Trabajo Fin de Máster

The West and Its Islamic 'Otherness':
Irony Reversals in Tabish Khair's *Just Another
Jihadi Jane*

Author

María Eugenia Ossana

Supervisor

Prof. María Dolores Herrero Granado

FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

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ABSTRACT

Current binary oppositions in connection to either western or Islam tenets only seem to beget mutual ignorance and distrust, and escalate violence in detriment of democracy and human rights. Consequently, the aim of this Master thesis will be to analyse Tabish Khair's *Just Another Jihadi Jane* in order to ascertain how terrorism might be said to emerge from the western globalized neoliberal structures, discourses and policies inherited from the Enlightenment and its postmodern critique. A number of theories from historical, postcolonial, literary criticism and social psychology sources will be deployed to establish a background from which to explore the roots of western assumptions and Islamic resentment. Furthermore, an argumentative analysis will focus on the novel's recurrent use of irony reversals at the levels of theme, characterization and narrative devices. Attention is drawn on parallels between western culture and Islamic terrorist practices, the characters' shame-pride shift in the emergence of radicalized identities, and the concoction of a plurality of voices in connection to Muslim women. Growing awareness of mediated discourses and their usually manipulative outcomes is also brought to the fore, together with the need to open up new spaces from which to contest these truisms. Finally, the need to uphold individual human rights against worldwide inequality and systemic violence will be advocated.

Keywords: globalization; Islamist terrorism; Enlightenment; shame/pride; Muslim women; human rights; Tabish Khair.

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INTRODUCTION

Several compelling metaphors have been suggested to signal the end of an era and the beginning of a protracted new global socio-political paradigm which has fear and violence at its core. The 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers was described by many prominent intellectuals who, in shock, expressed their deep concern for knowledge and understanding. Deborah Eisenberg conjured up a curtain torn apart by the planes which ostensibly exposed "the dark world that lay right behind it, of populations ruthlessly exploited, inflamed with hatred, and tired of waiting for change to happen by" (2007, 33). Likewise, Slavoj Žižek (2002) announced the intrusion of the Real on the illusory screens, that is, Third World horror reality permeating and shattering our quasi virtual perceived notion of reality for the first time. Jean Baudrillard (2012) likened the two wrecked colossi to arrogant giants losing all energy and resilience, and suddenly yielding to the pressure of the effort to be always the unique world model, while a Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick was the simile Edward Said (1997) conceived to describe the collective response of the imperial power injured at home for the first time.

The use of these rhetorical devices may have accounted for the impossibility to overcome the impact of such a scale mediated onslaught, but it may also have prompted the dire need to face long-ignored issues. The time had come to openly debate on the established, and already acknowledged, single neoliberal system donned in its economic, political and cultural uniform; the decline of the nation-states and their welfare systems —wherever they existed; the so-called First World unrebuked foreign policies inflicted upon the Third World; the growing and immoral global gap between the rich and the poor; the massively displaced populations worldwide; the overall impoverishment and

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commodification of cultural standards; the radicalization of pre-emptive security controls; and , above all, the ubiquitous violence of religious zealotry.

If, as Badiou asserts (2016, 9; original emphasis), "*Nothing that anyone does is unintelligible*, then, "the declaration of the unthinkable is always a defeat of thought, and the defeat of thought is always precisely the victory of the irrational and criminal behaviour." In an attempt to search for meaning, in his latest novel *Just Another Jihadi Jane* (2016), also published in India as *Jihadi Jane*, the Indian writer Tabish Khair seems to be adamantly committed to exploring, understanding, and envisaging contexts to reach the Other; in this particular instance, the post 9/11 Jihadist convert.[1]

Even though it has been repeatedly suggested that there is an intrinsic incompatibility between Islam —as an identitarian and religious collective— and democratic western systems, my contention is that its most radical expression, that is, Islamic terrorism, appears to be more a product of the emergence of the globalized capitalist system than of an unsurmountable clash between civilizations (the belief that has become a commonly acknowledged discourse in western societies).[2] Hence, the aim of the present essay will be to pursue an argumentative analysis by means of which I will try to demonstrate how the radical Islamic practices are embedded within western global structures. In order to achieve this objective, I will first concentrate on how the Enlightenment ideas historically appear to have mutated into a contemporary status quo of inequality and legalized violence. I will be drawing some insights from postcolonial history and literary criticism

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[1] "Jihad" from the Arabic root meaning "to strive," "to exert," "to fight"; the word's exact meaning depends on the context. It may express a personal struggle against evil inclinations, an exercise to convert unbelievers, or a struggle for the moral improvement of the Islamic community. Contemporary thinking about jihad offers a wide spectrum of views: conservatives who look up to classical Islamic law and radicals who promote a violent clash between Muslim and non-Muslim. For more information see "Jihad" in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, and McAuliffe 2015, 550-555.

[2] The terms "West" and "Islam" and its derivatives, though intrinsically polysemic and evidencing intricate representations without monolithic or fixed identities, will be used to represent European and American perspectives, on the one side, and Islamic angles, on the other, lacking more specific and accurate coinages to use.

perspectives. By the same token, some social psychology theory will be explored in an effort to understand the identity quandary of Muslim peoples living in western contexts.

Moreover, in this Master thesis I will endeavour to focus on the recurrent evidence of irony reversals in Tabish Khair's *Just Another Jihadi Jane* at the levels of subject, characterization and narrative voice so as to convey the interdependent and multi-layered nature of contemporary representations and the author's rejection of universal dogmas. The argumentation will pivot around the paradox evidenced in extant parallels between western culture and its Other —Islamic radicals. Furthermore, I will analyse the contradictory transformation of Islam against Islam in the novel, that is, ISIS as an oppositional force within Islam.[3] In addition, the interwoven identities of the two main characters will be analyzed in order to explore the ways in which they crisscross and the shame-pride-complex that appears to emerge from the experience of western Muslims, presumably breeding the conditions for radicalization. Eventually, I will attempt to explain how the author —from a man's secular perspective— seeks to give voice to a polyphonic concoction of the much silenced Other: the Muslim woman.

The need to pursue such an argumentation arises from listening to recurrent sweeping statements in connection to either western or Islam tenets, which only seem to beget mutual ignorance and distrust and, consequently, escalate violence in detriment of democracy and human rights. In an endeavour to hopefully throw some rational discernment over this tacit binary opposition, this Master thesis will try to humbly contribute to fostering some attentiveness towards what Edward Said (1997) referred to as the mediated experience of human knowledge; in other words, awareness of the received second-hand meanings that understanding presupposes, whenever there are two

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[3] ISIS means "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," also called in Arabic "ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi'l-'Iraq wash-Sham," and derogatively referred to as "Daesh." These are the common coinages used to designate the Radical Islamist Terrorist organization which established the so-called Islamic Caliphate in some areas of Iraq and Syria. The organization was born in 2004 after the US invaded Iraq.

allegedly opposing stances equally deserving critical analysis. In addition, this essay may also contribute to bringing to the fore the ironic contemporary consequence that the indefinite ideal of rational advancement in pursuit of individualism, freedom and happiness seems to have engendered: growing dependence on materialism, inequality, resentment, violence, and restriction of the very individual liberties that the system intends to extol and safeguard.

1. Suicide Bombing: Contradictions and Taboos

Terrorism, so it seems, is the new global virus. As such it might be difficult to detect, predict and cure. Talad Asad (2007) speculates on this phenomenon and its cultural implications in the West. The first issue he finds interestingly paradoxical is the difference between the apparently legal bind attached to *war* and the liability impinged on *terrorism*. Thus, for many intellectuals, war is synonymous of *excess* while terrorism is *essence*. Asad alludes to the quintessential contradiction of the liberal Western culture of war, whereby such struggle is legitimized by the need to destroy an enemy that threatens the lives and values of its culture. However, there seems to be a guilty side to this demeanour, which is evidenced in the western humanitarian desire to save human lives. In other words, the killing of certain lives can be considered to be a necessary condition — collateral damage— to save many others. This bloodshed may be immoral in wars waged by the West, except when it is instigated at the last minute and "under absolute necessity" (Waltzer 2004, 50). According to this, the killing of civilians would become a necessary decision, so to say, in order to avoid greater damage. However, Asad (2007, 37) ponders:

> couldn't the same be said of the terrorist whose killing of civilians is at once deliberate and yet coerced? He has reached the limit; he has no other option left —or so he claims, when he argues that in order to prevent "the coercive transformation of his [people's] way of

life," he must carry out immoral killings. If he kills enough civilians (so he reasons), perhaps those who are politically responsible will respond in the desired way.

The situation in Palestine, to name but one example, seems to meet the conditions of a legitimate war: citizens are in danger of death and there is a real threat of "coercive transformation of their way of life." However, when Palestinian violence morphs into terrorist bombing, it turns out to be inadmissible violence. Thus, the line defining allowed and deplorable violence seems to be shifting and ambiguous. Western public opinion seems to be numbed by the fact that torture could be an acknowledged and justified practice; that drones are targeted on, say gang chieftains, but can hastily end several civilian lives accidentally. Moreover, the brutalized, broken individual built out of the subject prepared to kill in military training is usually overlooked or condoned even though, to some extent, it resembles terrorist and his/her practices. However, what terrorism does, namely, spreading a sense of ubiquitous fear and insecurity among the civilian population for political purposes, cannot be justified. "What is especially intriguing," Asad poses, "is the ingenuity of liberal discourse in rendering inhuman acts humane. This is certainly something the savage discourse cannot achieve" (38).

Asad also analyses some controversial concepts such as freedom, horror and death in connection to suicide bombing. Liberty and its much-emphasized role in western society seems to be food for thought. He identifies the paradox in the Hobbesian discourse which claims to enhance the individual's right to choose his/her own life, while at the same time granting the sovereign state the power to interrupt such rights to defend itself. This violence seems to lie at the heart of the liberal conception: the individual, ethically independent, has a natural right to self-defence which is yielded to the state, which in turn becomes the main guardian of his/her individual liberties. Consequently, "[s]uicide is a sin because it is a unique act of freedom, a right that neither the religious authorities nor the nation-state allows" (67). The punishment, restitution essential for the functioning of

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modern law on which modern identities and liberties are founded, cannot be inflicted after suicide. That is why it remains intolerable. Suicide seems to conjure up the limitless pursuit of freedom, "the illusion of uncoerced interiority that can withstand the force of institutional disciplines" (91).

Moreover, horror is said to be at the marrow of suicide bombing, which encompasses the dissolution of human bodies —enemy and victim— in a deadly embrace. Mary Douglas (in Asad 2007, 76) argues that, in every culture "things are categorized according to distinctive criteria whose confusion is viewed as an outrage. When boundaries are breached —when form is endangered— they must be restored" (76). The blur between a mere carcass and a human corpse seems to be a frightful reminder of the contingency of life, of the stubbornly neglected continuum between life and death. In addition, Dolores Herrero highlights the *hybrid ritualistic* nature of terrorism. A ceremonial which is "deeply intertwined with media and technologies and smudging boundaries between the private and the public, spectacle and secrecy," the subjective and the collective, exhibitionism and voyeurism (2006, 28). Similarly, as Asad speculates, terrorism evidences some kind of Burkean fascination in the blend of power, pain and delight, and some kind of aesthetic pornography of killing.

In spite of the fact that life —and health— seem to be emphatically celebrated while death is stubbornly neglected, the modern secular societies appear to retain a contradictory view of both:

> [o]n the one hand, every individual must face his or her own mortality; on the other hand, the science genetics promises an unending life. On the one hand, the sanctity of human life is valued above all things, while, on the other, there is the sanction to kill and to die, and to do whatever it takes, to defend a collective way of life. On the one hand, the life of every human has equal value; on the other, the massacre of civilized humans is more affecting than that of the uncivilized. (Asad 2007, 96)

On the whole, there seems to be some liberal structural contradictions aimed at strengthening the immortality of the secular community and laying the foundations of invisible systemic violence. This invalidates the much-cherished individual freedom, and evidences an ambivalent tension, which exhibits and obliterates death at the same time.

2. Terrorism and Literature

Terrorism and suicidal political deaths, it appears, are not exclusive prerogatives of Islamist radicals.[4] A brief review of some prominent texts in western literature could easily prove that such behaviour has been, in dire social circumstances, a more frequent practice in fiction than contemporary political and media discourse seem to proclaim. Arata Takeda (2010, 456) observes that "in Western history and literature, actions and figures can be found whose development and strategies conspicuously resemble those of today's suicide bombers. Here, the phenomenon of suicide terrorism betrays its potentially universal character."

He goes on to argue that across western prose, poetry and drama, from the Biblical and Greek heroes to the seventeenth century liberal defenders, from nineteenth-century idealists to twentieth-century anarchists and terrorists, there are many characters who share similar traits and contingencies. Takeda mentions mythological heroes, such as Samson in the Old Testament (Judges 13. 5) and Sophocles' Ajax (ca 450 BC), whose self-sacrifice is freely chosen; death is for them the ultimate strategy of asymmetric warfare. Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623), Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*

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[4] The terms Islamists, Radical Islamists and Radical Islamist Terrorists could be used almost synonymously since the differences between them are not clear-cut. Some, like the Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas, have political status in their countries, whereas others, such as ISIS, are not recognized as such by the world or any national community; only by themselves when self-proclaiming the Caliphate. Religious off-shoots of Islam, such as Wahhabis, Salafis or Deobandis are Puritanical Reform Islamist communities who comply with, though not necessarily adhere to, terrorist practices. For more information, see Sookhdeo, 244.

(1651), and Gottold E. Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755), profoundly submissive servants are at the disposal of their masters, who can thus use them as human weapons as they are tactically sacrificeable. In Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers* (1781), Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), Heinrich Mann's *Man of Straw* (1918), and Italo Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno* (1923) the suicidal anarchist drive consumes the victims' anger for change. Moreover, Albert Camus' *The Just Assassins* (1949), Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985), and the contemporaries John Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006) and Cristoph Peters's *A Room in the House of War* (2006), among many others, evidence a shift towards cultural and religious biases in an attempt to explain the status quo. What welds such a number of different characters together could be synthesized as follows: "the trauma of violence and injustice, the asymmetric power relation, the pathological demand for justice, identification and solidarity with all those suffering oppression and injustice, and not least the suicidal aggression towards stereotypical enemy images" (Takeda 2010, 465-66).

