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A Personal Matter: The Memoirs of Sarfraz Manzoor, Yasmin Hai and Zaiba Malik as a Response to 7/7

Miquel Pomar-Amer
Universitat de les Illes Balears
miquel.pomar@uib.eu

The 2005 terrorist attack in London shook British multiculturalism to its foundations and meant a turning point in the relationship between British Muslims and the state. The actions of the four British-born bombers turned British Muslims, and British Pakistanis in particular, into suspects who needed to show their allegiance to British values. The memoirs by Sarfraz Manzoor, Yasmin Hai and Zaiba Malik emerge as attempts to reverse this twisted rhetoric and claim that Britishness and Islam are not incompatible. This article argues that the hostile media environment in the aftermath of 7/7 interpellated these three authors, journalists by profession, to publicly share their lives in order to become representatives of moderate British Muslims. Even though their memoirs devote few pages to discussing 7/7, their emotional response to this event acts as a catalyst for the writing process itself.

Keywords: autobiography; affective response; British Muslim; British-Pakistani; diaspora; Islamophobia; terrorism

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Un asunto personal: las memorias de Sarfraz Manzoor, Yasmin Hai y Zaiba Malik como respuesta a los atentados del 7 de julio

Los atentados de Londres en 2005 sacudieron los cimientos del multiculturalismo en Reino Unido y supusieron un punto de inflexión en la relación entre los musulmanes británicos y el estado. Las acciones de los cuatro terroristas nacidos en Gran Bretaña convirtieron los musulmanes británicos, y los británico-paquistaníes en particular, en sospechosos que debían demostrar que suscribían los valores británicos. Las autobiografías de Sarfraz Manzoor, Yasmin Hai y Zaiba Malik aparecen como intentos de revertir esta retórica perversa y

reclamar que el islam es compatible con la identidad británica. Este artículo argumenta que el ambiente mediático hostil que se dio tras los atentados del 7 de julio interpeló estos tres autores, periodistas de profesión, a compartir públicamente sus vidas como representativas de los musulmanes británicos moderados. A pesar de que las memorias dedican unas pocas páginas a los atentados, es la respuesta emocional a éstos lo que inicia el proceso de escritura.

Palabras clave: autobiografía; respuesta afectiva; musulmán británico; británico-paquistaní; diáspora; islamofobia; terrorismo

1. Introduction

On 7th July 2005, the day after the city had been chosen to host the 2012 Olympic Games, a joyful mood was to be expected in London but the celebrations of this achievement were marred by the bombings that occurred on various parts of the public transport system. With fifty-two victims and nearly eight hundred injured, it was the first suicide terrorist attack in Britain, and from the very beginning this was perceived as an attack on British lifestyle. Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, was praised for the speech he gave on the day of the attack, defining London as a city where people could enjoy freedom and live in harmony with one another (Stone 2005). Tony Blair, the incumbent prime minister, also endorsed these ideas and directed the final words of his first Commons statement after the bomb attacks to the Muslim community: "Fanaticism is not a state of religion but a state of mind. We will work with you to make the moderate and true voice of Islam heard as it should be" ("Full Text" 2005). A few days later, when the police released the identity of the four bombers, all British-born, media attention turned to British Muslims, wondering where their loyalties lied.

It is precisely this state of permanent suspicion that underlies the Terrorism Act 2006 and the Respect Action Plan, which can be seen as measures to confront, in Blair's terms, the fact that "the rules of the game are changing" since hospitality and tolerance had been abused (Jeffery 2005). In 2006 Blair went further and openly stated that there was "a problem with a minority of that [Muslim] community, particularly originating from certain countries" (Blair 2006). This speech marked a turning point in the Labour position concerning multiculturalism as the selection of certain controversial Muslim and/or South Asian practices that Blair touched on throughout his speech, together with his abundant references to the London bombings (three of the four bombers were of Pakistani heritage), suggested that Pakistan was one of the problematic countries he was alluding to.

Indeed, there has been a mainstream interest in British Muslims as "an object of curiosity and at times fearful fascination" (R. Ahmed 2015, 183), which has been largely satisfied by an increasing body of fiction and memoirs written by diasporic writers of Pakistani origin. In this regard, Chambers coined the term "Muslim Kool" to refer to those texts written by Muslim authors born in the late 1960s and early 1970s

which "plac[e] discussion of music, fashion, night life, and university study alongside analysis of identity politics, Thatcherism, and Islamophobia" (2013, 88), as is the case with Sarfraz Manzoor's *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter* (2008) and Zaiba Malik's *We Are a Muslim, Please* (2010). While there is an evident focus on British politics and lifestyle in these three autobiographical texts, the July terrorist attack in London seems to remain on the periphery and only a few pages are devoted to discuss this event.

