

## Faiz Ahmed Faiz: The Worlding of a Lyric Poet<sup>1</sup>

By Amina Yaqin

In a recent article in the *Guardian* Ahdaf Souief discusses the intellectual role and the duty of the fiction writer in times of crisis with reference to the Arab Spring. She asks the question “Should the novel be political?” and her answer emphasises a humanist prose style from the writer that will inspire his or her readership, regardless of political affiliation, to participate in the retelling of the “narrative of the great world”. At the heart of Souief’s questioning is an affiliation to a worldly Europeanised cosmopolitan stance that recognises the novelist as a citizen of the globalised world. However she sees a disjuncture between this global citizenship and artistic representation in times of national crisis and she says, “[i]n Egypt we novelists all seem to have given up - for the moment – on fiction”. Trying to work out how a novelist remains true to their role as a citizen of the world in such a period of trauma she finds an answer in the figure of the major Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) as an example of someone who remained true to his art and to the representation of truth, by moving away from his hometown of Haifa and distancing himself from the immediate place of crisis. In his address to the first Palestinian festival of literature in 2008 he expressed the problem of being a writer who “has to use the word to resist the military occupation, and

---

<sup>1</sup> This introduction has benefitted from a number presentations over the years, most recently at the World Literature: networks of circulation Conference at SOAS, as a research paper at McGill University, Punjab University, LUMS, Government College University and Oxford University. I am grateful to both students and faculty at all institutions who listened and made suggestions which have been invaluable. I am particularly grateful to the contributors of this volume for giving me a wonderful canvas to build on and indebted to the intellectual generosity of Geeta Patel who gave advice at crucial times. Some of the ideas expressed in this introduction have been developed from an earlier essay entitled, “Variants of Cultural Nationalism in Pakistan: a Reading of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jamil Jalibi, and Fahmida Riaz” that appeared in *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols: Process, Power, and the Articulation of identities in South Asia* (eds.) Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan in 2009.

has to resist – on behalf of the word – the danger of the banal and the repetitive”. (Souief 2012: 4).

However, unwilling to leave the site of crisis in Cairo herself Souief opines that under such constrained circumstances the writer can't help but report the real world tragedies that they witness at such times and the aesthetics of fiction are less urgent. Souief's concerns have been a key point of consideration in world literature, in particular by diasporic intellectuals such as Erich Auerbach and Edward Said. She re-opens a conversation on literature as aesthetics and literature as politics that has often divided literary critical thinking.

The contemporary context of a revolutionary movement and the return to the real in literary representation is an ideal beginning for looking back to a revolutionary poet: Faiz Ahmad Faiz who also wrote during times of crisis from the 1940s to the early 1980s in India and Pakistan. As such Faiz is not a stranger to World literature but his poetic oeuvre is not canonical. The poet Naomi Lazard who met him at an international literary conference in Honolulu in 1979 first introduced him to an American readership. As a poet she compared him to Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) and Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963). He is popular for being a people's poet and his verse has often been appropriated for revolutionary political activism in Pakistan. In a preface to his second collection of poetry *Dast-e Saba* (The Wind's caress) he said: "It is incumbent upon the artist to not only observe but also to struggle. To observe the restless drops (of life) in his surroundings is dependent upon his vision, to show them to others, upon his artistic abilities and to enter into them, to change the flow (of life) is dependent on the depth of his desire and the passion in his blood". (Hashmi 2012: 4).

There is much to be found in common between the contemplations of Darwish and Faiz on literature, aesthetics and politics. On the question of activism, Souief's reflections as an Egyptian writer can be extended to the writer of Pakistani literature living in a constant state of crisis.—Does the national writer need always to respond to political crises or can he or she preserve an aesthetic that is untouched by the politics of the nation? Can the aesthetic form only be retrieved through a cosmopolitan model of citizenship and worldliness?

———To answer these questions it is necessary to locate the narrative of worldliness and cosmopolitan sensibility that contradicts the national in Faiz's poetry and a useful starting point is to consider the concept of world literature. There are many competing definitions of world literature ranging from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's coinage of the term "Weltliteratur" in 1827 as an active universal space of interaction and transaction of literatures and cultures

in a largely European context, to the more recent writings of Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti with their respective analyses of the circulation of literary works in transnational and global contexts homing in on London and Paris as the centres of world literature (Casanova 2005; Moretti 2003). A key critique of world literature has been its bias toward a humanist universalism that includes a notable neglect of the global South and a privileging of European and North American contexts in alliance with Renaissance and Enlightenment models of classicism. Both the fields of World literature and Comparative literature incorporate a study of early modernity in European languages such as French and German embracing humanism and cosmopolitanism. Theo D’Haen points out that a noticeable shift in Comparative literary studies toward a non-European focus was first evident in the United States after World War II (D’Haen 2012). Out of this shifting model of Comparative literary studies emerged a new field of Postcolonial literary studies that offered as its point of departure a critique of Enlightenment thought and new ways of understanding colonial rule.