3. The Enlightenment: History and its Critics

The attack on the Twin Towers was clearly contrived and understood as an assault on the heart of the western system. Their curtained or illusory screens unveiled globalized contradictions, and terrorism —with suicide bombing as its unpredictable lethal weapon— could thus become the fatal personification of these contradictions. What are the social, political and historical variables that have mingled to lead on to the contemporary situation? Is terrorism a consequence of a "clash of civilizations," as Samuel Huntington (1996) defined it? Is it an excrescence of the undeterred globalized neoliberal system? Or is radical Islamism a globalization counter-movement in itself? An attempt to answer these questions could lead one to decipher the tenets on which the so-

called Western civilization and culture seem to be rooted upon: those of the Enlightenment.

This European movement, also called *Siècle des Lumières* in France or *Aufklärung* in Germany, took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and elevated rational understanding to the point of granting it the power to understand the universe and improve it, while placing its main goals on knowledge, freedom and happiness. The roots of such a trend are to be traced back to Ancient Greece, where ideas about the natural order and natural law flourished. Christian scholastics like Thomas Aquinas in the later Middle Ages cherished the notion of reason, so far subordinated to religious spirituality.

The combined ideologies of Humanism, the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation paved the way for revolutionary ideas about God, reason, nature and humanity that were to exert their influence on many knowledge realms, such as art, philosophy and politics. Humanism brought the experimental scientific method to the fore through the ideas of Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz and Isaac Newton, among others. The Renaissance restored classical notions of creativity by erecting man as the centre of the universe and ultimate creator. At this juncture, it may be important to observe that a great amount of Greek philosophy and science entered Europe mainly through Muslim academics in Spain and Italy, whose translations are said to have been pivotal in the emergence of the Italian Classical revival.[5] Moreover, the Lutheran Reformation challenged the dissolute practices of the Roman Catholic Church and suffused religion with an individualistic and materialistic mind-set. The force of these speculations dovetailed into the first modern secularized theories, which envisioned the establishment of a *social contract* that could overthrow the static conception of reality and power enforced by its absolute monarchies and the omnipresent influence of the

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[5] For more information, see Essa and Ali 2012, 21-23.

church in politics and everyday life. Thus, British intellectuals, such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume; the French Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, Voltaire; and the colonial Americans Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, to name but some, were regarded as the intellectual architects of the Enlightenment and its subsequent socio-political revolutions.

Pankaj Mishra (2012) argues that the American and French insurrections unleashed their energies across the world since they could not contain them within the West. Such movements would mainly propel an avant-garde European industrialized civilization whose synthesis was *organization.* The epitome of such a system was the creation and consolidation of the nation-state. "European forms of political and military mobilization (conscript armies, efficient taxation, codified laws), financial innovations (capital-raising joint-stock companies) and information-rich public cultures of enquiry and debate fed upon each other to create a formidable and decisive advantage" (Mishra 2012, 40). As Nezar AlSayyad et al (2002, 1) argue: "[s]tates historically constituted in the modern age have been characterized, on the one hand, by the control of money and, on the other, by the control of violence."

The political turmoil which followed the French revolution eventually crystallized in the impersonal institutions of the state, which proved to be able to overrule parochial identities and concoct a resilient bind whose main asset was citizenry. Eventually, Napoleon's enlightened absolutism would spread secularism and scientific rationality all across Europe. Nineteenth-century German Romanticism would, in turn, imbue the Enlightenment with the idealism that the French tradition lacked.

The German Romantics stressed that the Enlightenment and science had educated man "but left undisturbed his 'inner barbarian,' which only art and literature could redeem" (Mishra 2012, 187). The romantic ideal was to reaffirm "the value of wholeness,

with oneself, others and nature" (188). Man was supposed to be at home in the world again, not confronted with it, and was to make up a community which could weld people together by instilling a sense of belonging, identity and security. German Romanticism metamorphosed into the Hegelian "end of history" —the time when all the major conflicts of humanity would be finally solved; the Marxist proletariat revolution that was to bring about the abolition of class and private property; and also the Nietzschean notion of man in terms, not of *being*, but rather *developing*. As Mishra concludes "materialism and loss of faith were generating a bogus of mysticism of the state and nation, and dreams of utopia" (2012, 215). Thus, "development" would emerge as the great contribution of nineteenth-century thinkers to posterity, since they were "the first people to give value to a process defined by continuous movement with a fixed direction and no terminus" (205). Consequently, the process that had started in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereby man was to replace God by science and technology, would crystallize in the idea that God was an idealized projection of human beings. In due course, these ideals would be co-opted and morph into twentieth-century Fascism and Communism.

Even though republicanism and democracy, together with the ideals of individual freedom, were the suitable systems to establish within European and American frontiers, the rest of the world was readily recognized as a protean market to be accordingly exploited. "The white peril" (Mishra, 2012) was the term coined in Asia to define the combined force of Social Darwinism and the supremacy of nation-states and capitalism in its last imperialistic stage. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British Empire was to establish its influence and institutions over two thirds of the world. Adhering to the principle of "might is right," "the European never seemed to experience any contradiction between his selfish needs and the demands of morality. […] [thus] 'failing to understand how [his] happiness cannot be the source of universal bliss'"

(Raychaudhuri 1988, 77). Europe's enlightened aspirations, nevertheless, revealed a darker side, since the continent was soon to be involved in two fratricide wars. The two World Wars would bring about the emergence of liberal imperialism as shown in the United States hegemony, the demise of colonialism, Nazism and, eventually, several decolonization processes. Well-known thinkers, such as Max Weber, tried to explain this contradiction. In Asad's words:

> Max Weber observed that European forms of freedom and democracy were made possible in part by the forcible expansion of the West over many centuries into the non-European world —and in spite of the simultaneous growth of a standardizing capitalism. This led him to fear that the ending of the West's territorial expansion in which the drive for freedom was deeply embedded would seriously compromise its democracy. (2007, 14)

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 a new world was to be envisioned. When the threat of nuclear cataclysm dissolved, democracy was thought to gradually spread over the whole planet, to the point that the barriers between countries would eventually disappear, or so it was hypothesized. In fact, the opposite happened. As Amin Maalouf (2012b) argues, the overwhelming superiority of the West in terms of economic, financial, military, industrial and technological power, together with its moral virtue of having a model society, did not offer the world a way to escape underdevelopment and tyranny. Be that as it may, the fall of communism was in fact the final deterrent for the freed forces of capitalism to spread their influence as a monolithic single system worldwide. And national frontiers were far from being blurred. As Talal Asad (2007, 15) somberly summarizes: "what one finds is a shift in which the violence that yesterday facilitated freedom [in the Western world] today is facilitating a creeping unfreedom."

In his seminal work *From the Ruins of Empire*, Pankaj Mishra focuses on the contradictory response of prominent Asian intellectuals when confronted with western values and policies. He mainly brings to the fore the opinions of ideologues such as Jamal

al-Din al-Afghani —the most renowned spokesman for the Muslim world— from Iran, Lian Qichao from China, Tokutomi Soho from Japan and Rabindranath Tagore from India, to name but the most salient. Many of these intellectuals shared their enthusiasm and admiration for Western social systems and their technological development, though they deeply mistrusted the liberal zeal for secularism, individualism and undeterred materialistic progress. By the same token, they feared the western expansionist colonial drive and economic hunger, which could drain their resources and endanger their complex network of traditional values and social structures. Likewise, they foresaw that the same ideas which had proved to be successful in the West could reveal disastrous when transplanted to their societies. In time, they all witnessed the nefarious conquest of India, the surreptitious incursions in China through the Opium Wars, and the explicitly profit-seeking policies in Egypt, Turkey and Iran, among other Asian countries. As Mishra observes:

> The 'materialist' West had managed to subdue nature through science and technology and created a Darwinian universe of conflict between individuals, classes and nations. But to what effect? Its materialistic people, constantly desiring ever-new things and constantly frustrated, were worn out by war, were afflicted with insecurity, and were far from happiness as ever. (2012, 210)

What most Asian intellectuals criticized was the western enthroning of the nation-state as some kind of machinery which could deny the humanity of those it was supposed to protect. They explicitly claimed that democracy and civil rights were strictly enforced at home, not in the colonies. As Jawaharlal Nehru (1936, 520) ironically put it: "democracy for an Eastern country seems to mean only one thing: to carry out the behests of the imperialist ruling power and not to touch any of its interests. Subject to that proviso, democratic freedom can flourish unchecked."

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Paradoxically, Jean Jacques Rousseau —one of the predecessors of the French revolution— was at the same time one of the most cautious faultfinders in the ideas of continuous progress and endless competition. He inveighed against Smith, Hobbes and Locke's ideas, which advocated the role of the social dynamics that defended the right to property by the rich to the detriment of the underprivileged. In addition, he went on to argue that, not only would the weak try to imitate the powerful, but the strong would also try to dominate the others, "forcing them into positions of inferiority and deference" (Mishra 2017, 89).

With incredible foreshadowing, in the nineteenth century Alexis de Tocqueville warned about the risks of anxiety and fatigue that constant agitation and change presuppose. "'With the world of the intellect in universal flux, [people] want everything in the material realm, at least, to be firm and stable, and, unable to resume their former beliefs, they subject themselves to a master'" (in Mishra 2017, 26). The French aristocrat also predicted with utmost accuracy the negative impact of western modernizing policies on native foreign populations. Uprooting their intermediate institutions and identities might end up in the emergence of fanatical leaders, who belonged neither to the East nor the West, since they had been devoid of all traditions. This kind of leader was to be a *mimic man*, "a tortured figure [who] ended up searching from a native identity to uphold against a maddeningly seductive but befuddling West; and enumerating Western vices seemed to confirm the existence of local virtues" (Mishra 2017, 141).

After the two World Wars, even western thinkers, such as Thomas Mann, T. S. Eliot, Herman Broch, Robert Musil, Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt, questioned the hectic dynamism that had turned malign and uncontrollable, laying bare the rapacity of European ruling elites. "[B]y the 1930s, the barbarities inflicted on native populations in Asia and Africa —concentration camps, poison gas attacks, systematic murder— were

transplanted to the heart of Europe, and unleashed on Europeans themselves during the search for *Lebensraum*" (living space) (Mishra 2012, 254).

Hannah Arendt coined the term "negative solidarity" to define the confluence of individuals with very different pasts huddled together by capitalism and technology into a common present, "where grossly unequal distributions of wealth and power have created humiliating new hierarchies" (in Mishra 2017, 13). These peoples' natural rights to life, liberty and security could therefore be constantly challenged by ingrained systemic inequalities, political malfunction and economic stasis. The result of such a situation, she argued, could be "a tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else," or *ressentiment* (in Mishra 2017, 14). In other words, Arendt was already bespeaking the emergence of the clash between the contemporary so-called 'terrorist' and the West as shown in the outbreak of the latter's 'War on Terror.'

In the late twentieth century, the overall critique of the Enlightenment presuppositions came to be known as Postmodernism. This internal subversion of modernity was characterized by scepticism, subjectivism and adherence to extreme relativism. Simply put, reason, truth, scientific epistemology, as well as the role of historical discourse and technology in the shaping of master narratives of power, were systematically deconstructed and questioned. Ideology was denounced in its paramount role of maintaining so-called Enlightenment structures. Among its main critical branches was philosophical criticism as undertook by figures such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, Jean Braudrillard, Michel Foucault, Gianni Vatimo and Mario Perniola; the postmodern feminist critique carried out by Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Nancy Fraser and Julia Kristeva; and the potscolonial stance defended by Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, to name but the most

salient. Thereby, the already drained faith in universal givens and steady development morphed into its diametrically opposite: the dissolution of any permanent construct, the eternal repetition of contingent knowledge, randomness, the blurring and questioning of reality and the deep quest for ethical values.

However, by the end of the twentieth century, Samuel Huntington (among other think-tanks of the American pre- and post- 9/11 era) postulated his polemic theory of *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) by means of which he prophezied a future world torn apart by cultural idiosyncracies rather than political or economic conflict. He defended the idea of a conflict between civilization and tribalism which could be traced back to the Middle Ages. His influential work has been co-opted by a radicalized political discourse seeking to justify foreign policies based on the maintenance of western prerogatives. Huntington recommended: "to maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states; to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests" ([1996] 1998, 49). After 9/11, his advice proved to have found fertile soil, as it contributed to engendering the idea that there is an impossible fault line between the West and Muslim cultures. Even though postmodernism has succeeded in shaking the apparently solid edifice of modern Enlightenment, it would not be unwise to assert that there seems to be a contemporary trend shifting backwards in a search for past certainties, which the globalized irruption has rendered in constant flux and sheer relativity.[6] The consequences of this are to be witnessed in the worldwide ascent to power of radical far-Right populist parties, together with the emergence of local and regional nationalisms.

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[6] For more information see Zygmunt Bauman's *Retrotopia* (2017).

4. Western Capitalism and Islamic Anger

Having witnessed the Iranian revolution rise to power, Michel Foucault anticipated that this would be the "first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane." According to Foucault, "Islam, which is not simply a religion, but an entire way of life, and adherence to a history and a civilization —has a good chance to become a gigantic powder keg, at the level of hundreds of millions of men" (in Mishra 2012, 271).

Undoubtedly, successive historical and political mishaps have eroded Muslim confidence in western ways. It goes without saying that the two World Wars seriously compromised any rational thinking; the Great Depression, in addition, evidenced a systemic capitalist flaw; the conflicts in Suez, Algeria and Vietnam revealed the still reluctant attitude of western metropoles to relinquish power. Moreover, the creation of the state of Israel and the plight of Palestinians have become "a symbol of Arab impotence against Western power" (Mishra 2012, 268) at the heart of eastern territories. Likewise, the western political laboratory established in Afghanistan —where allegedly feudal cultures were violently uprooted by communists, which paved the way for a radical Islamist backlash endorsed by the US, Pakistan and Arabian interests respectively— further impinged doubts in any western development policy. In addition, as Al-Afghani is said to have preached, Islam and West

> attested to no simple opposition but a fundamental imbalance of power. Internally weak, the world of Islam was threatened from outside. Yet its own belief in the divinely guided society and prescribed notions of social good survived the confrontation with a socio-economic order predicated on individual self-interest. (Mishra 2012, 257-58)

Some other facts are also worth considering. The Muslim elites in charge of eastern nation-building reforms favoured and imposed top-bottom policies, which played down the role of Islam and their scholars as the centre of public life. Concurrently, ever-

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increasing urbanization forced many Muslim people to leave rural areas in order to head for crowded cities between 1950 and 1990. Inequality and injustice were somehow soothed by embracing the Islamic faith gradually made available by those journalists and preachers who "began to offer a do-it-yourself Islam to people uprooted from traditional social structures" (Mishra 2012, 264).

