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ON THE WINGS OF 'POESY'

Pakistani diaspora poets and the 'Pakistani idiom'

*Waseem Anwar***Hybridising a theory: the 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom'**

Whenever we talk of Pakistani art, culture, or literature, political undertones of our *Pakistaniat* or 'Pakistaniness' begin to creep in with an ever-impulsive inquisitiveness, resulting in the query: So what does it mean to be a true or real Pakistani? This investigative rootedness is also applicable to our Pakistani writers writing in English, more so to diaspora writers, but most of all to Pakistani diaspora poets whose works challenge as well as redefine 'Pakistaniness' implied through locally coined poetic but conceptual phrases. One such popular phrase is the title of the essay 'Towards a Pakistani Idiom' by our foremost Pakistani poet of English, Taufiq Rafat. We know that Rafat's notion raised concerns not only for the early Pakistani anglophone poets during the 1960s but also for many others since then. In many ways, the objective of my review of Rafat's essay is to deconstruct and hybridise our critical-poetic journey in light of colonial-postcolonial homogeneity, its 'moving poetry', which emerges from what Joshua Auerbach and Helen Zisimatos refer to in their Editors' Note to *Vallum's* special issue *Poets from Pakistan* as 'one of the world's most dangerous countries': Pakistan (2011: 5). And then, neither to forget the conjunctive direction informed by the prepositional and positional yet purposeful 'Towards' nor to ignore the pluralising implication of the single article 'a' before 'Pakistani Idiom', the intent is to offer Rafat's notion a futuristic epistemological metaphor with unique yet universal appeal. For our purposes, therefore, I suggest inserting 'English poetic' into Rafat's seminal idea and theorising it as 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom', making it a more interlocutory debate about *Pakistaniat* throughout this essay. I call the debate interlocutory because, in this way, it supports my argument regarding the outsider-insider or insider-outsider predicament of *Pakistaniat* and helps me to conduct our conversation in a more corroborative manner. However, some degree of overview of the global and local confluence of Pakistani-English literary history by South Asian and Pakistani critics will help us to contextualise and analyse this much-exploited term, 'Pakistani idiom', particularly with regard to its ongoing literary and poetic relevance.

The diasporic-indigenous and global-local dialectic, or what we now popularly understand as the 'glocal', is not a new phenomenon within the history of Pakistani-English poetics alongside its South Asian creative sensibility. As a historical fact, this phenomenon is also assumed to be an inevitable legacy of the *farangi* 'British Raj' period that Masood A. Raja describes in his *Constructing Pakistan*, purported to be a 'politics of difference' (2010: xix). The outcome

of such a politics of difference is what the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha had already recounted as 'identities of difference' (qtd. in Mansoor 2012: 16), so much so that even when one expresses oneself in a foreign language it is transformed into a universally acceptable local vernacular.¹ Today, these and many similar issues have much to do with how we like to perceive our so-called nationalistic or even selectively patriotic Pakistani identity, our *Pakistaniat* or 'Pakistaniness'. The issue of pursuing one's 'national identity in opposition to a more hybrid and ambivalent mode of thinking the nation' is again well taken care of by Raja in his article 'Exclusionary Narratives, Ambivalence, and Humanistic Studies' (2012).

Extrapolating Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity, his 'Third space of enunciation' connects to the 'transformative role of humanities' which Gayatri Spivak sees as 'the ethico-political task of the humanities' (2008: 3); Raja looks forward to an Islamic articulation of 'responsible citizenship' in Pakistan. He argues that it is through such an enunciated and articulated space that Pakistanis will learn not to 'hate, and distrust our so-called reviled others', but rather to manage and 'mobilize a narrative of love and reconciliation' (2012: 14, 20). The vivacity of a hybrid and possibly responsible and reconciling citizenship offers inclusiveness to those who are listed as separate in the name of rigid and monolithic nationalistic ideologies or agendas but who continue to pursue their global, local, or diverse Pakistani identities. Pakistani diaspora poets can be placed in similar categories of exclusive-inclusive dynamics along with so many others either labelled as minorities or segregated on grounds of their gender, religion, caste, or creed, and even somewhat humbler socioeconomic backgrounds. Given the 'form[s] of reclamation' and reconciliation regarding a pure Pakistani identity, the literary stalwart Muneeza Shamsie explores the notion of *Pakistaniat* evenly in her Introduction to *And the World Changed* by scrutinising the situation and suggesting that we need to observe diversity as a priority beyond the constraints of any monolithic or monolingual agendas (2005: xvii).