The Palestinian critic Edward Said straddles the two spectrums of Comparative and Postcolonial and his groundbreaking study *Orientalism* has been recognised as a foundational text for colonial and postcolonial studies. For this collection, his essay on “Secular Criticism” introducing his study on *The World, The text and The Critic* is particularly significant with its ruminations on the notion of culture and place where the latter is not just a reflection of the nation but also an expression of “*belonging to or in a place, being at home in a place*” (Said 1984: 8). In an article tracing the meaning of secular criticism in the work of Edward Said, Aamir Mufti has argued that Said’s critical position does not put forward a “contentless cosmopolitanism” but “a secularism imbued with the experience of minority – a secularism for which *minority* is simply not the name of a crisis (Mufti 1998: 96).” In establishing this critical attitude Said turns to Auerbach’s essay “*Philologie der Weltliteratur*” that underwrites the case for homelessness as a way toward worldliness. It is important to consider some of the reasons why Said appropriates Auerbach’s philological approach that looks toward the authenticity of historical experience to determine meaning. On history Auerbach is of the opinion that it is “the science of reality that affects us most immediately, stirs us deeply and compels us most forcibly to a consciousness of ourselves. It is the only science in which human beings step before us in their totality” (Auerbach 1969: 4-5). Yet he is convinced modernity can only provide a world culture in which the history of materialism is dominant and standardised and spirituality downgraded and removed. For Auerbach a modern alienation from premodern sensibilities has meant a rejection of those

earlier multiple forms of social identification in favour of a universalising common subjectivity that is hollow. He argues for a return to the method of classical literary philology as a better way of understanding History than the modern “scientifically ordered and conducted research of reality” (1969: 4). As Said forcefully argues Auerbach’s methodological approach while inclusive of earlier models of knowledge is itself borne out of a modern intellectual western European tradition of Enlightenment. Toward the end of the essay Auerbach makes clear that he is not after a national history but a world history: “our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation” (1969: 17). While he acknowledges that the philologist’s most precious heritage is his national language he is quite certain that it is only when he is separated from that home he comes to recognise that “the spirit [*Geist*] is not national” (1969: 17).

Said analyses Auerbach’s essay as a cultural artefact that reaffirms European hegemony. It nuances “belonging, association and community” from his position of exile in Istanbul prefacing his 1946 publication of *Mimesis* which is a successful venture of great cultural importance to European selfhood. Auerbach’s cultural identification with Europe while in Turkey represents what Said defines as an affiliation to the homeliness of a place and the felt unhomeliness of the nation. Said identifies Islam as a key cultural signifier of difference for Auerbach’s thesis which remains culturally untouched by his location in Istanbul. He articulates the otherness of Turkey, its significant link with Islam and the Orient and its “opposition to Europe” as an absent presence in Auerbach’s study of *Mimesis*. Said does not reject the cultural identification that comes from religious identity, indeed Auerbach’s own heritage as a Jew is a source of influence to his perception of the world. But in secular criticism Said does not overly dwell on religion and maps his notion of the secular. Having critiqued Auerbach at length he argues instead for a critical secular consciousness that is rooted in humanism. Aamir Mufti suggests that Said’s usage of secular is “catachrestic, in the sense that Gayatri Spivak has given to the term – that is, it is a meaningful and productive *misuse*. It is an invitation to rethink, from within the postcolonial present, the narrative of progress that underlies the very notion of secularization” (Mufti 1998: 107). For Mufti, Said’s inclusion of the minority question disturbs the experience of majority culture and takes him outside an elite consciousness. Said represents two contrasting visions of culture through Matthew Arnold’s idea of the “best that is known and thought” and Michel Foucault’s critique of culture as an “institutionalised process” to demonstrate the hegemonic power of majority culture that always overcomes the minority question, in this case Europe and Islamic cultures. A critical Saidian Postcolonial Studies approach

offers a point of departure to think through questions of individual and social transformation in Faiz.

This special issue thus maps a necessary dialogue between the fields of world literature, its liberal viewpoint and postcolonial perspectives looking retrospectively at a poet whose life and work echo those very nuances of home (nation) and homelessness (exile) complicated by a spiritual sense of belonging to the ideological nation of Pakistan – a separate homeland for the Muslims of India that came into being at the time of Indian independence from colonial rule. Decolonisation in the subcontinent is therefore marked by the haunting and violent spectre of Partition and the unfinished project of nationalism. Faiz's poem "Subh-e Azadi" August 1947 (Freedom's Dawn) captures the desolation of independence and Partition:

Ye dagh dagh ujala, ye shab gazida sahar  
Vo intizar tha jis ka, ye vo sahar to nahin  
Ye vo sahar to nahin jis-ki arzu lekar  
Chale the yar ke mil jae gi kahin na kahin  
[...].  
Jigar ki ag, nazar ki umang, dil ki jalan  
Kisi pe chara-e hijran ka kuch asar hi nahin  
Kahan se ai nigar-e saba, kidhar ko ga'i?  
...  
Najat-e-dida-o-dil ki ghari nahin a'I;  
Chale-chalo ke vo manzil abhi nahin a'i.

