

The rhythms of the city: The performance of time and space in Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag*

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Abstract

This article concentrates on Suhayl Saadi's novel *Psychoraag*, which is analysed in the light of urban space theory, paying special attention to Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*. It contextualizes the text within the emergence of postcolonial writing in post-devolution Scotland. It focuses on the articulation of the consumption, production, and performance of the rhythms of the city by its protagonist, whose corporeal and metaphysical exploration of space and time will be alleged to mirror the analytical standpoint termed by Lefebvre as "rhythmanalyst"; namely, to represent a subject who enquires into the social, emotional, and biological rhythms of everyday life, as developed in his work. It will be argued that the novel in fact has two protagonists. One is Glasgow and its social body, which is clearly polyrhythmic, if experiencing constant states of arrhythmia. The other one is Zaf, a young Pakistani-Glaswegian, who challenges the normativity of Glasgow's polyrhythms by intentionally creating individual, multi-layered states of disorder and interference. Lefebvre's classification of rhythms into "secret", "public", and "dominating–dominated" will be used to revise the portrayal of personal and social exchanges: intergenerational relations, interethnic affection, and the negotiation of new masculinities in the framework of a deregularized environment.

Keywords

Psychoraag, Rhythmanalysis, Scottish multiculturalism, Suhayl Saadi, urban writing

One year after the referendum on Scottish Devolution, Moira Burgess published *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (1998), the most comprehensive study to date of the literary representation of the city. Each of its four sections revises a period or a characteristic of

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this rich literary corpus, starting with part one, “Small City”, which centres on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as on the Kailyard movement. The second part, “Hard City”, considers the “proletarian concerns” (1998: 107) of the Scottish Renaissance, the realism of the Glasgow School and the recurrent imagery of violence associated with the city that in Burgess’ chapter culminates in Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* (1981). The third part, “Kaleidoscope City”, delves into the novels of the 1940s and 1950s and their shift towards middle-class interests, which start to dilute in the 1960s and have almost been obliterated by the 1970s, with the creation of Philip Hobsbaum’s Glasgow Group. Finally, the fourth part, “Deep City”, provides a context for the novels of the 1980s and 1990s and their criticism, on the one hand, of Thatcherite politics, and on the other of the commercialization of the local culture in the promotion of a “New Glasgow”. It also highlights the consolidation of the use of the demotic vernacular, Glaswegian, and the important role that women novelists have played in these two decades. As Burgess states in her introduction, her book draws “a map of fictional Glasgow to be laid over the real map, so that we can see where the two cities match and where they diverge” (1998: n.p.). Such a map evokes the immense cultural richness of Glasgow fiction, yet at the same time reveals how, at the turn of the twenty-first century, diasporic writing in the city was still too marginal to be included in the study.

In the same vein, more recent literary critics have analysed how Glasgow has had to reinvent itself architectonically and symbolically over the last two centuries (Malzahn, 2011; McCleery, 2004), assuming the title of Second City of the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through to its current incarnation as what Willy Maley defines as a “post-industrial heritage museum” (2000: 60) in reference to the recurrent nostalgic evocations of the city’s past prosperity and their exploitation by economic sectors. The diverse forms of representation associated with the city have been analysed in parallel to the socio-political and cultural debates of their times, which in late twentieth-century Scotland were often expressed as postcolonial articulations of the national. Yet, what Berthold Schoene defines as “the postcolonial tensions within Scotland” (1998: 58), namely, the reflection of diasporic experiences interacting and reconfiguring Scottish society, have only recently been translated into the urban fiction of Glasgow. This change, framed by post-devolution examinations of Scottishness, and more recently in the context of the September 2014 referendum on independence, has hailed the rise of multicultural writing of the nation (Macdonald, 2010; Schoene, 2007).

With the publication of Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag* (2004) came the first attempt at visualizing the different generations of Pakistani-Scots through literature, and their cultural routes to and within Glasgow. This novel, which draws on previous models of experimentation with language and voice — chiefly those of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh — also participates in a larger body of British Asian urban writing epitomized, among others, by Amit Chaudhuri’s *Afternoon Raag* (1993), an antecedent of using Indian musical structures, Atima Srivastava’s *Looking for Maya* (2000), Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003), and, of special interest given its subject matter and use of language, Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2006). Reviews of *Psychoraag* predominantly treated it as a crafty hybrid that had mastered previous models. For instance, *The Sunday Herald* rendered it as “not just *Midnight’s Children* meets *Trainspotting*” (Calder, 2004), much to the disapproval of Saadi, who has complained that “*Psychoraag* is not an exotic theme

park of ‘The Asian-Scots experience’; rather, it traverses the rivers of history and memory and the courses these rivers take through our lives” (2007: 30).