Whatever geopolitical, ideological, sociocultural, or religious factors serve as a backdrop to our obvious divide over the term *Pakistaniat* and its ever-proliferating brands, a broad understanding of 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom' offers scope to trace the hybridised evolution of our poetic as well as our patriotic selves, our Pakistani identity beyond the rigid precincts of so-called nationalism. That Pakistan, with all its ideological underpinnings of national identities and territorial boundaries, is the focal point of most of the writers who are trying to map out *Pakistaniat* according to their understanding, interpretation, and passion is beyond question, but the nationalistic discourse in this regard remains a challenging avenue for these writers who draw our attention to the need for more diverse inclusiveness (see Afzal-Khan and Anwar 2010). In this context, Pakistani writers working in English, inside or outside Pakistan, do contribute to expanding the horizon of the Pakistani literary and poetic canvas. Based on their instinctive articulation to stay rooted in the locality of their land, yet accentuate and express themselves globally, to be cosmopolitan in spirit, poets like Rafat and Alamgir Hashmi occupy more of a 'third' space when they point out an imaginable indispensability of the Pakistani in our *Pakistaniat*. One may read Hashmi's *Pakistani Literature* (1978) or *The Worlds of Muslim Imagination* (1986) and Rafat's 'Towards a Pakistani Idiom' as conjunctive for the idea of hybridity 'of enunciation' that Raja proposes through concepts developed by critics like Bhabha and Spivak. Within this context, the term 'Pakistani', and its literary *Pakistaniat*, remains critical but salubriously open-ended, signified by what Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Waseem Anwar see as necessary, as foundational and vital, though loosely interpreted (2010: 16).

Comparing 'the best in Third World literatures in English' in his *History of Pakistani Literature in English*, Tariq Rahman also adds to the interpretative openness of literary *Pakistaniat* (1991: 290). In the same context, Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India*, its 'idioms of empire and of nations' (1992: 10) and Raja's decoding of the *farangi* ambivalence over 'politics of difference',

the duality about existing/not existing in English, corroborate and help us foreground the regional specifics of *Pakistaniat* explicated by critics like Cara Cilano. In her *National Identities in Pakistan* (2010) and *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English* (2013), Cilano questions the notion of identity in *Pakistaniat*, given Pakistan's second partition, the breakup of its east wing for the creation of Bangladesh (the first partition being in 1947). In a way, alongside the partitioned, exilic, and diasporic imaginings of nationhood, we can see Cilano's works broadening and deepening our understanding of the terms Pakistani, Pakistaniness, and *Pakistaniat*.² One is thus inclined to agree with Cilano, also in light of what Shamsie points out in *And the World Changed, vis-à-vis* constraints on Pakistani monolithic and monolingual nationalistic agendas. Overall, the writers, historians, literary critics, and researchers mentioned here explore the interconnected and interlocutory uniqueness of the Pakistani literary idiom and identity within the growing context of its linguistic, cultural, political, religious, and multiple other dispersed affinities that are expanding in our global and *transnational* times. The works of these literary historians and critics also underscore what Shamsie describes in her latest work as 'hybrid Influences', influences that are bound to become part of 'Pakistani-English literature and its development [...] an almost incredible journey [...] which clearly reveals a genre which has found its sense of self' (2017: 1, 614).

Let us then go back to my hybrid interlocation inserted in Rafat's notion of the 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom'. Far ahead of his time, and focusing on Pakistani poetry in English and its fostering of a purer spirit in idiom as well as identity, Rafat furthered Pakistani literary sensibility, making the term 'Pakistani idiom' a multidimensional symbol of poetic *Pakistaniat*. We need to understand that Rafat's description of holding on to some sort of idiom does not exclude Pakistani anglophone literature produced by diaspora Pakistanis anywhere in the world. Rafat suggests the authenticity of 'voice' to be the foremost condition for a poet becoming Pakistani beyond any reductionist nationalistic structures of exclusivity, be they geographical or political. His inclusive viewpoint on a Pakistani voice is strongly validated and detailed in Rahman's *History*, where he mentions Rafat's comment on the pre- and post-Partition Pakistani writer Ahmed Ali. Rafat explicates Ali's poetry as clearly influenced by three diverse literary traditions, English Romantic, Chinese lyric, and Urdu *ghazal*, so that the poet writes: 'Across the vast unending sky / A pigeon plies its way [...] I stand and watch it fly, / Alone' (qtd. in Rahman 1991: 153).³ One can easily detect Ali's poetic desire to be nationalistically cosmopolitan in terms of Pakistanis who are not geopolitically bound. Further clues to the nature of an authentic Pakistani voice, its idiom and identity, are offered by the well-recognised poets Maki Kureishi, who spoke in the 1950s of 'makeshift geography' (qtd. in Rahman 1991: 160), and Zulfikar Ghose, in the 1960s, for whom 'The blood of India ran out with [his] youth' (2010: 7). Whatever else we might think, the works of such diasporic or self-alienated and self-exiled poets address the angst of multiple identity consciousness that a Pakistani writer living globally may carry. Ghose is one such multiply placed transnationalist in whose works we find intersections between his South Asian, South American, Indian, Pakistani, or other enforced or opted (dis)placements/positionalities. We see in him a more multidimensional Pakistani, one who has a broader sense of *Pakistaniat*, though generated initially through violently partitioned selves amid diverse locales of his settlement in Bombay ('The sky behind the peaks is the last of Bombay' (2010: 4)), in Sialkot ('Grandfather, if [...] Sialkot collapses, / I shall have no Mecca to turn to' (2010: 12)), and in Brazil ('Thirty-six years later [...] I walk down the Aleia das Mangueiras, the tunnel / of dark shade [...]') (2010: 94).⁴

