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Dead End: The Failure of Multicultural Britain in Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours Are the Streets* (2011)

Based on *Ours Are the Streets* (Sunjeev Sahota, 2011), this article examines how the UK's homeless, jobless, disenfranchised second-generation Muslims struggle to align their ethnic/cultural identities with their British identity. This is one of the first British novels that address the issue of integration in relation to radicalization. The Umma – the worldwide community of Muslims – provides some of these hyphenated Britons with a space for dissent through which they explore new modes of self-identification and commitment, through self-imposed exile and idealized trajectories in Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria, the inverted mirror image of their parents' westward journey.

Chaque génération sans doute, se croit vouée à refaire
le monde. La mienne sait pourtant qu'elle ne le refera
pas. Mais sa tâche est peut-être plus grande. Elle
consiste à empêcher que le monde ne se défasse.

Albert Camus¹

Recent diasporic fiction – *Heaven's Edge* (Romesh Gunesekera, 2002), *The Inheritance of Loss* (Kiran Desai, 2006), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Mohsin Hamid, 2007), or *Spiral Road* (Adib Khan, 2008) – addresses the difficulties and dilemmas of integration, and the issues of “returning home,” whether homecoming is temporary or permanent, as in the form of exile or deportation. *Ours Are the Streets* examines the failure of the multicultural project in the context of globalization and post 9/11, the latter having a “devastating impact” on Muslims at large, and on writers of Pakistani descent in particular (Chambers 27). The interactions between first-generation immigrants and their children play a central role, as well as the latter's growing sense of uncertainty and alienation, as they struggle with their hyphenated identities. I shall explore the causes of the narrator's estrangement both in Britain and in Pakistan, and the reasons for his new affiliations to an idealized Umma, and for his commitment to the cause of Jihad. A key to understanding the failure of integration can be found in the study of the novel's different lexica – South Yorkshire dialect, Urdu/Punjabi and Arabic. I shall also examine how the novel's narrative strategies reflect a Manichean worldview.

Ours Are the Streets is a diary doubling as a memoir of Imtiaz's teenage years in Sheffield and Pakistan, addressing the issues of home, identity and alienation. “The doctrine of state multiculturalism” has been criticized for preventing integration and fostering radicalization (Cameron; Meer and Modood 658-74). Given his bicultural identity, Imtiaz hardly seems to fit the description of a proponent of cultural separateness. Unlike assimilationist models of integration, based on citizenship and secularism, the underpinning principle of British multiculturalism is the “remaking of public identities, through cultural diversity, in order to achieve an equality of citizenship that is neither merely individualistic nor premised on assimilation” (Modood 5).

1. Albert Camus' Nobel prize acceptance speech, 10 December 1957: “Each generation doubtless feels called upon to remake the world. Mine knows that it will not remake it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself.”

The novel's cultural transcoding or code-switching between slang, vernacular English and Urdu may reflect such a degree of hybridity and cultural interaction. The ubiquitous "semt," or "it were," as well as dialect terms like "summat," "owt," "mithering," "love," "me mam," "bairn," "gunna," "traipse," definitely root the narrator in the South Yorkshire working-class. Furthermore, Imtiaz's use of ubiquitous pragmatic markers such as "fuck," "bastard" and "shit" is as much a reflection of his linguistic mimicry and desire for recognition as a youthful contestation of authority or of society's accepted norms, whether they are associated with the dominant white culture or his parents' conservative values. Ujala makes a similar use of slang in *Maps for Lost Lovers* (Nadeem Aslam, 2004) to reject his Pakistani parents' bigoted beliefs. He accuses his "cunt of a mother" and "fucking spineless father" of the honor killing of their uncle (Aslam 72).² However, Imtiaz's desire for assimilation falls short of Shahid Hasan's, the narrator of *The Black Album* who wants to "kick [...] the arse [of] all foreign bastards," and join the BNP (Kureishi 11). In both novels the use of slang, particularly sex slang, reflects the insecurity of young male adults negotiating identity beyond race, religion or class. In *Ours Are the Streets*, the description of Imtiaz's clandestine visit to his parents' house with his girlfriend should be read in that light. Respect for his mother's religious orthodoxy is incompatible with the idea of "shag[ging]" Becka (25).

