

Cosmopolitan ventures during times of crisis: a postcolonial reading of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Dasht-e tanhai" and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*¹

By Amina Yaqin

In this essay I engage with two writers whose work includes elements of both internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Generations apart they connect with the idea of the national from positions of exile igniting a very contemporary and historical debate on the position of faith and the location of culture in the modern postcolonial nation. I argue that exile in the case of the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz is informed by an internationalism tied to national sovereignty, whereas the British Pakistani novelist Nadeem Aslam responding to a post 9/11 world turns to a utopian model of cosmopolitanism, looking for the universal theme of love to repair a dysfunctional society. Since the terrorist attacks of September 2011, an international media response has overwhelmingly focused on the position of Pakistan as the most dangerous country in the world with headline framing narratives of terrorism and gender inequities forming key perceptions of its culture and society".² In the subsequent representations of Pakistan's political failure its lack of progress is often partly attributed to a deep-rooted cultural malaise that comes from a pre modern feudal society rejecting the call of modernity. Historically literary responses have offered a reflective counterpoint to such stereotypes. Diasporic writers such as Nadeem Aslam play an interesting role with Pakistan themed novels in English for consumption in a globalised world with their position as speaking subjects, whose narrative voice brings an authentic Pakistani perspective to the international stage with anthropologically styled narratives. While Aslam's 2004 novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* is not particularly invested in the idea of retrieving a core national identity as was Faiz, the resident poet of the immediate post national moment with his lyric poems, it is concerned with the depleted value system of Pakistani society at home and abroad. Early on in the novel we are told: "Perspective tricks the eyes and makes the snowflakes falling in the far distance appear as they are falling slower than

¹ This essay borrows key ideas from my chapter entitled "Muslims as Multicultural Misfits in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*" in *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing* (Eds. Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin). New York: Routledge, 2012, pp.101-116.

² See Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin. *Framing Muslims: stereotyping and representation after 9/11*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.

those nearby” (Alsam 2004: 5). It is this idea of perspective that requires further contemplation. The novel offers many perspectives yet it also privileges certain views over others. Perspective is also something that Faiz with his views on Pakistani culture felt passionately about. My aim in this essay is to try and trace the trajectory of perspectives in specific contributions by Aslam and Faiz, both of whom share a radical heritage of Progressive modernism in Urdu literature. The Progressive Writers Movement in India in the 1930s drew its inspiration largely from a spirit of internationalism and left activism on a world stage. This international outlook reflected a cosmopolitan sensibility that is the glue that binds the postcolonial novelist and the lyric poet although both offer different contexts for it. Therefore it is necessary to situate the idea of the cosmopolitan in a contemporary context. I begin with an interrogation of some recent theoretical concepts on cosmopolitanism by scholars in the field of postcolonial studies; the cosmo-theory of Timothy Brennan that offers a materialist approach alongside the partial cosmopolitanism put forward by Kwame Anthony Appiah, based on a model of shared values, in order to develop a deeper cultural understanding of the common and divergent perspectives of the lyric poet and the postcolonial British Pakistani novelist in English.

In his book *Wars of Position: the cultural politics of left and right* Timothy Brennan in a chapter on “Cosmo-Theory” attributes a proliferation of writing on cosmopolitanism as a direct consequence of the fall of communism. He identifies cosmopolitanism as a local American idea embedded in liberalism and a material culture tying it to Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony and an “imperial cosmopolitanism”. Brennan looks back to Gramsci’s reading of Italian Catholicism as a model for “imperial cosmopolitanism” and a resonant example for the United States as a nation with imperial power. His key argument is that cosmopolitanism is tied to American corporate interests and offers a complacent depoliticised response to the inequities of globalisation. He puts forward a new term “cosmo-theory” as an alternative to what he considers an outdated model of cosmopolitanism. Cosmo-theory, critical of the American state project aligns itself with cosmopolitan intellectuals as a group and recognises a “natural alliance between the American cultural Left and Third World constituencies on whose behalf the former speaks in domestic contexts, and whose presence (imaginary of actual) is marshalled for salutary means at home” (Brennan 2006: 228). It is, he says, “generally aware of the danger of imperial apologetics. The critic states his or her opposition to ‘reckless American expansion’ and is vocal about the dangers of an uncritical multiculturalism” (Brennan 2006: 227).