Examining Pakistani *transnational* identity and its multiplicity, and given the complex questions raised by Suleri regarding the 1947 Partition and then by Cilano regarding the 1971 'partitioning', geographical to generational, Shamsie dares to trace in her *A Dragonfly*

(1998) – whose title is inspired by Ghose's poem 'A Dragonfly in the Sun' (2010: 47) – the apparently 'trans-geographical' but 'deplorable tendency' of Muslim philosophies working behind Pakistani anglophone writings. These so-called Muslim philosophies, she adds, undermine 'the "Pakistani" identity of Pakistani English writers' simply because of their physical or linguistic distance from their lands of origin (Shamsie 1998: xxiii).⁵ Again, in her *Leaving Home* (2001), Shamsie reviews the question of exclusion with reference to Pakistani diaspora poets: 'in Pakistan, many questioned the "Pakistani" identity of Pakistani English writers who had migrated, or had Pakistani parents and lived elsewhere' (2001: xv). One can see that throughout her multidimensional yet focused probing Shamsie excruciatingly but confidently foregrounds the 'problem of identity [that] has been [...] complicated by the fact that Pakistan is an ideological state' (2001: xv). The Islamic Republic of Pakistan therefore becomes prone to complexity regarding over-ideological deliberations and over-nationalistic or over-religious propensities, which apply increasingly to marginalised, silenced, and excluded populations or groups like the subculturally or sexually segregated or the regionally, religiously, and linguistically differentiated: women, gays and lesbians, ethnic groups, diaspora writers, and many more. Whether political and religious ideologies are the source of the mentality of exclusivity of marginalised literary groups in an Islamic republic and welfare state like Pakistan is a separate matter, but that these factors add to the complicated exclusive-inclusive dynamics of Pakistani, its unique 'Pakistaniness' or *Pakistaniat*, cannot be disregarded.⁶

Given the complex intersections regarding the controversial term 'Pakistani' in 'Pakistani idiom' and Pakistani identity, and talking further about the Pakistani anglophone literary and poetic tradition, one can once again consult Rafat's mature versification in his *Arrival of the Monsoon* (1985), and in his translation of Punjabi poetry that foregrounds a modern, cross-bordered, and more cosmopolitan civilisation of love, much missed today: 'Love is a country / with its own climate' (1985: 2). While reading Rafat's love parlance in his poems, one is reminded of colloquial-metaphysical suggestiveness: 'will [morning] break on an empty bed, or a face I do not know?' (2008: 15). Again, in the poem 'Flight to London', we notice this typical colloquial-nostalgic call about his own divided self: 'Back home, we sit on the lawn, and wait' (2008: 14). Reading Rafat, then, requires sensitivity as well as sensuousness. One needs to develop a response to his 'slam' of a door as well as to his 'silence' that becomes a sign of 'affirmation' (2008: 12), because Rafat's work and its locales echo an indigenous growing in sync with a subtle but strong foreign, alienated yet 'authentic', Pakistani 'voice', the voice that Rafat approves for a poet who can be 'glocally' Pakistani. Throughout his work, Rafat's poetic culture remains universal and liberal, because like his 'deciduous love', he wants 'To see fruit ripen / By the weather's connivance' and 'to become complete' (2008: 128). His Pakistani idiomatic experimentation connects to what Rahman affirms:

Rafat's concern with a 'Pakistani idiom' is one expression of the conflict between tradition and modernity [...] Taufiq Rafat felt that [...] it was better to forge an idiom which could be distinctively indigenous while reflecting contemporary and universal themes.

