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## Memory Writing and Cosmopolitan Identity in Timothy Mo's *Pure*

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### ABSTRACT

In his recent novel *Pure* (2012), Timothy Mo maps the complex interaction between memory and identity in the post-9/11 context. The novel interweaves the memory narratives of four protagonists and mainly describes the protagonist Snooky's attempts to negotiate between the Islamic world and the West. This essay draws on memory studies to explore how memory shapes the protagonists' cosmopolitan identity. The novel contests the binarism prevalent in both Western and fundamentalist Islamic discourses and proposes a cosmopolitan identity that extends beyond the established narrative. This paper argues that the novel explores the otherness inherent in seemingly homogeneous memory narratives and thus nuances the self-versus-other narrative. It suggests that the normative role of collective memory in identity formation may compromise cultural reconciliation. *Pure* criticizes the constraints of collective memory and reveals the challenges to cosmopolitan identity in a conflict-ridden world.

As Anne Whitehead argues, “memory nevertheless remains a crucial underpinning for, and foundation of, our sense of self” (Whitehead, 59). Accordingly, memory is not all about remembering, and it is always accompanied by a sense of belonging. In *Pure*, Timothy Mo skillfully demonstrates the interplay between memory and identity in the context of religious extremism in Southern Thailand in the wake of the 9/11 event. The novel interweaves the memory narratives of four characters who hold diverse political opinions and delves into the interaction between Islamic fundamentalism and Western liberalism. This interweaving of two discourses, as I will analyze, is particularly evident in the protagonist Snooky's internally divided memory narrative. In addition to focusing on the relationship between memory and identity, this novel offers a critical insight into an essentialist notion of memory and identity and enquires how different cultural memories interact with each other. Due to its international perspective and multilingual quality, *Pure* contributes to enriching British Asian writing.

Both Mo's life experience and his literary career embody his attempts at cross-cultural communication and pinpoint his position in the liminal space between the East and the West. Born to a Chinese father and a British mother in 1950, Mo spent his childhood in Hong Kong and later received his higher education at Oxford. After graduation, he worked as a journalist for several years, before starting his career as a novelist with the publication of *The Monkey King* in 1978. In 1995, after refusing a handsome advance offered by Random House, Mo left London and settled down in Southeast Asia. The reason for this relocation, as Mo himself put it, is that “I don't want to live here. I want fresh and interesting subject-matter” (Tonkin, “The Books Interview”). Mo's experiences in both the East and the West permit him to probe into cultural differences and inspire him to focus on conflicts caused by cultural discrepancies on the one hand and social issues in the Global South on the other. Specifically, *Pure* revolves around the life experiences of Snooky, a Siamese-Muslim ladyboy,

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who is forced by the Thai police to infiltrate into a jihadist base and work as a spy for the West. Despite his/her attempts to reconcile the Islamic world with the West, Snooky finally identifies with Jihad and decides to carry out a suicidal attack on the Thai police. Snooky's story underscores diasporic subjects' shifting identity and navigation between cultures.

Most critical essays on Mo's fiction generally focus on his earlier works, especially those written before his relocation to Southeast Asia, and scholars generally explore the hybrid identity and "Chinese" ethnicity of Mo's protagonists. As Elaine Yee Lin Ho argues, "Mo's strenuous denial of value to 'Chineseness,' and the absence of some common ethnic denominator in his fiction, go against the dominant – if problematic – paradigm" (Ho, 146). Remarkably, Mo shifts his focus from China-related themes to historical events and social issues in Southeast Asia in the later period of his literary career. Therefore, it is arguably more reasonable to extend beyond an ethnographic interpretation of Mo's novels and instead analyze Mo's thoughts on the international order in a globalized world. This essay reads *Pure* against the post-9/11 context and explores how *Pure* revises the rhetoric of binarism inherent in the post-9/11 Western narrative through memory writing. In addition, this essay also investigates how memory shapes the protagonists' cosmopolitan identity, which, as I see it, opens up the possibility of transcending the self-versus-other logic.