A contrasting viewpoint on cosmopolitan as a desired for contemporary subjectivity is suggested by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book on *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers*. He favours this term over

globalization and multiculturalism and sets out to “rescue” it from its “posture of superiority toward the putative provincial” (Appiah 2006: xi). In contrast to Brennan’s materialist approach Appiah relies on a philosophic trajectory of relativism and rationality to argue for a figuration of the cosmopolitan that is more attuned to difference and tries to understand that through the difference of value systems. Drawing on themes of morality and values borrowing from the 3rd Century C.E. Stoic ideas of cosmopolitanism and a critique of eighteenth century positivism he specifies his position of “partial cosmopolitanism” as follows: “the one thought that cosmopolitans share is that no local loyalty can every justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other. Fortunately, we need take sides neither with the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality. The position worth defending might be called (in both senses) a *partial cosmopolitanism*.” (Appiah 2006: xv)

He refers to the clash of positions in a post 9/11 world between “us” and “them” suggesting that such conflicts have hardened around the “fixity” of values. Appiah’s conceptualisation of moral philosophy is a series of mirrors reflecting many truths rather than a singular image that divides the world into two halves. His view of the “partial cosmopolitan” is one who has to learn the art of conversation and to coexist alongside difference amongst fellow citizens. Appiah makes a distinctive separation between what can be identified as a community conscious metropolitan cosmopolitanism, that embraces values common to the western world, and what he calls a counter-cosmopolitanism, representative of the extremist elements of an Islamist globalisation exemplified by groups such as Al-Qaeda and linked to Hitler and Stalin, whom he refers to as cosmopolitanism’s “noisiest foes”. In his overall thesis the example of good Islamic cosmopolitanism is embodied in the mystical Sufi tradition as always. Historically speaking this is an area of Islamic practice which has been most acceptable to western governments, it is seen as the soft side of Islam. Critiquing this particular kind of representation Filippo and Caroline Osella have argued that in the longer tradition of sociological research on Islam there has been a noticeable trend of corroborating and celebrating “sufi-inspired forms of Islam as tolerant, plural, authentic ... against a maligned Other of reformist Islam” (Osella and Osella 2008: 3).

Fully embedded in a normative imperial culture in the U.S. Appiah is mystified by the “high-octane anti Western rhetoric” amongst Islamist movements in Egypt, Algeria, Iran and Pakistan in response to “the woman question”. “There are Muslims, many of them young men, who feel that forces from outside their society ... are pressuring them to reshape relations between men and women. Part of that pressure they feel comes from our media. Our films and television

programmes are crammed with indescribable indecency. ... We speak of women's rights. We make treaties enshrining these rights. And then we want their governments to enforce them". (Appiah 2006: 82-3).

The anti-western "other" who gets framed in this particular conversation is the modern Muslim citizen who remains anti-modern. In a manner reminiscent of Samuel P. Huntington's thesis on *The Clash of Civilisations* Appiah moves into his description of the anti- or what he calls the "Counter-Cosmopolitans". Drawing on Olivier Roy's monograph *Globalized Islam: the search for a new Ummah* he reiterates the identification of this outwardly westernised group as the new Ummah of global Muslim "neo-fundamentalists", those who believe in the fundamentals of Islam. This is the modern group stopping the progress that can be made by American society in its continuing march toward modernity (2006: 139). National American values and Islamic values are seen to clash and disturb the melting pot of multicultural communities at ease with each other. The discomfort comes mainly from issues such as honour killings recognised as a marker of pre-modern societies specifically Arabs, South and Central Asians who mistreat their women. These are not the partial cosmopolitans that Appiah has delineated in his thesis. Their values are a misfit in western societies.

Both Appiah and Brennan reject the notion of the multicultural in their respective positions of partial cosmopolitanism and cosmo-theory. Their interventions can be read as commentaries on the crisis of the national post 9/11. While Appiah marks a shift from a national trajectory toward a globalising vision Brennan returns to the idea of internationalism as conceptualised by Gramsci; an internationalism that includes a recognition of national sovereignty as a preferred model over an imperial cosmopolitanism that rides roughshod over civil society.