This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn  
This is not the dawn of which there was expectation;  
This is not that dawn with longing for which  
The friends set out, (convinced) that somewhere there would be met with,  
[...]  
The fire of the liver, the tumult of the eye, burning of the heart, -  
There is no effect on any of them of (this) cure for separation.  
Whence came that darling of a morning breeze, whither has it gone?  
...  
The hour of the deliverance of eye and heart has not arrived.  
Come, come on, for that goal has still not arrived.  
(tr. Kiernan 1971: 122,127)

It is a lyrical rendition that represents the aesthetic mood of an unrequited love and shies away from the violence and dehumanisation of Partition. Crucially

the journey to freedom remains unfinished. Edward Said understood Faiz as someone whose poetry bridged the worlds of the literary elite and the common man. He marks as his major achievement the creation of “a contrapuntal rhetoric and rhythm” by using classical forms such as the qasida, ghazal, masnavi, qita dramatically changing them for his readers, and acknowledges him as “one of the greatest poets of this century” (Edward Said quoted in Agha Shahid Ali 1991: xiii). Said who had been introduced to Faiz by the scholar and activist Eqbal Ahmed (1934-1999) met him as a poet in exile in Beirut. Said’s reading of Palestinian nationalism as a permanent state of exile found a comparative counterpart in the persona of Faiz the poet living in exile from his home country – Pakistan. Taking his cue from Said, Aamir Mufti argues for Faiz as a representative poet of Muslim minoritization in the Indian subcontinent and his love lyrics as an example of “a self in partition”. Reading the subjectivity of Faiz through Theodor Adorno’s critique of lyric poetry’s relationship to society Mufti makes the case that “the social truth embodied in Faiz’s lyric poetry is that the emergence of the (modern) self is also its self-division” (Mufti 2007: 212). Mufti rereads Faiz as part of his critique on Enlightenment identifying him as a poet of “a late postcolonial modernity” who “pushes the terms of identity and selfhood to their limits, to the point where they turn upon themselves and reveal the partial nature of postcolonial ‘national’ experience” (2007: 243). Mufti’s reading identifies the Indian Muslim as a permanent minority outcaste from the majoritarian politics of Indian nationalism. He points out that there is a double bind because “Before ‘Muslim’ could become ‘minority’, the majority of the Muslims had to be turned into non-Indians” or Pakistanis denying them any stake in the nation. (2007:118)

Mufti offers a compelling reading of Faiz Ahmad Faiz as a representative poet of an unrecognised Indian minority in an essay later developed into a book chapter for *Enlightenment in the Colony* although the existence of the state of Pakistan makes it a difficult position to sustain. An underexplored arena in Mufti’s argument is the conflicted space occupied by Faiz’s poetry vis-à-vis his public persona in Pakistan. He is particularly interested in a justification of Faiz’s appropriation of the classical lyric form. Mufti sees the ghazal as being “inextricably linked with the emergence and development of national culture” and reads Faiz’s deployment of the form as a marker of a passage from a specific literary history of Urdu into a “critical space” for the discussion of “Indian literary modernity as a whole” (2007: 218). Writing in Urdu he also inhabits the space of the post-partitioned national sphere in Pakistan, the memory of an ethnic community’s mother tongue heritage and the ideology of a new Muslim state. Belonging to what has been described as

a radical cultural movement that was represented mainly by the All India Progressive Writers Association established in 1936 Faiz was deeply invested in the anti-colonial struggle but he also had a very humanist response to the war in Europe and was ultimately unprepared for what Frantz Fanon has referred to in another context as “the pitfalls of national consciousness” when independence finally arrived in 1947 for Indians at the price of a bloody Partition (Gopal 2005).<sup>2</sup> In *Enlightenment in the Colony*, Mufti analyses Faiz’s public debates on national culture in the 1960s in Pakistan as an example of the “impossible narratives of the nation” where the historical and geographical come head to head and the Muslim and Pakistani narratives are the heritage of “an arbitrary colonial decision”. His central theme of Muslim identity as a discourse of minoritisation in an Indian secular critical consciousness is more successfully captured in his close readings of Faiz’s lyrics than the foray into the essays on Pakistani culture in which Mufti can only see the “illusion of a national identity”. That national identity is an illusion is a foregone conclusion for an ideological state but it is significant when organic intellectuals such as Faiz begin to make that illusion a real occurrence. This is something that Mufti leaves out of his discussion as it takes him away from his central thesis of Muslim minoritisation. In this issue, my essay on “Cosmopolitan ventures in the times of crisis: a postcolonial reading of Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s “Dasht-e tanhai” and Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*” offers a point of departure with a critical intertextual reading of a lyric poet and a diasporic writer. I argue that cosmopolitanism is the glue that binds the writer and the poet and is imbued with a worldliness that is borne out of times of crisis that cripple the national. Pakistan remains a real and imagined central concern in this identification of new value systems.

In his lectures on culture Faiz reviews the etymology of the word culture and tries to find its equivalent in Urdu. In his opinion, at the time of his writing, the word *saqafat* used in Urdu to refer to the English culture is itself a borrowing from Arabic. Faiz defines *tehzib* as a new word for culture in tandem with the modern English word. He also makes the point to dissociate *tehzib* from the older word of civilisation. For him, civilisation is a limited and closed word as it is very exclusive in its meaning whereas culture has equitable open-ended possibilities of plural and diverse societies. Faiz outlines three inter-dependent characteristics of culture, which he says come into focus in every nation: namely personal character, the arts, and society. He reasons that in Pakistan the value system is underwritten by religion and that

---

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction.