Alain Badiou observes that, in addition to the globalized substantiation of capitalism[7] and the shrinking of the nation-states, there is a third variable which seems to galvanize contemporary political violence and volatility, especially in Muslim regions. He refers to new practices of imperialism that he has termed "zoning": "[r]ather than taking control of the arduous task of establishing states under the supervision of the metropolis, […] the possibility is that we simply *destroy states*. […] In certain geographical spaces full of dormant wealth, we can create free, anarchic zones where there is no longer any state" (2016, 27; original emphasis). Contrary to what is often believed, he goes on to argue, capitalist mores are not incompatible with armed gang practices.

In terms of cultural, political and economic issues, the West has publicized and successfully sold its capitalist system as a global victory, which, moreover, has totally eradicated the idea of any substitute path in the collective consciousness. Two important outcomes seem to arise as a consequence of this status quo. One is intimately linked to the distribution of wealth and the creation of vast populations of disposable lives. The other, closely linked to this, seems to be the growing feeling of xenophobia, especially emerging —or partly induced— in western countries.

Alain Badiou contends that one cannot talk about democracy or equality any longer when being confronted with these bare figures: ten percent of the global population

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[7] Badiou prefers the term "capitalism" to "neoliberalism" since he argues that the reappearance of the primitive forces of the former have nothing of "neo." What he emphasizes is the efficacy of the constitutive ideology of capitalism. See Badiou 2016, 14.

possess eighty-six percent of the available resources —that is, much more than half of the world's wealth is in the hands of an extremely select new aristocracy; forty percent of this population possess the fourteen percent of global resources –this is the middle class which upholds the so-called western values and is supposed to endorse democratic power; and finally, fifty percent of the global population possess nothing. In Badiou's words: "they are counted for nothing *by capital*, meaning that from the point of view of the structural development of the world, they are nothing, and therefore, strictly speaking, they should not exist" (2016, 36; original emphasis). This argumentation is in tune with Giorgio Agamben's notion of *homo sacer,* used to refer to the state of exemption exerted on certain people who are thus deprived of their citizenry status to become instead subjects who may be killed with impunity, because their life simply belongs in the biological realm (*zoe* in Greek). In other words, life that is merely expendable.[8] Hence, a new fear seems to be spreading in areas where western middle classes reside: the anxiety of losing their status of defenders of democracy values and sacrificing their rights of being either employees or consumers. In addition, there is another cause of alarm: being overrun by a massive influx of no ones. To quote Badiou's words:

> [t]his is a major operation: to convince the middle classes that there are indeed risks; that their fear is legitimate; and that this fear is not at all motivated by the wise measures put in place by the government and by the democratic management of business, but that its unique cause is the intolerable pressure constantly exerted on the middle classes by the enormous destitute masses, and in particular by its representatives inside our societies: foreign workers, their children, refugees, the inhabitants of dark cities, fanatical Muslims. (2016, 47)

Old xenophobic practices have been, according to Tabish Khair (2016b), mainly marked by physical difference and the control of the body. Khair emphasizes their

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[8] See Agamben 1998, 90.

anthropoemic aspect —the drive to banish strangers from the limits of one's orderly world. This physicality of old xenophobia had racism and ethnicity as its core, and differences were categorized in a hierarchical fashion, in which essentialized identity traits were clearly (re)constructed and identifiable.

However, in Khair's terms (2016b), a *new xenophobia* has arisen in the contemporary context. This is characterized, not so much by racial prejudice —though it is not entirely devoid of it— as by a structural flaw in the present globalized neoliberal market. There is a systemic contradiction, he claims, in the possibility —and actual fostering of— free flow of capital and the hindrance of labour force. In other words, money and finance enjoy free mobility across borders, while people do not have such a prerogative. If welfare and prosperity are to be maintained, the doors of the so-called First World cannot be open. Another aspect of this new xenophobia is its *antropophagic* demeanour—its aim to assimilate or devour the stranger. The other remains a stranger, but is not allowed to show his/her difference. Consequently, Khair observes:

> Muslims are put under pressure not to tag themselves. […]. They are never really "assimilated," […] for the fact that their Muslimhood (often raised to an abstract level of idealist, cultural, and moral issues, such as the contention or belief that "they are not capable of democracy") makes them perpetual strangers, but they are expected to keep this difference as invisible as possible. (Khair 2008, 37)

In summary, the Islamic terrorist seems to mainly owe its existence to the efforts of the globalized spread of capitalism and its exclusions, to the (neo)imperialist policies of destatized zones where nihilist subjectivity prospers and market profits foster alliances with local mafias, and to the emergence of what Badiou reconfigures as simply new fascisms that provide youngsters without future prospects with a blend of heroism and western consumer products. And all this coagulated with an identitarian religion that inveighs against the secular West. As Badiou concludes, "in most cases Islamization is

terminal rather than inaugural. Let's say that it's fascization that Islamizes, not Islam that fascizes" (2016, 56).

CHAPTER 1. A STORY OF DECEPTIONS

Just Another Jihadi Jane (2016) seems to suggest from its very title and book cover (London: Periscope) a conflation of silences and anonymity. The design shows a censured text where the name of a woman in lower case typology is partially revealed —a faceless Jane which happens to be a jihadi. However, this first seemingly ominous hint could be said to be apparently obliterated by the direct and intimate account of a woman character narrator —Jamilla— manifestly committed to unveiling a story. This revelation, not devoid of ambivalence, is then to be publicly divulged by an implied listener/writer (in all probability Khair himself). She explicitly asks the writer/reader not to expect many details, exactitude or even the truth. In this way, readers are allowed to witness how she met her best friend, whom she calls with the false name 'Ameena.'

The novel's plot unravels in a fairly swift style, to lead up to two climatic moments. Structurally, Chapter 1: "Reading Scheme," Chapter 2: "My Brother's Wedding," and Chapter 3: "Amina's Flat," contextualize the action in Britain and describe the lives of the two Muslim adolescents, seen from the retrospective viewpoint of the latter, a young woman in her twenties. The narrator provides a detailed and personal account of how the two girls befriend, focusing on the disadvantages of being a Muslim in the West as regards their relations with their school peers, teachers, families, and English people and institutions in general. The plot unravels until it reaches a crisis: Ameena has failed in her attempt to assimilate westernized ways and, to counter this failure, embraces a radical Islamist cause which leads her to crave for action by striving to become a jihadi bride. Jamilla, on the contrary, does not want to adhere to Islam customs, which clearly urge her to get married at a young age. She prefers to pursue a college degree, but has no wherewithal. Eventually, in an attempt to leave behind adjustment wounds and seek a

new life of Sunna standards (in accordance to Mohammad's preaching), Ameena and Jamilla leave Britain to take part in the Syrian war.

Chapter 4: "The Flight" functions as a kind of bridge towards their life in Syria. Though this chapter is mainly a description of their trip from Istanbul to the Middle East, the narrator succeeds in creating an atmosphere of suspense and, at the same time, conveying Jamilla's expectations. In turn, Chapter 5: "A New Life" starts a new crescendo in the action which, ushering towards a step-by-step disclosure with the prose dexterity of a detective novel, will culminate in the last chapter. In this central chapter ("A New Life") Jamilla feels relieved and proud of her choice to have left home. Ironically, her life in Syria is ordered, simple, pure, and has a clear purpose. However, she gradually discovers the strict Islamic military routine and the growing radicalization of the ISIS interpretation of Islam. At this stage, Jamilla finds out how much her life has been modelled by her father's faith, while she also realizes how much she takes after her mother. Yet, she chooses not to doubt. Chapter 6: "Halide" and Chapter 7: "The Prisoners" are further steps towards the final revelation. Thus, the sanctuary morphs into a prison, and simplicity into meagreness. Daesh designs become clear in all their crudeness through the orphan Halide's account and punishment and the irruption of the real war with two Peshmerga (Kurdish) soldiers into the orphanage. Jamilla starts missing western ways, and despairs for not being able to trust anybody in the orphanage, not even newly arrived Ameena.

Chapter 8: "Jihadi Bride" is a flashback parenthesis in Jamilla's account —in which she narrates Ameena's story as if told by her friend. The forthright and idealist Ameena who arrives in Syria seeking to be part of a greater endeavour becomes a browbeaten jihadi wife. No sooner does she learn the cruelties of such a life than she starts to experience loneliness, and thus, gets very much attached to a Yazidi boy —Sabah— who

is her husband's often bullied slave. Ameena's encounter with heinous savagery and cruelty erodes her faith and begets her need for revenge.

Chapter 9: "The Sounds of War" and Chapter 10: "Suicide Bomber" are narrated in thrilling escalation towards a climatic suicide. The narrative pace fastens, in tune with the total undermining of Jamilla's aspirations to perfection, which sullenly turn into isolation and death. The orphanage is under war siege and, most noticeably, Jamilla perceives a subtle change in Ameena's demeanour. Gradually, Ameena's plotting is allowed into full view. Several possibilities are suggested in a mixture of conjectures and faulty lines until the reader is fully aware of the jihadi bomber final scheme. Eventually, a deeply moved and rather more mature Jamilla reveals existential doubt to be her new condition of life in her new home, Indonesia, where no prescription or proscription could possibly interfere with her newly acquired Sufi faith in the company of her cat, Batala.

1. Parallels and Mirrors

The first element that could reveal an ironic turn in the novel is the paradox evidenced by many parallels and/or mirror effects of globalized neoliberalism on the exertions of Islam, especially radical Islamism. In other words, so-called western culture appears to be undeniably present in its much feared and antagonistic Other, either by reproducing itself in the opposite group or by generating in it a mirror response. Hence, Jamilla describes her bland-façaded, dirty neighbourhood in England, as first peopled "with the so-called white working class. Or white drinking class" (Khair 2016a, 2) to be then displaced by the brown working class or, rather, Muslim non-drinking working class. These are some differences she highlights:

> [t]he lift would smell of vomit and beer [when she was a child]. And there were used
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> condoms and syringes lying about. […] Then, of course, more of us moved in, and more

of them moved out. The smell of vomit and beer disappeared. The syringes and condoms

disappeared. The graffiti got multilingual. All the rest stood as it was. (2-3)

Even though different in odours and camouflage, these drinking whites and Muslims are part of the same group: the working class; that is, the ones who perform the menial belittled jobs usually associated with this social group. Be that as it may, one cannot ignore the conspicuous old racist xenophobia evidenced in the English white people leaving the place.

Yet, other cultural aspects remain, similarly Janus-faced, in a mirroring of opposites. This is the case of films and clothing. Jamilla scornfully despises Hollywood films since she does not "find the sight of hips and bosoms having and thrusting along the same chant of sex-as-love in a hundred pop songs very new or interesting" (116). She claims she cannot understand how westerners can endure the same plot, retold *ad infinitum*; "the hero or the heroine is surrounded by villains and fights his or her way out with computerized elegance" (116). Ironically, she indulges in the likes of her orphanage friend Halide, who has so much enjoyed "Amitabh Bachchan's action dramas, where the Indian superhero righted the wrongs of the world" (116). Jamilla's disdain towards Hollywood plots, which she considers to be so predictable and uninteresting, is quite ironic, given the fact that the same can be said of both western and eastern film productions. By the same token, embarrassment seems to be the feeling of Muslims and westerners alike when they are confronted with the others' interests and outfits:

[t]here was little we shared with our ex-school friends any more. They were obsessed with fashions and boys and films; Ameena and I were more interested in matters of faith and life, as we saw it. They dressed in ways that embarrassed us, except for a couple of the Muslims girls, and we obviously dressed in a manner that made them feel uncomfortable. (53).

As teenagers —either Muslim or western— they are manifestly thriving for some topics, fashions and garments, which happen to be diametrically opposed in appearance, though not so much in the intensity of the interest they stimulate within members of each of the two groups.

Likewise, global brands seem to reach even the devastated landscapes of Syria. Jamilla expresses her astonishment at seeing "images of buildings devastated by war" with heedless "disregard for human achievement and hope" (85-6), and "[a]ll those towns where you can find brands from New York and Paris if you only know which dark, untidy shop to go to" (87), and spot "posters for Nike and other such brands" (88). Paradoxically, radical Islamists, such as jihadis, are paid with expensive cars —Mazda SUV— hotels for "honeymoon nights" (a clearly commodified western practice), and American-made weaponry —M113 APC. Furthermore, Hejjiye, the orphanage boss, is usually depicted in Muslim attire while also carrying her Gucci handbag and smartphone.

When it comes to considering the role of radical Islamist leaders such as Hejjiye or Hassan, Jamilla resorts to western referents to describe them. Thus, Hejjiye

> reminded me of models in a catwalk: an expression pasted on their faces, perfect posture, incredible balance, eyes giving nothing. You watch them and wonder if they can still distinguish between show and reality, if there was a difference in their minds? […]. The orphanage, or maybe Islamic State itself, was Hejjiye's catwalk. (134)

The narrator adds, similarly, that the orphanage boss "was a person who would be at home, in control and totally satisfied with herself, anywhere. She could have been a politician in Europe justifying racist immigration laws in the most humane terms; she could have been a corporate head in New York, or a banker in Tokyo" (205). Jamilla calls Hassan, the Daesh leader, an arriviste: "The careerists win everywhere, believe me! Hassan's fanaticism was a career for him. Killing was his corporate job. Apocalypse was how he planned to corner the market" (191). Moreover, she compares him to his

globalized counterpart: "A person like Hassan believes in choice of a sort, as much as any free-market capitalist does, and the choice is just as limited. […]. Only, the choice in the case of people such as Hassan is death" (211). And she sarcastically concludes: "Hassan would never deny a fellow Muslim the choice of death for the glory of his Allah" (211).