How do the tensions of nationalism, religion and an international cosmopolitanism play out in literary cultural representations written from within and outside Pakistan? What is the legacy of a diasporic and former imperial location such as Great Britain? A literary novel that incorporates some of these questions is Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Aslam prefaces a key reference to the iconic twentieth-century Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz with his naming of the home of a Muslim community in Britain as "Dasht-e-Tanhaii" variously translated by the author as "The Wilderness of Solitude" and "The Desert of Loneliness". This is a nod to Faiz's poem "Yad" (Memory) written in 1952. Aslam's ethnic minority characters – notably Pakistani - are stranded in a desolate fictionalised cold and hostile neighbourhood in the North of England. The hoped for union that is key to the romantic lyric by Faiz's verse has been worn thin by the wilderness of diasporic loss. It is this wasteland that serves as the backdrop for the honour crime that lies at the heart of the story.

The Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz can be read as an example of an

individual who responded to the politics of internationalism in the 1940s with his political and cultural affiliations. He was a Progressive poet and a key member of a major literary movement from 1936-1954 that spanned across India and later Pakistan. The term Progressive comes from the All-India Progressive Writer's Association that was formed in 1936. The Association was first established in 1935 in London and came under the influence of British literary figures such as the leftist Ralph Fox.³ The Progressive group in London were also drawn into the 1st and 2nd International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture organised by French intellectuals in response to the crisis of culture in European society. In addition there was a strong political affiliation to the Communist party of India amongst the key membership of the Association. After Partition the Association was also divided and a new chapter established of the All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association. As a radical group the Progressives were committed to a revisioning of Indian literature from its pre modern traditions such as, bhakti devotionalism, folklore, religious epics and asceticism toward a modern outlook that focused on "scientific rationalism". They wanted to bring home realism and reality to Indian society. Saadia Toor has argued that in Pakistan, the Progressives were a fractured group with two factions, one still committed to a radical nationalism prescribed by the Left and the other more liberal part attracted to a conservative vision of the nation. As an activist Faiz was firmly on the side of the Left and attracted direct censure from the state in the form of imprisonment.

Alongside his socialist activism Faiz is best loved for his persona as a revolutionary verse maker for which he has a following in Pakistan and beyond. He is an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense. 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 Faiz 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

³ See Priyamvada Gopal *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the transition to Independence*, Routledge, 2005.

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 firmly committed to the idea of national sovereignty but was faced with the haunting spectre of Partition and the ensuing experience of a permanent loss. His well-known and often quoted 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
Falak ke dasht men taron ki akhiri manzil,
Kahin to hoga shab-e sust mauj ka sahil,
Kahin to jake rukega safina-e gham-e dil.*

*Jawan lahu ki pur-asrar shahrahon se
Chale jo yar to daman pe kitne hath pare;
Diyar-e husn ki be-sabr khwabgahon se
Pukarti-rahin bahen, badan bulate-rahe;
Bahut ‘aziz thi lekin rukh-e-sahar ki lagan,
Bahut qarin tha hasinan-e nur ka daman
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,
In the desert of the sky, the final destination of the stars,
Somewhere there would be the shore of the sluggish wave of night,
Somewhere would go and halt the boat of the grief of pain.

By the mysterious highroads of youthful blood
When (we) friends set out, how many hands were laid on our skirts’

From impatient sleeping-chambers of the dwellings of beauty
Arms kept crying out, bodies kept calling;
But very dear was the passion for the face of dawn,
Very close the robe of the sylphs of light:
The longing was very buoyant, the weariness was very slight.
-It is heard that
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 specific mention of the violence and dehumanisation of Partition except for the hinted at calling bodies. Crucially the journey to freedom remains unfinished amongst the friends who had set out for a particular destination toward emancipation and self-determination. In that crossing they turned a blind eye to the violence and destruction of the moment of decolonisation, a historical juncture marked by the permanent loss that is Partition. With this fracture they remain in a state of permanent exile. This state of “hijr” separation is something that seeps through in his poetry giving it a particular quality of nostalgia and loss.

“Hijr” as a representation of the unrequited love of the nation has many networks of circulation in Urdu poetry and has also travelled beyond Urdu to the secular English novel. The British Pakistani writer Nadeem Aslam who was born in 1966 in the city of Gujranwala located in the province of Punjab in Pakistan is someone who is deeply influenced by it. Aslam moved to the market town of Huddersfield in the county of Yorkshire in England with his family when he was 14. His father Mian Mohammad Aslam was a Communist poet and film-maker and a member of the Progressive Writers Association. According to Aslam, the reason for their move to England was his father coming under increasing surveillance in Pakistan because of his political views (Chambers 2011: 132-4). Aslam claims to have had little exposure to an English education until his arrival in England as he went to an Urdu medium school in Gujranwala. He published his first novel *Season of the Rainbirds* in 1993 and it won the Betty Trask award, followed by *Maps for Lost Lovers* in 2004 and *The Wasted Vigil* in 2008.