is the real foundation of Pakistani culture. But he finds it problematic to interchange Pakistani *tehzib* for Islamic *tehzib* because Islam extends beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation, while national culture is circumscribed by the geopolitical nation. According to his understanding, the equation of Pakistani *qaumiat* equals *Islamiyat* and *Muslimiat* (Faiz 1988: 28). This *qaumiat* defines the morality and etiquette of Pakistan as advocated by Islam and is not a differential or oppositional energy. It connects Pakistan to other Muslim nations in the Middle East and takes on aspects of Arab “*wataniyya*” “which calls for political unity of all the Arab peoples.”<sup>3</sup> His difficulty lies in outlining a shared or common memory of the past in Pakistan. According to him, if Islamic countries such as Iran, Turan, Sudan and Egypt can have their indigenous culture as well as their *qaumi* culture of Islam then Pakistan too needs to define its *Pakistaniat*. He is adamant that Islamic culture cannot be made into national culture because the latter needs to account for everyday life, regional geography and history. As a solution, he proposes an ambiguous compromise which combines general Islamic religious nationalism with specific territorial affiliations, such as the geographic rootedness of the ancient Indus valley civilisation, as well as a materialist understanding of the structures of society. He also wrote an English poem entitled “The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl” which reiterates the sense of cultural identity as primordial and tied to the historical roots of the territorial nation:

In Pakistan as elsewhere in Asia  
And Africa, Time Past is Time Present  
And cities rose on the plains  
Attracting an unending caravan  
Of human feet marching in and out of timeless mountains  
Parthians, Bactrians, Huns and Scythians  
Arabs, Tatars, Turks and White Men [...].  
(Hashmi 2012: 61)

His vision of a cultural nationalism for Pakistan is fraught with complicated trajectories of belonging that seek to make the secular possible for a religious community that is continually and negatively compared to its successful secular neighbour India. He affiliates with Jinnah’s model of secularism and the necessity of a separate nation for Muslims in which they have the status of first class citizens. Bringing together the Indic and the Islamic, the modern

---

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopaedia of the Modern Middle East*, Volume 3, MacMillan, New York, 1996, p1322.

and the pre-modern he formulates a plural cosmopolitan subjectivity that does not conform to the singularity of the modern nation-state. He re-opens the debate on *qaumi* culture as a spokesman for the state and offers a liberal understanding of it. Faiz's critical secular thought appears to be informed by Matthew Arnold's nineteenth century idea of "sweetness and light [...]. our *best self*" (Arnold 1960: 72, 95).

On the theme of a cultural national language, Faiz debunks the outlook which traces Urdu's origins from India's southern region of the Deccan to its northern homeland of Delhi. He prefers to accord recognition to Urdu in Pakistan as a reflection of an organic everyday spoken language rather than the language of the former courts of Delhi. He aligns his egalitarian principles to a particular pre-modern representation of a historical harmonious Sufi Islam in the subcontinent that bridged cultures. With regards to the conflict between East and West Pakistan over the issue of national language he remained noncommittal and argued for a resolution devoid of emotion and based on logic. On the question of combining Urdu and Bengali to make a third language he opined that such projects if considered viable should be carried out using scientific research methods (Faiz 1988: 48). His emphasis on reason and progress echoes an Enlightenment sensibility that is at odds with his fierce rejection of the colonial occupation of territory. For him Urdu is an essential language for Pakistani nationalism because it offers a canvas, independent from the emotive nature of regional languages, for the construction of new stories of the nation. Thus, Faiz constructs a mythical stance about the nation and its national language.

In this volume a selection of translated verses of Faiz by the Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001) have been reproduced on the topic of Bangladesh and the secession of East Pakistan from West Pakistan in 1971. Faiz in this trilogy of poems represents the separation of 1971 as a violent and bloody parting that poisoned the soul of the nation. The sea of blood that flowed was a permanent loss to be mourned with the recognition that no apology however heartfelt would be enough to repair the division between friends who turned into enemies and strangers. Agha Shahid Ali in the introduction, to his collected translations from Faiz entitled *The Rebel's Silhouette*, speaks of his memory of Faiz being intertwined with that of the light classical singer Begum Akhtar who sang his ghazals and in one of his poems he recalls Faiz's lyric response through the immortal voice of the songstress who was listened to across the divide:

In New Delhi one night  
As Begum Akhtar sang, the lights went out.

It was perhaps during the Bangladesh war,  
Perhaps there were sirens,  
Air-raid warnings  
But the audience, hushed did not stir  
The microphone was dead, but she went on  
Singing and her voice  
Was coming from far  
Away, as if she had already died.  
(Lines 59-68, *Nostalgist's Map*)

It is worth noting that Faiz was introduced to readers in Australia and New Zealand by the anthropologist Estelle Dryland. She was drawn to Faiz on a humanist basis, in particular, the universal play on human emotions in his work. This particular quality to his writing came from a variety of influences including the Progressive Writers Movement of the 1930s. Of his active participation as a Progressive he lays claims to the controversies surrounding the Association commenting that: "At the time, there were two groups among writers: those who believed in literature for the sake of literature and those who maintained that literature had a higher social purpose. Their debates were fiery and I was never far from the scene of action" (Hasan 1988: xxvii). Faiz excelled in interweaving the classical ornamental style of an aristocratic stylised Urdu rhyme and metre with the modern functionality of social realism. He utilised the classical imagery of the lover and the beloved, the literal and metaphorical desolate desert of their separation, and the hopeful metaphor of the morning breeze, to articulate a new expression. There is no better example of this than the *nazm* which launched his career as a poet, *Mujh se pehli si muhabbat mere mahbub na mang* (My Beloved do not ask from me a love like before).