These “rivers” converge in the anarchic space of representation that is the novel’s symbolic Glasgow. As this article will try to demonstrate, the text is articulated on its protagonist’s consumption, production, and performance of urban rhythms, whose corporeal and metaphysical perception of space and time interferes with the overlapping rhythms of a city constantly negotiating its collective definitions. The clash of social and individual rhythms, which reveals the various states of crisis of its protagonist in the process of the construction and annihilation of his multirhythmic self, are read as embodying the novel’s strategy of creating “third spaces”, what Edward Soja defines as the coming together of

subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (1996: 56–7)

In Saadi’s fictional Glasgow, visible and invisible spaces are enfolded in his protagonist’s emotions. This embodiment of space facilitates the emergence of the uncanny in this post-imperial metropolis, where personalized maps, “whose keys are only to be found in the subject’s unconscious” (Cohen, 2000: 26) become the only available instrument to participate — albeit incompletely — in the present day polyrhythm of this historic city. In fact, its engagement with the multiple times and rhythms of Glasgow situates Saadi’s novel at the interstices of culture, in the “in-between space” that, according to Homi Bhabha, “innovates and interrupts the performance of the present [where] the ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (1994: 6).

Indeed, *Psychoraag* incorporates new rhythms into the tradition of Glasgow fiction and demonstrates that high-quality multicultural urban writing in the UK is not the exclusive realm of English writers (see Macdonald, 2010: 84–6). Early twentieth-century Glasgow novels often narrate the stark life of the working classes in the city’s slums, as well as the tensions derived from the presence of minority groups, like the Irish Catholic community, both in the urban space itself and in the labour market. Such works have contributed greatly to the fixing of a stereotypical image of Glasgow, and even nowadays images of the city suggesting deprivation, inequality, and gang violence predominate, especially when focusing on areas south of the River Clyde, a “locus of struggle” (Crawford, 2013: 216), which has hosted several immigrant communities since the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the urban, social, cultural, and political reconfiguration of Glasgow over the centuries cannot but be interpreted in terms of the city’s economic participation in the imperial enterprise: its expanding economy attracted not only the dispossessed of the Highland Clearances, and the Irish during the Great Famine, but also other peoples who, in more recent times, have set up new communities — be they Chinese, Jewish, Italian, Polish, or Russian. The many faces of Glasgow are often represented by the polarized separation between the Gorbals and the surrounding neighbourhoods, with their multicultural dwellers, and the prosperous side of the city’s history, the “Merchant City”, whose toponyms — Jamaica Street, Virginia Street, Buchanan Street,

Cochrane Street — bear the names of the “Tobacco lords” and the territories they exploited (Crawford, 2013: 217). Very much celebrated in the late twentieth century by both political and tourist campaigns, this partial representation of the city has been contested by different groups of intellectuals, the protests of the Workers’ City group being particularly audible.¹