However, low levels of integration and citizenship mark Imtiaz as a permanent outsider, and far from being lexica of integration, Urdu / Punjabi and English vernaculars serve as borders within borders, as markers of ghettoization between first-generation immigrants and their children as they face internal and external pressures to conform to society at large. This is illustrated in particular in a passage at the Lal Ghulaab restaurant. The narrator feels ashamed of his parents who cannot read the menu in English, and settle for the lamb tikka in order to avoid losing face. Further embarrassment ensues, as the meal is interrupted by the arrival of a raucous hen party. Out of fear, Imtiaz's parents exchange banalities about the food, while the drunken bride collapses, taking the tablecloth and all the smashing plates with her (46). The scene climaxes when the bride insists on Mr. Raina posing in a photo with her. Another guest suggests a kiss which Imtiaz's father dismisses curtly: "you are shaming me. I am sorry" (49). Imtiaz winces less under his father's treatment than under his lame excuses, "I am sorry," as though these "were the only three words he knew." The tension becomes further exacerbated as the inebriated woman coaxes Mr. Raina, a devout Muslim, to change his mind with the chance of fondling her breasts (49-50).

The question of integration is formulated in terms of negative perceptions. Humiliation is one of the novel's mainsprings as it sheds further light on the protagonist's identity crisis, as expressed in his confession to his great-uncle: "It **weren't** easy for **Abba** over there, you know. He had to take a lot of **crap**. [...] You don't get how hard it is for the kids. Growing up in England'" (137, emphasis added).³ "Crap" is literally what the immigrants face when they try to settle in the UK. This much is evidenced in Imtiaz's

2. The novel *Home Boy* (H. M. Naqvi, 2012) makes similar explicit references to the stigma of cultural inferiority when representing the alienation of first generation Pakistani immigrants.

3. In this instance and elsewhere, I have chosen to highlight in bold type the Urdu references and the slang phrases not merely to indicate their frequent combination, but to suggest that the terms of endearment, or the kinship terms and the prevalent use of slang or South Yorkshire vernacular are mutually exclusive. Those two languages as well as Arabic – mainly phrases from the Qu'ran which will be examined in the final part – are deployed as languages of exclusion. By contrast, all other forms of emphasis are to be italicized, according to convention.

humiliation. He criticizes his parents for hiding their shame behind euphemisms and evasive language when it comes to cleaning the father's cab reeking of urine and vomit:

"Why? What happened?"

"Oh, nothing. Someone was being ill and accidentally brought up their food. That is all."

[...]

"Why are you worrying? It was nothing. [...]"

"**Abba**, have you told the police?"

"**Uff**, what is the point in causing more trouble, **hain**? A little trouble is part of the job."
(71-2, emphasis added)

The father's humiliation is compounded by the son's shame and helplessness, which accounts for his growing sense of insecurity and marginalization (Speckhard 251-77), and provides a clue to understanding his ultimate radicalization:

It **were** horrible the way his eyes backed down, followed by his shoulders sagging. [...] I wanted to go over and put my arm around him, and say that I'd sort it out because that **were** what sons were for and that he didn't have to worry. I didn't, though. I wish I had, but I didn't. [S]ometimes I can't even work out what it is I **were** so ashamed of. I don't know whether I **were** ashamed of **Abba** because he **were** ashamed of himself, or whether I **were** ashamed of myself for being ashamed of **Abba**. [...] It **screws** my head up sometimes. [...] Your **abba** [sic] being made to feel ashamed is a terrifying thing to see. The way all his adult strength is made to just crumble by a few well-placed words, and all you can do is gaze helplessly at him with a kind of horror, as if you're watching a tower collapsing. (72-3, emphasis added)