Do not ask from me, my beloved, love like that former one.  
I had believed that you are, therefore life is shining;  
There is anguish over you, so what wrangle is there over the sorrow of the  
age?  
[...]  
There are other sufferings of the time (world) besides love,  
There are other pleasures besides the pleasures of union.  
The dark beastly spell of countless centuries.  
Woven into silk and satin and brocade, -  
Bodies sold everywhere in alley and market,  
Smearred with dust, washed in blood,

Bodies that have emerged from the ovens of diseases,  
Pus flowing from rotten ulcers  
[...]  
Do not ask from me, my beloved, love like that former one.  
(tr. Kiernan 1971: 66-7)

This poem was significant as it changed the perception and representation of the classical beloved for twentieth-century poets. In its refrain it conveyed a farewell to the traditional theme of unrequited love in Urdu poetry and introduced a new self and subjectivity that was to be the driving force for future developments in poetic thought. The real was to be the subject of modern poetry with its dehumanisation of the body and soul.

Faiz was that rare example of a Progressive poet whose poetry was not accused of sloganeering, a label that became attached to Progressive writers for neglecting style over content in their writing (Alam 1983: 78). In this volume Geeta Patel and A Sean Pue consider the divide between Progressive realism and a modernist aesthetic sensibility in Faiz's verse. Sean Pue's essay on "Modernism and Progressivism in Urdu Poetry" looks at the division of *adab bara-e adab* (literature for the sake of art) and *adab bara-e zindagi* (literature for the sake of life) amongst the Urdu literati. He presents a case study of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and N M Rashed as two poets of the same generation who on the face of it took opposite literary directions. Pue argues that the distinction doesn't hold when measured against the work of either poet but it is retained in the manner that both poets approached their writing and the way in which they perceived each other. If Faiz was alive he may claim "I am a poet with a particular perspective on reality" like his Palestinian counterpart Mahmoud Darwish (Darwish quoted by Muhawi, 1995, Al Qods Al-Arabi, 17 November 1993.)

Geeta Patel's essay "Rumination on Chronopoetics and the Political Subject: Miraji Reads Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Lyric" offers a compelling critique of the division between the *adab bara-e adab* (aesthetes) and *adab bara-e zindagi* (realist) schools of thought and an innovative theoretical understanding of how time and space operate in Faiz's well loved poem "Bol". Putting together romantic realism and what she refers to as fleshed politics, Patel traces the poetics of Faiz's lyrical verse as discussed in a critical essay by Miraji arguing that his reading recognised the creation of a new political subject. Patel builds on Miraji's allegorical reading of Faiz's poem deepening the discussion on technology, labor and temporality with close references to Heidegger and Benjamin.

As a Progressive Faiz was inclined toward themes of realism and modernity but he was also firmly embedded in his poetic practice as a traditionalist often appropriating the ghazal form for his verse. His prose on the other hand was directly implicated by his role as the Chief Editor of a national daily. After all the print media would have a role to play in bringing together the imagined community after the crisis of Partition. Roland Barthes' has suggested that modern poetic language is resistant to myth in contrast to the causality of newspaper journalism which easily lends itself to mythmaking. He says, "Contemporary poetry is a *regressive semiological system*" (Barthes 2000: 133). While myth attaches itself to a system of signification, poetry does otherwise, it seeks to be an "anti-language" outside the realm of reason and logic. Therefore in modern poetry meaning is not a tangible entity which connects itself directly to the sign, the signifier or the signified. It conveys itself as an abstraction and it is this quality which separates it from the factual, value-based understanding that is myth. Faiz's style as a poet is deeply rooted in the genre of the love lyric but the themes of his poetry are often modern. His career trajectory is that of a major poet, a left intellectual, an activist, a nationalist and a cosmopolitan. While his poetic voice may at times transcend the semiotic structures of language his lectures on culture remain embedded in the myth of nationalism and can be seen as tied to a "mythmaking" that was part of his journalistic career. In order to understand the complexity of his individual subjectivity it is useful to briefly summarise his career.

Born in Sialkot in 1911, Faiz received his primary education at Murray College, Sialkot and completed his higher education at Government College, Lahore in Arabic and English literature in pre-Partition Punjab. His ancestry was not aristocratic but his father had served the royal family of Afghanistan and travelled to England to study, to train as a lawyer at Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn in London. In 1935 he joined the staff at Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Amritsar where he taught English. In 1940 he secured a lectureship in English at Hailey College, Lahore. His first collection of poems entitled, *Naqsh-e faryadi* (The protestor's sketch) was published in 1941. In 1942 he joined the British Indian war publicity department in Delhi as captain, and was made a lieutenant colonel in 1944. "No one could have been made less for the army than Faiz, but he felt that in the struggle against Nazism and Fascism, if a uniform had to be worn then a uniform should be worn" (Hasan 1988: xv). He returned to Lahore in 1947 and began a career in journalism as editor of the new national daily *Pakistan Times* and its sister publication in Urdu, *Imroze*.

