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IDENTITY AND BELONGING: INSIDER/OUTSIDER IN ED HUSAIN'S *THE ISLAMIST*

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Abstract:

Since the events of 9/11 and the so-called 'war on terror' 'Muslim' has been used synonymously with 'terrorist' dividing particularly those Muslims living in the West into either 'good' Muslims or 'bad' Muslims. Ed Husain uses in his memoir The Islamist *this dichotomy, as well as that of the 'witness' in presenting himself as a credible analyst in answering why some young Muslims become attracted to fundamentalist Islamist groups hostile to the West. The author is a second generation British Asian Muslim who rejected the Sufi political quietism of his parents for the revolutionary ideologies of Islamic 'idéologues' such as Abu A'la Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb and particularly Taqi al-Din al Nahbani, joining Hizb-ut-Tahrir as an active member. Husain's story is one of a fractured past, manhood, the search for an authentic Islam and becoming British.*

***Key words*:** authenticity, identity, colonialism, Islamist, belonging, 'front organisations'.

1.0 Introduction

Ed Husain is just one of a growing number of Young British Asians who have flirted with Islamic extremism, reformed, and, then written a memoir of their experiences. From the beginning, the memorialist positions himself firmly within a Western democratic/secular discourse, at the same time professing zealous commitment to the various 'Islamist' groups he joins, falls out with, joining yet another even more radical group until a non-Muslim student is murdered by members of the group Hizb-ut-Tahrir he is a member of. Behind this outward expression of extremism there is a studious, well-adjusted young person trying to 'find his way'. He does this in a society where he is first introduced to Islamic politics at school by a Christian teacher in the form of the recommended RE textbook, *Islam: Beliefs and Teachings* by Gulam Sarwar whom he connects to various Islamist groups. Husain's book is written from the perspective of the once 'would-be' extremist who has 'seen the light'. However, throughout the book Husain often fuses and blurs the 'authorial' self with the 'experiencing' self, undermining the credibility of his multi-layered identities and belongings. His narrative appears at times mere political expediency and self–promotion as his analysis of Islamism is problematic. Husain presents radical 'Islamism' on the one hand, as a highly unified, global movement, but on the other hand, he portrays the various groups as fractionalised as well as dominated by in-fighting.

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> *Throughout the late 1980's , the East London mosque had been the site of conflict between the rival factions of the Jamaat- e- Islami in Britain (calling themselves Dawatul Islam and Islamic Forum Europe to conceal their extremist connections).* (2007: 24)

In disclosing his encounters with various groups, Husain uses the metaphor of 'front organisations' to position himself as 'good' Muslim and 'them' as bad Muslims by undermining the sincerity of the various groups by denigrating them as a 'front' for something even more devious. The writer describes Ghulam Sarwar as:

> *... the brains behind the separation of Muslim children from school assemblies into what we called 'Muslim assembly' managed by the Muslim Educational Trust (MET). What seemed like an innocuous body, was, in fact, an organization with an agenda. ...Ostensibly it all seemed harmless, but the personnel all belonged to Jamat-e-Islami front in Britain.* (21-22)

Furthermore, Husain seems to lump all groups together *as one global Islamist movement* on the basis of having two sides which *are inseparable*:

> *On the one hand, there is an ideological unity underpinning all Islamisms everywhere; on the other, there are organizational links, continuities, partnerships and affiliations that bind all Islamist groups to each other such that, we can speak of an Islamist movement.* (Mondal: 41)
> *.... thus, he links the ideas of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, writing in the 1950's and 60's, to those of Abu A'la Mawdudi, who founded the Jamaat i-Islami (JI) in Northern India in the 1930's, and Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 1928.*

However, he places most importance on Taqi Nabhani, the founder of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, considered a rather minor player in the overall gravitas of Islamist movements and thought. For the author, it was his introduction by a Christian RE teacher to the writings of Sarwar Ghulam who ignited his enthusiasm for radical Islamism.

