim literature as it examines the ways in which the senses shape the reading practices of postcolonial writings. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary authors from a Muslim heritage in Britain whose works were especially strongly politicized in the years following the Rushdie affair, Chambers asserts that these post-Fatwa narratives, to a varying degree of religiosity, "are richly sensual" (xiv). Using a highly innovative critical methodology, the author expands the boundaries of the current scholarship on postcolonial literary criticism to include sensory studies. This leads to Chambers's central argument: embracing sensation is an act of self-expression and resistance. Regarded as a double-edged sword, this resistance discloses "the marginalization or cover-up of non-heteronormative sexualities and women's rights that sometimes occur in Muslim communities" (xxxii), and more pervasively, it fends off the increased attempts by the British government to surveil and control Muslim bodies.

The book is divided into three main parts covering three decades after the Rushdie affair in 1989. As Chambers points out, while a focus on the touch characterized the 1990s, the following two decades witness the pairing of the senses. The 2000s foreground novelistic depictions of smell, and taste, and the 2010s center around the importance of sounds and the posthuman sensory perception. The introductory chapter reconstructs a genealogical line of Muslim British literature. The author argues that 1989 marks the onset of the Islamophobic outreach in Britain, following the Rushdie affair and the upheaval incurred by his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The Rushdie affair casts a long shadow across the British literary landscape of the last three decades when issues concerning knowledge, identity, religion, and multiculturalism have been reframed through an epistemology of the senses. By capitalizing on what

Walter D. Mignolo identifies as a "body-politics of knowledge," Chambers's work departs from the idea that knowledge begins and ends with sensory perception. To this end, Chambers is heralding the start of a sensory turn through presenting a case for value and urgency for taking a sensory approach to British Muslim literature and postcolonial literary criticism in general.

The first part, entitled "The 1990s: 'It Was Only Through Touch That We Really Knew Things,'" engages with the exploration of two central 1990s British Muslim texts: Ahdaf Souaif's *In the Eyes of the Sun* (1992), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995). Chambers proceeds to argue that touch, an overall forsaken pillar among the senses, constitutes a primordial outlet through which identities are ontologically reassembled and defined by the reader. Touch is, therefore, a means by which these authors explore issues of knowledge, desire, and violence. For example, in the first chapter the author adduces that the haptic reconfigures the way spaces and power relations operate within cosmopolitan Britain as initially demonstrated through Soueif's character, Asya. In Chambers's reading, Soueif's protagonist sets on a journey of tactile exploration in an attempt to reassemble her splintered sense of desire. Touch, as Chambers demonstrates, is paradigmatic of a variety of connotations, among them the "sensual (gentile) touch" that separates Soueif's character from the domestic life of servitude and the "violent touch" which brings around the death grips of domestic violence albeit, from her lover Gerald. Exploring Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*, the second chapter follows a similar trail, which the author initiates by linking the touch with the sensual experience of eating with one's hand. The maintenance of such a sensual etiquette by Indians undermines the repressive imperial discourse that deems such an act uncivilized. Moreover, Chambers pays particular attention to the putative desire of the "Human Touch," which marks a crucial turning point in the novel. She focuses on Chili, who came on to Deedee under the guise of wanting a "human touch" that connotes, as Chambers notes, a more trenchant contempt towards one's own skin and a becoming-white through tactile exposure to whiteness (46). Thus, from her perspective, the development of a sensory turn has been underscored by the "global movement towards touch" (63) during the 1990s.

The second part focuses on what Chambers considers as "Smelling and Tasting the 2000s." Being strongly aligned with race and gender, the 2000s, as Chamber indicates, "were the darker years of surveillance and rendition" (xxviii). In the first chapter of this part, Chambers offers an olfactory approach to read Muslim British writing. Drawing on Nadem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), the author indicates that both texts interrogate and explore elements of multiculturalism through a particular emphasis on the sense of smell. For them, the olfactory experiences, which are more often than not taken for granted (one only needs to think of the axiomaticity of breathing air), are central to the formulation of a deeper understanding of both narratives. For example, Aslam uses the sense of smell to "momentarily humanize Kaukab and encourage us to empathize with her" (109). Chambers argues that while *Maps for Lost Lovers* is preoccupied with an idealistic pastoral aromatic landscape, unpleasant smells are omnipresent in *Brick Lane.* In the novel's East London sections, Ali reflects on the very urban British odours (frying fat, dog excrement, petrol fumes, and rubbish) to show how "non-white