Since the final decades of the twentieth century, the literary representation of the city has been identified with the so-called “Glasgow Group”, and perhaps more specifically with Alasdair Gray’s masterpiece *Lanark* (1981), a blend of postmodern apocalyptic imaginary about Scottish urban culture, and Glasgow’s realist tradition. Also, and perhaps more importantly with regard to Saadi’s writing, it is associated with James Kelman’s distinctive use of linguistic registers and identity politics.² In fact, many works produced at the time have contributed greatly to discussion of the postcolonial status of Scottish culture in terms of its historical relations with England. Such analyses proliferated in the 1990s, in academic journals such as *Scotlands*, *Scottish Literary Journal*, or the special issue published by *SPAN* on “Celtic Nationalism and Postcoloniality” (1995), edited by Stuart Murray and Alan Riach. The adoption of postcolonial perspectives is the result of the internal cultural and political climate in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Scotland — post the 1979 referendum, post Thatcherism, following the 1997 referendum and devolution, and the September 2014 failed referendum on independence — but at the same time demonstrates an assessment of the national, bearing in mind an internationalist framework. Postcolonial terminology is used to reconsider aspects of Scottish culture ranging from political vindications of independence to the establishment of a national literary tradition, although the appropriation of postcolonial analytical tools still remains a controversial subject (Connell, 2003).³ In fact, there are frequent references to Scotland’s self-colonization even in early texts, like Nairn’s influential *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977), and what might be seen as postcolonial approaches to Scottish culture abound in key publications such as Beveridge and Turnbull’s *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (1989); Craig’s *Out of History* (1996) and *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999); Crawford’s *Devolving English Literature* (1992/2000); and Cowan and Gifford’s *The Polar Twins* (1999). Yet the landmarks in the adoption of postcolonial perspectives in Scottish literary criticism, as identified by Cairns Craig, are: first, given its focus on hybridity, the 1993 conference on “Bakhtin and Scottish Literature”, which he states “provided a means of accepting rather than regretting the nation’s mixed linguistic and cultural history, while at the same time shap[ed] a strategy that aligned Scottish writing with those ‘postcolonial’ cultures which were producing some of the most theoretically inspiring contemporary writing” (2004: 235); and, second, James Kelman’s acceptance speech for the Booker Prize in 1994, which “situated his own writing as part of the movement ‘towards decolonisation and self-determination’ based on ‘the validity of indigenous culture’ and ‘the right to defend it in the face of attack’” (2004: 236). From the first decades of the twenty-first century, other texts openly demonstrate their incorporation of a postcolonial focus, like Gardiner et al.’s *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* (2011), Stefanie Lehner’s *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature* (2011), or Carla Sassi and Theo van Heijnsbergen’s *Within and Without Empire: Scotland Across the (Post)Colonial Borderline* (2013).

The predominant form of analysis in these works considers postcolonial frictions in the relation between Scotland and England, although they have also been crucial to the discussion of cultural diversity within Scotland. At the same time, works of authors from minority groups started to appear in the publishing market. For instance, the Asian communities — about 38,000 people of Pakistani origin alone at the turn of the twenty-first century (Maan, 2008) — have progressively become more visible on the literary scene, often in collective volumes like MacNeil and Finlay's *Wish I Was Here* (2000) and Gifford and Riach's *Scottlands: Poets and the Nation* (2004). The role of Saadi has been important in this respect: in 1999, he set up the Pollokshields Writers' Group, aimed primarily — although not exclusively — at ethnic minority writers, and he has been an active promoter of multicultural activities in Glasgow. His literary production as a whole can be labelled an "intentional hybrid", following the term used by Pnina Werbner to refer to those artistic interventions that are "internally dialogical, fusing the unfusable", in her analysis of cultural hybridity and multicultural identities (1997: 5). His conception of writing has both a spatial and a temporal dimension, as the author himself acknowledges, "posing questions of self-definition" (Saadi, 2006: 118) by means of a three-dynamics process that involves "looking out, moving in, digging deep" (Saadi, 2000). In other words, he incorporates transcultural elements in his writing while rooting it in the Scottish tradition, which allows him to indigenize what were perceived as marginal experiences. Besides, Saadi's writing has a strong musical component and what he describes as a "mandala form", "connecting microcosm with macrocosm" (Saadi, 2006: 132):

Such a relationship is intrinsic, multi-layered, and undeniable. It emerges from the perpetual discourses of our mind. It is how we communicate with one another, with the past and with the multiple others that comprise ourselves. To wander through the streets of literature, facing both ways, towards the past and the future, to move [...] both dialectically, frenetically, analytically, and also undialectically like the proverbial village idiot, to allow random images, concepts and musics to filter into one's consciousness — is to effect a kind of linguistic transference which can result in powerful, multi-dimensional creative writing. (2006: 133)