### A Brief Overview of Memory Writing and Cosmopolitanism in Timothy Mo's Fiction

Before delving into an analysis of *Pure*, I intend to briefly explore the relationship between memory writing and cosmopolitanism and investigate how they are integrated into Mo's fiction. By memory writing, I mean the writer portrays and represents the protagonists' memories of historical events in the novels. As Vandana Saxena argues, literature "emerges as a space of meta-memory – a memory of the past but also the memory of the forms of recollections that adapt to the shifts in the culture and the changing context of recall" (Saxena, 36). Mo's fiction, in this sense, not only serves as a repository of memory narratives but also adopts diverse literary techniques, such as multiperspectivity and internal monologue, which shed light on the interaction between these memory narratives and disclose the ideologies inherent in these discourses.

Mo's fiction, on the one hand, records the protagonists' memories of historical events. For example, *An Insular Possession*, written from the perspective of American expatriates in the context of the First Opium War, revolves around the conflict between China and the West. Since Mo's relocation from London to Southeast Asia in the 1990s, his works have turned to Southeast Asian countries, focusing on the neocolonialism of a decolonized Indonesia in *The Redundancy of Courage*, the modernization process of the Philippines in *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, the migration of a marginalized Amerasian Filipino in a globalized context in *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup> and religious extremism in Thailand in *Pure*. All these novels represent memories of protagonists situated in the liminal space between diverse cultures and explore their negotiation and contestation in a matrix of cultures. On the other hand, Mo employs diverse literary strategies to highlight the interaction of cultures in memory writing. A telling example is *Pure*, where Mo creates a mosaic text through multiperspectivity. In this novel, four protagonists narrate their life experiences through first-person internal monologues, and the co-existence of multiple narratives reveals the challenge, even the impossibility, of reconciliation. The carnivalesque array of narratives contests an established grand narrative and sketches out the multi-cultural context, thereby underscoring the conflict-mediation dialectic inherent in the protagonists' memories and identities.

Mo's fiction creates a close link between memory and identity. In Mo's earlier works, *Sour Sweet* for instance, the protagonists' identity is constituted "through memory, daily rituals and practices, and in family relationships" (Ho, 146–147). A case in point is that Lily Chen teaches her son to defend himself from being bullied with Chinese martial arts. Here, Mo underscores the normative rule of cultural memory, which consists of "mythical history of origins, events in an absolute past" at the core and shapes individuals' identity through "fixed objectifications, traditional symbolic classification", including "words, pictures, dance, and so forth" (Assmann, 41). As a form of collective memory<sup>1</sup>, cultural

memory intends to identify an individual with a collectivity, but in most of Mo's works, protagonists generally situate themselves in a matrix of cultural memories and experience a tug-of-war between different identities. My reading of *Pure* will explore the protagonist Snooky's reconciliation between his/her identity as a Muslim and his/her attachment to Western culture.

It seems that Mo's protagonists are inclined toward cosmopolitan identity to varying degrees. Drawing on the existent scholarship<sup>2</sup>, I define cosmopolitanism as a discourse that advocates openness to and respect for different cultures and traditions and proposes an outlook of the world from a more global perspective. I intend to view cosmopolitanism as a heterogeneous discourse, which investigates differences and similarities of individuals and political entities. This tendency is noticeably evident in Mo's later works, in which protagonists seem to navigate and negotiate cultures with more ease than in his earlier ones. For example, in *Sour Sweet*, Lily Chen, a Chinese immigrant in Britain, fails to integrate herself into British society because of her lingering attachment to and even insistence on Chinese culture, and Ho argues that this novel "alerts the British reading public to the presence among them of immigrants who resolutely refuse to be assimilated" (Ho, 147). In contrast, in Mo's later works, protagonists do not perceive otherness as a threat to their sense of self, as evidenced by Rey Castro's acceptance of his identity as a black-skinned Amerasian in *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup>. Although, as Mo himself claimed, "What's interesting about these times, and what I write about, is the clash of cultures, the war of civilizations" (Jaggi, "Mixtures Like Candied Napalm: Interview with Timothy Mo"), I argue that Mo's later works extend beyond the paradigm of cultural clashes and explore the possibility of reconciling cultural memories on the level of an individual.

### **Pure as a Post-9/11 Novel**

The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre constituted a moment of shock for the US, and 9/11 has thus been viewed as "an epochal event" that has greatly influenced the world order (Liao, 2). In its official discourse, the US establishes a binary opposition between the civilized West and the presumed savage terrorists from regions such as Afghanistan, and this narrative seeks to justify its global efforts under the pretext of combating terrorism. As President Bush declared in his speech to the whole nation in the aftermath of 9/11, "America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism" (Bush, "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation"). A case in point is that America launched a war against Afghanistan and overthrew the local government. In a sense, the American authorities arouse the people's nationalism and depict Islam as a hostile "other," thus constructing a narrative that justifies its military attacks on the Islamic world as retaliatory actions.