However, this article will argue that 7/7 is crucial in these memoirs, not as a theme per se but as an event that influences the mood and the affective dimension of the three texts. They are articulated as both a response to, and an attempt to make sense of, this event and how to cope with its aftermath, particularly considering the repositioning of Muslims in the spotlight, which is often associated with Islamophobia. Although this is a contested term, the definition by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims will be considered here: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and its victims are not just Muslims but also those who are perceived to be Muslims. Its effects are seen in individual behaviours and institutional processes" (2018: 7).[1] In order to show the relevance of 7/7 in the selected autobiographical texts, the article will firstly contextualize their emergence considering that "the function of the memoir is to reflect on the past but its purpose—sometimes explicitly stated but otherwise implicit in the form—is to draw lessons for the present" (Mondal 2012, 37). Then, the three primary texts will be analysed in chronological order to show how the affective response to the terrorist attacks evolves through time so that the initial sense of urgency, which is particularly perceived in Manzoor's text, leads to an increasingly more reflective stance which also inflects the formal complexity of the text, as is seen in Malik's work.

2. Representing 7/7

In April 1995, Edward Said was insistently contacted by the media to comment on the Oklahoma City bomb attack: "The entirely factitious connection between Arabs, Muslims, and terrorism was never more forcefully made evident to me; the sense of guilty involvement which, despite myself, I was made to feel struck me as precisely the feeling I was meant to have" (1997, xiv). Ten years later, many newspapers would similarly invite Sarfraz Manzoor to write on 7/7: "I accepted the writing commissions, offered my views and banked the fees, but inside I felt like a fraud. The truth was that I had absolutely no idea how and why anyone would do what the 7/7 bombers did" (Manzoor 2021, 158). Such media interest situates Said and Manzoor as native informants and raises two concerns that underlie the publication of the autobiographical texts discussed below: firstly, media representations of Muslims are often reductive and associations with negative images such as terrorism abound, as has been exposed

[1] It must be noted that even though Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred have been sometimes used interchangeably, this distinction has taken on an ideological dimension in more recent years. Despite the efforts made by different groups and individuals, there is not an official definition of Islamophobia yet (Siddique 2024).

by extensive scholarly research in the British context (Moore et al. 2008; Morey and Yaqin 2011; Petley and Richardson 2011; Poole 2009; Richardson 2004); secondly, it is assumed that sharing a similar background can offer much deeper insight into the terrorist's mindset but, as Manzoor acknowledges, this is simply a fallacy. Ultimately, he is not just more approachable than the bombers but also fulfils his role as a native informant, keen on "mouthing for us the answers that we want to hear as confirmation of our view of the world" (Spivak 1999, 342). Hence, it was in response to both the recurringly biased media representations of Muslims and the demand for British Muslim voices that Hai, Malik and Manzoor published their memoirs.

As Clements argues, "in the decade of the 'war on terror', pressure has been placed upon transnational and diasporic writers of South Asian (and particularly Pakistani) Muslim origin to 'disclose' to Western readers" their allegiances, "either directly or through their characters" (2016, 21). Misery memoirs such as Hannah Shah's *The Imam's Daughter* (2009) and Ferzana Riley's *Unbroken Spirit* (2007), and male autobiographies about Islamism such as Maajid Nawaz's *Radical* (2013) and Ed Husain's *The Islamist* (2007) are examples of popular subgenres of life writing by Muslim authors which tell how the protagonists turn away from Islam after a transformative experience. In contrast, in Muslim Kool memoirs they "become increasingly conscious of their Muslim identity" (Chambers 2013, 81) but this is not presented as a threatening or problematic aspect. The choice of the autobiographical genre, therefore, clearly interweaves the personal and private with the public and political in an exercise where the autobiographical subject claims representativeness. Moreover, Hai, Manzoor and Malik all have a background in journalism and this may explain both why they are concerned with media representations and how aware they are of the influence they can have on their audience. Yet they do not engage directly with specific pervasive media representations of Muslims but instead try to counterbalance them by offering more positive depictions, namely their own life narratives. For this purpose, a humanist tone is predominant in the reflection on terrorism, "characterised by a reconciliatory gesture towards shared humanity" (Haschemi Yekani 2013, 210). Thus, these three authors align with their readership and create a distance with terrorists, embodying the figure of a moderate and rational Muslim who takes pride in his/her religion and condemns any violent act committed in the name of Islam.