Deprecatingly, Jamilla notices how her ethnic origins are equally mistaken by her English classmates – "Arabs, Pakis, Iranians, whatever he thought I was" (8) – and by her eastern hosts –"Ameena and I were taken for Pakistanis" (86). Conversely, both her friends, Halide and James, have very similar ideas about peace and destruction. Turkish-born Muslim Halide accepts punishment and a most probable death because of her ideals. After discovering that Daesh had been killing civilians and training young women to be suicide bombers, she curtly remarks: "I was taught to believe that Muslims neither kill themselves nor kill those who are innocent. I was taught that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said that to *kill one innocent person is the equivalent of destroying the world*" (130; emphasis added). Likewise, English-born James despises the idea of destroying books since "'Tis,' […], his face becoming redder than usual. 'Burning a book's like burning a human being. *Once start burning books, yer end up burning the entire world*, every damn human being in it!'" (178; emphasis added).

When Jamilla eventually acknowledges her failing faith while in Syria, she ironically finds herself in a situation she had already been: "I could still retreat into that small space of belief in myself, and ignore them. In some ways, it was no different from how I had grown up and lived in England" (185). This clear feeling of loneliness that the narrator adamantly seeks to overcome in England and in Syria appears to be a constant quandary in her life. The Internet, which seemed to be "an entire world out there in which we were the norm, not the exception" (53) is, for her, a good way to connect. She seems to have doubts as to the idea that new technologies have created a lonelier world of "people

isolating themselves behind their screens, connecting through a flat keyboard rather than in a park or at a party. Yes and no, yes and no. It depends on who you are, and where" (98). Surprisingly, one of the most ironic reversals in her account lies in the fact that she, however transitorily, believes to have found peace in the middle of a city waging a war. And she somehow contradicts herself when she concedes:

> At that moment, I am afraid, did not feel impoverished; I felt relieved. […]. How can it be possible to feel relief at the impoverishment of your life? […]. Maybe you can understand the way I felt if you think back to a time […] when you did not have mobiles, did not have iPhones or the Internet. […]. You were not eternally connected to everyone, always at the entire world's beck and call. I have been told by older people that they miss that simpler world at times. […]. I was suddenly back in a simpler world were things appeared to have meaning because they were not refracted into a million distorted shapes in thousands of mirrors of perception, sensation, thought. […]. I felt that the dross of existence was falling off me, leaving only what was essential. (108)

2. Media's Unfair Play

"The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds," C. Wright Mills observed, while also emphasizing that between "consciousness and existence stand meanings and designs and communications which other men have passed on […] by the management of symbols" (1967, 405). In addition, he concluded that the aim of symbols is to "focus experience; meanings organize knowledge, guiding the surface perceptions of an instant no less than the aspirations of a lifetime" (406). Clearly, the representation of media extreme discourses —in both western and Islamic radical stances— plays a crucial role in the novel. It is in line with what Alain Badiou (2016) refers to as the stirring of public affects, that is, the recourse that seeks to create deep connection to certain identitarian traits in a contrived and artificial manner, only

resulting in more volatility and mutual distrust between the parts confronted. In *Just Another Jihadi Jane*, the biased trading of media and politics, both within cultural and, mainly, ideological repertoires, is explicitly criticized. When considering her mistrust of the western media, Jamilla perceives that "'embedded' reporters, [are] catering to their governments' requirements in most cases and blinded by their own cultural assumptions in almost all" (55); that "[i]t was difficult to distinguish between truth and propaganda" because "there are too many official liars on all sides" (101).

Some British newspapers, such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*, are explicitly said to have omitted facts or having misconstrued them. To give an example, Jamilla points out to "an article, […] in which some of our ex-classmates had been interviewed. It carried a photo of Alex, looking even more handsome now, who was described as Ameena's 'ex-boyfriend.' Next to his shot, there was a photo of me, labelled with Ameena's name" (97). When referring to frequent air raids in street markets, such as the one in Khansaa, a village in northeastern Syria where a great number of people and animals had been killed, Jamilla observes: "It got in the news because so many people died, but there had been many such incidents —with casualties of four or five, which almost never got reported internationally" (111). The narrator of the novel seems particularly insistent when making straightforward references to real news and newspapers and their complicit role in creating public opinion. Likewise, she seems to denounce the commodified nature of information and how covert political biases can be when they conspicuously neglect, oversight or merely silence human rights issues.

Interestingly, Islamism appears to resort to the same mores that the western rightist discourse and, paradoxically enough, also the leftist Marxist one, often use. Thus, Jamilla scornfully recognizes both the hackneyed Crusade clichés of the right and the western-inflicted wounds catchphrases of the left:

[e]conomics was just a pretext; finally, [Islamic preachers] argued or suggested, this was an attack on Islam, and it was only a continuation of what had begun during the first Crusades. Look at the way the Christians have been circling and hemming in the Muslim world, they proclaimed. Look at the wildly sprouting military bases: did any Muslim nation have a single military base in a Christian country? No wonder, they scoffed, George W. Bush slipped and used words such as 'crusade' before his damage-controllers stepped in to assuage the conscience of those duplicitous leftists of the West, who did not even have the guts to face up the truth of the matter and instead quoted that ex-Jew, Marx. (30)

Even though the spectrum of news allowed at the orphanage in Syria is visibly reduced, it still appears to retain some kind of western leftist perspective:

the hypocrisies of the West: the political double standards, the arms industry, the orange-clothed prisoners in Guantánamo, the lack of international democracy, the inability of the West to hold Israel responsible for human rights violations, the role of oil money in the conflicts of the Middle East. (30)

By the same token, Islamist radicals use the same globalized channels, say YouTube or Facebook, to co-opt recruits for their cause. They usually exhort Muslims to comply with the role of faithful followers. They especially stress the decency expected of women, invariably expected to become wives and mothers and, eventually, martyrs' wives who could —and should— piously re-marry. Moreover, Jamilla observes "[f]rom what Hejjiye and others were telling us about the newly created Islamic State, it seemed to be that sort of place, a country where I thought I could be myself" (77), that is, a place in which people like Jamilla and Ameena could practice their faith undisturbedly and wholly feel at home. In the BBC documentary *Britain's Jihadi Brides* (Fatima Salaria, 2015) similar issues are highlighted. On-line propaganda shows how easy life can be in the Islamic State, and Internet websites exhibit taglines such as: "we don't pay rent here. Houses are free," "We pay neither electric nor water bills," "We're given monthly grocery

supplies. Spaghetti, pasta, can food, rice and eggs," "Monthly allowances are given not only to husband and wife but also for each child," "Medical check-ups and medication are free. The Islamic State pays on behalf of you" (Jaffer 2015). Were it not for the explicit beheadings, floggings and book pyres that Daesh leaders such as Hejjiye and Hassan upload and virally spread on the net, and for the debatable role of women in Muslim societies, one would be tempted to conclude that the Islamic Caliphate amounts to the materialization of a utopian socialist state.

3. Islam and its Other Within

In *Age of Anger* (2017) Pankaj Mishra observes that the West's 'Just War' has not succeeded in establishing some kind of political order in the territories they invaded after the 9/11 bombing. He suggests that ISIS owes its very existence more to "Operation Infinite Justice" and "Enduring Freedom" than to Islamic theology. He argues that this phenomenon

> is the quintessential product of a radical process of globalization in which governments, unable to protect their citizens from foreign invaders, brutal police, or economic turbulence, lose their moral and ideological legitimacy, creating a space for such non-state actors as armed gangs, mafia, vigilante groups, warlords and private revenge-seekers. (294)

Liberated from their past moral constraints, these new warlords seem to be free to define themselves in what might be labelled as postmodern individualistic ways, as they move at ease in mundane places and environments, such as motels, bars, gyms, Internet websites, private car rentals and luring escort services. In *Muslim Modernities* (2008) Tabish Khair further argues that "the aim of Islamic fundamentalists is not the exegesis of Islam. They would much rather skip the problems and potentials of the first line with

their profession of faith. They want a social, political and economic order in which they can feel safe —and empowered" (45).

In *Just Another Jihadi Jane* Jamilla's chronicle shows how her beliefs, and especially Ameena's, become increasingly radicalized, and denounces internal contradictions within the Islamic creed. Similarly, the implied listener/reader could also be said to witness how orthodox religious devotion eventually turns into a heinous political instrument. When Jamilla first encounters the orphanage people, she finds their credo stricter than hers. However, she willingly believes in their selfless intentions:

> I told myself these were very orthodox people, more orthodox than even my father and brother, and they had objections to such 'Western' subjects [maths, literature]. But unlike what the papers had reported in Britain, these people did seem to want to help women and learn at least a bit about the world. Why else would they run an orphanage like this? (102)

By degrees, she finds incongruities and differences with what she already deems to be a very stern version of Islam. Her first misgivings seem to arise when pondering on the issue of polygamy, which Jamilla's father and brother had considered to be an accepted practice on the condition that all wives were treated equally. Much to her surprise, she observes: "[Hejjiye's] husband's three wives were each the perfect combination of sister and slave […]. I wondered what her co-wives thought about the institution" (94). Likewise, many cultural and identitarian Muslim celebrations, such as Eid al Adha, in which devotees are supposed to raise and kill an animal to then eat it up in a community meal, appear to be utterly devoid of any celebratory tint. She consequently starts having second thoughts:

> [a]ny kind of celebration —even any display of happiness or joy— on the Prophet's birthday was considered bid'ah, or 'innovation' among us in the orphanage. […]. All we could do on that day was read from the Qur'an or offer extra prayers. But this was by no means the only festival that had disappeared. (105)

What is even more disquieting for Jamilla is the fact that different Hadiths of Islam —scholarly interpretations of the Qur'an— have been gradually narrowed down, to the point that the only interpretation of the holy book that can now be reckoned is a matter of literal understanding. At the beginning of her stay at the orphanage, "the girls were taught the Qur'an and the Hadiths, along with some Daesh-sanctioned commentaries on them" (100). However, "more and more schools of Islamic theology came out and criticized Daesh. […], because Daesh did not consider most Muslims —let alone non-Muslims— to be practising the right faith" (101). Eventually, all Muslim literature which was not strictly sanctioned by Daesh was overruled and publicly burnt. Even the most orthodox schools of Islam could not escape the rather paranoid control exercised by Daesh leaders. Jamilla sullenly remarks: "[i]f it had been dangerous to read secular literature in Daesh regions the previous year, now it was perhaps even more dangerous to read certain orthodox scholars of Islam. Many had been blacklisted as they or their institutions distanced themselves from Daesh" (145).

This gradual escalation of intolerance and violence, not only confirms the radicalization of Daesh religious pseudo-exegesis, but also their ultimate will to instil terror and submission by inflicting cruel physical pain and conducting unnecessary killings against Muslim people. Through Ameena's account, ISIS usual practices are denounced: book burnings, beheadings, floggings, and massive killings. Leaders like Hassan even despise the weakness of their own soldiers, whom they call "pillheads" when referring to "men who took capsules of Captagon before going into battle. (Evidently, real men needed nothing but their faith in order to murder and rape.) […], these men became addicted beyond redemption. They could be used as suicide bombs then" (165). Not only did radical Islamists use execrable coercion to terrorize their real or imagined

enemies, but their leaders also liked to film these atrocities and upload them on the Internet to keep the world in awe. As Ameena concludes:

> [Hassan's] was a technical Islam, its pruned rituals as shorn of ambiguity as a hammer or a computer code, Ameena realized. It was a do-it-yourself manual, […] concerned not with theory but with application, not with thought but with practice. Hassan's Islam was a do-it-yourself manual… for what? […]; it was either for living a certain kind of life or for gaining a certain kind of death, or perhaps both. (162)

Once all presuppositions and false pretensions have been laid bare, Hassan, after a discussion about Qur'an interpretations, sanctions his bleak understanding of Islam by placing his riffle on Ameena's lap while saying: "[t]his is all I need to know about Islam. That is what you whitewashed Muslims have forgotten, and that is why we have had our asses kicked for centuries now" (163). Judging by this, Daesh religion seems to be a mere excuse for manipulation, a tool to cement political authority. Jamilla recounts Ameena's final epiphany:

> [t]hat is what Islam was for him —a hankering after death, chosen by Muslims, true Muslims. For what greater evidence of submission to the will of God was there but voluntary death, and death imposed on everyone else, including false Muslims —that is, all Muslims who would not choose death? Voluntary death by a Muslim satisfied a deeper level of bloodlust in Hassan, and I am certain it also justified, in his mind, the violence he inflicted on others, on non-Muslims and 'false' Muslims. (211)

Consequently, ISIS appears to be, not only the West's Other, but also Islam's enemy. So much so that the Islamist terrorist group has concocted a system in which —more overtly than in the West— the use of certain lives as cannon fodder or simply sacrificeable beings seems, not merely acceptable, but even desirable. As Talal Asad grimly argues "[t]oday, cruelty is an indispensable technique for maintaining a particular kind of

international order, an order in which the lives of some peoples are less valuable than the lives of others and therefore their deaths less disturbing" (2007, 94).

If millions of lives —approximately half the world's population in Badiou's terms— appear to be the result of the emergence of a global capitalist residue or unnecessary excrescence, then this bare life seems to be more visibly expendable given ISIS' need to slaughter their whimsically sanctioned "Devil's-worshippers" (Khair 2016a, 166) so as to impose ubiquitous fear.

The orphanage where Jamilla had erstwhile experienced peace and the quietness of a simpler life is finally described and felt as an indoctrination centre.

> [T]wo or three girls would leave every month, and we would be informed that they had been happily married off. […]. Sometimes one of the orphans who had left would be celebrated as having 'martyred' herself for the cause. The assumption was that the girl had blown herself up as a suicide bomber on one of the front lines. (119)

The cynicism of Daesh leaders can reach sadistic proportions since, as Jamilla suspects, "it was only the unattractive girls who got talked into becoming suicide bombers. And of course, those who had witnessed such violence done to them or theirs that it had dried up everything in their hearts except the thirst for revenge, merciless revenge in the merciful name of God" (181). What the narrator wants to make clear —with a pang of cruel sarcasm— is that global leaders in general seem to be oblivious of the "monstrous shadows thrown by goodness," and also that they, like Hejjiye, "always manage to be driven to safety while someone else dies for their cause" (205).