The perception of his father's loss of face in terms of a "tower collapsing" is highly significant, as Mr. Raina made a prior explicit link between the attack on the World Trade Center and the West's erosion of responsibility and moral values (45); the connection is given an ironic twist, given the novel's reverse narrative. Low self-image, identity-related insecurity, and depressive symptoms can be related to sympathies towards violent protest and terrorism. Contrary to popular belief, recent migrants to Britain are shown to have greater resistance to radicalization, unlike people born in the UK who feel marginalized (Bhui *et al.*). Failure to obtain "a degree for dummies" (*OAS* 43, 74) and embracing radicalization resonate with *The Black Album* and *Burnt Shadows* (Kamila Shamsie, 2009). The novel's first-generation immigrants – Mr. Raina, Charag, Aalim and Zuffar – regard their disadvantaged status as "disposable bodies" as temporary, and are optimistic about the future. Unlike them, second-generation children like Imtiaz feel marginalized and internalize their identity vacuum. Thus, some second-generation youths become "born-again Muslims" (Roy 267, 268; Griffin 204), after switching radically from Westernized lifestyles to strict religious piety, and from integration or assimilation into mainstream society to total alienation and radicalization.

Sheffield, the setting of the framing narrative and the narrator's birthplace, proves to be a dehumanized city. It is successively described in Urdu "as cold as kulfī," (*OAS* 42) in Penglish as "a hill station on the banks of the river Don," (106)⁴ or in plain English as "a griefhole of a town" on a "bored and dirty river" (29, 289). It is reminiscent of Nadeem Aslam's "Dasht-e Tanhai," his Northern desert-like city in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Landmarks such as Meersbrook or Meadowhall are empty signifiers, and the urban geography resembles a montage of dislocated spaces: the Leadmill club with its "half-arsed" red

4. This is a standard expatriate depiction of "Blighty," another term suggesting displacement and alienation, as it is derived from the Urdu "valetiya," a definition of his identity that Imtiaz comes to resent (104, 108).

neon (29), a back alley with recycling bins, a rundown estate, a boarded-up music store, a park with drinking hoodies. The dysfunctional city is plagued by deindustrialization and high unemployment and South Asians are “entrenched in ethnic enclaves,” around the mosque or the youth social club; they inhabit “parallel” spaces (Cantle 114).

A distinctive feature of Sahota’s Sheffield is the conspicuous absence of the “goreh,” the white population. Thus places like Sheffield or Bradford become “Paki central,” (53) with nothing but “brown face[s]” (63). Indeed, apart from the early scene at the University club, the shoppers at the mall, and the characters of Becka and her mother, Theresa, most white Sheffielders become largely invisible in *Ours Are the Streets*. One may speculate as to the reason for such an erasure. One tentative explanation could be the narrator’s defence mechanism to symbolically dislodge those responsible for social segregation and rampant racism and ultimately reclaim the territory from which second-generation immigrants have been excluded. This is confirmed in Imtiaz’s valediction to his deceased father: “We were meant to become part of these streets. They were meant to be ours as much as anyone’s. That’s what you said you worked for, came for. **Were** it worth it, **Abba?**” (70, emphasis added)

The invisibility of the white population appears to be related to the protagonist’s socio-economic marginalization. In the aftermath of his failed ambitions and the death of his father, Imtiaz tries to turn his hand to cab driving. In diasporic fiction, for instance in *Home Boy* and *Burnt Shadows*, cab driving is associated with low levels of literacy, frustrated expectations of social advancement or cultural withdrawal. However, stepping into his father’s shoes proves unbearable, and Imtiaz finds himself literally unable to drive on (82). Loss of mobility and the internalization of shame are further symbolized by the narrator’s semi-permanent housebound condition. “Holed up” in his room, (17) he struggles to make ends meet, depending on his father’s insurance, allowances and handouts from his mother-in law as the terse exchange with his wife exemplifies:

“Oh, come on, **jaan**.”

“Don’t **jaan** me. If you really want to do something you could do worse than going out to work.” (57, emphasis added)

Becka does not only spurn the show of affection – the Urdu term for sweetheart. She also signals her refusal to bridge multicultural separateness, thus indicating that if the relationship is to be salvaged, it will be on her own terms. One may wonder, here and elsewhere in the framed anecdotes, whether the narrator does not overplay the childish voice, in marked contrast to the controlled voice of the diary. Thus the rituals of humiliation and exclusion justify *a posteriori* the course of radicalization and demonization of Western values.