However, the discourse about 9/11 in the West is by no means homogeneous. On the one hand, writers with Muslim backgrounds, especially those of Pakistani and Afghan origins, challenge the official narrative about their native countries through literary creation. In her research, Sarah O'Brien examines how transnational post-9/11 fiction contests the dominant discourse and gives voice to marginalized perspectives. In particular, she reads Khaled Hosseini's (from Afghanistan) *The Kite Runner*, Nadeem Aslam's (from Pakistan) *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden*, and Kamila Shamsie's (from Pakistan) *Burnt Shadows*, and argues that these writers depict traumatic events that "displace 9/11 as a unique, epoch-defining instance of trauma" (O'Brien, 168). She concludes that these writers disclose the inequality between the West and the Islamic world, attempt to make the silenced voices heard, and thus call into question "post-9/11 imperial endeavours in these regions" (O'Brien, 171).

On the other hand, some scholars disrupt the official representation of 9/11 and contest the US government's subsequent anti-terrorist policy. Edward Said (2001) argues that it is critical to avoid reducing the complex relationship between Islam and the West to a simple binary opposition, and contends that "demonization of the Other is not a sufficient basis for any kind of decent politics" (Said, "Islam and the West Are Inadequate Banners"). Noam Chomsky (2002) suggests that the definition of "terrorism" depends on the dominant discourse (see Chomsky, 16), and opposes the US government's

attack on Afghanistan, asserting that “wanton killing of innocent civilians is terrorism, not a war against terrorism” (Chomsky, 76). Jean Baudrillard (2002) claims that “[the media] are part of the terror,” and further explores the role of the media in the construction of terrorism (Baudrillard, 31). He believes that the West’s hostility toward Islam is “an – almost anthropological – confrontation between an undifferentiated universal culture and everything which, in any field whatever, retains something of an irreducible alterity” (Baudrillard, 97). Baudrillard criticizes the West for submitting heterogeneous cultures to universal law and claims that 9/11 is a dominated group’s humiliation of the West (see Baudrillard, 100). Accordingly, it is evident that the above-mentioned Western intellectuals disclose the constructedness of terrorism and reflect on the unequal relationship between the West and the rest of the world.

Given intellectuals’ interrogation of the prevalent discourse, the premise of my study is that *Pure* meditates on the deficiencies of both Western discourse and religious extremism. Mo accomplishes this by interweaving the memory narratives of a Western liberal and Islamic extremists into a dialogue. The method employed to establish a dialogical relation between the two sides, on the level of the literary form, is the adoption of multiple narrators, known as multiperspectivity. In a multiperspectival novel, “multiple and often discrepant viewpoints are employed for the presentation and evaluation of a story and its storyworld” (Hartner, 353). This novel juxtaposes the memory narratives of Snooky (a Westernized Muslim and ladyboy), Victor (an Oxford professor attached to Western liberalism), Shaykh and Umar (diehard extremists). Remarkably, these memory narratives are recounted from the first-person perspective, resembling the internal monologues of the protagonists. An internal monologue serves as a vehicle for the speaker to express his/her thoughts spontaneously without external interference, especially from an omniscient narrator. In this sense, protagonists seem to possess an independent consciousness. Multiperspectivity enables Muslims to hold the power of discourse and evoke their traumatic memories of religious discrimination in Southern Thailand, thus contesting the marginalization of the Islamic world in the Western discourse. Secondly, on the level of the story, the protagonist Snooky serves as the mediator between the Islamic world and the West. Just like Gideon Chase in Mo’s earlier work *An Insular Possession*, who intervenes in the conflict between China and Britain and translates Chinese culture into something comprehensible, Snooky witnesses the clash between Islam and the West and meanwhile communicates Western culture to conservative Imams.