4. A Single *Ummah* or Many Islams?

After the latest terrorist attack in London, Dina Nayeri, an American-Iranian writer, wonders in a *New York Times* article:

[d]o I condemn the terrorists but remain silent about the boot perpetually poised over the heads of every Arab and Iranian in the free world? Do I defend the Muslim community and ignore the passages in the Quran calling to the devout jihad? Do I point the Bible is hardly better? Do I embrace the complexity and proudly proclaim myself a member of many communities? (2017, online)

ISIS' claimed violent outbursts and carnage seem to awake among the Muslim community the need to either hide their shame or demonstrate their innocence. Turkish scholar Fetullah Gülen put it simply: "a terrorist cannot be a Muslim and a Muslim cannot be a terrorist" (in McAuliffe 2015, 639). Furthermore, Tabish Khair states (2008, 102) that the West will have to learn how to recognize moderate Muslim positions and opinions in order to avoid misunderstanding them as the "monster or the mirror" of fundamentalists. The failure to do so could lead to make them invisible, or worse, to strengthen their religious positions as a mechanism of cultural defence. As a matter of fact, it is widely acknowledged that very strong transnational identity ties have bound Muslims together into what has been labelled as the global *ummah* —a collective noun which conflates religious and identity concerns. However, many questions are still to be explored in connection to this issue. Is the global *ummah* real or contrived? Could it be regarded as the Foucauldian counter-global movement par excellence? Might it only be the space of identitarian mores against the standardizing forces of globalization? Or is it the present materialization of the resistance of the dispossessed?

Manuel Castells emphasizes that "[n]o identity can be an essence" (in AlSayyad et al. 2002, 31). Similarly, Kathryn Woodward claims that identity is more concerned with constructedness than rootedness (in AlSayyad et al. 2002, 17). Amin Maalouf (2012a, 103) interestingly suggests two types of heritage convergence: a vertical one, which is passed on by our ancestors, and a horizontal one, which is transmitted by our contemporaries. The latter, he emphasizes, seems to be rather more relevant than the

former these days. This is the reason why so many contemporary communities seek to assert their differences so fiercely: they perceive that "they are less and less different from one another."

In *Just Another Jihadi Jane* Jamilla speculates:

what, I wonder now, did we really have in common with the Somalian girl who refused to read anything but the Qur'an, the Algerian girl whose Islamism was driven by colonial memories of French atrocities instead of any religious belief, the Palestinian woman who had given up moderate politics because she was convinced that Israeli and American politicians were lying about the two-state solution? Or, for that matter, with the green-eyed Michelle, a stunning nineteen-year-old brunette from a Parisian suburb, a self-confessed 'film buff' who had converted to Islam after an online romance with a jihadi she had never even met, and who daydreamed of a future fighting by his side? (56)

The novel depicts many Muslim characters —mostly women— in a clear attempt to embrace the diversity of Islam devotees and, it may also be claimed, in an effort to convey the open-endedness and hybrid nature of their identities: from stereotypically submissive and devout Muslim women to the Muslim Peshmerga female soldiers; from westernized eastern immigrants to orthodox Islamist ones; from different culturally-based faiths —Syrian or Turkish— to globalized Daesh zealots. Thus, Jamilla's mother —Ammi— seems to represent the stereotypical Muslim woman according to western standards:[9] she "spoke no English, stayed at home, got anxious about the smallest of things like shopping on her own, never contradicted either Abba or Mohammed and almost never scolded me for any oversight, real or imagined" (10). Umm Layth, a much-respected eastern mother of Daesh martyrs and Ameena's co-wife, also seems to embody a similar pattern of subdued demeanour when considering matters beyond understanding —that is, cruelty in the name of God— "best left to God and men" (162). Some characters, including

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[9] For more information on Muslim stereotypes in the West, see Morey and Yaqin (2011).

Jamilla's Ammi and Halide, show a faith more closely connected to ethnic tribal practices than theological arguments. Paradoxically, Jamilla's mother mildly complains about the austerity of her son's wedding ceremony:

> 'But son,' she would half plead, 'this was done in our village. In all Muslim weddings. Even your father had to accept—'
>
> 'It was wrong, Ammi. It was not really Islamic. Some illiterate local tradition, that is all. There is no sanction for it in Islam.' (44)

Similarly, Halide "complained to others about elements she felt were lacking, reminiscing about how a particular festival or occasion would be celebrated in her Turkish town" (109). Visibly, Jamilla and Halide's visions of Islam collide when celebrating Eid al-Adha: Halide is not at all unhappy about eating the goat she has so devoutly raised, while Jamilla can barely swallow a bite. "'—You have to care for the animal you sacrifice,' Halide explained, '—you have to love it. Why should you offer Allah a sacrifice that means nothing to you?'" (122).

In addition, the narrator describes the best of West and East in the GTs —get together celebrations— in Britain. Eid Millan would be commemorated with a display of music, food and colourful attire; an occasion that Jamilla's father condemned as excessive and far too westernized. Some characters, like Ameena's secular mother (Auntie) and Jamilla's aesthetically enticed sister-in-law (Bhabhi), seem to share western influences. Consequently, one can readily identify many Islams within the apparently much-preached monolithic faith: Ameena's Islam was ideological; Jamilla's orthodox and conservative; Halide's "a strong faith of justice and brotherhood" (115); the Kurdish soldiers' a liberation doctrine; Hejjiye's an instrument of control; and Ammi's a communal inherited culture. Moreover, the historical Islamic schism that has fuelled the wars between the Sunni and the Shi'i dogmas cannot be overlooked either. Jamilla remarks: "the Sunni tribes in the region were generally considered trustworthy, if only because they distrusted

Baghdad and the Shi'i militias far more than they would distrust the Sunni men of the Daesh" (153). In short, not only does the novel inextricably show the political Daesh manual as a fascist off-shoot of Islam, but it also conjures up a myriad of hues and subtle differences within the *ummah*; differences which seem to testify to a high number of variegated cultural identities rather than a religiously homogenous creed.

CHAPTER 2. CHARACTERIZATION: PRIDE, SHAME AND IDENTITY

"I felt I had the truth, Ameena was seeking the truth" (Khair 2016a, 1). With this commentary, from the very outset of the novel Jamilla draws a clear difference between her attitude towards faith, and life in general, and that of her friend Ameena. Initially, Jamilla depicts herself as a self-satisfied orthodox Muslim, even a smug teenager, living in what she deemed to be the alienated and alienating West. On the other hand, Ameena is outlined, at this stage, as a vulnerable girl lacking self-confidence, struggling to fit in, in a quandary over her hybrid identity. These characterizations of both girls, however, will undergo a tangible shift throughout the narration. Their mind-set respective reversals could be seen as yet another ironic turn in the overall interpretation of *Just Another Jihadi Jane*.

The Self/Other movement of separation and fusion should be taken into consideration when analyzing the evolution of the main figures in the novel. In order to clarify this issue, some social psychology insights are worth considering. One of the latest discoveries in this science realm —in tune with biology and neuroscience— has been that of "mirror neurons" (Colden 2005, 27). Succinctly, they can be defined as brain cells which appear to "enable individuals to automatically and subconsciously simulate actions of other individuals" (28). Such a process has been labelled as "simulation theory of empathy" (31). In other words, the Self-Other coalescence seems to be fostered by an innately biological capacity of neural imitation integrated into threaded cognitive, emotional and behavioural permutations. This apparently natural predisposition to mimic others could be said to underlie complex "mind-reading" processes which include other intricate mental constructions, such as "perceptions, goals, beliefs, or expectations" (28).

These findings in the realm of so-called hard sciences appear to be in keeping with previous and long-standing theories in the domain of social psychology, such as Erving Goffman's notion of "theatrical performance" (in Scheff 2013, 111) and Charles Cooley's "Looking Glass Self" hypothesis (1998, 184). For the former, human life "is like a theatrical performance, because at an early age," Goffman goes on to argue, "we learn to live in the minds of others, seeing ourselves through their eyes" (111), even without being fully conscious of it. Moreover, humans are said to be "usually *performing* for others, rather than just being themselves, because they are attempting to be accepted as a fellow member of the tribe, or at least not to be rejected" (119; emphasis added). In accordance with this, the implied narrator in *Just Another Jihadi Jane* notices how her newly-met classmate, Ameena, earnestly tries to imitate western ways in order to assimilate and belong. Thus, even though Ameena is supposedly a Muslim, "[a]t fifteen (or was she sixteen then?), [she] was no longer a virgin. In that, she was like 'one of them.'" (11). Likewise, she is usually depicted as yearning to be part of the Birmingham school popular tribe. Alex, a boy she has been infatuated with "had inserted her into his group with the sporty boys with slicked hair and the girls who dressed, laughed and walked like models. She was a duckling in that herd of swans" (18).

For his part, the American sociologist Charles Cooley coined the term "Looking Glass Self" (1998), which seems to be congenial with some pride/shame system theories. He put forward that human life, both inner and outer, entails emotions, and that both social and individual processes often lead to either pride or shame. The 'Looking Glass Self movement' in turn implies three emotional moments. Firstly, that which one's appearance to the other person arouses; secondly, that resulting from the other's judgement of one's appearance; and finally, "some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or [shame]" (in Scheff 2013, 113-14). It must be noticed, however, that in spite of having outlined the processes

whereby shame could originate, he nonetheless failed to account for the reasons why this emotion actually emerges. In Khair's novel this threesome movement can be seen when Jamilla summarizes her anger about having to make such efforts to keep up with the others and seeing herself constantly judged and mirrored by both western and Muslim standards:

> no man, not one Muslim man, no matter how believing, how faithful, how orthodox, has to face a third of the difficulties that orthodox Muslim women encounter in the West. A man has to be careful about what he eats and his observances, true. But what about a woman? Think of it. The way an orthodox woman —the way you want to dress, interact, meet or not meet other people, live, all of it is under constant assault by ordinary life in the West. […]. It builds up a core of bitterness in you. On one hand, *you cannot really be part of everything that might empower you as a person, give you the options that you want*; on the other, *you do not want to be part of all this* —the parties, the flirting, the option to grab a sandwich without checking whether it is pork or beef, halal or not, the simple ability to walk down a street without feeling that you are an alien from Mars and sometimes treated like one! (78; emphasis added)

Furthermore, Jamilla expresses her resentment when guessing how she is seen by westerners. The mirror image she presumes the others return in their gaze is, clearly, a motive for shame and anger:

> you are told by every stupid politician or journalist, every white man who, as far as thinking is concerned, has never done anything that was not done by the very first white monkey —Adam— and his family. Every such idiot can tell you, will tell you, implicitly or explicitly, that you are an automaton, that you are brainwashed or daft. (78)

She also criticizes the leftish multicultural western discourse that supposedly seems to defend her immigrant/other status:

> And there are people for the left […] who defend women such I used to be, but pityingly, as one would fight for the rights of a performing seal in a circus. You cannot imagine the

bitterness all this builds up in our souls. Sometimes I felt I would do anything to be free of

all this, to be myself without being considered a monster or a curiosity (78).

Thomas Scheff attempts to provide some insights into the genesis of shame in the

social context of (post)modernity.[10] He observes that while the individualistic and rational

impulse of (post)modern institutions and societies may be seen as a constructive and

creative disposition, it may imply, at the same time, the concealment of emotions, which

can in turn beget alienation and shame. In other words, shame could be fostered by the

continuous encouragement to succeed as an individual, even at the expense of the

individual's relationships with others. In contrast, Scheff argues, in more traditional

societies —such as Muslim communities— group and identity relationships are highly

valued. The alleged emancipation of (post)modern life from strong relational/emotional

ties and manifestations might have triggered off a concealed disposition of shame and

anger, given that in modern societies emotions paradoxically tend to be either highly

controlled or adamantly denied. What basically changes is that attention is now focused

on the individual. Yet, relationships do not altogether disappear, Scheff goes on to argue.

Instead, "they just assume hidden, disguised, and ultimately destructive forms" (2013,

115).

By the same token, Sara Ahmed (2014) thoroughly expands on shame, the negative

affect which, she claims, could be experienced as a painful emotional and bodily sensation

which signals an experience of failure before the others. Whenever something like this

occurs, the individual tends to experience feelings of self-rejection, mainly arousing from

his/her idealization of the Other —who is, paradoxically, both admired and rejected.

Jamilla sees such looking glass mirror attitude in Ameena's longing to assimilate:

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[10] Since there is no general agreement as to the precise meaning of terms such as "modernity" and "postmodernity" and their implications, and the consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this analysis, the parenthesized version will accordingly be used in this section.

when Ameena said 'one of them,' she did not mean all the Pakistani, Polish, Lebanese, Bangladeshi, Welsh, hybrid or whatever girls who had a crush on Alex. She meant blonde white girls who dressed in ways that Ameena's mum would not permit her to adopt, and who went about with an aura that said, as big as a billboard in neon, I-know-all-about-sex-ping-ping-flashing-lights. Girls who were Lady Gaga on steroids. (6)

Ameena's failure is summarized by her friend as follows: "[s]he hung onto [Alex] and his crowd, making herself ludicrous and pathetic at times" (24) to the extent that she is every now and then publicly insulted and laughed at.