He was a trade union activist and firmly aligned to the political left. Because of his radical politics he often found himself under constant surveillance by different military regimes, Ayub in the 1960s and Zia in the 1980s. In this issue, the collection of letters from “Letters To Alys” edited by Salima Hashmi give us an insight into the personal life of Faiz, his jovial personality, easy intimacy with his family and the things that moved him and made him laugh. The letters cover mainly the 1950s with a brief span of the 1940s in pre-Partition India, Pakistan in 1972 and his time in Beirut during the Israeli invasion of 1982. In one of his letters he distinguishes between pain and unhappiness as external and internal to the self. Pain has to be suffered but unhappiness can be overcome. Written as words of advice for his daughter these lines give an insight of the inner personal journey through which Faiz reconciled himself to the torn halves of Partition and independence. The letters contain a sense of a travelling body that is never at home in one place, Faiz is often not at home with his family but is more likely to be found visiting them or traversing different parts of the country. Some of his places of travel and exile are not self-chosen, such as Hyderabad jail, but others are self-selected such as the trip to Ziarat and his time in Beirut.

In Pakistan, Faiz with his leftist stance and revolutionary Progressive poetry along with other literary and political activists of the All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association including Sajjad Zaheer was a troublesome figurehead for the post Partition Pakistani state. In a recent book Saadia Toor has argued that in the immediate period after independence East Pakistan was seen as a threat to the corporate interests of the Pakistani establishment and it is through the exchanges between Progressive writers such as Mohammad Hasan Askari and M.D Taseer that she interrogates the rift between the idea of the nation (qaum) as it was being propagated by nationalists and its awam (people) by the Progressives (Toor 2011). The Left came under increasing surveillance and in 1951 Faiz along with army officers and Sajjad Zaheer (founder member of the Progressive Writer’s Association) was arrested on a conspiracy charge for his alleged involvement to overthrow the government of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. (Dryland 1993: 57-81). This case known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy led to prison sentences for Faiz and Zaheer and marked the beginning of the end of the Progressives Writers Association which was formally closed down in 1954 (Toor 2011: 77). Field Marshal Ayub Khan effectively squeezed out the Communist party in Pakistan and initiated a state project to cleanse the influence of the Progressives in Pakistan. According to Toor this task was made easier by the cooperation of prominent “liberal intellectuals and writers such as M D Taseer and M H Askari [who] consciously aided and abetted this project” (Toor 2011: 78) This

collusion of liberal Progressive intellectuals with state led intervention altered the literary map of Urdu literature in years to come. Faiz continued to write, publishing *Dast-e Saba* and *Zinda nama* (Prison manuscript) in 1952 and 1956, respectively. He spent four years in prison from 1951-1955 and again after Ayub's military coup in 1958 for six months.

Faiz's next big moment was to come under what Hamzi Alavi has referred to as the bureaucratic-military oligarchy of the Pakistan People's Party led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto openly patronised the arts, he appointed Faiz as the founder and Director of the Pakistan National Council of Arts in 1971 based in Islamabad. Faiz advised the Pakistani government on cultural policy and represented Pakistan in International conferences. He also initiated a Lok Virsa (Folk Heritage) chapter. He resumed his official position as a well-known figure on national radio and television influencing a new generation of broadcasters, writers, intellectuals and artists. He now had an opportunity to consolidate the conversations he had begun on Pakistani culture in the 1950s. In 1977 General Zia-ul Haq came into power and Pakistan reverted to military rule. Faiz resigned from his position, and exiled himself to Beirut in 1978. He chose to live there because he had been offered the role of editor-in-chief of *Lotus*, an Afro-Asian Writers' journal. Whilst in Beirut he became passionately involved in the Palestinian struggle for freedom. After the Israeli attack on Beirut in 1982 Faiz departed a war ravaged Beirut amid fears for his safety and died in 1984 in Lahore. (Dryland 1993; Hasan 1988). Whilst based in Beirut Faiz travelled frequently to London and Moscow. In this volume, Iftikhar Arif's panoramic essay in Urdu highlights some of the major poems of Faiz's poetic career and particularly ones that were written in London such as "Koi 'ashiq apni mahbuba se" (A lover to his beloved) and "wa yaqba wajuh rabbika" more popularly recognised from its first line "Ham dekhien gai". The title comes from Sura-e Rahman (Quran 55:26,27). This poem was written in the wake of the Iranian revolution and adopted a people's voice. Arif argues that Faiz's poetry has elements of the egalitarian tradition of French republicanism. It can be further suggested that the borrowing of the Arabic in "wa yaqba wajuh rabbika" is not just a linguistic device in his poetry but that it conveys an attachment to the sacred and firmly ties it to the political. Faiz's ways of loving as a poet are constantly evolving and are also reflective of absorbed influences from the places he inhabited in exile. His poem "A Song for the Warriors of Palestine" is a tribute to his affiliation with the cause of Palestinian independence and his personal friendship with a fellow poet in exile, Mahmoud Darwish:

We will win

One day, in truth, we will win  
At last, one day we will win  
What do we fear the onslaught of enemies  
Every warrior stands straight and tall  
(tr. Hashmi 2012: 73)

Faiz who was equally at home in Punjabi embraced Urdu as a global language reflective of multilingual cultures and in his practice imbued it with the spirit of a cosmopolitan world literature, a quality that had defined the work of his predecessors. He was also a translator forming international allegiances with the Left beyond his immediate national location of Pakistan looking toward the Soviet Union. In 1962 he was awarded the Lenin Peace prize. As such Faiz is not a stranger to the World literature stage but his presence has not been as widely felt as those with whom he has been compared, Pablo Neruda and Nazim Hikmet.