As Mondal points out, for the writer all Muslim groups, societies and organisations were 'fronts' for radical Islamism:

> *Islamic societies on college and university campuses; Young Muslims Organization UK (YMOUK); the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB); the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB); East London Mosque; The Islamic Foundation; and even the Respect Party.* (Mondal in Ahmed, Morey & Yaqin (eds.), 2012: 39)

Although it would be true to say that some groups might have hidden their real intentions to avoid surveillance, Husain normalises 'fronts', therefore negating non-extremist and/or secular voices.

1.1 Journey from radical Islamism to good Muslim

Husain's memoir of growing up in the 1990's London tells a story of a young person's journey from obedient son, from a *not particularly wealthy, nor especially poor* (8) Muslim family to extremism (bad Muslim) to Britishness ('good' Muslim). However, Husain blurs his origins placing himself in a position of un-belonging. He describes his father as British Indian and his mother as from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and confesses: "[s]omewhere in my family line there is also Arab ancestry; some say from Yemen and others say the Hijaz." (Husain, 2007: 2) Here his point is two-fold. On the one hand, he wants to disassociate himself from a 'Hindu contaminated Islam':

> *The temper of Indian Islam is, compared with Arab Islam, harsh, neurotic and insecure. Whereas it is incontrovertible that 'God speaks Arabic', the language of the Qur'an, the status of Urdu is much more uncertain. The Qur'an, as an 'uncreated' part of the godhead, cannot be translated; most Muslims in Britain are required to memorise it in Arabic, a language they*

> *barely understand. Urdu and English translations were, until recently, looked upon askance.* (Ruthven, 1990: 55)

On the hand by claiming kinship to the Hijaz he is also linking himself to the Prophet Mohammed reinforcing his Islamic credibility as well as the emphasizing the fluidity of belonging, in addition to, changing territorial boundaries, alluding to the legacy of colonialism. His family practiced a spiritual form of Islam in which individuals/families attach themselves to following the teachings of a spiritual master (pir). Husain rebels against his parents labelling them as 'partial Muslims'. Husain's disassociation from the mystical form of Islam followed by his parents reflected a wider issue of insecurity in that as a non-Arab speaker, the divine language of the Qur'an, his Muslim credentials could be brought into question. Husain memorised the Qur'an like other non-Arabic speakers, in a language they did not practically understand.

He first encounters with Islam are from a family friend and spiritual guide, the "[s]haikh from Fultholy, who was a master of five Muslim mystical orders, as well as the founder of over 400 religious seminaries in India and Bangladesh." (Husain, 2007: 9) It was he who taught the young man to recite the Qur'an in the "art of Koranic recital." (11) Although travelling extensively throughout England with this *pir* who read aloud in Urdu and intricate Bengali to various groups of followers, Husain admits he looked on bewildered.

However, for Husain, this was another world, one not related to his experiences of growing up in England. In his view: "All of this was teaching me about mainstream, moderate Muslim ethos rooted not in Britain but in the eastern Muslim tradition of seeking guidance and religious advice from an elderly sage." (15) However, it was not of the 'authentic' Islam that Husain longed for, one he would travel to Syria to find, rooted in the language of God, Arabic. Husain's insecurity over the authenticity of his parents' Islam would have been reinforced by the fact that their "Islam of the villages, where the mystical practices of Sufism allowed a good number of Hindu beliefs to undermine the strictness of Islam*."* (Ruthven, 1990: 59) Husain's *pir* came from the rural region of *Sylhet* on the India-Bangladeshi border where his father met his mother and where her family comes from. (Husain, 2007: 9)

At the same time Husain was growing up, so too was the disintegration of the Soviet Union. He cites the breakup of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia as a catalyst for his journey into radical Islam:

> *Bosnia acted as a catalyst for extremism among large numbers of young Muslims in Britain. (91) The international community said they refused to arm the Bosnian Muslims to prevent the escalation of the conflict. But we knew that there was a conspiracy to reduce the number of Muslims in Europe.* (91)
> *True Muslims had been defeated by the imperialist and their agents, the rulers of the Muslim world. We had to regain the upper hand in Muslim countries and reject the culture of the West.* (49)

Husain initially joins the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO – the youth wing of the Islamic Forum of Europe – formed mainly by Bangladeshi youths in East London during a period of racial attacks in Tower Hamlets), progressing to an even more extremist group, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. His journey on one level is a search for an 'authentic' Islam which goes through various stages; teenage rebellion, to would-be terrorist, to moderate British Muslim, to being totally integrated into a Western democratic society based on individual freedoms, the rule of law, tolerance and diversity from a marginalised, disaffected youth living on the fringes in a country he did neither identify as home, nor identify with the traditions or culture of his parents.

But Husain's road to Islamic extremism started even before this as a young boy who did not 'fit in'. He explains that at an all boys' school in Stepney Green, he was called "glass man*"* and "boffin*"* by the other boys. He felt isolated: "I could not relate to the boys and they knew it I didn't fit in." (7)

In this school, the students were first generation Bangladeshis who "sang love songs in Hindi from the Bollywood movies*"* (7) while he was tucked away with his news-watching parents in a Victorian terrace in Limehouse while the other students who "lived in council flats and many were neighbours." (7)

On the one hand he is an 'insider' but also an 'outsider' because on one hand he is their classmate but on the other hand he is an 'outsider' as he doesn't belong to their gangs or class. Here it is blurred as to whether the Ed Husain as narrator, looking back, places himself as an 'outsider' or is the 'experiencing self' speaking. This ambiguity as to whether it is the narrating 'self' looking back or the experiencing 'self' speaking re-occurs throughout the narrative: "I moved between different circles of 'friends', never quite settling down with any one group." (7)

He describes having to choose between the various Asian gangs that the other boys were members of such as the "Brick Lane Mafia or the rival Canon Street Posse, the Stepney Green Posse or the Bow Massive." (7)

His loneliness deepens: *"*Uncommitted I continued to be a loner at school, occasionally bullied, frequently sworn at, and regularly ignored in most cases." (8) Not only does Husain distance himself from the other students that there is an underlying disapproval of their behaviour constituting a sense of superiority in that he was the 'good' boy. A position he would later translate into 'good' Muslim. This also reflects Husain's ambivalence around his multi-layered identities and his unease with being associated with his mother's country of origin. It is also ambiguous who is talking here, the reformed narrating 'self' or the 'experiencing' self and it is this blurring which leaves Husain 'unmoored' and 'floating' disconnected from the world he lives in.

1.2 Belonging

According to Ghassan Hage:

> *an insider is someone who identifies with the 'order of things' within a social space or habitus in that they know how things are done around here. The insider is someone who perceives that this collective order of things is their own but as an outsider is someone whose mental and bodily dispositions have evolved somewhere else and thus feels culturally 'out of place.'*(Hage in Beilharz & Hogan 2006: 342)

Husain as an 'insider' is able to understand the socio-cultural space he inhabits, his familiarity with the norms and social behaviour of where he lives and goes to school, in other words, he understands 'the order of things' the rules of social discourse. But on the other hand, Husain portrays himself as 'out of place', positioning himself as if he 'evolved somewhere else' and is therefore 'culturally out of place'. This is noticed in the school and with other students, 'they' identify with Hindi love songs from Bollywood movies, his parents watch the news, 'they' belong to gangs or play football/rugby, he spends his time memorising verses from the Qur'an. They smoked cigarettes, grew long hair and 'hung out' after school and at weekends. 'They' lived in council flats; he lived in a Victorian terrace. Here he distances himself from those he believed to be socially 'inferior'. However, it is ambiguous who is speaking. Is it the 'extremist' Husain, the experiencing 'self' or the narrating 'self'? Obviously, he is speaking from the position of an 'insider' as he is familiar with the *norms* and *social behaviour*. However, positioning himself as the 'outsider', he dislocates himself from those he is trying to leave behind. This dislocation pivots him to a 'higher status'. Hage argues that people who are outsiders are not as 'valorised' as those 'insiders'. It then appears that Husain is talking about class. He is not one of those groups who live on the periphery but by representing those attributes (middle-class British values) he becomes an 'insider'.