Maps for Lost Lovers is ostensibly a novel about the deep emotions of love and faith amongst ordinary British Muslims. It tells the story of a diasporic

family conflicted by the pressures of community, religion, nationality and multicultures. The story of Chanda and Jugnu's murder is narrated through the voice of Jugnu's brother, Shamas who is 64 years old, a poet, a socialist, and the Director of the Community Relations Council and his devout wife Kaukab. Shamas cast as the progressive father and husband lives to serve the needs of his community over and above those of his family. A large part of his character seems to parallel the legend of Faiz as an organic intellectual, a poet and an activist. In the novel the community regard Shamas as a good brother because despite having the financial means to move away he has stayed on, much to the dissatisfaction of his wife Kaukab. The counter foil to Shamas is his brother Jugnu, a highly educated well-travelled cosmopolitan lepidopterist whose has journeyed from Pakistan, via Moscow, to England, the US and has finally settled back in England. Jugnu is a rationalist: he has chosen a career in science, broadened his horizons through higher education, travel, and even owns a speedboat he has named 'Darwin'. Other than family affiliation it is difficult to understand why this cosmopolitan figure has chosen citizenship in the claustrophobic town of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, a place riddled by high unemployment and crime. Jugnu's characterisation puts forward an unproblematic representation of an Enlightenment intellectual who is a cosmopolitan devoted to the pursuit of love and making new discoveries. The representation of both brothers encapsulates an array of philosophic influences mapping an East-West tradition reminiscent of the ideals of a revolutionary national poet and an organic intellectual. The question I wish to raise here is: does Aslam's deployment of the novel form make it possible for him to represent inter community relations in British society as a straight forward divide between Eastern and the Western values? European versus non-European, or does his complex use of linguistic and artistic forms as paratextual devices offer a deeper intertextual layering of split diasporic subjectivities that can only be understood through a cultural transaction between the diasporic self and the home nation?⁴ Can the characters in his novel outgrow their stereotypical identity formations around the woman question and successfully traverse a new cultural landscape to achieve a status of partial cosmopolitanism or will they join the ranks of its "noisiest foes" by retreating from British society? Is there a meaningful multicultural landscape that they can occupy?

Aslam's novel has many intertexts with an intra ethnic cultural tradition of love that is anti clerical deploying the motif of the folk tale romance known as the

⁴ See Gerard Genette. *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge University Press. 1997.

qissa from Sindhi and Punjabi linguistic traditions such as, the story of Sassi Punnun and Hir Ranjha.⁵ These stories of unrequited love, family honour and forced marriages encapsulate some of the themes Nadeem Aslam revisits in his novel. He deploys a genre of devotional Sufi literature, the qawwali, usually attached to patron shrines and the internationally recognised figure of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the renowned Pakistani singer/qawwal, as a real character in the novel who performs for the community giving them a live rendition of a local aesthetic form of devotional music. Underwriting the universal tragic folk tales are the realist tragedies of love for ill-fated lovers in the novel from different religions, classes, ethnicities. The folk tales are used polemically to explicate the tyranny of men toward women and to connect to a Sufi tradition that has traditionally relied on a feminine voice to represent oppression. The narrator offers us his own view:

And always always it was the vulnerability of women that was used by the poet-saints to portray the intolerance and oppression of their times: in their verses the women rebel and try bravely to face all opposition. They – more than men – attempt to make a new world. And, in every poem and every story, they fail. But by striving they become part of the universal story of human hope – Sassi succumbed to the pitiless desert but died with her face pressed to the last sign of her lover (Aslam 2004:191-2).

The elite lyric aesthetic in Aslam's narrative reproduces this non-elite oppositional Sufi voice rooted in an expression of ecstatic faith. It is torn by the secularising voice of the national poet Faiz. The loneliness of the pitiless desert is hauntingly drawn from Faiz's "Dasht-e tanhai" paying a recognisable tribute to the poet, who is mentioned in the Dedication page alongside his father and the artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai with an acknowledgement to: "two masters who taught me, each in his own way, about what else is worth loving".

