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Performing innocence: Violence and the Nation in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours Are the Streets*

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Abstract

British normative society and post-9/11 fiction borrow from the discourse of American exceptionalism (including the fall from innocence to experience, the desire to create or preserve a better world, a 'Messianic consciousness' reflecting the arrogance of virtue, the development of narratives of heroism and goodness tied to nation-building, and the use of the above to justify 'exemptionalism') to expose and query the entitlement of those within the narrative home of Britishness and the outsider-status of those used to define its borders. This article discusses Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours Are the Streets*, arguing that they illustrate a turning point in Britain's imagination of itself as a nation in a struggle over Britishness which is predicated on notions of violence and innocence. Since 9/11 the debate about Britishness has used innocence as a constitutive inside of the nation and direct violence as an exclusionary characteristic. McEwan satirizes this rhetoric of innocence whereas Sahota challenges it. Both novels illustrate how post-9/11 British fiction deals with politics as war, placing violence at the heart of society. McEwan parodies the point of view of British normative society by allowing his main character to justify his privileged position under the guise of arguing for the current social and international status quo. Sahota charts the journey of those who are caught between the rejection of unjust social structures and the desire to fit within them, depicting his protagonist's misguided attempt to redefine the British nation through terrorism. Violence and exceptionalism are central to both novels, which portray a turn in the imagining of Britain. The events of 9/11 can therefore be seen not just as a historical turning point but as a turn in Britain's imagination of itself.

Keywords

Ian McEwan, Sunjeev Sahota, British literature, exceptionalism, innocence, nation, post 9/11, terrorism, violence

On 18 September 2001 Martin Amis wrote an essay for the Guardian commenting on the significance of the second plane to hit the Twin Towers. 'The second plane' framed the debate around terrorism in terms of 'political communication' and American 'innocence':

Terrorism is political communication by other means. The message of September 11 ran as follows: America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated. United Airlines Flight 175 was an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, launched in Afghanistan, and aimed at her innocence. That innocence, it was here being claimed, was a luxurious and anachronistic delusion. (2008: 3)

Amis links the events to American foreign policy. However, he also resorts to innocence as a trope and to the image of the US as a young country: 'the second plane would crash into the South Tower, and in that instant America's youth would turn into age' (Amis, 2008: 4). Amis sets up the well-known dichotomy of a young, innocent nation against Europe's older identity, and plays with 'the recurrent tendency in American writing, and in the observation of American history, to identify crisis as a descent from innocence to experience' (Gray, 2011: 2). The fall from 'innocent' grace into 'experience' is a retelling of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, an opposition that can also be seen as part of the US's construction of itself. Early colonizers saw themselves as creating a new society and their rhetoric is still present in what has been called American exceptionalism, the belief that the US is different

from other nations. American exceptionalism became widely employed in the twentieth century and has been criticized as enabling the US to see itself above international law ('exemptionalism'), leading to the application of 'double standards' and 'legal isolationism' (Ignatieff, 2005: 3-11). As Andrew Bacevich states, Americans came to see themselves as 'irreproachable, their actions not to be judged by standards applied to others' (2008: xi). In 1952 Reinhold Niebuhr highlighted how this 'Messianic Consciousness' (2008: 69) reflects the arrogance of virtue. American exceptionalism plays a huge part in how the events of 11 September and beyond are framed in the US (Duvall and Marzec, 2011; Crocker, 2007; Pether, 2007).

Amis follows a trend identified by Mario del Pero et al., who discuss how British historians 'regard American culture and history as part and parcel of their own' and use it 'for self-perception from a distance' (2014: 787). Amis identifies with the victims of 9/11 and the US nation in his slippery use of inclusive pronouns such as 'we' and 'us'. He also includes himself as an agent: 'What are we going to do?' (Amis, 2008: 9). This oscillation between identification and distance anticipates the particular way in which British society after 9/11 borrows from the discourse of American exceptionalism. The events of 11 September 2001 can therefore be seen not just as a historical turning point but as a turn in Britain's imagination of itself, in this case due not to a founding myth but to the UK's democratic credentials. This reimagining of the nation is present in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) and Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours Are the Streets* (2011). McEwan parodies the point of view of British normative society by allowing his main character, a representative of the establishment, to appropriate the narrative to justify his privileged position under the guise of arguing for the current social and international status quo. *Saturday* satirizes the establishment's use of a rhetoric of innocence (nominally against violence) while simultaneously benefitting from what Foucault has called 'politics as the continuation of war by other means' (2004: 15).

Sahota charts the journey of those who are caught between the rejection of unjust social structures and the desire to fit within them, depicting his protagonist's misguided attempt to redraw the British nation through a violent act of terrorism. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that violence and the exceptionalist rhetoric of innocence are central to both novels, which portray a turn in the imagining of Britain as a nation struggling to define what it is to be a British citizen.