Hage believes the newest communities "are constantly subjected to various social forces of inclusion and exclusion that can maintain or transform their status." (344)

Husain describes his role in Hizb-ut-Tahrir in London as important, firstly, because: [he] was responsible for the Hizb-ut-Tahrir entering Tower Hamlets College." *(*Husain, 2007: 86) and secondly, [t]o me, it became crucial that we explain to Muslims at college that they had an important role to play in the world. (88)

He describes being as a child being subjected to racist taunts on school trips but in school, although an 'outsider', he doesn't seem to have been subjected to any form of overt discrimination. For Husain, the attraction of Taqi Nahbani was: "[t]he concept of the 'Muslim nation', as opposed to a number of disparate ethnic communities, was the key. To the Hizb, Indians, Malaysians, Turks, Indonesians, Arabs, Africans, were all part of a single, global Muslim nation, ummah." (90)

Husain's reasoning for his involvement in political Islam was "... around rejecting democracy, removing the rulers of the Muslim world, and the duty of Muslims in the West to help advance the cause of our brothers in Muslim countries". (100) This somehow seems reminiscent of George W. Bush's later pledge to rid the Muslim world of dangerous regimes and leaders as well as, unlike Husain to spread democracy to the world. Both statements have the ring of empire building in addition to placing what comes out of the West to be superior to anywhere else. In other words Husain's words border on mimicking hegemonic discourses coming from the West.

Husain's disillusionment with these radical Islamist groups came suddenly at a meeting of the Islamic Society when a man Husain describes as someone who later became a councillor for the Respect Party attacked his 'presidency': *"*As I listened I could see how these very individuals I considered to be brothers could in turn nasty, violent even." (109)

The young man maintains his reason for involvement in radical Islamism was because "[he] wanted to be a better Muslim, not in order to divide Muslims. I had served the Islamic Society, raised the profile beyond that of any other college in Britain, in order to make Islam superior, not to instigate infighting." (109)

Later in the book, Husain describes himself as *"*going through a period of transformation." (189) He gets a job at HSBC, falls back on the writings of an American, Shaikh Nuh Keller, who like his parents and their family Pir believed in introspection, and "spiritual enrichment, transmitted from the hearts and mouths of men in an unbroken chain of narration, known as isnad, from early times to the present." (189)

This illustrates a constant theme in the book, Husain's search for an 'authentic, pure' form of Islam 'uncontaminated' by Hinduism and parents' spiritualism to an 'uncreated' Islam of God and Arabia the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed who is considered the 'perfect' person who all Muslims should emulate.

Husain frames all Islamisms together as a homogenous whole failing to identify the differences in the ideologies of the different 'idéologues'. For example, Abul A'la Mawdudi who believed that dividing communities into territorially separate nation states was contrary to the political ideal of Islam, being initially opposed to the creation of the separate state of Pakistan during the talks on Indian Independence from Britain. This is something Husain fails to recognise when he accuses Mawdudi of a 'lack lustre' approach to nation building in Pakistan and inflates the importance and influence of Taqi Nahbani, who believed the British utilised nationalism to divide the Muslims to make them more vulnerable to European conquest calling for an Arab polity which would encompass the entire Arab world working for the liberation of Palestine. According to David Commins, Taqi Nahbani was not interested in creating an Islamic state or establishing Islamic law as the basis of Muslim society, something that Husain seemingly fails to recognise, placing doubt on his position as a 'credible witness' capable of analysing the events in either 'selves', that of narrating 'self' looking back or experiencing 'self' who believed the rhetoric to one who seen through 'blinkered' belief and analysing events retrospectively.