In shame, Ahmed emphasizes, there is a double movement of cover and exposure, of vulnerability and wounding. The impossible attempt at both assimilation to western ways and loyalty to Muslim identity inexorably breeds sentiments of shame, and endows the subject with a hybrid or split identity, as there will always be something to hide or being ashamed of depending on the world one tries to please. This displacement is repeatedly brought to the fore in the attitude and behaviour of Ameena's parents. Ameena's father is described as a completely assimilated immigrant. He is a banker "something in the financial world, something that fetched good money and required flashy cars and custom-made suits. He walked and talked briskly. […] He had his wife or partner with him on at least two occasions. […] A white woman with limp thin blonde hair" (5). While he appears to have completely adjusted to his host country, Jamilla wonders if "despite his Western ways, his tennis-star looks, [he] did not feel that Ameena was safer growing into adulthood with a scarf around her head than in a miniskirt" (27). Conversely, Ameena's mother is a Muslim woman who does not seem to agree to some radical religious choices; "she respected people's faiths and their interpretation of her own faith, but […] there were limits, and putting a hijab on her daughter had crossed the limit. She would not put up with it" (39). Jamilla seeks to understand what could lie behind Ameena's father's dual

and ambivalent demeanour, since he seems to choose not to see the evident change in her daughter's behaviour and appearance:

> [w]hat is it that made him overlook this 'paraphernalia of fundamentalism,' as Auntie called it? Was it bitterness and resentment towards his ex-wife? Was it a guilty love for the child he had abandoned? Was it selfishness? Was it some hidden kernel of superstition or religiosity in the man, or just the male assumption that his child, being a young woman, would be safer with Islam than with the West? (43)

Further enhancing her psychological framework, Ahmed (2014) purports that the "ideal self" —that is, the self whom an individual wants to mirror— does not necessarily have to be *real*, since it is an imaginary projection. Moreover, it appears to be contingent, because it depends on values socially acknowledged and negotiated through the encounters with others. Thus, when one feels shame, it is because the approximation to this quasi-mythical ideal has failed in one's own perceptions. In other words, I am a failure to myself (or a group) because I have not succeeded in resembling my own conjured up image of the epitomized other. In this respect, it is when Jamilla is confronted with Islamic barbarity that her much inherited rhetoric of the West as a den of sin eventually morphs into memories of an idealized former life in England. Now that she is no longer there, she realizes that she did not have so many reasons for feeling ashamed, nor for putting all the blame for her displacement on the English she was in contact with. Two different Jamillas seem to evidence this split, clearly brought about by the clash between two different worlds/contexts. When looking at the way people of her age dressed and behaved she bitterly concluded: "I felt out of place there. I had grown up in this neighbourhood, but it was not home. I did not belong here, I felt; I never would" (67). However, the Muslim version of herself forced upon her by her family—a married woman at twenty without a college degree, like her own mother— is no longer acceptable to her. "The idea of living [my life] with that vapid, satisfied-looking man in the photo

frightened me. […], my shadow split into many shadows by the lights of the streets and from shuttered front shops" (67-8). Her 'dormant' clinging to western ways will be further bolstered when she witnesses the atrocities of Islamic radicalism in Syria. As was argued before, it is then that her memories of the West are visibly changed:

> How had I failed to register the many people who did accept me as I was, veiled and alien in their world, just because there were some who stared or muttered or shouted like that crazy woman on the bus? How had I failed to see the decency of parks with children, care for the weak and unemployed —for what can one call it, but decency? How, I sometimes wondered with shock and pain, how had I failed to register this basic decency, simply because there were idiots who excluded me and mine. (141)

The West/Other therefore becomes a shifting reference point —sometimes denigrated and sometimes idealized— to which Jamilla finally returns in order to redirect her objectives in life and redefine her identity.

In order not to be stigmatized, Ahmed goes on to argue, individuals must agree on a social contract or bond that seeks to approach the normative social ideal as much as possible (2014). Thus, Ahmed observes, "[w]e 'show' ourselves to be this way or that, a showing which is always addressed to others" (109). If there are some discrepancies in identification with this ideal contract, some identities and collectives may be stigmatized or shamed within the consensual social order. However, the distance between this normative ideal and particular identitarian groups may in turn foster in the latter the emergence of resilience, and even a certain amount of pride, which can endow them with certain values and character. Jamilla recalls the tribulations that her father suffered in the West, apparently because of his reluctance to assimilate. He endured having his car urinated, smashed and spray-painted with a swastika. However, he

> merely hinted at such trials; he never dwelled on them, accepting them as part and parcel of his working life. What he dwelled on, relentlessly, ceaselessly, obsessively, were his

spiritual sufferings: how he was lost in this den of iniquity and vice, this realm of

unbelievers, how he feared his lineage would be sucked into the morass and vileness of the

West. (21)

The adherence to Muslim values and character is clearly evidenced in Jamilla's

comfortable experience in Istanbul, where she found herself free to practise her creed and

to dress like everybody else; a feeling closely associated with home. Even when

confronted with the disheartening realities of Syria she

found relief to be with women, or —in the case of the odd guest imam— with men whose

interest in you was regulated by religion. I found relief to go out, on the occasions that we

did so, in a group of women (escorted by some male relative of one of the women), and to

not be pierced by the occasional look of surprise or even disdain that my attire would elicit

in England. (102).

Ahmed further observes that shame also arises when the group in question fails to

confirm its values and transform them into *action*. In other words, "the possession of an

ideal in feelings of pride or shame involves performance" (2014, 109). This performance

is also in tune with Brené Brown's notion of "moving against," a defence mechanism

that, according to this critic, implies trying to gain power over the other usually violently,

using shame against shame so as to foster pride (2007, 88-90). Ameena seems to be the

character who, feeling rejection and humiliation, becomes a hardline defender of her

newly-embraced radical Islamic faith. Consequently, she clearly strives for action to

assert her identity pride:

The ghost of hurt that had detected in Ameena's liquid eyes would change shape and

harden into anger and resentment. […] Mohammad had exactly the same opinions and

sometimes even the same words. But the words did not leave him bitter and restless; they

left him feeling good and righteous. Again and again, Ameena would conclude by

lamenting her inability to do anything to change the world. (32)

Condemnation is not enough for Ameena. Her new religious zealotry has endowed her with a cause to defend, and she is quite sure about the course of action she should opt for:

"If Ah wor a boy, Ah'd go fight!"

"Fight who?" Ali asked, half laughingly.

"The Israelis, Assad, Americans, Iranians, whatsamatter with yer? Whoever needs to be smashed," she retorted, shaking a puny fist at him. (36)

Ameena's and Jamilla's moving away from the West is evidenced in their extreme adherence to radical Islamist faith: "[w]e were the ones who wrapped ourselves up most severely, the ones who never allowed a frivolous smile to our faces" (29). They even reject other Muslims' friendship. Even the girls at the mosque meetings appear to be light-headed to Ameena. In other words, Ameena, and to a lesser extent Jamilla, could be said to have strengthened their Muslim faith and identity to the extreme; they choose to act in order to bury or fight their shame —and anger. They strive to turn those embarrassing emotions into assertive and proud activism.

The ironic reversals in the predicaments of the two main characters also testify to the complex intertwining of Self and Other identifications, in terms of individual as well as social dimensions. In due course, plain-looking and insecure Ameena ends up upholding an idealized radical faith that leads her to commit suicide. She distinctly turns from hybrid westerner to jihad extremist, to finally feel disenchanted with both worlds. However, it is her love for Jamilla, together with the affective bond that she develops with a slave boy, that ultimately redeem her. Jamilla broods:

I wonder now if she noticed the irony of it all, how she had left a world in order to rebel, to fight for what she considered right, and now, now… In the midst of the ruins in which she had landed —not just the ruins of the houses but also of humanity— Sabah was a symbol of hope. She started thinking of him as a son or younger brother. (164)

Similarly, a self-assured Jamilla eventually discovers that her faith is more an inherited identitarian condition than her own certitude and choice. She initially chooses to turn a blind eye and seems reluctant to disbelieve, until one day she starts questioning her dogmas:

> I had no wish to die, much less for a cause I no longer believed in —that, perhaps, I had never believed in, for what I had imagined the jihadi life in England had been largely a figment of my imagination, born of my desire to live my own faith and of my resentment towards a culture I had felt did not permit it. (197)

Interestingly enough, Jamilla's whole account also evidences her shame and need to decipher this emotion, since she also feels guilty[11] and responsible for her friend's radicalization and fate. Her entire narration could be seen as an attempt to explain the possible reasons behind Ameena's final decision to an addressee who could, in turn, tell their story to the world. Ameena's last word before committing suicide in Syria will haunt Jamilla for the rest of her life.

> Ameena's last word had been a cry, almost inhuman; that name, the long, never-ending *Sabaaaah*, which I still hear on some nights, and which makes me trash about in bed, pinioned and helpless, wanting to run and help her, unable, unable for ever, unable even to return to her that last, loving caress when she had patted my hair in place, unable for all eternity, unless, of course, I hope you understand, there is a merciful God, a loving Allah. (218)

Jamilla likens her on-going memories to a storm that appears to be receding, but only temporarily, since the explanations she gropes for only pose more and more questions:

> I still do not shrug away my role in all of it, but I ask you: are you sure it was the mosque that radicalized Ameena? Why Ameena, out of a thousand or more? Was it only the

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[11] Sara Ahmed claims that "guilt" is connected to the violation of some rule or internal law, while "shame" implies some characteristic of the self which has been compromised or brought into question (2014, 105).

mosque? Was it only my, and my father's and brother's Islam? Or was it also Ameena's parents' divorce? Was it that ghostly hurt and anger lurking in Ameena's lucid eyes? Was it the way her friends snubbed at her? Was it her mother's strong disapproval of the Islamic headscarf? (25-6)

Socio-psychological interpretations are, therefore, much in consonance with socio-historical ones. The Islamic Other seeks to mimic the ideal westerner but fails to do so, the outcome of which being nothing but shame, which can in turn dovetail into pride, or else into anger and resentment. The radical Islamist Other quite possibly owes its existence, at least to some extent, to the violence and inequality brought about by the globalized western order and its apparent incapacity to provide everybody with the long-cherished rights of liberty, property and happiness. Should this be the case, the Other would not be the West's radical opposite, but rather the one who wanted to be a westerner but could not be, was not allowed to become, or was simply rejected. Accordingly, the Other's only alternative to avoid shame is to oppose this untenable ideal by defining him/herself against it, that is, by becoming its antagonist and the one who has betrayed his/her original aspirations. By the same token, the West's Other would be nothing but that part of the Self that the West is systematically denying, that which westerners are so reluctant to acknowledge, in other words, the violent part of themselves that they adamantly strive to obliterate.

CHAPTER 3. ON IRONY AND POLYPHONY

1. Irony: Silence, Ideology and the Reader

"You are a novelist, and novelists love irony, don't they? […]. People who do not understand irony cannot understand fiction" (Khair 2016a, 196), Jamilla categorically remarks to the implied reader. And she continues: "I suppose you must have spotted the irony —well, one of the many little ironies— in my situation" (196). As can be seen, not only are paradoxical backslidings evident in the novel as regards theme and characterization, but also as a narrative device. In his seminal book *The Concept of Irony* (1965), Soren Kierkegaard (1965) observed that irony seems to be both the *essence* and fundamental *failure* of literature. As this critic argues, although the writer acknowledges that a connection between reality and fiction should be established, s/he ironically knows that this concoction is, after all, doomed to fail. In other words, s/he realizes the limits of language. Yet, as other well-known critics, such as Douglas Muecke, state, "irony must therefore be interpreted as both what is said and as more than what is said" (1970, 32). Similarly, for Georg Lukács (1971) literature is ironic since it offers a construction of the real world —with all its chaos, multilayers, cross-purposes and many-sided dimensions— through the limited possibilities of linguistic structure and choice. In spite of all of these drawbacks, literature still seems to be able to conjure up a readily recognizable configuration of fictional truth to the reader. One could consequently hypothesize that literature is about language as much as it is about silences and gaps. To quote Wittgenstein's words, "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (1922, 89).

In connection to this, Tabish Khair points out that good literature combines three main elements that are carefully intermingled: language, "literary" language, and what he

labels as a kind of "non-language," which he identifies with noise, gaps, silence and contradiction in "an attempt to push beyond the limits of discourse/meaning in language" (2011, 11). According to him, even when reality poses limits for representation, the act of writing, especially when it tackles disturbing social issues can —and should— be employed by writers to push language towards its limits. Thus, he remarks: "to read literature is to read the gaps, silences, obstacles and noise in its language, in its narrative, and the best writers make the most of not just what can be said but, above all, what *cannot* be said" (2011, 11; original emphasis).

In *Just Another Jihadi Jane*, Ameena is, in the words of Jamilla the narrator, the main justification for her story, the *raison d'être* of her chronicle. However, the narration — which takes the form of a monologue implicitly demanding the presence of a witness/listener— is crowded with memory gaps and silences, questions and speculations, false names and doubts. Ameena, therefore, remains a constant gap and a source of conjectures in the narration. Till the very end, implied readers/listeners will have to see her through her friend's eyes, which will prevent them from having direct access to her real motivations and feelings. Ameena's radical change and inner purposes for committing suicide remain a matter of speculation. Jamilla describes her friend's behaviour in rather ambiguous terms –Ameena is "careful and devious" (209)– and hypothesizes about the causes of Ameena's final decision: "perverted faith or love, sheer vainglory or just the last act of a woman who could not concede, to the world and herself, that most of her actions had been misguided" (209). To the incredulity of Jamilla, Ameena, having carefully planned her final self-immolation, sleeps placidly the night before her suicide bombing. As a matter of fact, the novel starts with a warning: "[d]on't ask me for too many details. The Devil is in the details, they say. […] There is death in the details, and there is guilt, crime and persecution" (1), and ends up with a query: "I

cannot imagine going back, now or ever. But what about Ameena, had she lived? What would she have wished, if she had a choice? I don't know. Do you?" (219).

Khair (2011) also assumes that the act of reading could be compared to that of digging up, as long as it entails interpreting and taking responsibility for the act. Since Barthes celebrated the birth of the reader —resulting from of the death of the author— much stress has been placed on the reader's role. However, for Khair, there is still some contemporary fiction that seeks to cast the reader in a rather passive position. He claims that, for the reader to take an active part in the literary experience, "what one expects is the presence of 'textual traces' that enable the reader to excavate the gaps, mark the rough patches, justify the 'errors,' 'authenticate' the fiction and read the silences" (2011, 17; original emphasis). The novel under analysis invites readers to elucidate the motives behind Ameena's decision, and to look for answers that could explain such extreme behaviour. Yet, all that can be found is a never-ending list of questions and gaps, which nonetheless speak out louder than words. Why is it that the narrator's alleged purpose seems to be to try and understand her friend, while she actually ends up talking mostly about herself and her own guilt? Is the whole story a camouflaged intent to work through her trauma? Why does Jamilla only care about her friend's suicide when she knows that many other girls in the orphanage also got killed, even on a weekly basis? Is Jamilla a reliable narrator? Can the reader trust her young adult account of her past as an adolescent orthodox zealot? Why is Jamilla still a believer after having gone through so much deception? Did Ameena still believe in God when she killed herself? Moreover, if Ameena was earnestly seeking the truth, why did she decide to put an end to her life? Did she kill herself out of spite and lack of certitudes or out of an excess of them?