In Sahota’s novel, homecoming carries the stigma of failure and dislocation. The narrator is aggrieved to be perceived as a “valetiya,” a visiting tourist, when he returns to Pakistan for his father’s funeral. Symbolically, at the airport customs in Lahore, the officer challenges his identity and considers deporting him (92). It takes Imtiaz time to acclimatize to time-warped Pakistan. Despite his cousin Charag’s welcome “Home,” the narrator complains about the “fucking” heat, cowpats and half-buried bricks (94, 95) and wonders whether he has come to “the wrong place.” In a process of mirror image reversal, Imtiaz feels foreign and out of place in much the same way as Pakistani “freshies” “look like a joke” (14, 84-6, 94, 109, 112, 278, 284), as they seek to blend into the host society in the UK.

Imtiaz resents being perceived as an “idiot tourist” by the locals or distant relatives (100, 105, 108). A sunglassed matinee idol blows Pakistan’s trumpet as well as his own status symbol, much to the chagrin of the visitor from Britain who scorns the host’s primitive eating habits and wishes to be back in England (101, 107). Indeed, by and large, Pakistan cuts a sorry figure with inadequate transport infrastructure, backward farming, daily power outages and lack of sanitation. Conversely, unlike first-generation Pakistanis who migrated to Britain in search of work and social advancement, if not Eldorado, and who hoped to reap the fruits of their labour in summer houses in Lahore (73), second-generation British Pakistanis find (re)location in their place of origin problematic. They are stigmatized as aliens (117).

The tone of self-pitying victim echoes the Sheffield scenes. Imtiaz’s sense of his Pakistani roots is nebulous. On their way to Azad Kashmir to learn more about their country’s history, Imtiaz and his Punjabi friends seem to transform their trip in a rusting campervan into a courtly Bollywood scene as Faisal treats them to a ghazal from *Umrão Jaan* and then “salaams” his admirers (148). When the narrator acts out the epic battles fought by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb Badshah Akbar on the turrets of Muzaffarabad’s Red Fort, the stark contrast between the Qila’s derelict state and the Bollywood-style epic battle complete with cannon and arrow soundtrack should be noted. On realizing that he has spectators, the would-be actor returns to reality and brings the curtain down (163). Far from being an eye-opener, the trip to Kashmir compounds the humiliation Imtiaz encountered elsewhere in Pakistan. Kashmir is hardly worth a mention for its scenery. Instead, the focus is on the cramped, smelly accommodation and Imtiaz’s sense of his own inadequacy as a foreigner unable to work the collective water pump (154). Imtiaz finds it difficult to communicate with local Kashmiris. A boatman exposes his foreignness, assuming he hails from the US. The young Sheffielder disguises his British identity, opting for a Punjabi one instead (165). Imtiaz takes exception at being branded a “shaitaan” or a traitor by the senile boatman, and he feels like assaulting him for attacking his home (166).

The field trip to Kashmir corresponds to a low point in the novel – the main protagonist has yet to come to terms with the loss of his father, and his sense of estrangement in his country of origin adds to the trauma. He even feels disconnected from home to the point of not calling his family or answering his wife’s text messages (153). Imtiaz perceives himself as an alien, a permanent Other, an in-between or a being in transit, “excluded from forms of belonging and identity, particularly within the context of discourses of nationhood” (Ahmed 5). In a rare admission to his uncle, the contradictions and fissures in the young Sheffielder’s identity become apparent, as well as the irrelevance of ethnicized national borders:

“Honestly, **Tauji**. We don’t really know what we’re about, I guess. Who we are, what we’re for.” [...] I wanted to talk about why I found myself defending Muslims against whites and whites against Muslims. About why I loved **Abba** but had still wished him dead. [...] “I mean, we’re the ones stuck in the middle of everything. Like we’re not sure whose side we’re meant to be on, you know?” (137-8, emphasis added)

With its parricidal overtones, the narcissistic confession is a key to understanding the narrator’s alienation. It resonates with earlier feelings of hurt and humiliation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Home Boy*, or *Burnt Shadows*.