In his discussion of the representation of London in twenty-first-century fiction, McLeod states that "while literary responses to 7/7 are still being formulated, it has been interesting to discern how some writers have been keen to rearticulate with urgency a sense of the city's multifarious cultural condition in the face of a divisive, and fatally explosive, logic of exclusion and purity" (2011, 254). The urgency of the demand for some sort of reconciliatory discourse can be traced back to the type of literary legacy the tragic 7/7 events have produced. With the exception of Tariq Ali's *Rough Music* (2005), which is a highly political text that argues that 7/7 is a direct consequence of Britain's participation in the war on terror, the first responses were

clearly autobiographical and were published shortly after the event, as early as 2006 and 2007. Such works were authored by a victim (Hicks 2007; North 2007; Tulloch 2006), a victim's relative (Fatayi-Williams 2006) or by someone involved in the rescue operations (Debnam 2007). Since 2008, both collections of testimonies put together by journalists (Taylor 2011; Zimonjic 2008) and fictional texts (Casey 2013; Kureishi 2008; Sahota 2011: Thompson 2015) have also been published.

In terms of this post-7/7 literary panorama, the autobiographical works discussed below are inscribed in the first strand and imbricate with the demands for a "true" or "moderate" Islam made by the government (Gunning 2010, 66). This adjustment to the central tenets of multiculturalism plays its part in "the obvious tensions created between oppositional forms of 'marginal' writing and the multiple constraints placed upon [authors] by the mainstream demands they are invited—or even expected—to meet" (Huggan 2001, 157). Manzoor incorporates these demands in his role as a journalist before *Greetings* is published: "I did feel it was my responsibility to say a few things [on 7/7 and its effects]. I don't write about things unless I feel compelled to say something I'm not reading anywhere else" (Manzoor and Shimon 2006, 163). In this regard, his is the earliest text to try to fill the existing gap, namely a response to the events by British Pakistani Muslim authors which represents them from a positive perspective and openly condemns terrorism. The texts by Hai and Malik, published shortly after, also respond to the same gap. Moreover, the use of comic elements in the three memoirs discussed sets them apart from others with a more serious outlook and contributes to making them more light-hearted and more approachable for a broader readership (Tönnies 2016, 123).

The three memoirs share a similar narrative arc which begins with an attempt to reconstruct their parents' arrival to Britain, followed by their childhood and teen experiences during the 1980s and culminating with their reflections on 7/7. Even though this event closes these autobiographies, it in fact operates as the initiator of the narrative because it is the turning point that destabilizes their position as British Muslims, bringing the debates following the Rushdie Controversy a step forward.[2] It is in this moment of uncertainty that they appeal to their professional background in journalism and claim for themselves a degree of representativeness on behalf of their community. In other words, they want to prevent the message conveyed by the terrorists from being considered representative of secular "good" British Muslims at large, even if this may worryingly fall into "valoriz[ing] secular modes of being Muslim while stigmatizing other, more assertive Islamic identities" (Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin 2012, 12).

[2] The protests by groups of British Muslims against the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) sparked debates on the limits to freedom of speech and "helped to forge a reductive binary opposition between creative freedom and religious repression which continues to shape constructions of Muslims" (Ahmed 2020, 635-6). This event also revealed a shift in identity terms as Islam became a primary identity marker for many British Asians

2.1. *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), by Sarfraz Manzoor

In 1974, Sarfraz Manzoor (Paharang, 1971) flew with his mother and siblings to Britain to join his father in Luton. As a journalist, he is a regular contributor to *The Guardian* and a documentary presenter on BBC Radio 4. Manzoor published his autobiography *Greetings from Bury Park: Race, Religion and Rock 'n' Roll* in 2007. As the subtitle suggests, Manzoor writes about his diasporic position in juxtaposition with his passion for Bruce Springsteen. Indeed, music and diasporicity also feature in many of the documentaries Manzoor has written and/or presented as well as in *Blinded by the Light*, the film based on *Greetings* and co-written by Manzoor himself with Gurinder Chadha and Paul Mayeda Berges, which premiered in 2019. Significantly, to keep the lightsome tone of the film, the narrative arc takes place in 1987, thereby circumventing the emergence of political Muslim identities that followed the Rushdie Controversy as well as other key events like 9/11 or 7/7, which feature in the memoir but are completely absent in the film adaptation. If *Greetings* is committed to fostering social cohesion by stressing similarities over differences, in his latest book, *They: What Muslims and Non-Muslims Get Wrong about Each Other* (2021), Manzoor systematically addresses prejudice by listing and debunking particular stereotypes typically associated with Muslims. In February 2023 he was appointed Chancellor of the University of Bedfordshire and assumed the role with one clear mission: "[T]o make people think of Luton as 'cool rather than crap'" (Davidson 2023).