In this volume Christina Oesterheld's essay on "Faiz's internationalist poetics: selected translations and free verses" explores his trajectory of travel and contact with English poetry as a common feature shared with late nineteenth century poets as well as contemporaries such as N. M. Rashed, Saqi Faruqi and others. Oesterheld turns her focus to that part of Faiz's travels which brought him into contact with delegations from the Soviet Union and came out of his connection with the Progressive Writers Association of the 1930s. She discusses his affiliation with internationalism as a premise of communist ideology and the co-option of literature for the purposes of political mobilisation of the masses. A point of departure suggested by Oesterheld is the close bond that developed as a result of this internationalism between established and well-received poets such as Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda. Her paper explores the aesthetic implications of Faiz's exposure to fellow writers in the Soviet Union as well as in the wider world that he travelled. She traces a fascinating journey in his *Mah-o sal-i asnai* (Months and years of acquaintance) from Moscow to Turkey drawing out the regard that Faiz held for Nazim Hikmet. She offers close readings of his translations of Russian poems and confirms that although there is no known method behind his translations he often relied on interpreters or the authors to convey a sense of the original to him in Urdu or English before he embarked on his own translation. Referring to the modern poetic forms of free verse and the paband nazm deployed by Faiz she offers a different and unique understanding of his poetic style. Her identification of the period of the 1960s and 1970s as key for Faiz links his later writing to a very purposeful nature. Her close readings of the free verse poems' present a view of Faiz that is

collective, political and reformist in contrast to the nebulous quality of his ghazals. She also traces a reverse Pan-Islamism in Faiz's work as he dedicated himself to the Palestinian cause particularly during his period of exile in Beirut and his editorship of *Lotus*. Her paper argues that the poet of a late modernity is unable to preserve the aesthetic qualities of his verse in the face of a brutal postcolonial condition of an ongoing violent struggle for freedom from colonial heritage.

In contrast to Oesterheld's look toward the East, Laurel Steele's essay on "Finding Faiz at Berkeley: Room for a celebration" evocatively details how the study of Faiz has travelled institutionally in the West. Her essay gives a rich intertextual reading of Faiz offering a critique of a centenary celebration at Berkeley and a reflective contemplation of the deeper resonances that mark such big occasions. The Faiz celebration at Berkeley launched both an Urdu and Pakistan studies initiative, something that is lauded by the author but is also a cause for concern with regards to long term viability for students because of the politically fraught history between the two nations and the bugbear that is Homeland Security controlled by the US Department of State which circumscribes the way we live modern lives in a global world. Steele usefully compares the output of Urdu scholars and the study of Pakistan at Berkeley with that done at Wisconsin, Chicago, Texas and confirms that there are fewer graduate dissertations on the region coming out of Berkeley posing a key question of relevance for the new initiative. She finds that the library in Berkeley is well resourced for scholars who wish to undertake new initiatives in the field of Urdu studies and Faiz has a formidable reputation amongst Urdu intellectuals. What we miss, notes Steele, is a biography that captures the heart and soul of Faiz in English making him accessible to a world readership. Appreciating the worldliness of Faiz as a writer she traces references to his work in the writings of acclaimed English and Urdu writers such as Salman Rushdie, Qurratul Ain Hyder and Ammer Hussein.

Aamer Hussein's essay "The Colour of My Heart: on Reading Faiz" gives a rich autobiographical account of how he lost and found the verse of Faiz in his intellectual and territorial journey from Pakistan to England, and from adolescence to adult life. Hussein's essay begins with memories of an array of well-known verses that have been immortalised in sung renditions by singers of trained gharanas as well as modern appropriations. Over time he develops a fondness for and a closeness to the verses that he grew up with. The essay ends on the memory of an encounter with the poet in London. Hussein's account gives witness to the significant role music and classically trained singers in Pakistan have given to Faiz, including verses sung by the Queen of ghazal Farida Khanum (b.1935) and Malika-e tarannum (The Queen

of Melody) late Madame Noorjehan (1926-2000). Noorjehan had a high regard for Faiz and in an interview commented that she would have given up singing if he had asked her to, so moved was she by his verse.<sup>4</sup> Faiz's poems, lovingly sung by iconic songstresses of his time continue to inspire a new generation of singers. As an unofficial poet laureate of Pakistan Faiz won the heart of millions with his deeply popular lyrical verse, and remains a figurehead for the present generation of Urdu poets (Coppola 1975; Kiernan 1971: 21-44; Sadiq 1995: 548-50; Zaidi 1993: 362-55). Hussein's essay registers this key detail about the attraction of Faiz for the global and the local listener and captures the alienation of the strange and the comfort of the familiar in Faiz's poetry. As an English writer he finds himself growing closer to Faiz's verse as he grows older.