Radical religion drives a wedge into the project of multiculturalism, as it brainwashes disoriented youths for jihadi terrorism. Prior to his departure for Pakistan, Imtiaz behaves like an average oversexed teenager plied with booze and drugs. He describes going to the mosque as a Friday feeling, “to wash off the sins of the week” (9). When it comes to religion, he demonstrates a wayward observance of Islam in his foul language and sexual innuendos (68). He even mildly mocks his mother’s niqab-wearing orthodoxy. Besides, he is prepared to backtrack on his early suggestion that Becka should “revert” – *i.e.* convert to Islam – to win over his parents.

Yet in the wake of his trip to Kashmir and Afghanistan, Imtiaz takes a radical new turn and so does our reading of *Ours Are the Streets*. Instead of being a rallying cry for inclusiveness and belonging, the meaning of the novel’s title can be twisted to suggest polarization, exclusion, segregation and separatism. The title may be interpreted as meaning that the streets are ours for the taking, thus reflecting the firebrand sermons of Salafists proselytizing for jihad and calling for the imposition of Sharia in Britain.

Sahota’s novel presents the reader with a double journey. The first one is a series of flashbacks recalling Imtiaz’s teenage years in Sheffield and his tribulations in Pakistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan. The second eschatological journey, presented as diary entries, chronicles his messianic return from Pakistan, bearded and wearing a kufi and kurta pajamas, as well as his preparations for a suicide bombing plot in the name of radical jihad. The two contradictory trajectories are obviously interconnected, and they dovetail very neatly. However, Imtiaz starts his confessional narrative, in an anti-climax, with the second journey. Using a reverse narrative allows the narrator to fragment and reorder his flashbacks so that they fit in his framing diary. The pious tone is set right from the first paragraphs couched in Arabic durood pragmatics like “Inshallah” and “Ameen” (1). Indeed, Arabic becomes the novel’s third lexicon, as Islam increasingly dictates Imtiaz’s way of life and judgment and can hardly coexist with the English vernacular and sex slang analyzed above. The diary entries are replete with references to the Qur’an or the Prophet, which suggests that Imtiaz’s third Pan-Islamist identity is no longer compatible with his Anglo-Pakistani vacuum identity (Hari).

Salafism disseminates a Manichean worldview, dividing people between believers and “kuffar,” based on a literalist and puritanical interpretation of Islam. As he espouses radical Islam, the narrator of *Ours Are the Streets* does not offer a theological explanation for his conversion. What he does offer, though, is mere sectarian ideology that seems to be lifted from standard Jihadi literature. Hence the narrator spouts violent, misogynistic and anti-Western tirades. Not long after his return to Sheffield, Imtiaz imposes on himself a punishing schedule of fasting and prayers, from which he unilaterally excludes his wife, who incidentally did convert to Islam for his sake. His emphasis on cultural separateness and haram prohibitions contrasts with her efforts at inclusiveness, both inside and outside her new faith. As a legacy to his daughter Noor, the narrator keeps hammering the need to detach oneself from “taghoot,” or false idols. The proselytizing tone is noteworthy as he prepares himself to become a shaheed:

[B]elieve me it’s a good job I did clean myself up before it were too late. Otherwise how would I answer **Allah (swt)** when **Mashar** arrives and **He** asks me what I did while **my people** were being removed from the face of the Earth. Remember that, Noor. Remember that these material goods are just the things they try to dazzle you with so you won’t notice what’s really going on. (75)

Symbolically, the denunciation of false idols coincides with Imtiaz's return to Sheffield. Whereas Charag, his immigrant cousin, cannot wait to discover a new Eldorado, Imtiaz, on the other hand, fails to reconnect with this unreal country that is his birthplace. He cannot make sense of the spectacle of simulacrum (278). Back in his house, it seems that everything is "fake" and has changed beyond recognition – even his wife (279). This is a convenient ploy to demonize the Other, instead of confronting his own inner demons, just as his indictment of representation and consumerism gives legitimacy to his hermitic status.⁵ Imtiaz's sense of alienation in Britain contrasts with his purification rituals, and with his mutation into a superhero, as he learns to handle guns during one of the tipping points to his conversion to radical jihad. Under the wings of an Afghan warlord, he foreshadows his sacrifice as a shaheed: "I were ripping free, like my skin were tearing apart to reveal a new and stronger man" (217).