Exceptionalism relies on a binary rhetoric that displaces corruption and evil outside the nation and strengthens moral righteousness. The 'Messianic consciousness' identified by Niebuhr contains moral certainty about rightness and virtue. Individuals and nations reliant on exceptionalism consider themselves as irreproachable and, for this reason, innocent when confronted with violent retribution or challenges to their ideas. In their eyes they are always, so to speak, presumed innocent. When their moral stance is questioned, 'exceptionalism' allows double-standards. For this reason throughout this article I refer to 'performing innocence' or a 'ceremony' of innocence'. In contemporary Britain, the concept of the nation is limited to those who are perceived as both innocent and performing innocence by ignoring social injustice and condemning those who respond violently to it. This use of innocence relates to Niebuhr's 'Messianic consciousness' which reflects the arrogance of virtue and contributes to national feelings of exceptionality. Likewise, the discourse of innocence is also employed by those who perpetrate violent acts in the name of retribution and justice, either by developing narratives of heroic defence of the status quo (*Saturday*) or retribution based on ideas of religious exceptionality (*Ours Are the Streets*). Appearing not to conform to mainstream social codes leads to suspicion and expulsion from the imaginary home of Britishness. Moreover, innocence and guilt are used to justify national inclusion/exclusion.¹ Since 9/11 the debate about Britishness has used innocence as a constitutive inside of the nation and direct violence as an exclusionary characteristic.

Identification relies on what Stuart Hall (following Derrida) calls the ‘constitutive outside’ of identity (1996: 4, emphasis in original): ‘identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render “outside”, abjected. [...] So the “unities” which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion’ (Hall, 1996: 5, emphasis in original). This can be applied to national identities and other cultural identities, as analysed by Kristeva:

Hatred of those others who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally. [...] Hatred of oneself, for when exposed to violence, individuals despair of their own qualities, undervalue their achievements and yearnings, run down their own freedoms whose preservation leaves so much to chance; and so they withdraw into a sullen, warm, private world, unnameable and biological, the impregnable ‘aloofness’ of a weird primal paradise – family, ethnicity, nation, race. (1996: 2-3, emphasis in original)

9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks have prompted a renewed introspection, and policing of the borders of ‘Britishness’ relying on ethnic and religious ‘constitutive outsides’ which are abjected. These are predicated on ‘authenticism’, which assumes that ‘difference and otherness can be traced back to an original, unchanging, and “pre-existing” reality’ (Sánchez-Arce, 2007: 143).² As framing exclusion in racial or religious terms is politically undesirable, nation-building is displaced onto ‘British values’. These values have variously been identified as tolerance and respect for laws and human rights such as freedom of speech. For example, the non-statutory advice on ‘Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC [Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development]’ in maintained schools issued by the Department for Education in November 2014 includes these notions. It also sets Britishness

apart from religious belief, as the document stresses that children must be ‘made aware of the difference between the law of the land and religious law’ (Department for Education, 2014: 4). The focus on British values reflects a fear of infiltration (in particular by Muslims) and of change to the status quo.

Religious terminology is frequently used in conflict and was also used by British imperialism to justify itself. W. B. Yeats’s poem ‘The second coming’ (1920) – to which Amis’s ‘The second plane’ alludes – exploits this, but not perhaps in the most expected way. In a rare postcolonial reading of the poem,³ Edward Said argues for Yeats to be seen in the context of decolonisation, as a writer who is not necessarily opposed to violence (seen as ‘inevitable’ in the ‘colonial conflict’) but who recognizes that after violence must come politics: ‘Yeats’s prophetic perception that at some point violence cannot be enough’ is ‘the first important announcement in the context of decolonization of the need to balance violent force with an exigent political and organizational process’ (Said, 1990: 89-90). Considering ‘The second coming’ in this context opens up possibilities which Amis’s essay does not envisage. The ‘centre’ not being able to ‘hold’ may be an ‘inevitable’ part of this necessary process. A despairing Amis recognizes terrorism as ‘political communication by other means’ but cannot see beyond the violence that will ensue from both sides or reflect on the violence that is already present in the current social order, as he calls for the ‘development of what has been called “species consciousness, something over and above nationalisms, blocs, religions, ethnicities”’ (2008: 9-10), something he does not define. Said’s insight into Yeats’s conflict resolution is something that *Saturday* and *Ours Are the Streets* have not reached. The former is an exceptional dissection of the ideology underpinning the current status quo in the UK via the story of Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon who is involved in a car accident with Baxter, denies any responsibility for it and justifies his actions throughout the novel by positioning himself as victim. In the latter, narrator Imtiaz wants to rebuild the British nation-family but

ends up planning a terrorist attack without a ‘political and organizational process’ (Said, 1990: 89-90).

‘The second coming’ has been used in contemporary culture to illustrate that violence and threatening the status quo are unacceptable. As Said argues:

It is interesting that Yeats has often been cited in recent years as someone whose poetry warned of nationalist excesses. He is quoted without attribution, for example, in Gary Sick’s book (*All Fall Down*) [...] [T]he New York Times correspondent in Beirut in 1975–76, James Markham, quotes the same passages from ‘The Second Coming’ in a piece he did about the onset of the Lebanese civil war in 1977. ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold’ is one phrase. The other is ‘The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.’ Sick and Markham both write as Americans frightened of the revolutionary tide sweeping through a Third World once contained by Western power. Their use of Yeats is minatory: remain orderly, or you’re doomed to a frenzy you cannot control. [...] They simply assume that Yeats, in any event, is on our side, against the revolution. It’s as if both men could never have thought to take the current disorder back to the colonial intervention itself. (1990: 89-90)

The ‘centre’ that ‘cannot hold’ in Yeats’s line becomes the established power in readings which use it to preserve hegemonic power and stoke fear of ‘anarchy’ in those who are unhappy with the current political situation. The rhetoric of fear and abrogation of responsibility in these appropriations of Yeats are precisely what Saturday successfully depicts and *Ours Are the Streets* exploits to comment on the cul de sac experienced by its

protagonist – Imtiaz – as he tries to make a political intervention by becoming a suicide bomber.