(2013: n.p.)

The continued nervous scepticism about the 'Pakistani idiom' and its sensibility, its exclusive-inclusive dynamic that also caters to the experiences of diaspora writers writing in English, their anguish over tracing roots in their imaginary homelands, Pakistani diaspora poets offer a more multifaceted perception that keeps reifying the question of Pakistani identity as a core value for the promotion of *Pakistaniat*. With regard to *Pakistaniat* in the 'Pakistani idiom' and

its diasporic-indigenous and global-local or 'glocal' growth, in his 2001 essay 'Some Recent English-Language Poetry from Pakistan', Carlo Coppola refers to seven different volumes of Pakistani anglophone poetry produced intermittently up to the golden anniversary of the country in 1997. Coppola argues that this Pakistani poetic journey presents 'a veritable embarrassment of riches' to assure 'attention [to] and appreciation' of Pakistani poets writing consciously in English (2001: 220).⁷ Amid all the various phases of the ongoing Pakistani critical and poetic journey and its re/search for a 'Pakistani idiom', I analyse in the second part of this essay contemporary diaspora voices, like Waqas A. Khwaja, Moniza Alvi, Shadaab Zeest Hashmi, Zohra Zoberi, Afzal-Khan, and John Siddique, and try to trace how, one way or another, and despite all sorts of displacements, their connections to their land of origin help us review the notion of *Pakistaniat*. Although Khwaja detects an 'identity crisis' among such voices, Pakistani diaspora poetry in English today offers an element of ever-growing fluid expansion. In many ways, it foregrounds a presence that I am trying to grasp here as a fundamental part of the 'real' or true 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom'.

Pakistani contemporary poet Ilona Yusuf's essay 'A Lively Progression: Mapping Pakistani Poetry' offers a critical-historical survey of how emerging local and contemporary diaspora poets experiment with the 'playing field of modernist and post-modernist form' to refashion 'the idea of identity' that is reliant on spatiotemporal frames beyond borders (2012: 88, 92).⁸ Yusuf's poetical-political contemporaneity in 'A Lively Progression' is concomitant with Rafat's acknowledged initiation of the 1950s in 'Towards a Pakistani Idiom', which inspired the incredible journey 'towards a more universal [and hybrid] metaphor' (Yusuf 2012: 88) and which poets and critics like Hashmi, Ghose, Suleri, Rahman, Cilano, Shamsie, Khwaja, and others investigated later and found it to be thematically 'trans-geographical'. Within the postmodernist-postcolonial myriad connotations of the prefix *trans*, as it is now all the more applicable to a historically stipulated 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom', our choices amid its varieties of *translation*, *transliteration*, *transcreation*, *transition*, *transformation*, or other *transpiring* forms help us synchronise the fluid diversity of Pakistani identity. Given the composite and multifarious poetics of a *trans*-Pakistani identity, one such example to refer to is Iftikhar Arif and Khwaja's *Modern Poetry of Pakistan* (2010), a complementary volume to Fakhar Zaman's *Contemporary American Poetry* (2009).

Our poetic *transcendence* over the powerful 'wings of poesy' as represented in *Modern Poetry* makes us realise the importance of Pakistani regional rhythmical patterns that may grow and become universal. The anthology offers what Arif describes in the Preface as 'A remarkable range of poetic sentiments' (Arif and Khwaja 2010: xviii). Translations, retranslations, and transcreations in *Modern Poetry* render the Pakistani national creativity into an international co-creation, dispelling local identities as glocal fidelities beyond any imposed geopolitical rigidities. Through its cross-pollinating sentimental journey of regional works transformed into a universal tradition of transcendence of borders of nationalities, the anthology unveils multiple propositions of popular Pakistani poetics: *nazm* (controlled verse), *azad nazm* (free verse), *ghazal* (rhyming couplet), *qaafiyaa* (refraining pattern), *rubai* (Persian quatrain), *thumri* (a dance verse), *qawwali* (popular devotional verse), *sufiana kalam* (softer devotional verse), *marsiya* (martyrdom elegy), *masnavi* (epical spiritual verse), *doha* (regional couplet), *qasida* (benefactor's praise), and so on and so forth. Some of these local and regional forms, experimented with by Pakistani diaspora poets like Khwaja, Zeest Hashmi, or Afzal-Khan, who initiate the merging and mythologising of the *sufiana kalam*, *qasida*, and *ghazal* styles into their English poetic expression, open up avenues for a broad-based and sophisticated blend of multidimensionality. Do such experiments help to reduce bias against local subcultural Pakistani poetic sentiments? Does then the inclusion of local cultural/subcultural expressions and the use of bi-, tri-, trans-lingual,