Such multidimensionality recurs in his writing, perhaps most clearly in his latest novel *Joseph's Box* (2009), but it is also prevalent in previous collections of short stories like *The Burning Mirror* (2001), and even in his novella *The Spanish House* (2008), where his equating of writing with *cante jondo* — highly physical and emotional — is also evident. His characters have access to hidden "ancestral memories [...] beyond the rational, beyond even thought" (Saadi, 2000), by means of entheogenic substances, but above all, through their connection with what he considers the malleable flow of space and time, a position which allows him to interrogate the authority of national geopolitics: "if the history and geography of reality are far more complex than even contemporary mathematicians or astrophysicists can conceive of, then who is to say what is, and what is not, possible? Indeed, who is to say what is, and what is not?" (Saadi, 2006: 129). In *Psychoraag*, such interrogation is channelled through the protagonist acting as what Henri Lefebvre terms a "rhythmanalyst"; namely, a subject whose urban routes and daily performances of time and space allow him to enquire into the social, emotional, and biological rhythms of everyday life:

More sensitive to times than to spaces, to moods than to images, to the atmosphere than to particular events [...]. He is always “listening out”, but he does not only hear words, discourses, noises and sounds; he is capable of listening to a house, a street, a town as one listens to a symphony, an opera. [...] Attentive to time (to tempo) and consequently to repetitions and likewise to differences in time, he separates out through a mental act that which gives itself as lined to a whole; namely rhythms and their associations. He does not only observe human activities, he also hears [*entend*] (in the double sense of the word; noticing and understanding) the temporalities in which these activities unfold. (Lefebvre, 1992/2013: 94–5)

In the novel, Glasgow, like any other city, is subject to the interaction of several rhythms, as described in Lefebvre’s study: first of all to cycles, which are associated with the cosmic, the natural; and also to linear rhythms, which stand for social practice. They constitute a reciprocal measurement, a “measuring-measure” in themselves, representing, according to the author, “law, calculated and expected obligation, a project” (1992/2013: 18). Yet in *Psychoraag*, the rhythms of the city show particular characteristics: “That wis the thing about this city — the time wis always out of joint” (Saadi, 2005: 8).⁴ As Filipa Wunderlich argues in her examination of the interconnectedness of place and time, “a sense of time [is] not only somewhat intersubjective but also place-specific. Accordingly, time in urban places is produced and perceived jointly. As people perform their tasks in everyday life, they perform time collectively” (2010: 45). Such collective performance in Saadi’s Glasgow is portrayed as arrhythmic, fragmentary, and there is an overall emphasis on the different stages required for its architectural construction and the historical redefinition of its spaces. In its search for eurhythmia, this urban body is patently trying to synchronize its rhythms and contradictions in the specific political, social, and cultural environment that is post-devolution Scotland. Glasgow figures as part of a larger project, that is, a nation in the process of becoming, where transcultural connections cannot be obliterated, and where the many rhythms produced in its spaces — physical and social — are struggling simultaneously, not only with one another to achieve a normative pattern, but also struggling within themselves. In the novel, such portrayal of the urban inevitably has a human dimension: a main character whose corporeity acts as the instrument with which to channel a myriad of rhythms. In fact, it could be argued that Saadi chooses a double protagonist for his book. One is clearly polyrhythmic, ongoing, albeit experiencing continuous states of arrhythmia: Glasgow and its social body. Then, the other, who challenges the normativity of Glasgow’s polyrhythms by intentionally creating individual multi-layered states of disorder, is Zaf, a young Pakistani-Scot whose ethnic, social, and educational background exemplifies Lefebvre’s definition of the “pathology” in which “rhythms break apart, alter and bypass synchronisation” (1992/2013: 77).

Glasgow is portrayed as a historical site of intercultural encounter and intense negotiation of social hierarchies through Zaf’s embodiment and performance of its space and rhythms. His individual rhythmicity is framed by the overwhelming presence of infinite parallel and interfering patterns that can again be classified according to Lefebvre’s labelling: secret (physiological and psychological), public (social), fictional (verbal, imaginary, “but also elegance, gestures and learning processes”), and dominating–dominated rhythms (1992/2013: 27). *Psychoraag* is mostly narrated by the various first-person voices its protagonist adopts, a DJ speaking on the last night that Radio Chaadni, a