When ‘The second coming’ becomes ‘The second plane’, the dichotomies of evil/innocent, violent/non-violent, active/passive are re-enacted, a simplification that Slavoj Žižek describes like this:

‘The Second Coming’ seems perfectly to render our present predicament: ‘The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.’ This is an excellent description of the current split between anaemic liberals and impassioned fundamentalists. ‘The best’ are no longer able fully to engage, while ‘the worst’ engage in racist, religious, sexist fanaticism. (2009: 72)

Žižek warns against this distinction, arguing that ‘terrorist fundamentalists, be they Christian or Muslim’, are not as certain of their beliefs as they seem, or they would not feel threatened by non-believers (2009: 72). Žižek undermines the belief that zealotry moves the ‘terrorist fundamentalist’. McEwan challenges the notion of the ‘terrorist fundamentalist’ by undermining Perowne’s point of view in *Saturday* whilst at the same time reinscribing it by making Perowne’s perspective predominant. Sahota’s text seems to side with those who place terrorism alongside religious doubts or self-hatred – such as Žižek (2009: 73) – or a crisis in Western masculinity⁴, but in this article I argue that those personal aspects of identity cannot be separated from the ‘social disintegration’ (Snower 2016) and the political struggle over Britishness. Comparing both novels creates a diptych on the debate about national identity in twenty-first-century Britain involving a struggle between redefinition and immobilism, the latter favouring those holding social power. As American economist Dennis J. Snower says, there is ‘a sense of social exceptionalism [in Europe], leading to greater importance being

attributed to national identities', which is 'beginning to dwarf the importance of economic issues. The situation has cultivated a sense of victimhood, enabling the disadvantaged to ascribe their misfortunes to others, and motivating a general search for scapegoats' (Snower 2016). Violence and powerful convictions are not the preserve of one side, but they are framed differently according to who exercises them. Those who, like Perowne, at first seem 'anaemic liberals' lacking 'all conviction' or present themselves as innocent targets of 'irrational' or 'fundamentalist' direct violence, are perhaps more certain than at first appears, for example, of their 'economic and social success' being attributable to 'personal achievements' (Snower 2016). Innocence and rationality are used as rhetorical shields that mask a different type of violence, if not perpetrated by these individuals, then upheld by them in their failure to see beyond direct violence and recognise that social injustice or structural violence favours them. Innocence is also at play in Sahota's novel, where the UK and US governments, and (by extension) their 'law-abiding' citizens, are seen as acting deliberately violently towards Muslims or condoning this violence, and Imtiaz's associates consider themselves to be responding to western 'fanaticism'.

Crucially, in Yeats 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned', not innocence itself. A religious or sacred ritual, 'ceremony' connotes adherence to a prescribed norm. The line that seems so negative at first is perhaps not so, as it is prescribed, hypocritical behaviour that drowns, not innocence itself. This 'ceremony of innocence' is portrayed in Saturday through the clever juxtaposition of Perowne's fear of terrorism and understandable (though concealed) anger when his family is targeted by Baxter with his support for intervention in Iraq, indifference to the anti-Iraq war demonstration, and ideas about social determinism. Baxter also tries to justify his attack on Perowne's family as retaliation for Perowne's earlier aggression; he fails to understand how social structures themselves are just as important to his sense of injustice in the face of Perowne's lack of accountability for his actions. Similarly,

Ours Are the Streets portrays Imtiaz's awakening to the prevalence of the 'ceremony of innocence' of those in power in the western world and his (real or imagined) decision to blow himself up in Meadowhall, a large shopping centre on the outskirts of Sheffield, as a way to change Britain for the benefit of his daughter, who is one of the intended readers of his narrative (Sahota 2011a: 2) Imtiaz refers to his sacrifice for Noor by obliquely discussing his distaste for his father's sacrifices for him:

I'd tell him not to kill himself for me. To not use me as an excuse. 'You will understand when you have children of your own,' he'd say. And maybe I do, maybe I do. Maybe I understand too much. We were meant to become part of these streets. They were meant to be ours as much as anyone's. That's what you said you worked for, came for. Was it worth it, Abba? Because I sure as hell don't know. (Sahota 2011a: 70)

Seeing that his father's belief in hard work in return for acceptance does not work, Imtiaz resolves to fight differently for Noor, whom he calls his 'little soldier' (Sahota 2011a: 29), to prevent her from feeling the same he felt in seeing his father ashamed through racism and failure (Sahota 2011a: 73; 75). Imtiaz turns to direct violence when his painful feelings about the closed nature of Englishness are not acknowledged and, at the same time, he finds he cannot let go of England as his 'home', no matter how much he talks to Noor about a 'homeland' elsewhere (Sahota 2011a: 29). This ambivalence is exemplified by his football-themed recycling of the Tebbit cricket test finding it 'fine to root for Liverpool, in a quiet way, but not England' (Sahota 2011a: 137), and his hatred of the river man when he is critical of 'Britishers' (Sahota 2011a: 165): 'I hated him for attacking my home, I hated myself for not defending it, but more for feeling like I should' (Sahota 2011a: 166).