By invoking a living tradition of lyric poetry through intertextual references Aslam embeds an inter-generic reference in his novel that adds a deep layer of meaning to the Pakistani novel in English. In doing so he offers his own interpretation of the meaning of lyric poetry in a multicultural environment. This meaning is considerably different to the nostalgic representation in the filmic adaptation of Anita Desai's *In Custody* and in the novel itself. There the Urdu lyric is used as an emotive inter-generic device to depict a decaying cultural tradition. However, what is common to both diasporic novelists is the stylistic

⁵ See Farina Mir, "A Punjabi Literary Formation" in her *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, University of California Press, 2010.

device of the lyric to deepen the narrative voice and lend it an inner subjectivity (Frow 2006: 51-71)). Faiz's "Dasht-e tanhai" has at its heart the theme of separation and union and is closely connected to the Sufi expression of an unrequited love and desired for union.

*Dasht-e tanhai men, ai jan-e jahan larzan hain
Teri avaz ke sa'e, tere honton ke sarab
Dasht-e tanhai men, duri ke khas-o khak tale
Khil rahe hain tere pahlu ke saman aur gulab
Uth rahi hai kahin qurbat se teri sans ki anch
Apni khushbu men sulagti hui maddham maddham
Dur-ufaq par, chamakti hui qatra qatra
Gir rahi hai teri dildar nazar ki shabnam
Is qadar pyar se, ai jan-e jahan, rakkha hai
Dil ke rukhsar pe is vaqt teri yad ne hath
Yun guman hota hai, garche hai abhi subh-e firaq
Dhal gaya hijr ka din, a bhi ga'I vasl ki rat.*

'Yad' (Memory) from the collection *Dast-e saba* (1952)

My dearest I quiver in the desert of solitude
The memory of your lips, the shadow of your voice
In the desert of loneliness in the dust of separation
Your embodiment is in the flowering jasmine and the rose

Your warm breath is close to me as you draw near
Its fragrance faintly smouldering
Far – beyond the horizon – sparkling drop by drop
Falls the dew from your lover's eyes

With such love have you my love
Reached out to the inner core of my heart
That although it is the morning of separation it feels as if
The day of separation has passed and the night of union is here.

(Faiz 1952: my translation)

Published as part of his *Dast-e Saba* collection, composed during his prison years when he was charged with the conspiracy to overthrow the government of Liaquat

Ali Khan, it is a poem that reflects Faiz Ahmed Faiz's personal experience of incarceration, the pain of separation from his beloved and the longed for desire for union that sustains him in his loss. As has been argued by Aamir Mufti and Ted Genoways, with reference to Theodor Adorno's analysis of lyric poetry as essentially "social in nature", Faiz's lyric style can be read beyond the immediately personal level of the lover and his beloved and is deeply engaged with the historical processes of individual subjectivity in the postcolonial nation. Faiz's love lyric encapsulates a utopian desire for union that will somehow erase the "dagh dagh ujala" (the night bitten dawn) the more entrenched he becomes with politics in Pakistan. For Mufti, "the significance of Faiz's repeated use of *hijr* and its derivatives is that it imbues the lyric experience of separation from the beloved with a concrete historical meaning – the parting of ways or leave taking that is Partition". (Mufti 2007: 223) Mufti reasons that Faiz's lyric poetry with its constant referentiality to *hijr* takes his readers and listeners back to August 1947 and the minority status of the Indian Muslim. To some extent this is true in Aslam's novel as the story of Shamas and his brother Jugnu is embedded within another story, that of their father's Hindu identity lost in the RAF bombing of Gujranwala in 1919. Separated from his sister Aarti, the child Deepak eventually finds himself at a Sufi shrine and is given the name Chakor. He married Mahtaab whom he met at the shrine in 1922 and they have three children together and live in a house that is called Sohni Dharti (Beautiful land) in Lahore, resonating a patriotic Pakistani national song of the 1970s. Chakor regains his lost memory over time and when he develops pancreatic cancer as an old man his wishes are to be cremated as a Hindu and to be rejoined with his religious identity in death. This creates a furore amongst the family, notably the third brother who we are told is religiously minded and Shamas's wife Kaukab, who is also conservative coming from a cleric's family. The timing of Chakor / Deepak's death in the novel coincides with the year 1971 and the cessation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan. Thus the pain of *hijr* is continuously with us in the novel and exile happens to both Muslim and non-Muslim characters. The reader is frequently reminded of this pain by the larger than life spectre of honour crime that is the main plot and the shocking storylines that accompany it, for instance, the story of the Muslim girl who is beaten to death for having a Hindu lover. She dies during an exorcism to "rid her of djinns". Therefore both in Faiz's poetry and Aslam's novel the move to *hijr* may, in the first instance, mark the desire for an eventual union or return to a utopian Indian national identity that normalizes the Muslim, but this desire is torn by the need for social reform in Pakistan that will cultivate new inspirational directions, reversing the spiritual and political degeneration of the postcolonial period. *Hijr* is closer in spirit to the Ummah and its formative moment of the Islamic Hijrah (migration) marking the start of the Islamic