In Husain's 'narrating self', looking back on the events that, firstly, lead him to become an advocate of radical Islam, and the 'experiencing self, seems blurred as it is unclear if, although Husain points to him being a 'main player', he was always on the 'outside' of these groups 'looking in' just like his 'choice' to remain 'outside' the gang culture at his Stepney Green School.

On the one hand, Husain narrates his memoir from the point of view of being an 'insider' and therefore, a credible witness to events, but on the other hand, he seems to 'float' from 'insider' to 'outsider', making his position ambivalent and multi-layered as he positions himself as 'mediator' between radical Islam, young male Muslims living in the West, British society in that the act of remembering. This is 'presented' as the voice of 'all' Muslims, consequently, silencing other Muslim voices. Although he highlights the fluidity of belonging, he cannot accept those moderate Muslim 'voices' who didn't belong to 'front' organisations or extremist groups. Husain presents 'all' Muslims as 'extremists' by failing to differentiate between the ideologies of the different Islamist 'ideologues', and ordinary Muslims going about their daily life not having ascribed to the teaching of these 'ideologues'.

Another theme throughout the book is hybridity, Husain's multilayered 'selves' contest and conflict while he negotiates between his 'Britishness' and 'Muslim-ness'. Throughout the narrative, Husain emphasizes his belief in 'British values' contrary to his anti-British radical Islamist self. To do this he frames Muslims using a 'good' Muslim/'bad' Muslim dichotomy but instead of presenting a new way of framing Muslims living in the West, he falls back on a 'them' and 'us' dichotomy common in Media presentations of Muslims reinforcing the 'enemy within' discourse as well as the reinforcing the views of certain groups who perceive Muslims as not 'fitting in' in accepting the British way of life: "I returned to Britain because I believe it to be my home. I want my children to grow up here. I do not want them to consider Islamism an option as I once did. I worry when I see young girls, many below the age of eight, wearing the hijab to primary school." (Husain, 2007: 282).

Husain is writing as the narrating 'self', in other words, the reformed Islamist 'insider' and therefore 'good' Muslim positions himself as an expert on the dangers of Islamism. However, he does it by using stereotypical images of the bad Muslim 'other' as a 'threat' to the 'British way of life', he promotes hegemonic Western discourses of the Muslim 'other' as 'terrorist'. He therefore negates not only the presence of other forms of Islamism that are not anti-Western, but also silences their voices 'to be heard' by not allowing them to 'speak'. We only hear the 'voice' of Husain the 'insider', a credible witness by virtue of having 'reformed' himself within the voices of the dominant Western discourses of 'good' and 'bad' Muslim.

As the 'narrating self', Husain often presents contradictory images of Muslims living in Britain. On the one hand he presents the Muslim communities as law-abiding and integrated, for example, "[the] silent majority of law-abiding and loyal Muslims who work hard in business and the professions across Britain not seeking to turn religion into politics" (284) (the secular view of separation of religion and politics adhered to in Western democracies), whereas he had previously stated "the ideology that led to successful suicide bombings of July 7 2005 and many similar though thwarted attempts since then is still alive and firmly rooted among Britain's young Muslims." (283)

Husain's narration consequently is complicit in perpetuating public discourses of Muslims as 'threat/terrorist' although criticising the Media and sections of the government of doing just that in perpetuating stories of Muslims failing to integrate and living '*parallel lives'* using integration or lack of as a measuring stick for possible Muslim terrorists.

Nicole Falkenhayner argues that the 'fanatic son' trope is not something new and had emerged 'fully formed' before 9/11 and 7/7. This was a familiar trope but before the events of 9/11 these characters were nearly always comical, not to be taken seriously, whereas post these events the 'fanatic son' became something more sinister, someone who was dangerous and capable of violent action against the country he was born in like the 7/7 London bombers. Falkenhayner believes that this trope has been made emblematic for conflict in British multicultural society. (2014: 104)

This is something that Husain would have been aware of when framing himself within this trope as a method of understanding the attraction of extremist forms of Islam for young Muslims growing up in Britain leading him to ambivalence on his own positioning during this period.