McEwan and Sahota present two main uses of innocence with links to religion. In both instances, those employing the rhetoric of innocence blame the victims of their violence. The plots of *Saturday* and *Ours Are the Streets* are embedded in this symbolic struggle where innocence and victim-status are employed to justify 'exemptionalism'. In *Saturday*, direct violence is condemned whilst responsibility for social injustice is denied and thus sanctioned. In *Ours are the Streets*, direct violence is legitimized as a response to inequality both within the UK and internationally, and as retaliation for the direct violence (in the shape of military intervention abroad, the very same international policy that Perowne in *Saturday* supports) required to maintain the western neocolonialist hold on the world. In the case of *Saturday* the preponderant theme of class struggle underlying the conflict between Perowne and Baxter functions as a metonymy for the mostly unexplored issue of state violence at an international level and its justification, as opposed to the terrorism of which Perowne is so afraid. Imtiaz in *Ours Are the Streets* is caught in the discrepancy between the discourse of innocence employed by the British nation in its international interventions and that espoused by the group he joins in Kashmir, who justify terrorism as retribution.

Amis's premise that the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 are 'political communication by other means' can be turned on its head; legitimate political structures can be considered a form of violence. Michel Foucault, inverting Carl von Clausewitz's famous proposition that war is the continuation of politics by other means (one that Amis subscribes to), explores the idea that '[p]olitics is the continuation of war by other means' (2004: 15). He questions the dyads war/peace and violence/non-violence: 'If we look beneath peace, order, wealth, and authority, beneath the calm order of subordinations, beneath the State and State apparatuses, beneath the laws, and so on, will we hear and discover a sort of primitive and permanent war?' (Foucault, 2008: 46-47). Foucault dismantles the Hobbesian maxim that the state guarantees peace in exchange for individuals' freedom. Johan Galtung distinguishes

between ‘personal, or direct’ violence, ‘where there is an actor that commits the violence’, and ‘structural, or indirect’ violence, or ‘social injustice’, where ‘there is no such actor’ (1969: 170). Galtung’s analysis of violence and Foucault’s archaeology of the indebtedness of power structures to war place direct violence and structural violence on an equal footing. Furthermore, the link between structural violence and power is crucial to understanding why direct violence is condemned whilst structural violence is not even registered. As Galtung states: ‘Structural violence is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters. In a static society, personal violence will be registered, whereas structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us’ (Galtung, 1969: 173). By exposing the naturalisation of structural violence Galtung indicates why it is so difficult to challenge.

In 1990 Galtung added ‘cultural violence’ to direct and indirect violence: ‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence [...] that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong’ (291). Žižek makes a distinction along Galtung’s lines, employing the terms ‘subjective’ (direct) violence and ‘objective’ (indirect) violence. The latter is sub-divided into ‘a “symbolic” violence embodied in language and its forms’ and “systemic” violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of economic and political systems’ (2009: 1). As Galtung notes, ‘[c]ulture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them [...] at all’ (1990: 295). Those benefitting from structural violence and/or enforcing it can therefore maintain an illusion of innocence whilst using ‘cultural’ or ‘symbolic’ violence to enforce what they would call ‘peace, order, wealth, and authority’, but is in effect ‘systemic violence’. This is apparent in contemporary uses of ‘The Second Coming’ as discussed in the introduction to this article, of the Qur’an and ancient history in *Ours Are the Streets*, and of Matthew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ in *Saturday*.

Imtiaz's act of self-writing in *Ours Are the Streets* is an attempt at counter-narrative: '[Noor] Don't listen to what the newspapers and TV will have said about me. None of it is true. They don't know me' (Sahota 2011a: 2). Although this is not the focus of this article, literature is particularly relevant to Saturday's denouement, 'Dover Beach' acting as a soother for Baxter's rage and a prompt for love and kindness. 'Dover Beach' is also a call for a pragmatic recognition of identity as the nation symbolized by its geography, a call for unity in the face of imagined dangers in the shape of 'ignorant armies' (Arnold cited McEwan 2006: epilogue). As David Herd states, 'the value of Arnold's poem lies in the self-consciousness with which such a gesture of identification is made. 'Dover Beach' does not presuppose an identity with country. [...] It is a link, rather, that Arnold constructs in the absence of other links, the poem consciously arriving at a sense of its identity in the way an opportunistic politician may assert national identity at a moment of crisis' (2013 :499)

Terrorism is not restricted to post-9/11 literature. What has changed since 9/11 are the 'interpretive communities' that produce texts (Fish, 1982: 171). Stanley Fish suggests that readers' framing of texts and expectations around their features are crucial in accounting for particular interpretations. Saturday presents Henry Perowne as a post-9/11 reader of his world, showing how fear of terrorism and violence in general dominates his responses as it is likely to dominate those of many readers. This would not be possible without the heightened social awareness of terrorism since the 9/11 and subsequent attacks. Saturday is bookended by Perowne watching landing planes, first in terror as he worries about a terrorist attack, but calmly at the end of the narrative following his confrontation with Baxter. The first instance is used to establish Perowne's rationality through description of his 'objective' medical

activities. These details mitigate any suspicion in readers that Perowne is not as rational as he makes out. Perowne starts the day by finding himself moving before he is awake. The boundaries between sleep and wakefulness are blurred, as are those between sanity and madness: 'he suspects at once he's dreaming or sleepwalking. [...] And he's entirely himself, he's certain of it, and he knows that sleep is behind him: to know the difference between it and waking, to know the boundaries, is the essence of sanity' (McEwan, 2006: 3-4). The third-person narrative is focalized through Perowne, the free indirect style thus appearing objective but proving unreliable. Perowne's certainty arrives after doubt, which undermines his beliefs about 'boundaries' and 'sanity' whilst also affirming them conclusively. On seeing the burning object in the night sky, readers are likely to go along with Perowne's paranoia and are primed to expect him to work through his puzzlement to find out the truth, but before doing so Perowne lets post-9/11 anxiety take hold of his imagination. Of course this is the anticipated outcome of terrorism, but statistically it is still less likely that a plane will be set on fire by a terrorist than develop a fault.⁵ Perowne's interpretation of events is imbued with 'the subjective', something he attributes to an imaginary terrorist:

An excess of the subjective, the ordering of the world in line with your needs, an inability to contemplate our own unimportance. In Henry's view such reasoning belongs on a spectrum at whose far end, reading like an abandoned temple, lies psychosis.

And such reasoning may have caused the fire on the plane. A man of sound faith with a bomb in the heel of his shoe. Among the terrified passengers many might be praying – another problem of reference – to their own god for intercession.

(McEwan, 2006: 17-18)

Perowne's speculative horror is directly linked to home-grown terrorism as seen in the allusion to the 'shoe bomber', Richard Reid.⁶ He also links terrorism to 'psychosis', thus referring to his earlier definition of 'sanity' in order to place the supposed terrorist on the other side of normality and of the social. However, Perowne's paranoia may also place him on the other side of the divide, as does his latent fear of descending into dementia like his mother.

Saturday ends with Perowne watching planes approaching Heathrow airport at night. Coming just as the tense situation with Baxter has been resolved and family life restored, this tranquil ending is undermined by recurrent anxiety about terrorism:

Perhaps a bomb in the cause of jihad will drive them out with all the other faint-hearts into the suburbs, or deeper into the country, or to the chateau – their Saturday will become a Sunday. [...] London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. [...] The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable. (McEwan, 2006: 276)

Besides being a direct allusion to Perowne's and Rosalind's aging, a theme that runs through the novel, the title of the novel refers also to Perowne's veiled fear about his way of life, the nation-home as he knows it, coming to an end. Perowne aligns himself with the 'faint-hearts' who, as in Yeats's poem, 'lack all conviction'. Is he claiming to be 'best', as opposed to the 'worst' that 'are full of passionate intensity', the terrorists, those who invade his nation-home and threaten his family? More importantly, are Perowne and his family as innocent as he thinks?

McEwan has Perowne dismiss social injustice in favour of biological determinism as the cause of social deviance:

It can't just be class or opportunities – the drunks and junkies come from all kinds of backgrounds, as do the office people. Some of the worst wrecks have been privately educated. Perowne, the professional reductionist, can't help thinking it's down to invisible folds and kinks of character, written in code, at the level of molecules. [...] No amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town. (McEwan, 2006: 272)

The aptly named Perowne, a name from Anglo-Norman and Middle French meaning 'stone', the base of a monument or platform outside a church, is the voice of the pillars of the community. He has enough social capital to meet the then Prime Minister Tony Blair and his economic capital is evident in the luxury car at the centre of the narrative drama and in his family ownership of both a London house and a French château. Perowne dismisses structural violence in favour of determinism, diagnosing the symptoms of Huntington's disease, ignoring other factors in Baxter's life that may contribute to his behaviour and advocating psychiatric treatment rather than prison as the best remedy for Baxter: 'the system, the right hospital, must draw [Baxter] in securely before he does more harm' (McEwan, 2006: 278). In short, Perowne sees everyone as innocent, as victims of genetic makeup, whilst still institutionalising those who threaten normativity. Nevertheless, there is a small crack in Perowne's golden bowl: as he and his son Theo throw Baxter down the stairs, 'Henry thinks he sees in [Baxter's] wide brown eyes a sorrowful accusation of betrayal. He, Henry Perowne, possesses so much – the work, money, status, the home, above all, the family – [...]; and he has done nothing, given nothing to Baxter who has so little that is not wrecked

by his defective gene' (McEwan, 2006: 227-228). Perowne's momentary acknowledgement of social inequality, however much it is propped up by determinism, shows that there are other lines of thought of which he is aware but which he chooses not to pursue. This is also apparent in his dismissal of his daughter's lecturers' use of Foucault whilst at the same time using his medical knowledge to create a boundary between 'normal' and 'deviant' and upholding current power relations. Perowne is fearful of losing his status to those less 'lucky' than himself and his family. He also harks after 'a form of anosognosia, a useful psychiatric term for lack of awareness of one's own condition', which he relates to 'another age, to be prosperous and believe that an all-knowing supernatural force had allotted people to their stations in life' (McEwan, 2006: 74). Saturday cleverly allows Perowne's point of view to dominate whilst peppering the narrative with tools for readers to unravel his self-justifications. For is he not suffering from a contemporary form of 'anosognosia', substituting God's will for scientific knowledge in order to ignore how social structures favour the likes of him?