or transcreative discourses make the works of Pakistani diaspora writers effective 'with' as well as 'without' English? (Anwar 2014: n.p.). Many such queries are unanswered, and need to be researched, but whether the poetic ventures in *Modern Poetry* add to the polymorphous multi-dimensionality of the 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom' and allow us to envisage how contemporary Pakistani diaspora poets urge a more hybrid yet responsible response and what Rafat, Kureshi, Ghose, Rahman, or Raja talk about as inclusive (global/glocal) and reconciling citizenship. Our critique of Pakistani anglophone poetics thus accounts for *transnational* 'glocal' poetics of diasporic writings that imagine new horizons yearning for a more homely and hybrid homeland/motherland. While many of the Pakistani diaspora poets do so, Khwaja, Alvi, Zeest Hashmi, Zoberi, Afzal-Khan, and Siddique definitely add to the kaleidoscopic multiplicity of the 'Pakistani idiom' with its growing literary precincts. Taken as a journey in continuity of 'Towards a Pakistani Idiom', their works trace the dialectics of Pakistani anglophone poetics in multiple ways, for these diverse rhymesters do theorise the dynamics of inclusiveness that I am claiming to engage for our 'Pakistani (English poetic) idiom'.

Transforming identities: some Pakistani diaspora poets

In his *No One Waits for the Train* (2007), Khwaja offers a contemplative record of multiple displacements that Amritjit Singh describes as a 'contentious legacy' and 'soulful meditation on the 1947 partition of British India'.⁹ In many ways, the universal intensity of Khwaja's poems in *No One* goes beyond the original Partition, suggesting many other partitionings, displacements, and disconnects that have occurred in post-independence Pakistan. With his latest collection, *Hold Your Breath* (2017), and its 'tangible illusion', its poetic discursiveness about identity, and its 'cracking of opaqueness' (2017: 27), Khwaja's verse now spans over three decades. The range of Khwaja's sketching and symbolising between *No One* and *Hold* characterises the recurrent theme of transformed identities. Given Khwaja's own South Asian/Pakistani background, and more so his filial/familial interests in the language of his ever-expressive origination and its musicality, the '*piya torey nain*' (2017: 32–33) that takes after the classical *raga* adored by his musician uncle Khwaja Khurshid Anwar, his destinations of difference and dispersal help him compose verses that operate through fading lands of acquired belonging along with imaginable lands of assumed settlement. Call it 'diaspora' for convenience, it remains steadfast to evolve inertia in his works in terms of mobility, migration, immigration, exile, refuge, escape, nostalgia, yearning and what not! Khwaja's *Hold Your Breath* thus foregrounds the interlaced metaphoric meanderings that haunt one's glocalised sensibility, so much so that the origin and its unprecedented transformation assume an inertial occurrence. Overall, Khwaja's Pakistani creative impulse recreates a fair homeland for dispersed humans by playing with language, luggage, and all that such metaphors of flux may contain.

With dispersal and partitioning as a continuous trailing backdrop, the marriage and remarriage of division through difference becomes an important contact point for a 'real' as well as an 'imagined homeland' in Alvi's poems. In her work, we sense growing affinities among multiracial/multi-ethnic Pakistani groups so that identity for Alvi merges the lyrical with the epic; a fantasy that she describes as 'strange seeming' and which becomes the essence of her poetic experience within extensive imaginative possibilities for engaging feeling.¹⁰ Alvi is conscious and confident about displacements and, therefore, asserts a comfortable position. For example, in 'I Would Like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro' in *The Country at My Shoulder*, she contends: 'But it's fine where I am. [...] The fact that I am not a perfect circle / makes me more interesting in this world' (1993: 15).¹¹ Perhaps a better observer of who is or is not to be a Pakistani, and with a fascinating mobility to explore the world beyond limits of nationality

by indulging in many forms of migration, Alvi declares her abode to be ‘The Double City’, riveting in replicas: ‘I live in one city, but then it becomes another’ (1996: 4). Pierced, broken, or damaged, in *Europa* (2008), Alvi finally succeeds in sailing through waters, blowing winds, and bordered lands of histories/(her) stories regarding divisions, partitions, exiles, and migrations from home or a homeland, all that she left behind long ago.