calendar with the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.

The experience of hijr for Faiz is an ever-changing one and meaning shifts in his verse from migration to exile. In his later collection *Mere dil mere masafar* (My traveller, my heart) the title poem “Dil-e man, musafar-e man” composed in London reads:

*Mere dil, mere musafir
Hua phir hukam sadir
Ke vatan badr hon hum tum
Dain gali gali sadae'n
Karen rukh nagar nagar ka
Ke suragh koi pae'n
Kisi yar-e namabar ka
Har ik ajnabi se puchen
Jo pata tha apne ghar ka
Sar-ku-e nashanaaian,
Hamen din se rat karna
Kabhi is se bat karna
Kabhi us se bat karna
Tumhen kya kahun ke kiya hai
Shab-e gham buri bala hai
Hamen ye bhi tha ghanimat
Jo koi shumar hota,
Hamen kya bura tha marna
Agar ek bar hota!*

My heart, my fellow traveller
It has been ordained again
That you and I be exiled
We call out in every street,
We scour every town.

In order to find a code
To a messenger of love
We ask every stranger
The address of our old home

In this town of unfamiliar people
We watch the days go by

At times talking to this visitor,
At times to that one

How can I articulate to you, my friend
The desolation of this night of loneliness
It would have been enough for us
If there was just some reckoning
Death would have been welcome to us
If it were to come but once
(Faiz 1978: my translation)

Written in London this poem captures the essence of the poet in exile, it reimagines the desert of loneliness from “Yad” in 1958 and transports the sentiments from the experience of a forced imprisonment to the location of a voluntary exile in a metropolitan city. The seduction of the lover’s gaze has faded somewhat and the constant companion of the narrative voice is its own self. He experiments with the detachment of modernity referencing strangers, unfamiliar people and a lack of knowledge about a permanent home address. A figure comes to light who constantly feels the pain of separation and who is numbed by the repetition of loss. Although Aslam’s novel does not directly reference this poem, it speaks to it through the continued use of the lyric as an emotive inter-generic device that expresses the loneliness of individual characters experiencing the alienation of exile.

Following in the footsteps of Faiz, who wrote a small collection of poems in Punjabi, Nadeem Aslam shifts the linguistic register from Urdu to Punjabi expressing the state of hijr through the lyrics of ‘Dard di Raunaq’ (The spectacle of Pain) by a Punjabi poet Abid Tamimi (d. 2006) in the novel.

Ki pata-tikana puchde ho-
Mere sheher da na Tanhaii ey
Zila: Sukhan-navaz
Tehseel: Hijar
Jeda daak-khanna Rusvair ey.
Oda rasta Gehrian Sochan han, te mashoor makam Judair ey.
Othay aaj-kal Abid mil sakda ey –
Betha dard di raunaq laii ey.
[...]
You ask for my address
My city’s name is loneliness
District: The Relating of Tales

Sub-District: Longing

And its post office is Condemnation and Disrepute.

The road leading to it is Devoted Thought, and its famous monument is Separation.

That's where Abid, the writer of these lines, can be found nowadays –

There he sits, attracting everyone to a lively spectacle of pain.