The narrator asks, 'Where's Henry's appetite for removing a tyrant now? At the end of this day, this particular evening, he's timid, vulnerable, he keeps drawing his dressing gown more tightly around him' (McEwan, 2006: 277). Perowne, despite his firm determinist ideas, now 'lack[s] all conviction'. Vulnerability is best seen in Perowne's compulsive tightening of his dressing gown (272, 277). Perowne has been called an 'everyman of the post-9/11 world' (Root, 2011: 60-61), but it is precisely this that makes him suspect. Just as Root questions Saturday's realism, stating that 'Henry only seems to inhabit a straightforward, realist narrative' (2011: 61), so must we question Perowne's position as the voice of the majority. This satire of the establishment offers readers enough material to think of Perowne as either an 'everyman' or an entitled egotist who is also classist, sexist and racist. In an early interview, McEwan already questions Perowne's 'humiliation' of Baxter

(2005). As Peter Childs explains, Perowne is 'insufficiently alive to his involvement in the world until he is confronted with violence and the opportunity for mercy close to home' (2006: 146). Perowne has been considered to be 'virtually acting as a mouthpiece for the author's views' (Foley 2010: 147), but McEwan's thoughtful and ambivalent stance towards the Iraq war (2003) is not to be found in Perowne who is firmly in favour for most of the novel. For this reason, even though satire is not usually overt, it is possible that McEwan is satirising the position of those like Perowne. The narrative is slippery in its mixture of free indirect style, reported speech and direct speech. Whereas conventionally we might say that the implied narrator takes over the thoughts and words of the character, Perowne takes over the narrator function just as much. His alignment with master narratives and scientific discourse that 'reinscribe [...] relationships of power', and his complicity with 'power relations [which] are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment' (Foucault, 2004: 16), make him the ideal spokesperson for established thought.⁷

Saturday's narrative strategy exemplifies how structural violence can seem objective and inevitable. The serene conclusion to the novel, as Perowne falls asleep next to Rosalind, symbolically returns the household and readers to 'the tranquil waters' of structural violence once Baxter's bout of personal violence has been overcome. Perowne offers a narrative arc from 'a time now acquiring a polish, a fake gleam of innocence' in May 2000 to the present, where there has been a fall from this state of innocence (McEwan, 2006: 142). Indeed, Saturday ends with a twist on the American trope of the fall, as Perowne is 'falling' into sleep.⁸ Perowne's triumph is not so much his victory over Baxter but his ability to sleep having righteously reasserted his innocence, whilst planning to use his social position to victimize Baxter even more: 'By saving his life in the operating theatre, Henry also committed Baxter to his torture. Revenge enough. And here is one area where Henry can

exercise authority and shape events. He knows how the system works – the difference between good and bad care is near-infinite’ (McEwan, 2006: 278).

Perowne may not be conscious of his classism, racism and sexism, but ominously he ‘is familiar with some of the current literature on violence. It’s not always a pathology; self-interested social organisms find it rational to be violent sometimes’ (McEwan, 2006: 88). Perowne (and of course McEwan as well) is replicating words nearly verbatim from Steven Pinker’s endorsement of Hobbes and ‘an armed authority’ in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2003), a popular evolutionary psychology book that has been criticized for being unscientific: ‘violence is not a primitive, irrational urge, nor is it a “pathology” [...]. Instead, it is a near-inevitable outcome of the dynamics of self-interested, rational social organisms’ (Pinker, 2002: 329). Perowne’s appropriated narrative is one of exceptionalism, justifying structural and direct violence by those in power whilst decrying direct violence in the disempowered. Galtung warns of how ‘ruling elites’ deal with efforts ‘to get out of the structural iron cage’ through direct violence: ‘counter-violence to keep the cage intact. [...] Indeed, a major form of cultural violence indulged in by ruling elites is to blame the victim of structural violence who throws the first stone, not in a glasshouse but to get out of the iron cage, stamping him as “aggressor”’ (Galtung, 1990: 295). There is no doubt that *Saturday* re-enacts this ‘counter-violence’ whilst at the same time allowing readers to see its workings.

Perowne operates on Baxter to save his life, an action that can be seen as merciful or a worse revenge as he is condemning Baxter to a slow painful death as his condition is incurable. Despite Perowne’s dismissal of Foucauldian ideas, this is a clear example of the subjection of individuals, including their bodies, to normative discipline. Perowne’s treatment of Baxter is not an act of kindness, but the final assertion of his and, ultimately, the establishment’s power over his patient. As John Parry points out, *Saturday* criticizes the

concept of liberal individual rights for not addressing issues of class, gender and race, and presents us with 'welfare rights [that] include rights to be treated, cared for, and, if necessary, dominated and controlled' (Parry, 2007: 208). By foregrounding Perowne's self-justification, McEwan unmasks the way structural violence works. 'Counter-violence' (in this case Baxter's invasion of the family home, kidnap and assault) is met first with direct violence and then with structural violence that disguises (badly, in Perowne's case) subjection and punishment of the individual as respect for 'welfare rights'. Pether has called this a 'Foucauldian nightmare's model' (2007: 157).