What distinguishes *Pure* from other 9/11 novels, in terms of memory writing, is that it refrains from lingering on the paradigm of trauma and recovery and instead explores interactions between Islam and the West in the wake of 9/11 and the rationale behind their conflicts. As Lucy Bond analyses, “the corpus of 9/11 trauma fiction recurrently returns to tropes of silence and amnesia, evoking buried or repressed pasts” (Bond, 22). On the contrary, in *Pure*, the memory narratives of the protagonists disclose how the protagonists are gradually transformed into supporters of their respective beliefs and meanwhile integrate otherness into their seemingly homogeneous identities. Therefore, the memory writing in this novel concentrates on the process of protagonists’ transformations, to adopt the title “Transformers” of Part 1 of the novel, and concerns itself with contesting the rhetoric of dichotomy inherent in the Western narrative and the fundamentalist religion.

### Interactions of Memory Narratives Between Islam and the West

As a novel discussing memory and identity, *Pure* underscores the role of memory in fostering characters’ proclivity toward extremism. A telling example is Victor Veridian, an archdeacon emeritus at a fictional college of Oxford, who insists on the perceived cruelty of the other in his memory narrative. At the beginning of his narrative, he recalls the presence of “Oriental despots and their modern descendant, the dictator” at his college and expresses his disdain for the migrants, thus setting a xenophobic tone for his narrative (Mo, 45). Victor’s xenophobia manifests the dark side of nationalism, which proposes the integrity of a nation-state and objects to its heterogeneity, as revealed by his proposition for a “happier, more stable, more homogeneous society” (Mo, 46–47). Remarkably,

Victor's nationalism is heightened in his narrative through his reminiscence of the British Empire's heyday and his lamentation over the loss of the empire, as manifested by his thought that 'I was the Americans' rival here in 1945. Now I'm their glorified errand-boy' (Mo, 313). Victor's nationalism, intertwined with its undercurrents of imperialism, suggests a worldview featuring a dichotomy between superior and inferior cultures. Reflecting on the previously glorious imperial history and the migration mass, Victor's memories contribute to shaping Victor's identity with a xenophobic tendency.

This novel also explores the rationale behind Jihad's anti-West inclination and underscores the prescriptive role of collective memory. Collective memory creates "shared versions of the past, which results through interaction, communication, media, and institutions within small social groups as well as large cultural communities" (Erl, 15). Shaykh and Umar, religious leaders of Jihad, evoke Muslims' traumatic memories and draw on the collective memory to create a transnational anti-West Islamic community known as the Caliphate. Both religious leaders recall Muslims' sufferings in their memory narratives, and their actions of recollection, in my view, illustrate what Rothberg terms "multidirectional memory," which highlights "the interaction of different historical memories" and "the productive, intercultural dynamic" (Rothberg, 3). Shaykh, born in Pakistan, recalls Hindus' massacre of Muslims, and this traumatic memory, as Shaykh asserts, is "the most forming memory and experience of [his life]" (Mo, 152). Shaykh's retrospective interpretation of this traumatic event links his personal memory and his present engagement in Jihad, thus justifying his actions and identifying himself with the broader jihadist cause. Similarly, Umar, born in Southern Thailand, recalls the Siamese's severe persecutions of Muslims, albeit without pinpointing a specific event that motivates his participation in Jihad. As multidirectional memory permits groups to "articulate established positions" and to "come into being through their dialogical interactions with others" (Rothberg, 5), the multidirectionality of Muslims' traumatic memories discloses the transnational dimension of Muslims' afflictions and leads to the formation of a collective identity. It is through evoking collective traumatic memories that religious leaders arouse a sense of injustice and communal suffering and motivate their followers to participate in retaliatory actions against assumed oppressors.

In *Pure*, memory writing features a dialogical structure, whereby jihadists' memory narratives are entangled with Western discourse, and this interactive aspect within the text, instead of motivating readers to acknowledge the truth and reason behind the discourses, invites multiple interpretations of the narratives in question. In particular, religious leaders' narratives oppose the West's denigration of Islam. Ashcroft et al. argue that a post-colonial text can "assert the complex of intersecting 'peripheries' as the actual substance of experience" (Ashcroft et al., 77). This novel not only gives voice to the memories of the marginalized group but also undermines the reliability of the Western narrative. This can be achieved by, for example, appropriating the language in Western discourse and turning it into an instrument for resistance. In his memory narrative, Shaykh strategically repurposes Western discourse and employs it in an ironic way to underscore the cruelty inherent in Western history. Shaykh refers sarcastically to Western civilization by mentioning Germans' massacre of Jewish people and the British invention of concentration camps, claiming that "this is what they call Christian civilisation and they try to call us uncivilised cowards" (Mo, 151). Through his ironic appropriation of Western discourse, Shaykh discloses the hypocrisy and contradictions that pervade the Western narrative.