The first two parts of this study have focused on the narrator's disorientation and estrangement from his family, his social milieu and British society. By internalizing his personal and family failures, Imtiaz shuns social engagement, as is illustrated in the left-hand side of the triangular radicalization model – see figure 1 below –, and thus once the alienation threshold is breached, he develops further neurotic tendencies, and falls prey to sect recruitment.

Figure. Radicalization – Social Exclusion Model (Halafoff & Wright-Neville 928)

The third and final part examines the narrator's conversion to radical Islam and his mission as a shaheed, a phase corresponding to the right-hand part of the diagram, in between the two threshold levels. Small group dynamics play an important role in the radicalization process (Sageman 154-7). The process does not occur overnight (Wright-Neville 11-23; Halafoff and Wright-Neville 926-8), but follows a carefully stage-managed system of indoctrination, based on in-group inclusiveness, anti-Western rhetoric, and devaluation of human life – as made explicit in the above social exclusion

5. Born-again Muslims and Western converts invoke unrestrained consumerism, lack of morality and sexual permissiveness, as motivations for embracing radical Islam.

model – and scheduled over several weeks, in Pakistan, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. The process can be divided into three asymmetrical stages. During the induction, Imtiaz is introduced to Ustaadji, a benign and charismatic spiritual guide who delivers a crash course on history and politics, interspersed with readings from the Qur'an and Islamic prescriptions (OAS 128). Gurus play a key role in the mobilization of activists by transforming “widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle” (Bjorgo 260). Such lectures seem fairly innocuous – Aaqil, one of Imtiaz's friends, even parodies the self-appointed imam, who lets his young listeners smoke hookahs and listen to qawwali music. In this phase, references to hard-line Islam are underplayed, if not evaded altogether. What counts is the awakening and mobilization of the in-group, which is presented in the form of an experiential religious retreat to Kashmir (OAS 129).

The second phase culminates with Imtiaz's apotheosis as he changes from passive believer to devout Muslim and is anointed by their spiritual guide to lead “fajr.” After a tentative few words, the dawn prayer resonates in the Kashmir valley; the narrator depicts a numinous landscape or soundscape with the sun peaking over the snow crests of the mountains to shed light on the valley; his fractured identity is healed, as he holds centre stage:

Louder still, and louder more until I couldn't quite believe how full and clean and fresh the sound coming out of me was. [...] And I were leading them all. [...] And soon we were all as one great boiling voice washing over the valley. *Magic were spilling over me. The whole world were on fire [...]* At that moment I knew no one would be able to beat a force this straight and bright. [...] *The mountain air were a dreamy green, as if Allah Himself had chosen to lean down from on high and breathe upon this day.* (183-4, emphasis added)

Imtiaz's epiphany – if such a term can be used – completes an ingenious indoctrination course combining religious orthodoxy, media training and team building activities, under the helm and watchful eye of Ustaadji and Aaqil. In the course of the second phase, there appears to be a growing rift between the spiritual mentor and the group's young charismatic leader. I read this rift as a maneuver to polarize and test the group's cohesiveness so that the two of them can sift the waverers from the militants; hence the games of divide and rule, and the religious assignment given to Imtiaz after his mettle has been tested and after his induction to the group as an “apna,” as opposed to his former status as a “valetiya.” Such bonding is a prerequisite for the third phase, to take place in Afghanistan. The misnomer “eunuchs,” (170) which Aaqil brandishes as a sign of his frustration, provides another example of the way he masterminds group strategy. In this instance and elsewhere, the language of the group's charismatic leader reflects male ego dominance. He presses on his young recruits that they will only attain manhood by proving themselves on the Afghan battleground.