On the other hand, there are some purposeful, although apparently irrelevant, omissions in the narration, such as Halide's real fate and the Syrian conflict itself, which

is described as a merely blurred background, only to become more real at the end of the novel. "Yes, I pieced together her story," Jamilla concludes, "—but can I truly understand her? Can anyone?" (216). As a matter of fact, Ameena remains "a waif, a wick" (216), that is, an evanescent existence, both to her friend and the reader. Simply put, the irony of the situation is that, after reading Jamilla's account, the reader knows much more about Jamilla than her friend, the very object of the narration.

When analyzing the limits of language representation in connection to multifaceted and polysemic reality, Tabish Khair (2011, 49) claims that gaps and silences apply, not only to matters of emotion, feeling or experience, but also to those of intellectual and political concern. He underlines the importance of ideological exertions in the text and the power of language to interpret its own times. As he observes:

> What I am highlighting is not the political and social purpose of literature, which remains secondary to its definition. However, if literature presses against the limits of language, such an impulse can —some might say, should— have a historical context: the political or social significance of a literary text is just an indication of the ability of that text to press the limits of language in its own epoch. (49)

In *Just Another Jihadi Jane*, the narrator repeatedly resorts to ironic comments that manifestly espouse ideological issues. To give but some examples, when Jamilla is called "Jamie" at school, she observes that "evidently Europeans cannot stop themselves from giving new names to people and places" (8). When Jamilla describes her literature teacher, Mrs Chatterjee, she bemusedly remarks: "she loved English and English poetry with the sort of fanaticism that only the ex-colonized bring to both" (12). Moreover, when watching TV in Ameena's flat she comments: "[t]he news was not too bad that evening. No Muslim was being blamed for a terrorist attack, and no Palestinian boy or Afghan girl had been killed on purpose or by mistake" (50). While referring to the omission of many Syrian casualties on the news, Jamilla caustically observes that "Assad was never

particular about where his bombs fell!" (111). By the same token, when referring to the US-Coalition bombing in Syria, she speculates that "they had not bombed yet, perhaps because the area governed by Hassan had no oil wells" (165).

The way in which Khair uses media discourses may also account for his aforementioned literary claim to force the limits of language within and beyond its historical and political context. It could also be seen as a device to give credibility to Jamilla's memories. Thus, Jamilla's account teems with interspersed quotations from speeches by Maulana Abdul Aziz, the controversial Pakistani preacher —also supporter of ISIS. Several of his YouTube video excerpts are literally transcribed in Jamilla's recording. Likewise, the news case of two British girls travelling to Syria is mentioned: "This was before those British schoolgirls… what were their names? One of them was almost Ameena's namesake; Amira" (96); and also the Chapel Hill shooting: "the killings of three Muslim university students illustrated the Islamophobia of the West and also its hypocrisy —for they did not even see it as an act of Islamophobia, let alone an act of terror against American Muslims" (114).

Similarly, there are recurrent references to historical facts and geographical sites that seem to endow the narrator's discourse with verisimilitude. Fictional truth seems to be reinforced by non-fictional names, dates and places: the Birmingham school and neighbourhood; the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* Pan-Islamist Arab Liberation Party supporters to whom Jamilla listened in her mosque; a relatively complete historical account of the situation in Afghanistan and the birth of the *mujahideen*, those indomitable Afghan fighters who were invaded by the Russians, and were in turn supported and combated by the US; news about the Gaza conflict between Palestinians and Israelis; Jamilla and Amena's fleeting stay in Istanbul; the detailed descriptions of the Syrian border, the river Euphrates, and the devastated city of Raqqa under Daesh control; the outbreak of the

Coalition bombings in 2015; and allusions to the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê —or PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party, and to how its soldiers entered the war, to name but some. The inclusion of real life news and its agents seems to reinforce the irony of the situation: on the one hand, the inclusion of media reports contributes to giving credibility to the plot and contextualizing the story; on the other, the novel adamantly criticizes journalistic discourse as being utterly manipulative and untruthful.

In *Reading Literature Today*, Sébastien Doubinsky observes that the reader "knows that the text is its own palimpsest, and that underneath the coded writing, there is another text, that 'speaks' a clearer language" (in Khair et al 2011, 109). He also states that "Equivocality is the essence of fiction" (110). Although, as Eco (1992) has warned, there can be no absolute freedom of interpretation since words are what they are, it is also true that reading becomes "a specific action at a specific time, for a specific purpose —but still, is *relative* action in its nature, just as much as the text becomes what the Reader desires it to become" (in Khair et al 2011, 111; original emphasis). In tune with this, the complicity of *Just Another Jihadi Jane* with implied readers seems to be twofold: firstly, Jamilla keeps on interacting with them by indirectly addressing them. In her monologue, the narrator recurrently anticipates questions that implied readers could be asking themselves. Secondly, the questioning nature of the narration presupposes the readers' active engagement in it. There are no conclusive truths or dogmas: this appears to be the corollary of the novel. All knowledge and prescriptions are mediated, interpreted and second-hand. In consequence, nobody could possibly claim to be in possession of the truth, be it God's knowledge or the essence of Islam in this particular instance. Taking into consideration that one of the main aims of the novel seems to be the attempt to explain the reasons behind religious radicalization, it is surprising that the message finally conveyed should be overtly open-ended and ambiguous. Fiction is used as an open

invitation to discuss religion, to exercise doubt, to search for meaningful truths, in a word, to reject 'Truth.'

Jamilla's monologue presupposes a listener who, in all likelihood, will be the spokesman for her story. Consequently, she often anticipates and echoes her interlocutor's queries, commentaries, looks, even thoughts. Many examples can be given: "When did I first meet Ameena? I don't recall" (1); "Do you know the poem *Reading Scheme*. No? I will tell you about it" (6); "Even you observed me on the sly. No, don't get flustered" (7); "Did I tease Ameena with the notion? I don't think so" (32); "Did the possibility of marrying my brother cross Ameena's mind? I don't know" (32); "I can see you looking curiously at me; you are wondering if that 'radicalized' her, as the media like to put it" (25); "Am I mixing this occasion with another one?" (36); "What about Hassan you ask?" (182).

At this point, it may also be interesting to remark that many of Jamilla's answers to the implied listener's questions often seem to generate even more uncertainty. Hence, the reader might be led to believe that Jamilla is an unreliable narrator. Considering the gaps and hesitation in her account, and her rather unsuccessful attempt to decipher her friend's real motives for reaching such a decision, one might conclude that she is not a narrator to be trusted. As Frank Zipfel claims: "homodiegetic narrators can always be suspected to be potentially unreliable" (2011, 122). Her narration may be influenced by her own experience of the world, her guilt, her knowledge, let alone her moral and religious principles. Still, Jamilla's narration sounds quite credible and real, and her complicity with the implied reader, whom she continually encourages, might conversely be seen as evidence that she is as honest and trustworthy as she can be. She cannot reveal the whole truth because she is leading an undercover life and, most importantly, because what she

has learnt after having undergone so much war and death is that all she can actually embrace is doubt.

Surprisingly enough, however, irony seems to be recurrent once again. Almost at the end of her narration Jamilla asks the implied reader: "Can you spot the flaw? No? Oh, well, you have never lived in [the Muslim] world" (209). In Ameena's perfect scheme to take her own revenge —and save her friend, or achieve glory, or any other disregarded and obscure reason— there seems to be a real structural flaw. Ameena's perfect plot can only be accomplished provided that Hassan, her rather amoral husband, agrees to respect *purdah*, that is, not to see Jamilla since she is still an unmarried woman and no relative of his. What seems to be difficult to believe is that a leader such as Hassan, capable of the most outrageous crimes, including beheadings, floggings, massive killings and the raping of women, could meekly agree to respect Jamilla's honour in such dire circumstances, especially when taking into account that Ameena deceived and lied to him before and he systematically trusts no one. Even when the narrator urges the reader to understand that "no brother, no husband, no father […] could approach me (let alone touch me) while I was unveiled. And obviously, our bomb vests had to be hidden under our clothes" (210), it does not seem quite plausible that a man such as Hassan should refrain from contemplating and touching a woman who was still a virgin. Thus, the flaw that Jamilla spots in Ameena's intricate plan could actually be the very shortcoming in the novel's plot.

2. Doubt and Polyphony

Tabish Khair introduces his collection of essays *Muslim Modernities* (2008) giving a detailed description of his childhood in India. He reveals he was educated in a Roman

Catholic school in a small town in Bihar. He seems to cherish his past school days in which religious identities, though visible, did not appear to be divisive. As he explains:

> My Hindu school friends would come and eat at my house for Eid and other Muslim festivals. I would go to their houses for Diwali and Holi. We would all go to the sisters of the Roman Catholic school for Christmas, and not just because cakes and cookies might be on offer. […] These were gestures we grew up with. We took them for granted. They came naturally to us in those days. They are gestures that, I later realized, remain largely unknown in the supposedly "liberal" North Europe, and might be dying out in places like India. (2008, x)

He goes on to describe that, when asked about his religious beliefs, he used to answer that, although belonging to a Muslim culture —his parents were practising Muslims— he considered himself to be secular: "That was the only honest answer I could give, as I did not feel very religious," he observes (x). Yet, after the 9/11 attack, he noticed that his answer evoked adverse reactions, mostly among westerners. Consequently, his present answer is "I am a Muslim" (x), and he further explains:

> I may not be religious, but I am not ashamed of my Muslim inheritance. I am not ashamed of being Muslim or Indian or coloured or anything else that has descended on me through time and as such carries with it complexities —neither entirely good nor entirely bad— of history. […] I grew up in a rhetorically-Socialist phase when both Islamic and Hindu fundamentalisms were unfashionable —and in a nation that remains a rich land of minorities. […] I hope classmates have not started to walk away when someone says that he is Muslim, or Hindu, or Jew, or Christian, or any other of the wonderful and confused ways in which human beings have experienced and understood time and space. (xi)

Khair's position towards religion in general, and the Muslim faith in particular, is quite useful to understand the role of mediated discourse when trying to describe and understand the human behaviour and experience of the world. As the novel under analysis seems to suggest, like any other human constructs, all religions without exception are

tainted by a myriad of ethnic, cultural and identitarian peculiarities, and often rely on second-hand symbolic and artistic representations to convey their message. In this case, it is interesting to note that it is a secular Muslim man who is in charge of unearthing, not only the so many contradictions that lie at the core of both western and Islamic cultures, but also of giving voice to women.

When it comes to discussing the role of religion in *Just Another Jihadi Jane*, it is easy to see that one of the main aims of the implied narrator is to seek some understanding. Jamilla has experienced the hardening of the religious discourse she has grown up with, to the extent that she is eventually confronted with the need to further explore her inherited convictions. Her new knowledge finally leads her to embrace existential doubt as her new condition of life. This is evidenced when she starts having second thoughts about her family's orthodox certainties. "I was part of a group of girls who observed Islamic precepts, or in any case what our parents thought were Islamic precepts" (7). When working in the Syrian orphanage she concedes that "[her] Islam was still a minefield of rights and wrongs —but I left condemnation to others, to imams, to men in general, to God" (99). Hejjiye's utter adherence to Islamic dogma and blindness to human suffering seems to be crucial to prompt Jamilla's doubts:

> Hejjiye regularly spoke of the dozens, hundreds, thousands of Muslims waiting to join us, not to mention the thousands of non-Muslims who were about to convert to the true faith. Did she believe in it? Did I believe her? I think such questions cease to matter when you are situated as we were; to cease to believe in your mind would have been to cease to exist in your own heart. I wanted to exist. (117)

A particularly illuminating momentum in Jamilla's religious awakening occurs when she discusses God's ways with the Peshmerga prisoners. Sera works as translator between her and her superior Dilnaz, and poses the following question: "She wants me to ask you if you really think that God wants all this? That God wants women to be treated like

slaves, and Muslims to kill good human beings, even other Muslims?" To this Jamilla retorts: "'—Who knows what God wants?'", which leads the elder other woman to exclaim: "'—Exactly!'" (142). This query, namely, whether there is actually anyone who can understand and prescribe divine designs, will become central for Jamilla's religious evolution. She seems to quote her interlocutor's opinion when she remarks: "You've said that even if God existed, you could not know the mind of God, for that would be sacrilege from any religious perspective. Divinity is divinity only to the extent that exceeds the bounds of human understanding, you said" (44). These convictions are quite consistent with Tabish Khair's understanding of divinity:

> Just as God is an index of human possibilities and limitations, we are only human to the extent that we are not divine. […] When we, in the name of some God or the other appropriate to us the powers of God, we betray the sacred. Perhaps the people who are most irreligious are those who use religion to justify murder and genocide. Perhaps it is a greater blasphemy to claim that you are doing the work of God than to claim that you cannot believe in a God —for the person who claims to be the will of God claims that he knows the mind of God. But who except God can know the mind of God?" (Khair 2008, 34)

Jamilla ascertains her newly-acquired knowledge of the intricate connivance between good and evil. As she explains, evil seems to be a precondition for goodness, which means that goodness is only visible if it proves capable of tolerating "the pettiness and dullness of evil" (Khair 2016a, 118). If goodness managed to eradicate evil, it would then become absolutely pure and isolated, which would be even worse. To quote her words in the novel: "That is when it turns evil, truly evil; not the grubby evil that it has to tolerate in order to be goodness, but Evil itself" (118). In the end, the narrator chooses to live far from England, in a place where she can practise her new faith without reducing "God to a little bookkeeping clerk" (175). She has "become convinced that if there was evidence of divinity in anything on Earth, it was in life. Without the miracle of life, there was no

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God" (196). She wants to live in a place where she is not judged, where she can practise her faith, whatever this may be, freely. Above all, she has learned "to live with doubt, to welcome doubt as a condition of life and faith" (205).