The choice of words is fitting as Manzoor's *Greetings from Bury Park* is probably the most obvious example of Chambers's Muslim Kool. Manzoor negotiates his cultural identity with the vibrant music scene of the time and the text pays homage not just to his deceased father but also to his great idol Bruce Springsteen, whose debut album's title *Greetings from Asbury Park N.J.* inspires Manzoor's (Manzoor 2007: 140). In fact, American culture supplied a role model for Manzoor in the figure of Springsteen (Maxey 2012, 7), as he could not identify with either Rushdie or Kureishi because "for someone like myself who was not born into wealth and did not have a mixed-race heritage there were no role models" (Manzoor 2007, 171). The blurb on the back cover presents the book as "an inspiring tribute to the power of music to transcend race and religion." These three elements are indeed present in the work's subtitle but it is music that is presented throughout the text as a truly inclusive community-building force. For example, declaring his passion for Springsteen to an immigration officer seems to suspend the tension of going through the US border checkpoint just a year after 9/11 (238).

In addition, the text avoids other controversial topics that might threaten the smooth accommodation of multiculturalism. For instance, Rehana Ahmed highlights that the hijab remains unseen in *Greetings* and considers it to be "suggestive of a general invisibility or absence of an assertive political Muslim identity that is not extremist or violent" (2015, 198). Indeed, Manzoor re-articulates Huntington's clash of civilizations and locates the crux of misunderstanding "between people of all religions – those who were moderate and reasonable – and extremists" (266). This distinction,

however, disables the articulation of a politically committed Muslim identity which is not reduced to an extremist and unreasonable position. This reductionist view of Islam seems to concur with his brother's fierce rebuke, "[t]he only time you even [*sic*] think about Islam is when you are in the media pretending to be a Muslim" (Manzoor 2010b). Regardless of the veracity of this accusation, Yaqin notes that Manzoor nevertheless "demonstrates an acute self-consciousness in his various appearances across all forms of media – recognizing that he is being positioned as an authentic spokesperson and working that knowledge ironically into his commentary" (2010: 236). In *Greetings*, Manzoor exhibits this self-conscious personification of authenticity although a certain degree of uncertainty about the legitimacy of his claims can also be traced.

Bhanot bluntly defines *Greetings* as "a commercial response to 7/7" (2019, 204) and its back cover signals just such a marketing strategy by declaring it to be Manzoor's "reaction to the tragedies of 9/11 and 7/7." Yet, the space he devotes to discussing them is rather limited and his voice is clearly relegated to reporting what those around him think. In his approach to 9/11, Manzoor timidly reveals his voice but it generally works as a cue for other characters to continue elaborating with their views of the events and their consequences. Surprisingly, when it comes to commenting on 7/7, the autobiographical subject becomes elusive and seems to be hiding behind an earlier generation "to compensate for his own lack of answers" (R. Ahmed 2015, 199). On the one hand, the humanist approach is embodied by his mother, concerned with the consequences that the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks have had for the victims, the terrorists and their families (235, 266-267). On the other, Manzoor imagines that his deceased father would have accused the next generation of ingratitude (268). With this, he uses the figure of his father to claim for himself a position of authority against those British Muslims who speak with contempt about Britain.[3] Their actions may contribute to increasing Islamophobia and this affects not just Muslims, as Manzoor's best friend Amolak succinctly puts it: "Muslims blow things up and us Sikhs get mashed up by some fucking drunken muppets who don't know any better" (264). This is why Manzoor reacts against radical Muslims with "anger, confusion and betrayal" because they do not speak in his name (264). Yet, if Manzoor's narrative falls short in something, it is in speaking up and finding a voice which goes beyond the positions of the previous generation. As I have suggested, this may be due to the promptitude of his response to the events of 7/7. Indeed, the closing paragraphs of Manzoor's autobiography seem to be the result of the post-9/11 climate, since a clear engagement with post-7/7 Britain is evaded. He renounces his former dream of moving to America and proudly proclaims his Britishness and acknowledges that Britain is his "land of hope and dreams" (269). In fact, the journalist David Goodhart chose Manzoor as "someone who exemplifies" the British Dream in the book he wrote on this concept (2013, 335).

[3] This a technique also used by Mrs Hai in *The Making* and by Manzoor himself in *They*, where he devotes the prologue to talking about his father.