Hussein's essay is about the rediscovery of Faiz in a metropolitan location. The worlding of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry has taken many forms beyond its original composition and classical renditions in music. For instance the 1994 filmic adaptation of Anita Desai's *In Custody*, directed by Ismail Merchant, narrates the story of Urdu as a dying language in India. Retold in Urdu it draws on the stereotype of an Urdu poet marked by brilliance and with a taste for excess. Building on the novel's minor mention of Faiz the film deploys selected verses by Faiz Ahmad Faiz to enhance the lyrical theme of nostalgia and loss for a filmic audience. In this special issue Shahrukh Husain shares a personal view on translating Faiz's verse for the Merchant-Ivory film *Muhafiz* based on the novel *In Custody* by Anita Desai. She highlights the highs and lows of the translator's task from the mundane to the sublime. Husain conveys the universal appeal of Faiz beyond that of a national icon, a poet whose verse represents the many possibilities of linguistic and cultural interpretation on a world stage.

The SOAS student Forum on Faiz edited by Samreen Kazmi brings together a diverse set of student responses on Faiz ranging from; the revolutionary appeal of Faiz for those who were actively involved in the lawyers movement in Pakistan; a personal aesthetic connectivity with the theme of love in his verse; a historical return to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and the cultural heritage of Faiz in India. It shows the depth of student engagement with the legacy of Faiz and the desire to understand the specific contexts that make him a national icon and a popular cross-border poet.

In seeking to remember and honour the work of Faiz Ahmad Faiz this special issue has tried to convey the depth and variety of Faiz's intellectual

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.madamnoorjehan.com/her-life-and-art/interviews-58/62-bbc-interview.html>. Accessed 13 December 2012.

engagement with poetry, politics, culture, the national and the worldly. His death in 1984 left a void in the Urdu literary landscape. His legacy as an unofficial poet laureate for Pakistan has been lovingly recreated by his family in the Lahore museum dedicated to his memory, Faiz ghar (The house of Faiz). The main consumers of the cultural events held at the Centre are the urban elite although it hosts a variety of performers and artists from different class backgrounds. His poetry is a testimony to his humanist ideals and his poetic aesthetic was often guided by the theme of exile and separation. As a cultural commentator he had a vision to offer for the future of Pakistani culture and society, one that tried to blend the secular with the religious and not to see them as two separate entities. He was committed to the national project as an essential route to the recovery of human dignity lost during the colonial period but his left politics meant that he would remain on the fringes of the cultural life of the nation. Toward the latter part of his career he seemed to shift his poetic ideals from a revolutionary national politics to an aesthetic of Worldiness that rejuvenated his faith in human life.

## REFERENCES

- Hamza Alavi. "The state in postcolonial societies" in *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia* (eds., Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma) New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1973, pp. 145-73.
- Matthew Arnold. *Culture and Anarchy* (ed., J. Dover Wilson) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.
- Erich Auerbach. "Philology and Weltliteratur" trans. Maire and Edward Said. *The Centennial Review*. Vol.XIII. 13.1 (1969: 1-17).
- Agha Shahid Ali. *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems by Faiz Ahmad Faiz*. Cambridge MA: Massachusetts University Press, 1995.
- - *A Nostalgist's Map of America*. Norton, 1991.
- Q.Z. Alam. "Progressive Poetry and Propaganda". *Indian Literature*. 26:1 (1983: 69-78).
- Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. ed & trans. Annette Lavers. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Pascale Casanova. "Literature as a World". *New Left Review* 31 (Jan Feb 2005: 71-90).
- Carlo Coppola. "Urdu Poetry: the Progressive Episode". PhD thesis. Illinois, Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1975.
- Theo D'haen. *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. Routledge: London and New York, 2012, pp.27-73.

- Estelle Dryland. *Faiz Ahmad Faiz: Urdu Poet of Social Realism*. Vanguard: Lahore, 1993.
- Faiz Ahmad Faiz. *Pakistani kalchar aur qaumi tashakhus ki talash* (Pakistani culture and the search for national character) (ed., Sheema Majeed) Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd, Lahore, 1988.
- *Nuskha-e wafa*. Lahore: Maktaba-e karavan, n.d.
- Priyamvada Gopal. *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, nation and the transition to independence*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Ali Madeeh Hashmi and Shoaib Hashmi. *The Way it was Once, Faiz Ahmad Faiz: his life, his poems*. India: Harper Collins, 2012.
- Naomi Lazard (trans.) *The True Subject*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Franco Moretti. "More Conjectures" *New Left Review* 20 (Mar Apr 2003: 73-81).
- Aamir R Mufti. *Enlightenment in the Colony: the Jewish question and the crisis of postcolonial culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture. *Critical Inquiry*. 25:1 (Autumn 1998) 95-125.
- Edward Said. *The World, The Text, The Critic*. London: Faber and Faber 1984.
- Ahdaf Soueif. *Review Saturday Guardian*. 18. 08. 2012.
- Mohammad Sadiq. *A History of Urdu Literature*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1995.
- Saadia Toor. *The State of Islam: culture and cold war politics in Pakistan*. London: Pluto. 2011.
- Victor Kiernan (trans.) *Poems by Faiz*. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1971.
- Amina Yaqin. "Variants of Cultural Nationalism in Pakistan: a Reading of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jamil Jalibi, and Fahmida Riaz" in *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols: Process, Power, and the Articulation of identities in South Asia* (Eds. Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan) Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp.115-42.
- A. J. Zaidi. *A History of Urdu literature*. Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993.