Another issue worth analysing is Khair's aforementioned risky decision to give voice to a motley number of fictional Muslim women. Such a gesture could be regarded as yet another ironic reversal in the novel. It is quite relevant that female characters should clearly outnumber male ones, at least as regards the depth and complexity of their portrayal. Among them, two groups can be distinguished. On the one hand, those representing the figure of the stereotypically submissive Muslim woman as embodied by Jamilla's mother and Umm Layth, Ameena's co-wives and, to a certain extent, also Ameena's sister-in-law, Bhabhi (this being said, it is also true that Um Layth seems to show much more temperament than Ammi, and that Bhabhi is a hybrid Muslim with a university degree who likes her hijab to match her nail polish). On the other hand, the Muslim women characters who dare to deviate from, and rebel against, rather paternal and browbeaten clichés –those the West insists on representing. The Kurdish Dilnaz and Sera are Muslim and soldiers for whom religion does not seem to be incompatible with ideology and politics. Ameena's mother could be regarded as a moderate Muslim who refuses to wear a veil and is clearly against Islam orthodoxies. As for Ameena and Jamilla, they are teenagers who, following adolescence's dictates, strive to find out who they are and what to believe, and Hejjiye apparently stands for the globalized Daesh recruiter and leader —who is, at the same time, a transnational capitalist and radical Islamist. Last but not least, Mrs Chatterjee, the non-Muslim Indian secondary school literature teacher, is described as a well-meaning and conciliating woman, although at times unable to realize and deal with different cultural sensibilities in the classroom.

In contrast, most male characters seem to share similar characteristics: on the whole, they are far too rigid, opinionated and sexist. The figure of the stereotypical Muslim man —according to western standards— is mainly represented by Jamilla's father, Abba, and brother, Mohammed, whose religious faith sounds more like an inherited discourse full of clichés than a truly spiritual commitment. Cruel and ruthless Hassan, who uses Islam for political and bloodlust interests, is the ultimate embodiment of the stereotypical radical Islamist. As to the imams, their secondary role in the novel does not offer a view different from that usually concocted by western media. With regard to Alex and James, the white westerners, they could be seen as opposites: while the former is portrayed as an adolescent womanizer, the latter seems to be an honest and tolerant classmate, whom Ameena and Jamilla often remember with affection. Ameena's father appears to embrace western standards while secretly treasuring Muslim morality. Finally, Sabah, though sketchily contrived as a submissive and browbeaten Yazidi slave, seems to be the only worldly tie Ameena finally holds on to.

When being asked at the 2017 Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet about his reasons for writing "under the skin of a woman," Khair answered that he never wanted to write in a "girlie tone." On the contrary, he describes the experience of giving voice to the Muslim woman Other as "challenging and frightening" (2017). He rejects Manichean depictions; that is why he refuses to portray evil, murderous and brainwashed characters. Female characters allowed him to introduce more nuanced situations and higher levels of complexity. He insisted that people are losing their capacity to engage with facts; that is why they find it increasingly troublesome to read stories with multi-layered, complex and contradictory stances and interpretations. For him, "that's what fiction does, you enter other spaces, you enter other voices, you do that with self-awareness in an attempt to open up a space for the other." Simply put, the writer cannot possibly speak for the other, but

she/he can contrive exploratory and imaginary subjectivities, although always being aware of her/his own cultural constructs and limitations. Writers can do so if they are able to create a credible context from which to listen to their characters. For fiction to work, he goes on to argue, some exchange between character and narrator is essential, that is, narrators cannot simply put their own words into the characters' mouths, for this would not be ethical. As he firmly states: "That's the point of imagination. Fiction trains you to empathize with others, to demand human rights for others. Human rights are demanded on behalf of others, not for yourself, that's pure selfishness" (2017). Moreover, he says that the choice of narrative voice and characterization also endowed these female characters with agency, thus making it clear that Jamilla and Ameena do make their own choices, that they are not passive victims but rather the protagonists of their own stories; they have been given agency, for better or worse, whatever the outcome. To quote Khair's words:

> [a]ny representation, or claim to represent is problematic. Can I represent anyone other than myself? On what grounds can I speak for someone else? Don't I actually put my words in his/her mouth? Actually, it is worse than that: can I even speak for myself? Is my self-understanding so profound that I can claim to understand myself thoroughly, to see myself as transparent enough to be represented fully in my own words? […]. Moreover, any fiction is about things that one has not experienced. That is why it is fiction and not a factual essay, not journalism or a report or an autobiography. Fiction does not really make true claims, at least by definition. (in Awargal 2008, 81)

Contrary to the idea that a secular man is bound to offer a rather paternalistic stance when choosing to speak for silent Muslim women, this novel manages to introduce a myriad of possible female perspectives, thus advocating difference and plurality at the expense of any monolithic vision of the Islamic faith. Jamilla's monologue paradoxically gives voice to a plurality of Muslim voices. To conclude, *Just Another Jihadi Jane*

unquestionably speaks in favour of the need to open oneself up to the other as the one and only way to become aware of the complexity of the world we are living in. Above all, fiction —and art in general— can, and some writers like Khair would say should, be a space of encounter and speculation about the multiple contradictions and dangers that lie at the core of any essentialized/totalitarian givens.

CONCLUSION

"No doctor can cure the past," (Khair 2016a, 103) sentences Jamilla. Yet, understanding the illness and its causes can help to prevent undesirable future ailments. In tune with this, the aim of this Master thesis has been to try to better understand Islamic terrorism and its agents, and make it clear that they might also be seen as the outcome of the globalized neoliberal power structures and universalizing and universalized discourses inherited from the Enlightenment.

In order to demonstrate this, I have first examined the tenets of such movement and its critical contestations. In Chapter 1, I have analyzed the contradictions within western discourse, which often refers to terrorism as a taboo against the seemingly coherent corpus of legal war. I have also argued that the topic of terrorism is not alien to western myths and literature, and have offered a brief historical account of the emergence of the Enlightenment, together with its many critical voices —Asian and western. The political unrest in Islamic regions has also been explored by focusing on the several American and European foreign policies deployed in the Middle East. In addition, an examination of more global structural changes has been carried out by concentrating on issues such as the shrinking nation-states, the spread of the unique neoliberal systemic model, the emergence of so-called zoning areas, the growing world levels of inequality, the increasing fear of immigration, and the materialization of a new xenophobia.

In *Just Another Jihadi Jane*, recurrent ironic reversals seem to play an important role. Unilateral western representations are questioned, one could even say gambled with, at different levels. The implied narrator's vivid monologue somehow intends to turn credos into ambiguities or, at least, into queries open to speculation. The binaries West vs. Islamic radicalism are symbolically exchanged in a game-like integration of parallels and mirrors that blur the clear-cut definitions of both. Moreover, the media and their usual

practices of commodification of the information and construction of public opinion at the ideological level are also criticized. Communication systems, like the market, do not seem to acknowledge borders as regards goods, but are rather more exclusionary when it comes to people and ideologies that differ from the normative ones.

Another irony that the novel tackles is Daesh as an off-shooting of Islam. The western unilateral portrayal of Islam as a strict, unchangeable and monolithic faith is also contested in the novel. Jamilla seems to be committed to showing that ISIS has more in common with western ways than might at first sight be thought. There is no single/monolithic Islam. Moreover, the *ummah* could be seen as yet another version of the single-handed —and usually mirrored— discourse in which the West appears to be so entrenched. Another ironic shift is revealed in Jamilla and Ameena's attempts to assimilate or adjust to western standards; the former rather unconsciously, the latter somehow desperately and with a most unsuccessful outcome. Western ways are also shown as the mirror onto which these characters want to be reflected, albeit very often without success. Being rejected —or in part unable to negotiate western standards— these Muslim teenagers are left with only one option: to move away from the ideal to embrace rather different, even contrary, models.

Irony is used as the most adequate tool to express the dismissal of universal truths and the limits of inherited meanings, and by extension the limits of their representation in fictional terms. *Just Another Jihadi Jane* refuses to give any partial or unidirectional interpretation. Every situation is subject and likely to undergo an ironic twist: presence could be constructed as silence (this seems to be Ameena's case); one single voice — Jamilla's— can become the chorus that integrates many other Muslim women; a strict dogma, such as ISIS's, can give way to a myriad of identitarian traits, even the need to question and doubt divine matters. Language is often pushed against its own limits in

order to make readers reach their own conclusions, as no conclusive interpretations are provided.

By and large, I have tried to show that, no matter how hard the West may try to spread its civilizing influence all over the world, it is in constant fear of unexpected terrorist attacks, which it somehow and partly propitiates. This appears to be, eventually, the most contemporary and paradoxical worldwide ironic reversal. The once seemingly solid faith in reason and development, later on turned into a sceptical constant flux of uncertainties, has lately welded into a rather desperate longing for a bygone distinctiveness —either in western or eastern contexts; a dangerous groping for past myths (or dogmas) with which to demand present restoration of sectarian interests. The West and its sometimes capricious economically-bound pursuit of dominance has sought to impose a single and unilateral discourse, together with a standardized worldwide neoliberal structure with which to achieve its exclusionary targets. This status quo seems to have engendered its own resistant other: the radical Islamist terrorist. Simply put, the machinery of accepted homogeneous symbolic representations and material achievement could be said to have paradoxically begotten its own counter-system.

The liberal French Enlightenment with its emphasis on rationalism, and in turn suffused with the German idealist belief in indefinite development, mutated into the postmodern disillusionment that challenged its edifice from inside. As a result, a complex situation seems to have emerged: a universal neoliberal system which offers no way-out, nor any alternative structure or ideology; growing populations of dispensable lives; and the gradual destruction of ecological resources in a desperate attempt to satisfy the needs of a privileged world that never seems to have enough. In that respect, the Islamic terrorist could be seen as the excrescence —the virus so to say— which seems to belong to neither the western world nor the Islamic one. The terrorist could thus be defined as the bare life

that does not seem to value her/his own life, nor that of the others. This universalized systemic violence, which has been endured and inflicted, sometimes physically, some other times ideologically, either in open or covert ways is, in turn, poured forth against westerners by deploying their same weapons and representations, namely, post-imperialist military extant practices, market discourses, and the fanaticism of monolithic dogmas.

Alain Badiou (2016, 32) claims that the long western endeavour to establish a unique system of reason and progress has dovetailed, ironically, into the same situation humanity had before the Enlightenment. As he puts it, humanity "is not so far from the aristocracy of the *ancient régime*. It's pretty much of the same order. Our world reinstates, reconfigures, an oligarchical situation that it has passed through before, which was in place a long time ago and to which it is returning in a new form." In other words, the western zeal to create a monolithic structure —or rather a unique boundless market— has crystallized in a seemingly irreversible journey without any clear destination and nobody in charge. As Zygmunt Bauman has observed, "we are already all in the same boat, but what we actually lack is the oars and engines that can direct this boat in the right direction" (*In the Same Boat*, Gnutti 2016). To put it differently, the system has turned into a single supra-structure of obsolescing objects with no concern for their subjects, as it mainly aims at "socializing risks and privatizing rewards" (Gnutti 2016) in a world where technology and finance are at their speediest momentum, while half of the world lives on borrowed time. This state of affairs has created its own safety valve: suicide terrorism. Although it could be argued *ad nauseam* that religious and clashing cultural particularities are the main cause of its emergence, what also seems clear is that Daesh owes its existence to policies and discourses engrained in the very western system that it attempts to destroy. This should be food for thought. If the so-called 'civilized' world insists on being

involved in retaliation actions, the reasons behind violence, nihilism, fanaticism, hatred, even idealism, will prove to be elusive, and compromises will hardly be reached. Truisms should be contested, and contemporary problems need new answers, since they cannot be solved with the old recipes of the past. Inherited representations need to be continually challenged: those of the West and Islam, of the media, of westerners, and of their feared 'others': the fanatic jihadist, the disposable immigrant, the asylum seeker. One should be able, as in *Just Another Jihadi Jane,* to delve on the gaps, silences and contradictions of the system, which usually hides violence, selfish interests and unquestioned creeds.

As a corollary, it could be said that one should learn how to live with uncertainty as a new condition of life. Yet, one cannot surrender in the quest for new alternatives. Other realities seem more than necessary in the actual circumstances, in which human rights have become by no means universal. The existence of bare life —whether radicalized or not— renders freedom and progress precarious, as the so-called civilized world is under the ubiquitous menace of the dehumanized other it has created. The dire contemporary challenge lies in negotiating globally, relying less on state strictures and frontiers and more on supranational agreements. The individual should endorse its pre-eminence over objects, human interchange and negotiations should dispute the fleeting blurring of virtual bonds, and ethical compromises should be revisited to cater for the void left by the market. Although rather shyly, some proposals have been taken in this direction, such as that of a universal "basic income" (Bauman 2017, 106; Gnutti 2016), and a new contract between the intellectuals, the middle classes, and what Alain Badiou terms "the nomadic proletariat" (2016, 73). If globalization is clearly irreversible, inequality and violence should not be.

As Tabish Khair (2011) asserts, representation is both an existential and political need. The human brain is constantly creating the illusion of stable entities and beliefs. In

fact, individuals seem to be nothing but precarious concoctions of themselves, the world and the others. New spaces for compromise and negotiation should be encouraged before it is too late. Art can undoubtedly become such an enriching space. As far as cinema is concerned, some recent examples are the movies *Without Borders* (Nick Gaitatjis, 2011), *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016), *The Other Side of Hope* (Aki Kaurismäki, 2017), *Happy End* (Michael Haneke, 2017) along with initiatives such as *Films Without Borders* or *Playing for Change,* which produce short documentaries, music and video clips, and organize concerts all over the world. In the realm of literature, titles such as Tabish Khair's *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (2014), Yuri Herrera's *The Signs Preceding the End of the World* (2015), Merlinda Bobis's *Locust Girl: A Lovesong* (2015), Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), Kamila Shamsie *Home Fire* (2017) or Jenny Erpenbeck *Go, Went, Gone* (2017) to mention but some, can also be worth drawing attention to. As Sébastien Doubinsky poetically argues:

> Like light, fiction and poetry, once published, cannot be stopped, although they can meet obstacles. Wave, particle, language, reality, fiction, it is all part of the same fundamental questions, the human quest for definitions that match the cultural time/space frame in which we are living. And writing. And reading. And learning. (in Khair et al. 2011, 154)

As this French writer puts it, writer and reader and, by extension, different individuals, groups and communities are, despite their differences, all closely interrelated, "locked in an impossible vibration" (95) that can keep us all alive.

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