In his more recent work, Manzoor is able to put into his own words the emotions elicited by 7/7. He believes that it affected him more deeply than 9/11 because "it hit closer to home" (2021, 157). He also admits "a personal connection to the bombing" of Manchester Arena in 2017 because he studied in that city and attended many concerts in that particular venue (2021, 187). In both cases, Manzoor's emotional attachment to certain spaces, and Britain at large, sustains his definition of home and enables a sense of belonging. At the same time, though, the post-9/11 discourse has contributed to alienating many British Muslims by singling them out as suspects, and their response "incorporates negative emotions such as fear, insecurity, helplessness, sadness, anger and suffering that are not acted upon whereas for other British Muslims the negative emotions are acted upon through the individual being radicalized" (S. Ahmed 2015, 557).[4] Manzoor acknowledges this double affective response and chooses a side when he declares that the bombers "were like me, and yet nothing like me" (2021, 158). In *They*, his reaction to 7/7 is still limited to helplessness and bafflement at what the bombers did, but instead of looking back in anger, he projects his hope into a better society for his children's generation.

2.2. *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter* (2008), by Yasmin Hai

Just a year after the launch of *Greetings*, Yasmin Hai (London, 1970) published *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter: Becoming British*, which has been serialized on BBC's Radio 4 and in the *Daily Mail*. She has worked for BBC Radio 4 and the BBC on TV programmes such as *Newsnight*. Her memoir is articulated not just as a response to the hostile post-7/7 climate for British Muslims but also as an attempt to explain why some young British Muslims have embraced extremism. In this regard, Hai overcomes Manzoor's bafflement and problematizes what he sees as simply ungrateful behaviour by contextualizing the emergence of a committed Muslim identity: "being a second-generation British Asian was not quite so simple… especially as the Muslim community was about to go through some very profound challenges" (2008, back cover). Her father's death closes the first part of her memoir and the second part tellingly begins with a chapter entitled "Rushdie and Roots." Throughout this second part, Hai traces how two important influences have impacted her own identity: on the one hand, her father's understanding of Britishness; on the other, the emergence of an increasingly self-conscious Asian, and later Muslim, identity throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

This aspect was even more prominent in the manuscript but her publisher, Virago, encouraged her to reduce contentious passages on being Muslim, "arguing that it was its humour that would sell the memoir rather than the serious discussion of Islam and multiculturalism" (Chambers 2013, 84). Despite this editorial decision, Hai's combative tone remains, especially in the final chapters of her work: Hai places herself

[4] Manzoor ironically comments on the situation of feeling constantly under suspicion in "How to tell I'm not a terrorist" (2009) and Mohsin Hamid has also reflected on post-7/7 paranoia in his 2006 piece "Down the Tube" (2015, 33-6).

in the interstice between the media discourses featuring reductionist images of Islam (242, 293) and her childhood friends—nicknamed the Bhajis—, who have recently re-discovered their faith and reject everything they consider un-Islamic (236, 272). For this purpose, as a journalist, Hai considers that she must use whatever influence she has in terms of representation to try to reconcile these two opposite poles: "The need to show who British Muslims were was more urgent than ever. But who were British Muslims?" (295).

It is Hai's answer to this question that Rehana Ahmed considers problematic because, even though Hai overcomes Manzoor's limitations in claiming a Muslim identity for himself, her account still endorses a liberal understanding that may too easily "feed into the 'good Muslim'/'bad Muslim' dichotomy" (R. Ahmed 2015, 202). Hai does seem at odds with the possibility of adopting such an identity herself, but Ahmed's categorical statement that "an overtly Islamic identity is framed in Hai's narrative primarily in terms of conformity, immersion and even submission rather than as an assertion of difference, a form of resistance and a potential means to self-empowerment" also seems slightly biased (2015, 202). Instead, Hai claims to be Muslim within a frame of Britishness shaped by post-Enlightenment values such as freedom, reason and equality (237) and this "conceals the many other British Muslim subjectivities that are sketched in her memoir" (R. Ahmed 2015, 203). However, the problem is not so much the individualistic centrality of the autobiographical subject in the narrative – as might be expected of a memoir – but the fact that her friends' move towards political Islam is met with bewilderment by the narrative voice. This attitude may suggest an Orientalist conception of Islam as incompatible with modernity. This is suggested both by the parodic tone used in Hai's short story "Safa@40" (2013a), which represents a possible compatibility of modernity and an orthodox observation of Islam, and by the connection she draws between political commitment and violent action in her portrayal of the Islamic awakening of British Muslim youth.