(quoted and translated in Aslam 2004: 271)

These lines echo in the memory of the murdered girl Chanda's mother as she prepares to open the family shop for Eid. Like the other characters in the novel who are not marked as organic intellectuals Chanda's mother affiliates to her original home through a linguistic route, which is tied to a community identity rather than a national one. As a region that was torn apart by Partition the Punjab was host to over a million forced migrations. In remembering this poem, Chanda's mother is shown to associate with an aesthetic tradition that recognises loss of community, and the ensuing loneliness and separation as key signifiers of identification for migrants. It recalls a "structure of feeling" that is rooted in an oral tradition that includes Hir Ranjha as a key reference point.⁶ Aslam's characters who are in a permanent state of exile from their home connect easily to this poetry of hijr and while existentially they are part of the Dasht-e-Tanhaii they inhabit, mentally they have never recovered from the original loss of separation. The loss from their immediate community is lost in the narrative of the nation and the Punjabi poet captures that sense of community identity through his linguistic register. The daughter, Chanda has been torn apart by many literal separations of divorce and is already lost as a respectable member of the local community. In remembering this poem Chanda's mother seeks solace in the universal theme of separation from the beloved as a diasporic individual who has been torn from her home and has like her daughter suffered the loss of community although for different reasons. As a partial cosmopolitan transnational Pakistani subject she is tied to a particular subjectivity and it is only her linguistic self-expression that gives her the space to mark her retreat and resistance from a dominant narrative.

Aslam's novel offers a syncretic view of Asian identities and influences but the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii are torn apart by communal tensions, mixed love affairs and honour crimes destined to live separate lives. It is a claustrophobic town and its geography is superimposed with

⁶ I am borrowing the phrase from Raymond Williams who first coined it in *A Preface to Film* (with Michael Orom, 1954) and developed it in later publications notably *Marxism and Literature* (1977).

the religious beliefs of its inhabitants with a lasting image of the cultural clash between Muslims and Christians reflected in the architectural mapping of the streets: “The crescent faces the cross squarely across the narrow side-street” (Aslam 2004: 9). It is at this juncture that secular humanism and culturally diverse faith based communities can be seen as a site for the clash of civilisations and the lack of class mobility traps both sides into a constant state of misrecognition of the “other”.⁷

The novel’s central characters Shamas, Kaukab, Mah-Jabin, Chanda, Charag, Ujala are given names that recall the sun, the moon, stars setting up a cosmology that echoes some of the stock characteristics of the lyric. They represent light and darkness, enlightenment and ignorance. Early on in the novel a conversation between the two brothers reveals that they believe and trust science and scientists more than prophets and messengers of God (2004: 38). In this story the religious clerics and the secular left intellectuals are doomed to clash. The villains of the story and the perpetrators of the honour crime are Chanda’s two brothers named “Barra” (Big) and “Chotta” (Small) who are enveloped by the darkness of the abattoirs they visit. They occupy the dark fringes of the novel with little characterization. Toward the end of the book when the honour crime has been traced to the perpetrators through the English Criminal Justice System, Shamas quotes a well known Punjabi couplet by the poet Munir Niazi (1928-2006) encapsulating the poignancy of the two lovers killed “*Kuj Sheher de loke vi zalam san / Kuj mainon maran da shauk vi si [...]. On the one hand, the city surrounding me was easily provoked. On the other, I was curious about ways of dying*” (2004: 280). Shamas repeats these lines to Kiran looking to assign a moral victory to the murdered lovers. However, his mood is thwarted by Kiran, a Punjabi neighbour, who it turns out had been having an affair with one of the murderers, Chotta. She too had feared for her life in that relationship and a lover’s tiff between the two had been a catalyst for the events of the fateful night that led to the murder of Chanda and Jugnu. Everyone in Dasht-e-Tanhaii lives in a state of hijr, it is not a state of ecstatic emotion as imagined in the love lyric but a condition of statelessness, of unbelonging and unworldliness. There is a radical Progressive spirit to Nadeem Aslam’s writing ethic that draws from the earlier generation of intellectuals who wrote against the grain with a desire to unleash new and uncomfortable realities to their reading masses. Aamir Mufti suggests that the Indian Progressive Writers Movement of the 1930s embeds a national realism that in addition to mimesis entails a national “passage from primitivism to modernity”. He goes on to argue that “Urdu literary culture in late colonial India

⁷ See Charles Taylor “The Politics of Recognition,” in Amy Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. (25-74).