*Pure* extends beyond a mere contestation of the Western narrative and offers equally critical insights into an ingrained tendency toward dichotomous thinking in Western and jihadist discourses. The novel rejects the notion of memory narrative as a fixed and essentialized entity and instead discloses the existence of "otherness" in seemingly homogeneous narratives. Julia Kristeva proposes the term "strangers to ourselves" and argues that "the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity" (Kristeva, 1). Accordingly, the relationship between the self and the other is not one of exclusivity, but rather inclusivity. Kristeva encourages everyone to reveal otherness in themselves by claiming that "the foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners" (Kristeva, 192). In the novel, all the protagonists reveal their "otherness" in their memory narratives through their inconsistent

attitudes toward the other. Victor, Shaykh, and Umar demonstrate the heterogeneity of their memory narratives and the complexities of their identities. In a sense, the otherness in their memory narratives imbues the protagonists with an inclination toward cosmopolitanism, which proposes a recognition of “the dignity and rights of people across borders, cultures and communities” (Tihanov, 13).

Firstly, although Victor is depicted as an obstinate nationalist who prioritizes the interests of Britain, his memory narrative reveals his sympathy for the marginalized other. A case in point is marked in the moment when, while confronting jihadists, Victor highlights the dilemmas faced by both the Siamese and Muslims in Thailand and appeals for a cessation of violence by claiming:

There is [. . .] justice on both sides. You who were born here and are dispossessed by the Siamese. But think of the Siamese who were born here, worked the land, watered it with the sweat of their brows. Do they not have a just claim, too? There are two rights, not two wrongs. And two wrongs do not make a right. (Mo, 377)

In this case, Victor acknowledges the deep-seated grievances experienced by Muslims and recognizes the historical context accounting for Muslims’ sense of injustice and their decision to take revenge on alleged enemies. Victor transcends a simple us-versus-them narrative and humanizes the perceived cruel “other,” and his call for a suspension in hostilities nods to what Judith Butler terms “nonviolence” to a great extent. Butler views violence “as an intensification of social inequality” (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 142) and proposes “nonviolence” because “selves are implicated in each other’s lives, bound by a set of relations that can be as destructive as they can be sustaining” (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 9). Victor manifests his ethics of nonviolence by arguing for the interdependence between the Siamese and Muslims and envisions a cosmopolitan world order featuring “universal respect, hospitality, and tolerance” (Tihanov, 15).

By the same token, religious leaders’ memory narratives embody otherness and a cosmopolitan vision to varying degrees through encounters with the other. According to Levinas’s ethics, in a face-to-face encounter with the other, “I am confronted with the often tough choices between, on the one hand, responsibility and obligation toward the Other, and, on the other, contempt and violent rejection or indifference” (Marcus, 43). Although he advocates that Muslims should retaliate against the West, Shaykh still carries out the art of balance between violence and mercy. A case in point is Shaykh’s attempt to defend Christians from being shot and burnt to death in a bus, and Shaykh’s encounter with Christians marks a moment of sympathy and ethical obligation, which echoes Levinas’s thesis that an inter-human relationship, fostered through an encounter with the suffering other, appeals to the self to help the other (see Levinas, 165). As Shaykh claims, “As a boy I was powerless to stop it, then, and as a man now I am impotent, too” (Mo, 266). The execution of Christians triggers Shaykh’s traumatic memory of witnessing the massacre of Muslims by Hindus and fosters Shaykh’s identification with sufferers, thus arousing his sense of ethical responsibility despite religious differences. Shaykh’s assertion that “I am not so debased that I can watch children burn” (Mo, 266) reveals a fracture within this jihadist’s memory narrative replete with hatred and violence and sheds light on the presence of humanity in Shaykh’s character. Mo’s nuanced depiction of Shaykh, who embodies an equilibrium between “mercy and ruthlessness, compassion and cruelty” (Mo, 292), serves as a counter-narrative to stereotypical derogatory representations of Muslims prevalent in post-9/11 Western discourse.