Land to motherland to home and finally to a real or imaginary homeland, the cosmopolitan spirit of Pakistani diaspora poets ventures a broadening of the ‘Pakistani (English poetic) idiom’ for a *transnational* poetics. Poets like Zeest Hashmi, Zoberi, Afzal-Khan, and Siddique address the issue of such convergence through their diverse experiences. Zeest Hashmi’s *Baker of Tarifa* (2010) re-echoes the collectively conscious ‘Cordobian’ sensibility of pan-Muslim affinities through the work of local poets like Allama Mohammad Iqbal’s ‘The Mosque of Cordoba’ and Athar Tahir’s ‘Andalusian Qasida’. In her venture to trace her ‘Muslim Pakistani’, Zeest Hashmi offers a sensual contemplation of a South Asian/Pakistani traveller/settler who flourishes in the lovely *ghazal*-like lyricism of luminous revelation. Zeest Hashmi’s *Kohl and Chalk* (2013), textured with bilingual and multilingual dreams, and described by the poet herself in her dedication as a ‘MIRROR BETWEEN BORDERS [...] TO SEE THE MOON LUCID’, suggests a powdery mix of cavernous grey, bracketing blacks and whites. Overall, her Eastern-Western poems in *Baker of Tarifa* and *Kohl and Chalk* fantasise the retrieval of a bygone grandeur in terms of a much-yearned-for South Asian/Pakistani identity that reciprocates with an equally desired, yet lost, Muslimhood in spaces like Spain, Turkey, or Pakistan.

As a stream of consciousness comparative to Zeest Hashmi’s world of lost (Muslim) glories, Zoberi’s *True Colours* is the offspring of the inner mind’s universe of someone who holds their heart in their hand to make their spiritual love journey ‘the greatest pilgrimage’ (2012: 5). Zoberi’s poetry draws on the ‘Canvas of the Heart’ (2012: 12) and its ‘True Colours’ (2012: 13) and the ‘emotional landscape’ of an immigrant woman blowing against the wind, to capture the true colours of ‘smiling tulips’ and wishful longings that finally ‘embrace’ (2012: 13). Self-identified as ‘a Canadian-Pakistani, or a Pakistani-Canadian’ in her aptly titled poem ‘Hyphenated Canadian’ (2012: 84), Zoberi, through her poetic flights, tries to connect back to *kamees shalwar* in her poem ‘Against the Wind’, ‘Kalashnikov guns’ in ‘Afghanistan Speaks’, the ‘Aromas of Iram’ and ‘victims of the Iraq War’ in ‘Car Wash Epiphany’ (2012: 11, 22, 26, 33). The range of images, metaphors, similes, and symbols in Zoberi’s poems address the psychology of divide through breast cancers and platonic loves (2012: 36–37). In most of her poems, Zoberi seems to be dispersed by the divinity of her diasporic being as well as by her ‘psycho-neuro-endocrinologi[call]’ wisdom (2012: 74). She gathers dewdrops of (dis)connection and (un)concern to enhance a fragrance of difference that helps us unfold her glittering gift of a travelling Pakistani human insight.

With its diversity as a design for her diasporic discourse, Afzal-Khan’s internationally performed and ‘hip-hop influenced free verse’ offers another blunt style (Afzal-Khan and Anwar 2010: 20). On the one hand, her ‘Birthing Pain’ reminds her of ‘[...] the pain / of birthing you / My poem’ (2017: 89); on the other, in ‘M/Other’, she struggles with ‘The clink-clanging of knives and forks / [...] Mindful of kitchen’ and the ‘madness of mothering / the Other’, ‘tall other’ to ‘embrace woman’ (2017: 91–92). As a consistent though jazzy border-crosser, geographically as well as culturally and spiritually, and during her ‘(Crossing into France Bastille Day, 2007)’ to compose her poem ‘Flaming – Go’, Afzal-Khan notices how a ‘Long neck / [...] Sinuous S / [may] Ease / her up’, while in her ‘Lai li la ah’, ‘(En route from Lahore to New York...2010)’, the ‘Arabic verse licks / [her] ears splitting / The East West / Binary [...] / Patterns [she] cannot Foretell [but are] Dedicated to some / [...] Herstory’ (2017: 94–95). In general and overall, Afzal-Khan’s poetic narratives, her engendered engravings in the contemporary environment,

are a search for a moment of 'Looking for a Real Freak' and 'courage to see' (2017: 96–98) and, thus, to have 'Tea with / sex', 'Fashion / Image', 'Dress / Drugs', 'Desires [...] Disrobes [...] Dis / Ease' and 'Love's Foreplay' during the 'Journey' of 'Life's / Broken / Beast' (2017: 94–95). Her cross-continental journeys are like remembering the creative moments of birthing freak poems. She blends her comic-ironic and bathetically funky tone in an ingeniously experimental and adventurous nature, so that when it comes to connecting with identity, her multi-stringed poetics explores the unwrapped forbidden avenues of the sceptical Pakistani self alongside its much-debated outsider-insider dichotomy of the dispersed.