One of the mechanisms commonly used in the radicalization process is the conscious or unconscious framing of grievances in terms of a larger narrative – the narrative of a “just war” or the Umma victimization narrative. Interestingly Aaqil choreographs the group's Pavlovian stimulus-responses before media training has even started with repeated injunctions to mobilize and come to the defence of “our brothers and sisters [who] are being destroyed” (170-2, 176). The media training is a clever montage of two complementary, yet radically different videos. The first, which is described as formulaic and crudely edited, serves to denounce the so-called international Jewish conspiracy

against the Umma. The second video is proper cinemascope with panning and zooming effects, voiceover, music and cacophonous gunfire. Although there is no such video of a shaheed glorifying jihad in a steroidal action montage accompanied by a recruitment nashid, the close-up on the face of an American soldier filling up the whole screen, singing the Star-Spangled Banner or threatening to kick “brown ass” has a far greater impact on the spectators who replay the sequence time and again and mobilize for action against “the infidels” (175).

In the third phase, the messages that have been planted in the recruits’ minds are reactivated and reinforced. There are similar tests and rituals of inclusion and exclusion which the narrator passes with flying colours, as though he were a film hero or top goal scorer in a football game (197). Again the exposure of Muslim humiliation is central to the radicalization process. Aaqil and Abu Bhai, the Afghan warlord who has taken over Ustaadj’s role, carry on the media training, this time with the Abu Ghraib video of Lynndie England parading a naked Iraqi prisoner on a leash (211). As previously, Aaqil orchestrates the group’s response in a crusade for “pan-national Islamism” or for the Caliphate (211; Hari).

To legitimize its ideology, radical Jihad recuperates and recycles the concept of biopower/necropower theorized by Arendt, Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe to analyze the culture of surveillance and repression of the nation-state or the colonial-state apparatus. Such clips of “collateral damage” are invoked to justify counter-narratives of biopower, in the form of gruesome videos of beheadings, posted on social networks by British jihadists using “al-Britani” titles as *noms de guerre* (Pantucci 2014; Sengupta). Similarly, the rhetoric of an asymmetrical war deployed by Imtiaz’s mentors is lifted from Jihadi propaganda social networks (Pantucci 2015, 213-31). All such charges against the West’s double standards are not leveled on the basis of ethics or human rights; rather they serve as justifications to escalate acts of terror.

This phase, however, is no longer only speculative or doctrinal; it prepares the group for the violence threshold and grooms them for radical action. This final stage takes Imtiaz and his fellow would-be jihadi to face US military occupation of Afghanistan in several encounters, in the course of which they evolve from passive to active participation in the war. Imtiaz confronts biopower in the form of a detainee subjected to torture in a secret American detention centre (*OAS* 239-41). The final encounter which crowns the ultimate radicalization phase is no longer a war computer game. Group cohesiveness is at its maximum – the immature youths or “eunuchs” have grown into “men,” programmed to become shaheed and avenge Muslim blood (Hari). By passing death sentences on aspiring Jihad martyr-candidates, the Afghan warlord micro-manages martyrdom as a form of biopower. Abu Bhai has no shortage of disposable bodies, much like his American nemesis, and his main concern seems to be status recognition and media outreach in the form of Mujatweets (Bunt 25-66, 205-11; Prucha 117-36).

Confessional narrative is a convenient genre for self-introspection and self-aggrandizement. *Ours Are the Streets* does not lend itself to much self-questioning, owing to the main protagonist’s radicalization and sectarian ideology. On the other hand, self-exaltation features prominently, in relation to in-group indoctrination. Confessional narratives are often equated with what narratologists refer to as “unreliable narration” (Booth 339-74; Rimmon-Kenan 15; Phelan 31-97). I-narratives cultivate both ambiguity and disclosure as they articulate “a systole and diastole not simply of facts, of informa-

tion consciously or unconsciously withheld, but of self and voice” (Newton 246). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a novel that also explores the theme of radicalization, acts of self-mantling alternate with hypermnesia (Hamid 118).

Imtiaz’s diary is informative for what it eschews and suppresses, as much as for what it discloses. The reader is not told much about the happier times Becka and Imtiaz shared, which are retrospectively reinterpreted as deviant, nor do we learn much about Noor’s birth, or about the reasons why the narrator’s mother chose to remain in Pakistan, but such erasures are in keeping with Imtiaz’s univocal, sectarian discourse and puritanical lifestyle – questions about women’s issues become haram, given his surrogate group identity and his commitment as a shaheed.