Similarly, it is also by recollecting an encounter with the other that Umar acknowledges the otherness in himself. Umar realizes that “it was always me in control” (Mo, 210) during his submissive encounter with Victor and recalls that “I have for the first time in my life the feeling that I am standing outside myself, watching myself as a stranger” (Mo, 214). The memory of self-awareness enables Umar to contemplate the instability of his identity, and the encounter with Victor destabilizes Umar’s allegiance to Jihad, thus leading to a potential intertwining of the Islamic world and the West in Umar’s identity formation. As Robert Lance Snyder asserts, espionage fiction involves two traits, namely, “balancing the claims of competing ideologies on the main character” and “the encroachment of liminal boundaries” (Snyder, 6). Umar’s betrayal illustrates Snyder’s claim, as he grapples with conflicting ideologies and seems to breach the boundaries between Islam and the West, thus offering

opportunities for reconciliation. In a word, the otherness within this religious leader's memory narrative unveils the internal division of the seemingly homogeneous jihadist group and symbolizes a cosmopolitan vision that emphasizes the interconnection, rather than conflict, between Islam and the West.

In *Pure*, Mo invests the protagonists' memory narratives and identities with otherness and explores their senses of cosmopolitanism that serve as a critique of binarism and a metaphor for cultural reconciliation. An encounter with the other, which is likely to "enact the potential reconstruction of the impaired relation between the self and the other" (Gamal, 114), challenges a self-versus-other rhetoric inherent in the Western narrative and religious fundamentalism.

### **Snooky's Internally Divided Memory Narrative and Cosmopolitan Identity**

Snooky's memory narrative, in my view, represents his/her intervention in the conflict between the Islamic world and the West. This novel illuminates Snooky's complex memory and identity, showcasing a stronger inclination toward cosmopolitanism in the case of Snooky compared with Victor and religious leaders. Mo underscores the constant negotiation in Snooky's identity formation, as evidenced in Snooky's mediation between cultural memories. Since the beginning of the novel, Snooky has been depicted as a character with a hard-to-define identity, and Mo portrays Snooky as a Westernized Muslim with a cosmopolitan outlook, as revealed by Snooky's claim that he/she "never truly hated outsiders" because cinema "cosmopolitanized" him/her (Mo, 8). Different from Victor and religious extremists, who mostly advocate for a binary opposition between the West and the Islamic world, Snooky blurs the boundaries between the self and the other and believes that "you could put anything, however weird, into your particular orbit" (Mo, 9). Meanwhile, Snooky still holds a lingering attachment to his/her identity as a Muslim. Although he/she attempts to reject this identity, Snooky still believes that "it's a sense of where I came from. [...] It's belonging" (Mo, 43). Snooky can be viewed as what Kwame Appiah terms a "rooted cosmopolitan," who "aspires toward universal attention and engagement while also legitimating an inclined partiality toward local concerns" (Lee, 129). Accordingly, Snooky is rooted in the Islamic world and nurtures an open-minded attitude toward foreign cultures.

At the outset of the novel, Mo underscores Snooky's agency in identity construction, as remarked by Snooky's shift between masculinity and femininity. Judith Butler proposes the performativity of gender identity and argues "[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 136). In simple terms, one's gender identity is determined by one's acts. Although Snooky was born to be male, he/she refuses masculinity and places emphasis on femininity in daily life to integrate him/herself into the metropolitan culture in Bangkok. Ironically, after being coerced into penetrating into a jihadist base, he/she begins to wear a beard and thus performs masculinity. Essentially speaking, Snooky's vacillation between masculinity and femininity arises from the necessity of adapting to different cultures, showcasing Snooky's adeptness at performing gender identity and accordingly mediating between cultural memories.

Snooky's cosmopolitanized memory narrative de-essentializes the homogeneous narrative prevalent in Jihad. Remarkably, Jihadism underscores a prospect of solidarity and uniformity among its followers and excludes members deemed subversive or incompatible with its tenets, including LGBTQIA communities and individuals perceived to be influenced by Western culture. I view the dominant narrative of Jihadism as homonationalism, which connects gender issues with xenophobia and national ideology and uses the notion of "us" versus "them" against "migrant and other populations who are cast as 'perverse' in orientalist terms" (cited in McCann and Monaghan, 162–163). Snooky's liminality serves as a productive position for developing a critical outlook on homonationalism and creating a new cultural form within Islamic fundamentalism. Firstly, Snooky's memory narrative offers nuanced interpretations of both Islam and Western culture. Despite his/her identification with Muslims and even religious extremists, Snooky remains aware of the damaging impact of