That the Pakistani diaspora poets writing in English must stay experimental, adventurous, 'bold', 'brave', and 'rebellious', yet 'pure' and 'authentic', is perhaps best illustrated through the works of Siddique – who almost, in Zulfikar Ghose and Adrian A. Husain fashion, wins laurels across borders for his love for humanity – and its sweetly savoured sensuality for all that is really forbidden. Living ahead of his time to play with the genre, Siddique's 'Six Snapshots of Partition', a prosaic-poetic narrative, describes partition as a 'thin wall made of simple materials' (2011b: 40). That the 1947 Indo-Pak Partition bloodshed could never bear purity heightens the belonging-alienating paradox in his works to 'undo' what Suleri had implied as the continued 'once-and-future' (Cilano 2009: 9) partitioning. In many ways, Siddique's latest, *Full Blood* (2011a), resonates with his *The Prize* (2005), but with differences in space, time, and distance from loved, missed, and dead ones, for its bloody search for the passionate love of the lost. In the confusion of loss and gain, 'We stand & fall in love' to kill a bird, the war-peacock and share 'bread and feast for Eid' (2005: 10). Fluttering with flowers, flames, and ever-blowing kisses, Siddique yearns for oneness in stories never told, stories of the 'Punjabi night sky' or 'the future produced by your fall' (2005: 18). In the UK, Siddique's story goes round 'The Danger and Result of Days Spent with a Narrowing Mind, Repetition, Wage Slavery and Conservatism', 'Isolated Incidents', 'Strawberries' (2005: 45, 42, 52), or the angelus he experiences. His poems in *Full Blood* and *The Prize* come forth as 'The bombs I set [to] / bloom in blood shades, / [giving] pleasure in garden' (2005: 31). Whistling amid the un-focusable darkness, Siddique furthers his themes and writes about what is mostly unspeakable, be it 'A Place of Silence', a 'Sky Burial', some 'Circumnavigations', or 'My penis and my lower belly' (2011a: 109, 107, 68–74, 56). *Full Blood* re-sounds the fulfilment of a dream dreamt in ancient times, when butterflies became 'Full Blood' to feel and live the 'Tree of Life' (2011a: 82, 75). Siddique's poems offer an 'authentic' search for the oblivious South Asian-non-South Asian and Pakistani-non-Pakistani sceptical selves drowned in the darkness of a human tropical forest filled with cutthroats, cruelties, trees, tangles, muddles, mazes. Whatever else, Siddique's brave poetic expedition and those of other diaspora poets discussed here do enable us to resist the monolithic and rigid descriptions of *Pakistaniat*. Critical discourse in their creative ventures and their 'English poetic' help us to foreground the ambivalently portrayed dialectic of our sceptical selves contained in the much clichéd phrase 'Pakistani idiom'.

Wrapping it up: so where are we now?

This short essay could not tell the tale of all the great Pakistani diaspora poets writing in English. Many old and new voices could not even be mentioned. Justice could not be done to the extensive work of the stalwarts discussed here. Close to wrapping up with reiterations, because one is also bound to be asked, On the wings of Pakistani 'poesy', where are we now?, the question of what we make of our Pakistani voices and silences, our imaginative and borderless horizons, our existing non-existences and our freer-floating homelands, motherlands, and love-lands, this essay basically underscores the outsider-insider or insider-outsider dilemma

regarding our complex *Pakistaniat*. Pakistani diaspora poets, critics, and theorists have every right to abstain from the various brands of available *Pakistaniat*, including mine, while the possibilities for their ‘periodizing and philosophizing’ (Schwartz and Ray 2000: 5) the Pakistani literary tradition definitely add to what Paul Brians has described as: ‘a colorful kaleidoscope [...] reflecting myriad [South Asian/Pakistani] realities’ (2003: 6). Thus, our reading and criticism of contemporary Pakistani anglophone diaspora poets, as Ghose asserts in his *Beckett’s Company*, gets ‘absorbed by the reader as an experience’ (2009: ix). As critical readers and citizens responsible for and reconciling with our ‘Pakistani (English poetic) idiom’, are we ready to accept the challenge to theorise the growing global-local interpretative viabilities of *Pakistaniat* for the future? I believe we are.