Ruth Miller has analysed the post-9/11 era as a movement from an emphasis on the individual's right to bodily integrity (habeas corpus) to the nation's right to integrity and freedom from attack. The nation-state is seen as an organic body that cannot be broken or altered and individuals' agency over their bodies can be curtailed in the name of national security or freedom. This has implications for the body of the criminal or the terrorist, a body that may be used as a weapon. It also provides a link between McEwan's and Sahota's texts. As the nation-state becomes less open to challenge, levels of violence are likely to rise against those perceived as a threat to it. Baxter and Imtiaz threaten the status quo in post-9/11 Britain for different reasons. With its references to the Iraq war and both external and internal terrorism, *Saturday* encourages an allegorical reading of Perowne's family as a particular incarnation of the establishment's British nation and Baxter becomes a proxy for the terrorist. Baxter's direct violence does not change his predicament; it makes it worse. In *Ours Are the Streets* we are not told of Imtiaz's fate, but his revelation to Becka of his terrorist intentions is likely to end in arrest and possible detention under the Terrorism and Mental Health Acts. Sahota's novel depicts American and British intervention in Pakistan and Afghanistan as direct violence over those countries' general population. Whereas *Saturday* satirizes accepted views on violence as described by Galtung, *Ours Are the Streets* makes western readers

confront the direct violence that their governments are using elsewhere. Both allow for a critique of exceptionalism's double standards in very different ways.

Unsurprisingly, death (particularly death whilst killing) has become the ultimate challenge to sovereign power and the nation since 9/11, and 'violations of one's own bodily borders' are becoming 'the greatest acts of treason' (Miller, 2007: 163). Perowne cannot let Baxter die as this death would undermine his self-image as the innocent party. Imtiaz considers death as a means to force the British 'family' to open its doors to those like him and his daughter. Despite Foucault's insight into death moving from a symbol of sovereigns' power over their subjects to a private moment 'when the individual escapes all power' (2004: 248), death by terrorism is not a retreat into individuality, but 'political communication', and at the heart of this political communication is a presumption of innocence and justified violence to redraw national and international borders. Imtiaz also uses the trope of the fall, in this case to signal his lack of support in Britain, as he leaves Pakistan: 'it felt like someone who'd been holding my hand were now letting me fall' (Sahota, 2011: 277).

Innocence, violence and the nation are at the heart of Sahota's *Ours Are The Streets*. William Skildesky describes Imtiaz thus: 'a second-generation immigrant who marries an English woman before embracing extremism on a visit to Kashmir. Sahota avoids many of the cliches [sic] of radicalisation – he presents Imtiaz as spurred less by religious conviction than a desperate desire to belong' (2011: 15). In a movement that reflects Žižek's views on 'fundamentalists', Skildesky notes how Sahota moves away from the commonplace view of the terrorist as zealot and towards the idea of the terrorist as fuelled by confusion and uncertainty (2011: 72). However, this reading of the novel places it within the literary tradition of the British Asian narrative established in the 1990s without realising that Sahota is doing something else. Generational and cultural conflict are part of *Ours Are the Streets*, but the first-person narrative and the actions of the protagonist are not part of a personal

search for identity; Imtiaz is looking to rewrite national borders that place him ethnically and religiously as the 'constitutive outside', and he has decided to do so through direct violence as well as through a counter-narrative in the form of memoir.

The choice of first person for a would-be suicide bomber is bold and the first words Imtiaz writes are 'Ours are the streets', claiming urban space and Britain as his/theirs. Imtiaz is a self-conscious writer: 'At last the page is stained. It feels like a relief, truth be told. Sitting here hovering over the paper with my pen and waiting for the perfect words weren't getting me nowhere fast' (Sahota, 2011: 1). Imtiaz has to start with a statement of appropriation to be able to write. Unlike Perowne, who can rely on free indirect style to relay his thoughts, Imtiaz has no such guarantee. Saturday's 'calm waters' of third-person realist narrative become the choppy waters of fragmented first-person narrative in *Ours Are the Streets*. Cultural conflict in Sahota's novel is mostly signalled through the experiences of Imtiaz's parents. Imtiaz is not simply ashamed of his parents, but also furious that they do not want to rebel against the racist and Islamophobic society in which they live. His father's death is attributed to this structural violence and Imtiaz, who by now has an English wife and daughter, and whose mother has remained in Pakistan, has to refigure his place in relation to British society and his Muslim Pakistani origins. Imtiaz's is not only a narrative about his 'desire to belong' but also a symbolic narrative component of the struggle over geography, in this case Britain and Britishness. The title of the novel reflects this and echoes Imtiaz's complaint that he addresses to his dead father: 'We were meant to become part of these streets. There were meant to be ours as much as anyone's' (Sahota, 2011: 70).

Imtiaz's story can be interpreted within the frame of structural violence. Significantly, he is already troubled about social injustice in multicultural Britain before he travels to Pakistan, switching between blaming the colonial subjects (his parents) for their situation and being aware of racial inequality, prejudice against British Asians and Islamophobia. He

dreams of 'growing up and writing plays or something [...]. Knew it'd never happen, like. For all the usual boring brown reasons' (Sahota, 2011: 27). Imtiaz is embarrassed by his father's failure to respond to a racist exchange with a drunken woman just after boasting about his outspokenness: 'Maybe if there were more brave enough to speak like me we would not be having our children driving planes into buildings' (Sahota, 2011: 45). Imtiaz's father links terrorism to repression in the face of structural violence. Subsequently Imtiaz tries to break the 'structural iron cage' and resist cultural violence by putting his side of the story on paper, but Imtiaz is ultimately unable to 'hold' it together creatively in a first-person narrative that disintegrates under the strain of trying to reconcile postcolonial conflict within multicultural Britain. His attempt to redefine Britishness springs from a sense of guilt as a British citizen, and feelings of non-belonging expressed during his trip to Pakistan: 'You don't get how hard it is for the kids. Growing up in England' (Sahota 2011: 137). He is repeatedly called 'valetiya' (108), meaning from abroad, and mistaken for a 'ferengi' (165), a sometimes derogatory word for a foreigner which is associated with Europeaness and whiteness. Imtiaz's musings on his identity are laughed at by his Pakistani relatives: 'Tauji made a scoffing noise. "It must be very difficult for you. So difficult that you are having the luxury to sit around and be thinking such high-high thoughts"' (138). When Imtiaz finally starts acting, he does so by helping out his family with agricultural tasks, but he soon decides that action ought to be in the form of direct violence as he is training at Abu Bhai's and talks about 'the role of Muslims in the West' and for the first time feels included: 'no one laughed. No one called me ridiculous. They just ran with my point, expanded on it, one rhythm in service to Him. I'd never felt like that before' (Sahota 2011: 215).