is located ambivalently at the cusp of ‘nation’ and ‘minority’, resisting precisely the resolutions the Partition attempted to implement, that is, minoritization in India and nationalization in Pakistan”. (Mufti 2007: 209). Strictly speaking that analysis does not hold true for Faiz who did look toward the resolution of the national in Pakistan. Nadeem Aslam has switched that focus to an engagement with notions of community. For Aslam, *Maps for Lost Lovers* is a revolutionary book because it engages with a real issue that has a negative impact on the lives of both Asian and Muslim migrants living in Britain. He has bared their subaltern Dasht-e-Tanhaii to a cosmopolitan English novel tradition. *Maps for Lost Lovers* offers an uneven and contradictory engagement with honour crime. On the one hand it is concerned to provide a forensic, pseudo-documentary analysis of a sociological phenomenon - albeit one already over-determined by Orientalist moral projections. On the other, the story of two lovers killed for their transgression is complicated by the additional factors of ghettoisation and lack of material resources and cultural capital. In an interview with the Pakistani writer Kamila Shamsie, Aslam describes himself as someone who lives in the west and is therefore aware of “its injustices and subtle repressions, but I also know this other world, and I have to bring news of it too”.⁸ The narrator in *Maps for Lost Lovers* is always concerned with the fate of girls and young women who are shown to be at the forefront of their community’s absolutist approach to personal morality. We are told that, “A Pakistani man mounted the footpath and ran over his sister-in-law – repeatedly, in broad daylight – because he suspected she was cheating on his brother. ... This was here in England and, according to the statistics, in one Pakistani province alone, a woman is murdered every thirty-eight hours solely because her virtue is in doubt.” (Aslam 2004: 136) Aslam sees such atrocities, which often go almost unnoticed by the surrounding white majority society, as every bit as worthy of note as those more eye-catching spectacular acts of violence, such as that seen on 11 September 2001. For instance, in an interview with the *Independent* newspaper, he nails his colours firmly to the mast when asked how he might have framed the novel if he had set it in 2001 instead of 1997. He states, “In a way, the book is about September 11”. He recounts how, when visiting Ground Zero in New York, he felt “disappointed and angry” with himself as a writer for not having been “rigorous enough to condemn the small scale September 11s that go on every day”. For him, “Jugnu and Chanda are the September 11 of this book”. For Aslam as a novelist, there is an awareness of living in a post 9/11 world, “Most ordinary Muslims say, ‘We just want to get on with our lives. Don’t identify us with fundamentalists.’ But it’s a luxury. We

⁸ Kamila Shamsie, ‘Writer at Heart’, *Newsline*, 1 July 2004.
<http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2004/07/writer-at-heart/>. Accessed 15. 06.2011.

moderate Muslims have to stand up.”⁹ This “rigorous” positioning suggests that Aslam as a writer is inclined toward a value based model of partial cosmopolitanism as discussed by Appiah. While his predecessor Faiz remained an internationalist with a perspective that is closer to Brennan’s conceptualisation of cosmo-theory. As has been shown in the essay neither of the theoretical conceptualisations are straight forward appropriations. However they help to delineate a cosmopolitan perspective that is shared differently by the lyric poet and the diasporic writer. Through their creative responses they offer complex patterns of representation beyond the national imaginary of a liberal secularism and religious community at times of international crisis.

REFERENCES

- Kwame Anthony Appiah. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. W. W. Norton and Company, 2006.
- Nadeem Aslam. *Maps for Lost Lovers*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004.
- Timothy Brennan. *Wars of Position: the cultural politics of left and right*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Claire Chambers. *British Muslim Fictions: interviews with contemporary writers*. Palgrave: London, 2011.
- Carlo Coppola. “The All-India Progressive Writers’ Association: the European Phase.” In *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, edited by Carlo Coppola. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1974.
- Faiz Ahmad Faiz. *Nuskha-e wafa*. Lahore: Maktaba-e karavan, n.d.
- Poems by Faiz*. Translated by V. G. Kiernan. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1971.
- Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.
- John Frow. *Genre*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Filipo Osella and Caroline Osella. “Introduction: Islamic Reformism in South Asia”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 42 (March/May) 2008, pp. 1-11.
- Aamir R. Mufti. *Enlightenment in the Colony: the Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Olivier Roy. *Globalised Islam: the search for a new Ummah*. London: Hurst and Company, 2004.
- Saadia Toor. *The State of Islam: Culture and cold war politics in Pakistan*. London: Pluto, 2011.

⁹ Marianne Brace, ‘Nadeem Aslam: A Question of Honour’, *The Independent*, 11 June 2004. <http://independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/nadeem-aslam-a-question-of-honour-731732.html> (Accessed 7 March 2006).