More problematically, the narrator cursorily dismisses the reasons why Charag opts out of the bombing plot. This eleventh-hour withdrawal coincides with the narrator’s own dilatory tactics, his own irrational fears and paranoia over his entourage, particularly his cousin whom he decides to spy on. Imtiaz accuses Charag of being deceitful and manipulative, stopping short of calling him an informer, and then in the next breath, he is compelled to admit that it is not his cousin who is acting “weird,” but it is he who is muddled up and trading false accusations (*OAS* 199, 201-2, 221). Set on a collision course, the narrator becomes economical with the truth and delusional as a defence mechanism, unlike Kureishi’s Shahid who challenges his new radical friends and seizes the chance to redefine and reinvent himself. The reader can interpret the strange appearance of Tarun in a similar light. Initially, Tarun is presented as a benefactor who gives food tokens to Imtiaz’s family as they struggle to make ends meet. This chance encounter turns out to be anything but chance with the security watchman’s ubiquitous appearances. As the day for the suicide bombing draws near, Imtiaz becomes paranoid. He sees Tarun everywhere and rushes home, locking the door, drawing the curtains and putting tape all around the windows (268-9). The narrator becomes convinced that Tarun is a counter-terror agent whose mission is to snoop on him to foil his suicide mission, and he even risks compromising the plot by calling Abu Bhai in Afghanistan (269, 293). The diary’s closing entry clearly suggests that Tarun is projected as a figment of Imtiaz’s delusional imagination. The small-scale conspiracy against the narrator is also a reflector of the Manichean worldview of radical groups as part of a supposed Western crusade against the Umma.

Sunjeev Sahota’s *Ours Are the Streets* intersects diasporic identities, interculturality, globalization and Islamic radicalization. Such interactions have received scant critical scrutiny. While the novel sheds light on the *modus operandi* of European jihadis, it focuses its attention on their complex motivations as well as the difficulties to demarcate terrorists from non-terrorists, on the grounds of personal traits. The emergence of “homegrown terrorism” is not a recent phenomenon; it has occupied and Islamized a space that was filled by anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist extremism. Its mutation which appeals to the sons and daughters of many South-Asian or Middle-Eastern immigrants reflects the failure of the multicultural project due to internalized humiliation and socio-economic grievances. Although the novel does not highlight the role of radical mosques and organizations as such, or even the influence of social media, it sheds light on the way such grievances are manipulated to “incubat[e] a very English jihadism” (Hari; Bjørge 260) and carve out mini Londonistans. Radicalization is the result of a complex set of interactions between individuals, groups and their environment. For disenchan-

ted, disoriented and homeless youths like Imtiaz, the construction of a “deculturalized” Islam is perceived as an antidote to the process of othering and an alternative to multicultural anxiety. Thus the narrator is able to recast a new identity as he espouses this imaginary “neo-umma.” However this spiritual rebirth, contingent as it is on Western demonization, is inextricably enmeshed with radical Islam and Jihad. The novel is presented as a kind of “du’a,” a prayer that Imtiaz offers to his daughter Noor, hoping that she will be raised as a “righteous Muslima.” The confessional genre allows the narrator to present his narrative as the ultimate truth. Yet when it comes to penning his personal history, the main protagonist of *Ours Are the Streets* is prone to evasion and revisionism. Despite his admonitions to the contrary, Imtiaz seems to have scant regard for his estranged wife and soon-to-be-orphaned daughter. His conversion to radical Islam supersedes the bonds of those he used to cherish. Wracked by self-loathing and guilt, the heroes of *Crime and Punishment* and *A Curse on Dostoevsky* seek atonement (Dostoevsky, 1866; Rahimi, 2014). There is no such implicit gesture in Imtiaz’s diary, as he contemplates killing innocent victims. Yet, his last-minute appeal to his dead father to see him through, or even stay his hand – both readings seem possible, albeit contradictory – may be such a tentative gesture.

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