At the same time, the novel also resorts to madness as partial explanation, something that aligns *Ours Are the Streets* with Perowne's endorsement of medical explanations in *Saturday* and established ideas about 'normality' (as opposed to criminal or 'mad')

behaviour). The narrative encourages a reading of Imtiaz as having mental health problems: psychosis triggered by his father's death and represented in hallucinations (seeing people who are not there), delusions (imagining that he is part of a large terrorist organisation) and paranoia (believing that his wife and cousin have betrayed him). Doubt is one of the main drivers of Imtiaz's narrative. Part of Imtiaz's paranoia about his cousin Charag relates to Charag's supposed lack of commitment to his/their cause and his feelings of unbelonging to Britain. The security guard Tarun also seems to be a projection of Imtiaz's need to be pushed into action. This reading concurs with Perowne's assessment of why there are terrorists. Imtiaz – whose name means distinct, with power of discrimination – may have become psychotic. Or perhaps he is too discriminating, seeing through the 'iron cage' of structural violence in British society and threatening to respond with direct violence. Imtiaz's self-sabotage proves that he does not want to blow up Meadowhall but sees this as a way to express impotence at the disintegration of his family and the multicultural nation-family through a symbolic medium. In telling Becka of his intention to become a suicide bomber Imtiaz proves that he is not ready to let go of the idea of the multicultural nation and of their marriage. Of course the threat of direct violence is violent in itself.

Destroying one's body has become an act of treason or of defiance against the nation. *Ours Are the Streets* uses the stereotypes of maladjustment and alienation to explain the phenomenon of the western would-be suicide bomber, but in doing so places him firmly within the UK home, a home he is trying to redraw. This is a fractured text, a text that is torn between its allegiance to the British nation as currently framed, a nation that 'demands complicity with racialized state terror' (Edwards, 2012: 191), and the 'nostalgia' for a Pakistani British cultural past embodied in the absent or dead parents. *Ours Are the Streets* merges citizen and terrorist, decoupling the 'dialectic victim-citizen versus outsider-terrorist which has been foregrounded by the rhetoric and law of the "War on Terror"' (Quiney, 2007:

328). Lisa Hartnell talks about ‘the unnamed source of America’s post-9/11 fear: the Islamist enemy within’ (quoted in Duvall and Marzec, 2007: 396). There is such a fear in Britain, and both *Saturday* and *Ours Are the Streets* address and correct this narrative of abjection from different standpoints.

The events of 9/11 can be considered a turning point in our imagining of Britain as a nation. There is a struggle over Britishness which is reflected in McEwan’s satire of normativity and Sahota’s challenge to it. Both novels illustrate how post-9/11 British fiction deals with terrorism and traditional politics as war, placing war – that ‘was expelled to the limits of the nation State’ (Foucault, 2004: 49) – at the heart of society. This article has argued that British normative society borrows from the discourse of American exceptionalism, and that post-9/11 fiction harnesses this to expose and query the entitlement of those within the narrative home of Britishness and the outsider-status of those used to define its borders.

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¹ The UK government's pre-emptive drone strikes against UK citizens fighting with ISIS are a controversial development of this unacknowledged suspension of citizen rights on suspicion of violent offences. Another example is the withdrawal of British citizenship and rendering people stateless (*Pham v Secretary of State*, 2015).

² See Sánchez-Arce (2007) on authenticism and uses of authenticity to police identity, and Sánchez-Arce (2014) on how authenticism affects the reception of contemporary English literature.

³ Many thanks to Madeleine Callaghan for invaluable help in tracking this academic work.

⁴ Ruth Quiney explores representations of 'the often violent emptiness at the heart of Western masculinity' against the backdrop of 'the current 'War on Terror' and the new British and American law in which this deterritorialised battle is inscribed' (2007: 327).

⁵ A study of the causes of deadly aviation from 1960 to 2015 by PlaneCrashInfo.com shows that pilot error is by far the most common cause, followed by mechanical failure, and the weather. Sabotage (including hijacking, shot down, and explosive device onboard) comes a distant fourth, accounting for only 9% of fatal accidents overall.

⁶ Richard Reid is a British citizen who attempted an attack on an American Airlines flight in December 2001 by concealing explosives in the sole of his shoe.

⁷ See Perry's analysis of Perowne's subscription to Kantian theory and Orientalist discourse (2007: 211-1), and Butler (2011) and Root (2011) for discussions of Perowne's subscription to master narratives and scientific discourse, respectively.

⁸ See Gray for a discussion of the trope of the fall and innocence in American literature. Gray also associates 'The second coming' with 'the myth of the fall' (2011: 2).