Jihad and makes a clear distinction between Islam and Jihad, as revealed by his/her claim that “President Bush clearly says the West is not at War with Islam as such but only against terrorism” (Mo, 114). Meanwhile, Snooky challenges the Western narrative as regards its denigration of Islam and requests that Victor should refrain from abusing Snooky’s religion. In addition, Snooky’s cosmopolitan vision enables him/her to innovate cultural expressions of Islamic fundamentalism. While jihadists object to Western popular culture, Snooky views music as “a counter-point” and highlights the complementarity between the two cultures (Mo, 245). Snooky abides by Shaykh’s requirement that art should be based on reality, and the propaganda film that Snooky produces “corresponds with real life in all details” (Mo, 247). Snooky creates a hybrid culture by fusing his/her memory of the Western entertainment industry and Jihadism, and thus Snooky challenges cultural essentialism by “put[ting] the fun into fundamentalism” (Mo, 257).

Snooky is compelled by the Thai police to work as an agent for the West, and this coercive liminality places Snooky in a position of double loyalty. This novel reflects the unwarranted consequences of cultural reconciliation. The involuntary recruitment underscores the predicament of individuals in the face of powerful forces, and identity negotiation seems a method for survival amidst the oppressive circumstances. Despite his/her attempts to negotiate between Islam and the West, Snooky’s double loyalty causes his/her marginalization in both cultures and leads to a fractured sense of self. Snooky recalls feeling that “she was one of the crowd and she was a stand-out” while standing among jihadists (Mo, 174), and this experience shows uncanny strangeness, which involves “the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Kristeva, 183). Snooky’s uncanny sensation arises from his/her simultaneous integration and exception and underscores the tension between the requirement to take on a collective identity and the desire to maintain personal distinctiveness. Snooky’s cosmopolitan identity parallels the condition of being an exile, who “dwell[s] in space with a constant awareness that one is not at home” (Barbour, 294), and for whom, as Edward Said claims, “homecoming is out of the question” (Said, “Reflections on Exile” 179). Mo examines the challenge to cosmopolitan identity, revealing the identity dilemma that a cosmopolitanized individual faces in a world dominated by dichotomous thinking.

Despite Snooky’s agency in identity formation at the beginning, paradoxically, this novel seems to cast doubt on individuals’ agency and instead underlines the normative role of memory. The use of memory throughout Snooky’s narrative illustrates its role as a catalyst for ideological assimilation and affiliation with a collectivity. Mo treats memory not merely as a passive repository of past events, but as a field of negotiation and contestation between discourses and even as a coercive factor that prevails over individuality and compels individuals to identify with a collectivity. For instance, Muslims’ collective memory functions as a normative structure for articulating personal memory and constructing identity. Snooky tells Jefri, a jihadist, that he/she has been tired of the lifestyle in Bangkok and intends to take revenge for “the injustices Muslims suffered not just there but apparently everywhere” (Mo, 100), because he/she recalls that “the government in Bangkok was in denial about us, whilst still ferociously repressing us, the officially non-existent” (Mo, 117). The manipulative structure of collective memory is evident in this case, as Muslims’ collective memory imparts to Snooky a sense of injustice and hinders his/her identification with the metropolitan lifestyle in Bangkok.

Cultural memory plays a critical role in Snooky’s identity formation. A self-defining cultural memory for Snooky is about a collective prayer, in which, as Snooky claims retrospectively, “I felt one of them. For the first time I felt one of them. One of us” (Mo, 230). The normative role of cultural memory seems to illustrate Louis Althusser’s conception of ideological state apparatuses, which aim to inculcate ideology into individuals not by violence but by religion, education, family, law, politics, trade unions, communications, and culture (see Althusser, 16–17). It is by recollecting this prayer that Snooky acknowledges a sense of unity with his/her fellows and responds affirmatively to the ideological interpellation of Jihadism. This memory of a religious ritual thus suggests Snooky’s transformation from an outsider to a faithful member of the jihadist group. The prescriptive quality of memory shapes Snooky’s perception of the past self and molds his/her conception of the present self. Such a coercive aspect of memory runs the risk of compromising individuals’ agency in cultural

reconciliation. Douglas Kerr (2001), who analyses Rey Castro's identity issue in Mo's *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup>, argues for the group identity's "tyrannical claims on the individual" (Kerr, 25). Kerr's idea is further confirmed by Brian Finney (2007), who asserts that "Mo sees all forms of group identity as oppressive, a threat to the autonomy of the self" (Finney, 68), referring to Mo's claim that "individuals will rise above the imputed traits of a group" (Tonkin, "The Books Interview"). Although these scholars do not explore Mo's attitude toward memory, they shed light on Mo's critique of collective identity. In a sense, through Snooky's assimilation into the jihadist group, Mo exposes the negative aspect of memory, i.e. imposing collective identity on an individual, and challenges the reliance of identity construction on memory.