In this regard, Hai outlines the evolution of this politically committed British Muslim identity throughout the second part of her memoir: chapter fourteen references the Rushdie Affair (214); in chapter sixteen, she explores further the Bhajis' movement towards a political Muslim identity (235-236); in chapter nineteen, she focuses on the process of Islamic radicalization (272); chapter twenty takes as its title 9/11; in chapter twenty-one she interviews the brother of a jihadi (302) and, finally, the last chapter presents 7/7 as the last straw in terms of her identity negotiation. This leads Hai to try to make up for the neglect she had shown her father by visiting his grave and re-reading his writings. In doing so, she ultimately thanks him for having provided her with the "tools to take control of my life and to resist the easy answers" (333). This statement is aimed at those who have found in religion an answer to their quest for belonging, clearly positioning her secular choice as more preferable.

Discussing Manzoor's and Hai's works, Rehana Ahmed argues that "[t]he tensions that characterize these memoirs can be traced to the contradictions of a liberal approach

to multiculturalism that professes an equality of citizenship but cannot accommodate assertive communitarian Muslim identities in the public sphere" (2012, 65). Both texts devote only a few pages to describing their reaction to 7/7 and Hai seems to run short of words to express her outrage for what the bombers did (328). Unlike Manzoor, however, she does not simply raise and criticize the event as a turning point for British Muslims but also tries to explain its causes. In his exploration of suicide bombing, Asad states that identifying it with religious terrorism "defines the bomber as morally underdeveloped – and therefore premodern – when compared with peoples whose civilized status is partly indicated by their secular politics and their private religion" (2007, 45). This move is undertaken by the three authors discussed here but only Hai connects the expanding Islamic awakening among British Muslim youth to certain pressing issues that affect them: Hai discounts explanations that refer to Britain's foreign policy as the initiating factor and identifies alienation and social deprivation along with lack of self-control—e.g. drug addiction—as the forerunners of Muslim extremism: "What had alienated them from their fellow British citizens in the first place to attract them to an interpretation of Islam that favoured murder as a vehicle of protest?" (328). Hai laments that the subsequent public debate does not revolve around this question and consists instead of a predictable criticism of Muslims and multiculturalism, along with a superficial understanding of what Britishness stands for. Contrarily, Hai believes that Britishness must be redefined so that it becomes a really inclusive identity

Hai upheld this theory in the BBC radio programme *Four Thought* (Hai 2013b) but, in contrast with *The Making*, she opens this intervention with biographic details of Mohammad Sidique Khan, considered the mastermind behind the London bombings. This attempt to find a motivation in his past responds to a liberal understanding that, in a dubious way, reduces and caricatures the enemy but at the same time discourages the idea that s/he can be metaphysically evil because that would make "the chances of defeating him look rather poor" (Eagleton 2005, 117). Hai's research into the life of one of the bombers becomes an extended literary exercise in Zaiba Malik's autobiography, as she also engages with the psycho-biography of another 7/7 bomber.

2.3. *We Are a Muslim, Please* (2010), by Zaiba Malik

Zaiba Malik (Bradford, 1969) published her memoir *We Are a Muslim, Please* in 2010 and was longlisted for the 2011 Orwell Prize. Her background in investigative journalism on topics related to racism and multiculturalism is also evident throughout her autobiography. As a regular media commentator and public speaker both in the UK and abroad, Malik has been nominated for Royal Television Society and BAFTA Awards. She has been named as one of the twenty most influential black and Asian women in the UK, was awarded the Women in Film and Television Award and the Asian Women of Achievement Award (Coppergate Communications 2024). She is a former chair and trustee John Schofield Trust to improve diversity in newsrooms, and

is the founder of Coppergate Communications, a consultancy specialized in reputation and crisis management.

Since *We Are a Muslim, Please* appears considerably later than Manzoor's and Hai's texts, the five-year gap between 7/7 and her work seems to blur the sense of urgency mentioned in the section two of this article. Her memoir also deals with the effects the July bombs had on her with regard to Britishness but its engagement with the ethical concerns related to the 7/7 attacks is intensified by their recurring presence throughout the narrative. Thus, even though *We Are* also clearly distinguishes the moderate Muslim autobiographical subject from the extremist bomber, it brings the reflection on 7/7 a step further on both the representational and affective planes of interpretation. As Gemie states: "[H]umour and tragedy run parallel in [Malik's] work, giving it a distinctive, edgy feel" (2012, 13). Chambers acknowledges this shift by noticing that it "begins on a sombre note with a description of her interrogation in a Bangladeshi 'Torture Room'" which may not match the overall tone of Muslim Kool (2013, 88). For this reason, I propose an analysis of the formal aspects of this text in order to question the use of this label for this work and to understand how Malik articulates her particular response to 7/7.