people, particularly women migrants, often have to live in unsanitary conditions and are treated as disposable" (94). The topic of smell is interpreted in relation to *Brick Lane*'s portrayal of material culture, social class, race, and religion. Smell, which is often understudied in literary criticism, is a prominent aspect of both texts, allowing the author to advance her arguments on smell in her analysis of these politically charged texts. The chapter that follows offers a critical reading of novels by Leila Aboulela, Yasmin Crowther, and Robin Yassin-Kassab, in which Chambers explores the sense of taste as a crucial topic to consider in a book about British Muslim fiction. Chambers's reading of these novels foregrounds food as fundamental to the formation of migrant identity: "we are what eat" (125). These authors negotiate their cultural and religious differences through the sense of taste and their dynamic relationship with food. Such Perso-Arab novelists, as Chambers affirms, are "biting back against stereotypical ideas about Western freedom and Muslim oppression" (135).

Given the recent rapid normalization and advancement of technological approaches to our everyday life, part three, "Taking Soundings in the Technologized 2010s," provides a compelling and empirical discussion of how 2010s British Muslim texts call attention to the importance of sound technologies as well as the place of five sense modalities in the posthuman condition. In this respect, a whole chapter of this part is devoted to the investigation of the novelistic representations of sounds in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) and Tabish Khair's *Just Another Jihadi Jane* (2016). As Chambers emphasizes, these two novels implicitly concentrate on the relationship between the textual and the sonic. Considering sound as a form of communication, Chambers is keen on articulating the vital significance that "voices from below are heard in public discourse" (195). Here, Chambers quotes Gayatri Spivak's assertion that "speaking and hearing complete the speech act" (Spivak qtd. in Chambers 174). Therefore, sound appears as a "metaphorical conceit and as a material or embodied experience" (200) in the texts. In other words, there are moments when sound and voice are not only positioned literally as ways of "being heard" but also metaphorically accessing representation and gaining political and social recognition. It is in this context that Spivak urges us to listen to others whom she has famously called subalterns because sound, as the author affirms, is mostly productive and has an ethical value. In its material sense, sound appears as a violent weapon, for example, in Khair's war scenes and Shamsie's portrayal of torture.

In the last chapter of this volume, Chambers explains that the five modalities of senses are evolving and enhanced by advanced technology, which has led sensory studies to take a new direction. It is particularly noteworthy that the author chooses to conclude the book by questioning what happens to the five senses in a digital, complex world. Through the lens of posthuman sensory perception, Chambers identifies Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) as a tech-savvy novel that engages with understanding the global refugee crisis via the novelist's intervention in interrogating the senses in a digital age of advanced technologies. In this vein, Chambers invites us to read Hamid's novel as a text in which "digital technologies function as a door to a world in which the human is decentred and stable selfhood is unmoored" (220). Indeed, Chambers shows that Hamid's refugees are more empowered by their devices than disempowered. Thus, technology not only serves to enhance the senses, but

also reduces, in slight but crucial ways, the disparity between rich natives and poor migrants (244).

All in all, exploring the senses as ontological markers of identity, *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels* is a groundbreaking exploration of the sensorial realm in British Muslim literature. In her willingness to be as inclusive as to subject ten contemporary novels to close scrutiny, Chambers succeeds in the important task of exploring, in new insightful ways, the unifying concern of how British Muslim authors negotiate their racialized, religious, and gendered identities through their complex sensory experiences. Thus, in taking into account these texts' political, cultural, and religious contexts, Chambers offers a richly detailed and compelling study of a full-bodied account of the senses as a terrain of identity contestation and construction in contemporary Britain.

Chambers's book is timely, well-conceived, and path-breaking; it will surely establish itself as a vital contribution to the ongoing debates about the role of Islam in the British multicultural landscape. Thanks to Chambers's innovative multidisciplinary approach, this volume is an indispensable reading for those interested in sensory studies and postcolonial literature. Particularly, its paramount originality resides in opening up a new epistemology to the politics of the senses, where problematic issues of identity and multiculturalism are reframed through the lens of postcolonial and sensory studies.