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Notes

- 1 Mansoor quotes Bhabha’s call to go beyond a ‘binary logic’ (2012: 16). For Bhabha’s notion of ‘identities of difference’, see his *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (1990).
- 2 In her essay “‘Freeing the Outlook of Man from its Geographical Limitations’”, Cilano furthers Suleri’s call for balance within Pakistan by reorienting and stabilising the ‘disequilibrium’ created by ‘once-and-future partitions’. Cilano agrees with Suleri that post-Partition Pakistan loses its sense of land and the idea of national identity by hinging too much upon Islam and Urdu and, resultantly, constructing a monolingual Pakistani literary tradition (2009: 9).
- 3 On the vastness of Ali’s literary profile, see also Muneeza Shamsie’s biographical note (2011).
- 4 These references are taken from Ghose’s poems ‘Across India: February 1952’, ‘The Attack on Sialkot’, and ‘Returning to the Botanical Garden in Rio de Janeiro’ (2010: 4–5, 11–12, 93–95). Ghose’s reference to ‘Plaza Pakistan’ in Buenos Aires in the essay ‘Brazilian Beaches, Buenos Aires and Plaza Pakistan’, in *Beckett’s Company*, reiterates similar ideas about how Pakistani idiom and identity and their diverse shades may get transformed amid the current global, transcultural, and transnational multiplicities: ‘In Buenos Aires I remarked that while it was common for South American cities to have streets and places named after European capitals [London Palace Hotel in Montevideo ...] I was being shown the beautiful Palermo park in Buenos Aires with its associations of the Bois de Boulogne. We were driving [...] My host suddenly stopped the car and pointed to a sign that marked a clearing in front of a wooded area. The sign read: Plaza Pakistan’ (Ghose 2009: 30).
- 5 In the article ‘Islamophobia’ (2013), Claire Chambers also observes that the Muslim identity has proven an increasingly useful valence for understanding Pakistani texts since a series of pivotal events between 1989 and 2005 or even after, including the Rushdie Affair, the two Gulf Wars, 9/11, 7/7, and the ‘war on terror’.
- 6 Other critics adding dimensions to the notion about South Asian *Pakistaniat* are Chambers and Herbert (2014), Waterman (2015), Kanwal (2015), Clements (2016).

- 7 Coppola discusses the expanding value of Pakistani poetry in English towards world literature in English, the evolution of 'postindependence milieux' based on multiple individual *Voices* (2001: 7–9). In the same collection, Huma Ibrahim's pedagogically contextualised study of 'otherized texts', 'Transnational Migrations and the Debate of English Writing in/of Pakistan' refers to 'growing [Pakistani literary] structures of cultural cross-pollination' (2001: 35). Moving on and with some shift in emphasis, the poet-critic Waqas Khwaja's Introduction to the 2009 special issue of the *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* on Pakistani literature accounts for 'sustained attempts at theorizing the heteroglossic and heteroethnic diversity of literary works of the country [Pakistan]' that have been 'conspicuously absent', resulting in an 'acute crisis of identity' (2009: 3). And then, in the same context, Afzal-Khan and Anwar highlight the theoretical-critical value of emerging Pakistani creative writing in English and offer yet another scholarly stance *vis-à-vis* the scope of the Pakistani literary tradition in the 2010 special issue of the *South Asian Review*. While the poetry section of this issue addresses concerns like: 'what then makes the literature Pakistani? [...] What is a Pakistani [poetic] sensibility?' (2010: 17), the authors argue over the question of Pakistani and Pakistani diasporic writers exhibiting 'Pakistani skeptical selfhood' (2010: 23–28).
- 8 Yusuf discerns that Pakistani poets do so 'by aspiring to the universal rather than remaining confined to one place [...] and time', thus imagining 'how we transcend them' (2012: 92).
- 9 Singh's endorsement blurb on the flap of *No One* states that Khwaja's poetry 'captures in image, narrative voice, and personal memory the terrible beauty of an innocence now lost'.
- 10 For details, see Encyclopedia.com (2018), where Alvi explains how the convergence of East and West is crucial for her: 'I am attracted to the strange seeming and to fantasy and find there some essence of experience'.
- 11 References to Alvi's poems in this chapter are from *The Country at my Shoulder* (1993), *A Bowl of Warm Air* (1996), and *Europa* (2008). However, just for information *The Split World: Poems 1990–2005* (2008) anthologises all of Alvi's previous works.

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