The title of her autobiography echoes a catchphrase of her mother (12) even though Malik only reaffirms her faith when she is deprived of it in Bangladesh: she is accused of sedition, imprisoned in extremely poor conditions and some of the members of her press team are even tortured but she only explodes at the officers when she is accused of not being Muslim (29-30). The narration of this experience in the prologue apparently indicates the intention for it to be read as a climactic moment and seems to suggest that this is the trigger for her account. However, I argue that she intentionally uses this experience as a form of elaborate objective correlative to express how she feels about 7/7. The scene in the torture room places Malik in an extremely difficult situation of fear and physical vulnerability at the same time as she feels responsible for both the pain inflicted on her press team's Bangladeshi collaborators and the worries she may cause to her family back in Britain (10, 28). The 7/7 attacks were not aimed at her but she feels their effects as intensely as she feels the lack of hunger and sleep, hears the threats of solitary confinement and sees the suffering of others on her behalf (29): the affective irrupts and she passionately dismisses the accusations put against her.

This same rage is present in the questions posed throughout her memoir at an addressee whose identity will not be revealed until the epilogue, a long letter addressed to the London bomber Shehzad Tanweer. The choice of a distinct typeface for both the epilogue and the reflections included at the end of most chapters suggest that all stem from the same affective force. In contrast to the packaging of Manzoor's and Hai's autobiographies, Malik's does not suggest an intention to reflect on the terrorist attacks but conveys a rather clichéd summary of a memoir by a diasporic subject "torn between two identities" (back cover). Malik articulates her narrative on two levels: her autobiographical account pays particular homage to Bradford and her family but also

expresses her affective response to 7/7. Despite the use of humour, her references to popular culture and the inclusion of pictures from the family album, the comic tone does not conceal the almost elegiac nature of Malik's narrative, in which she pities the current state of affairs of the Pakistani community in Britain (213-24).

In this respect, it is revealing that Malik entitles the first chapter "The Found City (1977)" and the seventh "The Lost City (1989)," echoing the sentiments of a famous Bradfordian writer: "Just as J.B. Priestley lamented the Bradford he had known when he was growing up half a century ago, I too mourn my old home every time I go back" (211). It is no coincidence that this loss begins for Malik with an event that put the city at the heart of the news all over the world, namely the burning of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. This nostalgic remembering of a lively past can be clearly seen by comparing two chapters: "Goat Eid (1981)," which ends on a fantastic note that implies the redemption of the goat that was to be sacrificed (97-98), and "Hutham (2002)," which refers to her visit to the Muslim cemetery in Bradford that closes the chapter but also to her mourning process after both the 2001 Bradford riots and 9/11.

Malik's affective response to 7/7 irrupts inevitably throughout her life-writing, often using repetition strategies such as parallelism and anaphora to highlight and try to make sense of the terrorist attack: she struggles to understand how someone with a background similar to hers could become a bomber. Even though these bursts of outrage are thematically connected to the content of the chapter they close, Malik's choice to include them suggests that her life narrative is disturbed by her reaction to Tanweer, which she is neither able nor willing to repress. For this reason, even though in *We Are* her life-writing takes up more space, and the incident in Bangladesh is presented as the trigger for her narrative, her response to the 7/7 attacks takes over and becomes the main theme of the book. Regardless of the chronological line that is suggested by including a year in brackets alongside the title of each chapter, most of them develop and go beyond that time frame to approach the pivotal event. Unlike Manzoor's and Hai's memoirs, though, references to 7/7 are not restricted to the few last pages but sprinkled throughout her account. Moreover, Malik also ends up endorsing the literary and journalistic fascination for the figure of the terrorist, regardless of the revulsion she may feel for him (Asad 2007, 65; Nash 2012, 93-116). This impulse leads Malik to an epilogue which is intended to reconstruct Tanweer's psycho-biographic profile, for which she relies on her background in investigative journalism.

Nevertheless, this attempt to understand what turned Tanweer into a suicide bomber is destined to fail because the questions she poses are inscribed in a humanist project that expects answers within the frame of liberalism: "All these questions and hardly any answers" (268). In this sense, Malik's approach does not differ substantially from those posed by Manzoor and Hai as she also appeals, for example, to the suffering Tanweer may have caused his mother (174). Suicide bombing, however, is inherently incompatible with liberalism because this "disapproves of the violent exercise of freedom outside the frame of the law" (Asad 2007, 91). Certainly, immolation goes

beyond liberal logic as can be inferred from Malik's distinct reaction to the Bradford Twelve case and their stash of petrol bombs:[5] while the secular nature of the anti-racist movement of the 1980s is highlighted, she does not openly support the Bradford Twelve nor show her consternation (2012, 145). Indeed, she closes her letter marking the 1980s as a turning point for the role of Islam in the community, positioning a quiet family reading of the Koran in contrast to the currency of a whole new vocabulary: "Then there were no suicide bombers, no inflammatory clerics, no jihadis, no *kuffirs*, no war on terror, no extremists or fundamentalists, no radicalism or fanaticism, no Islamism, no Islamophobia" (277; for a discourse analytic approach to the recurrence of words like these in the construction of "Islamic terrorism," see Jackson (2007)). This new situation explains Malik's research into sacred texts in order to reveal the peaceful character of Islam and to provide a counter-argument to the discourses that support violent jihad (66, 253, 262, 270-272; Bin Laden 2007).