Mo compromises Snooky's cosmopolitan identity through the depiction of Snooky's turn to Jihad and underlines the precarity of cosmopolitanism that hinges on the protagonist's navigation between cultural memories. Just like Rey Castro, who returns to his homeland after traveling around the world, Snooky undergoes a spiritual return to Islam through ideological assimilation, thus ending his/her enforced exile. Although I have argued that protagonists in Mo's later works shift between cultures with apparent ease, this fluidity is intertwined with complexities. Among these is a constant tension between hegemonic discourse and personal identity in Snooky's case, as highlighted by his/her heartfelt assertion that "I want to be nothing other than I am" (Mo, 300). Snooky's unstable cosmopolitan identity reveals the asymmetry between the cultural memories at play in Snooky's identity formation. Considering that the conflict is aggravated at the end of the novel, as evidenced by Snooky's engagement in a suicidal attack, I argue that Snooky's mediation fails to achieve the goal of reconciliation. Despite the limitations of cosmopolitan identity in the post-9/11 world fraught with conflicts, the role of the protagonists situated in the liminal space is to navigate cultural boundaries and look beyond an established rhetoric of binarism.

## Conclusion

Timothy Mo's *Pure* creates a multiperspectival textual space where multiple memory narratives negotiate and contest each other. This dialogical structure underscores multiculturalism and plurality of the current world order and challenges the post-9/11 self-versus-other narrative prevalent in the official Western narrative and religious fundamentalism. Mo envisages a cosmopolitan identity that transcends binarism by introducing otherness into homogeneous memory narratives of both the Islamic world and the West. However, Mo's stance toward the feasibility of a cosmopolitan identity seems rather ambiguous, as evidenced by the normative role of cultural memory in Snooky's identity formation. The failure of the protagonist's cultural reconciliation underscores the challenges of transcending the rhetoric of dichotomy and establishing a new world order featuring inclusivity, mutual respect, and nonviolence.

## Notes

1. Although memory is generally perceived as an individual's act, Maurice Halbwachs delves into the collective dimension of memory and proposes the term "collective memory." Collective memory, on the one hand, is "the organic memory of the individual, which operates within the framework of a sociocultural environment" (Erl, 15), or social framework in Halbwachs's term. On the other hand, collective memory consists in the "creation of shared versions of the past" (Erl, 15). Jan Assmann further classifies collective memory into communicative memory and cultural memory. On the definitions of these two terms, see Assmann.
2. Research on cosmopolitanism abounds. To name a few, David Held (2010) contends that cosmopolitanism implies "the ethical and political space which sets out the terms of reference for the recognition of people's equal moral worth, their active agency and what is required for their autonomy and development" and "builds on principles that all could reasonably assent to in defending basic ideas which emphasize equal dignity, equal respect, the priority of vital needs and so on" (49). On the other hand, Held points out that cosmopolitanism considers "the hermeneutic complexity of traditions, with their unique temporal and cultural structures" (49). In simpler terms, Held's definition of cosmopolitanism is based on respect for equality, dignity, and basic requirements, as well as the recognition of differences. Galin Tihanov (2021) defines cosmopolitanism as "a) an ethos

and a set of values that include openness to other cultures, tolerance, respect for others despite their background and traditions; b) a foundation for a specific world order built on peace and mutual recognition amongst states and communities; c) a particular methodology in the social sciences since the fall of the Berlin Wall that looks at social phenomena not through the prism of the nation state [...], but from a more global ('cosmopolitan') perspective" (13–14). He underscores not only a peaceful relationship but also openness to and tolerance of differences, as well as an international outlook. (Held, David. *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, p. 49. Tihanov, Galin. "Two Types of Cosmopolitanism: Instead of a Preface," pp. 13–14.)

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