1.4 Memoirs

Mondal believes the function "of a memoir is to reflect on the past as well as drawing lessons for the present" (Mondal in Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin, Rouledge, 2012: 37) to the author and the readers. Memoirs can contain messages that are *explicit* and *implicit* as well as being *social and private*. As already stated they consist of 2 subjectivities the 'narrating' self looking back from the vantage point of the present on the 'experiencing' self (38).

In Husain's memoir the discontinuity between the 'present' self is radically different from the one who experienced those things but Husain often blurs these 'selves' creating a representational uncertainty. Husain is metaphorised from a radical Islamic 'idéologue' pursuing the downfall of the West replaced with an Islamic Caliphate to a well-adjusted and integrated British citizen expounding the virtues of British democratic values.

Throughout the book the recurring trope of devotion, firstly to Sufi *pir*, then devotion to various Islamist causes portrays Husain as replacing one addiction for another. Therefore, instead of representing an insider's view as credible 'witness' breaks down as he appears more the 'addict'. Another theme is that he presents ALL Muslim organisations as 'fronts' for Islamist radicalism pandering to mainstream discourses which equate Muslim with terrorist, out to destroy the West. His response is to equate 'moderate' Islam with a non-political pietism that is radically antithetical to Islamism. Husain sees conspirators everywhere and "it is this blanket suspicion of all Muslim efforts to organize politically" where Ed Husain's memoir falls apart in his inability to differentiate between "genuine moderate groups" from *front* organisations. (Mondal in Ahmed, Morey & Yaqin, 2012: 40) It is therefore implicit in Husain's memoirs that he views all Islamisms as a threat to the West.

It is necessary for Husain to link all Islamisms together as an *all-embracing ideology* as this mimicks his own vision of

> *a global movement that encompasses political parties such as Pakistan's Jammat-i-Islami and its offshoots (e.g. Young Muslims Organisation UK), the Muslim Brotherhood and it affiliates(HAMAS, Muslim Association of Britain), Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Al Muhajiroun, the Taliban and beyond them, the militant jihadist organiszations such as al-Qaeda. The basic architecture of Islamism presented by Husain is simple: Muslim politics= Islamism = extremism = terrorism.* (Mondal in Ahmed, Morey & Yaqin, 2012: 43)

Although an insider's account he blurs the distinction between the 'inside' perspective of the experiencing self and the outside perspective of the narrating self which in turn blurs the distinction between the Islamists and 'ordinary' Muslims. Husain's portrayal of Islamism is that as he graduated from one Islamism to an even more extremist ideology and group so will all other Muslims who see Islamism as an alternative to Western discourses.

Hage contends that it is practically the case that in the binary insider/outsider it is often the insider side of the binary that is more highly valorised than the outsider side. But there is no logical necessity for this. There are desirable modes of being inside and undesirable ones. And the same goes for being an outsider. For example, when there are outsiders that we morally valorise we are quick to make them insiders. For Husain, being an outsider refers to undesirable modes of belonging.

Husain is attracted to Islamist groups as he is valorised as an insider. In following his father's *pir* for all his hard memorising the Quran and having perfect Arabic pronunciation, he remained on the outside as while he sat by the *pir*'s side followers came to venerate the *pir* while he remained

invisible: "As he approached the departure gates at Heathrow a crowd of his devotees surrounded him for a last blessing, a touch, a farewell. I kept at a distance, not comfortable with the pushing and shoving." (Husain, 2007: 17)

Husain's young life was also portrayed as being invisible whereas his life as a radial Islamist put him in the spot-light. With his only school friend, another misfit, Falik, they were able to negotiate a place that was visible and active not quietist like their parents:

> *Together, we started to assert a new identity: we were young, Muslim, studious, and London born. We were not immigrants and neither understood the mentality of our peers who reminisced about their villages in Bangladesh, nor shared their passion for Bollywood actresses.* (23)

At the YMO and the Islamic Forum of Europe, the writer was able to emerge from the shadow of his father's world:

There I was a young boy, in my father's shadow; here the place was buzzing with young, trim-bearded, English-speaking activists ... everybody here seemed to know their place. I was *introduced to no fewer than fifteen people ... almost without exception they took an interest in me, my studies, my family, and my future plans.* (27)

2. Conclusion

By writing a memoir from the position of 'insider' was supposedly to give authenticity to the question: why young British Muslims become extremists.

However, what Husain does by lumping all Muslim groups into 'front organisations' is that he silences any alternative voices. According to the writer, all Muslim groups are Islamic extremists, there are no moderate voices.

By positioning himself as providing a truthful view by virtue of being an 'insider', he also becomes able to defining himself in terms of his Britishness, and it is this Britishness that saves him eventually. Through the authority of the witness, of making the Self into a testimonial for something outside of it (history, society etc.):

> *Husain laudable aim is trickled by language, the language of tropes; Husain writes his 'Islamist' right into a discourse already established in fictional writing, and uses tropes that these texts have already established.* (Falkenhayner: 146) (Hanif Kureishi and Sadie Smith)

Husain initially asserts an English persona through a 'typical' English childhood, one devoid of discrimination:

> *My earliest memories are fond recollections of school trips to the green, serene English countryside. I remember the uninhibited joy of walking along the coast in Upnor, being invited abroad cheerful anglers' small boats, and devouring fish and soggy chips together.*
> *At weekends she often took us to theatres in the West End*. (2)

However, this all this changed when he started school in East London a boy's school of students who were mainly Asian. As a consequence Husain becomes defined in terms of public discourse. And is it this realisation of his "mixed heritage of being British by birth, Asian by descent and Muslim by conviction was set to tear me apart in later life." (3)

Husain's approach of writing as an 'insider' equating 'witness' with 'authenticity' therefore 'truth' has it pitfalls in essentialising Islamic extremism to one of 'front organisations': "It risks inflating the

view from inside whilst, conversely minimizing developments outside." (Mondal in Ahmed, Morey & Yaqin, 2012: 45)

In addition, it is not clear in his accounts of the various groups he joined, particularly Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Taqi Nabbani, who was considered a minor player in political Islam, but whose importance Husain has inflated whether he still believes this or only at the time or whether this is presented as the subjective perspective of the 'experiencing' self of the time, or the presumably more 'objective' vision of the 'narrating' self looking back is blurred obfuscating the difference between moderate groups and extremist groups.

Consequently, Mondal firmly observes that "it also results in an equivocation that blurs the distinction between the 'inside' perspective of the experiencing self and the 'outside' perspective of the narrating self, which in turn blurs the distinction between Islamists and 'ordinary' Muslims." (45)

Husain's use of the 'good' Muslim/'bad' Muslim dichotomy diverts the reader from the real issues for Muslims living in the West. That is, in being visible and also active members of the society without being the victims of such accusations as of living 'parallel lives' and 'failing to integrate', therefore supposedly posing a threat to British democracy. Husain fails to provide answers to the challenges faced by ordinary Muslims in reconciling their religious beliefs and traditions with living in a Western secular democracy rather than Muslim majority countries, in other words how do one lives as a minority?

Mondal believes that *The Islamist* presents "a very monochromatic, dualist picture of Muslim life in Britain, which doesn't do justice to the polychromatic, multivalent, contradictory and dynamic texture of Muslim communities in Britain and Europe." (49-50)

Husain's 'addiction' to radical Islamist groups, the sense of 'importance', membership bestowed on him and he's eventual reformed 'self' into a law abiding 'good citizen' does not necessarily provide the only convincing way forward for Muslims living in the West as it silences other voices and alternative journeys.

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