Moreover, the elegiac tone of the epilogue enables a process of mourning and the overcoming of trauma. Deleuze and Guattari discuss the relevance of faciality for signification and state that both consciousness and passion "would remain absolutely empty if faces did not form loci of resonance that select the sensed or mental reality and make it conform in advance to a dominant reality" (1987, 168). This process of facialization is the driving force of the epilogue, as the closing sentence of the last chapter anticipates: "I'll never forget your face for as long as I live" (244). Tanweer, or rather "that picture the press got hold of" (246), comes to embody Malik's angst because his school-uniform-like clothes and his half-smile do not make him "look like [he] belonged to that group" (247). This apparent mismatch between his candid appearance and his involvement with terrorism unsettles Malik and drives her away from "the road to the asignifying and asubjective," which is where the face unfolds in all its potential (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 171). Instead, she tries to make sense of the apparent contradiction, falling into "the desire to 'understand' and 'judge' the image rather than encounter its operative force on its own terms" (Abel 2007, 136). In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the face consists of a white wall, which serves as a surface or screen for representation, and black holes, which refer to the affective sphere (1987, 167-168). Yet, Malik's fixation with the picture prevents her from breaking through the wall because the black holes that Tanweer's picture puts in motion are seamed by her pursuit of making sense. Her humanist approach compels her to try to establish an empathetic relationship with the bomber but that is an already-doomed project because "[t]he bomber appears as it were in disguise; he appears anonymously, like any member of the public going about his normal business. An object of great danger, he is unrecognized until it is too late" (Asad 2007, 67). The stress put on the British-born quality of the terrorists encourages Malik to identify with the bomber, but that disguise of resemblance is just the wall of the face.

[5] In 1981, twelve members of the anti-racist United Black Youth League were arrested for the possession of thirty-eight petrol bombs they had made for self-defence after rumours that a fascist march would take place in Bradford. Thanks to an intense campaign and their supportive lawyers, they were eventually acquitted.

3. Conclusion

At the height of the Islamic caliphate, the home-born terrorist has featured in various novels such as *Just Another Jihadi Jane* (2016) by Tabish Khair, *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie and *The Runaways* (2019) by Fatima Bhutto. Yet, it was after 7/7 that British public opinion realized that the threat of terrorism was no longer embodied solely by foreigners entering Britain, but by British-born youths turning jihadi. The impact of this shift particularly affected British Muslims because they saw their allegiances and loyalties being questioned. It is amidst an overwhelming presence of negative media images, which nonetheless demands moderate British Muslims to speak up, that Manzoor, Hai and Malik decide to share their life trajectories to counterbalance the polarized discourses based on hatred that both the bombers and racists expressed. These three authors use their own private lives to set themselves, and the community they intend to represent, apart from the terrorists in a clear appropriation of the phrase "the personal is political." Moreover, unlike the novels mentioned at the start of this section, their choice of the memoir form to convey this message has a double aim: on the one hand, it confirms their personal involvement in the cause; on the other, their accounts of living as moderate Muslims turn them not just into role models but also present their lifestyle as a feasible, authentic and unproblematic way of being Muslim in Britain.

By discussing how these three memoirs have textually engaged with and represented 7/7 and its aftermath, this article has shown that their efforts to make sense of the terrorist attacks are fruitless because they do not operate within a logical order. However, it is the response to these attacks in their affective dimension that this article has traced, moving from initial shock and bafflement to an upsurge of outrage at what the terrorists did that day in July 2005 and the long-lasting effects of their actions for other British Muslims. Their interventions, however, intend to minimize precisely these effects by offering a representation of British Muslims that undermines Islamophobic discourses.

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Miquel Pomar-Amer is a senior lecturer at the University of the Balearic Islands, where he teaches English Language and Literatures. He completed his PhD on British-Pakistani and Catalan-Moroccan texts at the University of Manchester. His main research interest deals with the representation of identity in literature, especially in postcolonial contexts of migration and diaspora, on which he has published several articles and book chapters. He is currently exploring a corpus of romantic novels by female writers of Pakistani descent.