little community station, will broadcast.⁵ He projects his personal and fictional rhythms into the public arena during the six hours where he takes his listeners from night to morning and which shape the overall structuring of the book into six chapters, allowing him to create states of interference between dominating and dominated urban rhythms. In order to do this, he weaves a complex net of collective and individual cultural associations through his use of languages — Urdu, English, Glaswegian-Scots, among others — as well as through his playlists, which transcend cultural hierarchies in an improvised chaotic selection of Irish folk, British and American pop-rock, electronic music, traditional Pakistani songs, and flamenco, which Saadi includes in a final appendix. He becomes the medium through which his many languages break into the city's rhythms, and as the novel unfolds, each and every one of the songs turns out to be part of his narrative of identity, consciously manipulated by him as author-God: "he would interject before the end of a track or just as another wis beginnin. It was the mark of a DJ to do that — to overarch the artists, to butt in, to play God" (3). Yet, his authority is conditioned by the capacity of his audience to decipher and reinterpret his meaning, as Roland Barthes would argue (1968/1992).

In this sense, as the narrator reflects, the novel does not only deal with the transmitter of a message, but also raises the decisive question of "who wis listenin" (19), that is, the existence or not of a recipient for Zaf's existential cry.⁶ His subversive performance of space and time is fundamentally based on the rhizomatic flow of musical meanings he projects on the imagined city, where his message is to be received and completed by an indefinite audience. It is crucial here to bear in mind that in cities, as cultural geographer Tim Edensor argues, "the efficacy of the performance is equally reliant upon the cultural context within which it is enacted and the ability of the audience to share the intended meaning" (2000: 123), which in Zaf's case becomes increasingly problematic when he complicates his message by playing two tracks at the same time, or the same one several times, among other subversive actions. Zaf, in arranging songs into a frenzied text of identity, constructs a personal cultural route with no clear direction. This is in juxtaposition with his parents' route of displacement from the Pakistani city of Lahore to Glasgow in the 1950s. It also counterpoints their subsequent relocation in the social scale, symbolically represented by his father's job in the city's underground, as part of the Sewage Works team, as well as his mother's domestic reclusion and isolation.

Still, Zaf's articulation of his hybrid self is far from reassuring and depends on meanings contained in songs commercialized by the music industry, which confirms, as Alan Bissett argues in his analysis of twenty-first-century Glasgow fiction, "the ways in which 'identity' becomes consumable, the extent to which even race and nationality are commodified into mere fashionable 'items'" (2007: 64). Music, as Katherine Ashley contends in her study of language and identity in Saadi's novel, "builds the community and gives it a physical, material presence" (2011: 135), but Zaf's musical construction acts mostly on an individual level, given his highly personal associations with the city spaces he inhabits. Music becomes a parallel means of communication for this subject living between cultures, but the code he creates is anarchic, and its meanings sometimes remain inaccessible, even to himself. He saturates his songs with transcultural connotations that are always rooted in the local and the personal, while at the same time his intertextual representation is always mediated by the associations in the minds of his listeners or the

readers of the novel. Stuart Hall claims that “[j]ust as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language for only in this way can meaning be effectively exchanged between people” (1997: 19). He also maintains that “there’s absolutely no final fixing of meaning. Social and linguistic conventions change over time” (1997: 24). Zaf’s proposal obviates this temporality. It represents an abrupt attempt at fixing a “mental map” on the city of Glasgow, of imprinting a rhythm that is inevitably doomed to be provisional.

The word *raag* haunts the novel from its very title and is performed by Zaf throughout. Saadi defines it in his glossary as:

a pattern of notes in Indian music used as the basis for melodies and improvisation [...]. Raags convey various emotions [...] and are classified according to times of the day, month or season. Personalised descriptions of a raag enable a musician to meditate on its characteristics and to unite his or her personality within a particular mood and, thereby, instil the same mood in the audience. (428)

Once again cyclical and linear rhythms, as well as the rhythms of the body and its emotions, interact with forms of ancestral knowledge that are accessed through a dissociation of consciousness by external means — both the use of entheogens, that is, hallucinogen substances believed to facilitate spiritual experiences, and the influence of music — and form the scaffolding of the novel. Zaf’s improvised discourse — his rambling speech and the anarchic arrangement of songs — are the basis for the rhythmical metaphor. Ashley remarks that “like a raag, which is never performed the same way twice, identity [...] is conceived as a flexible process rather than as a predetermined state of being” (2011: 141); this highlights the importance of understanding Zaf’s masks of identity, which depend on his songs, but also on his use of language. As a polyglot who finds himself in the crossing coordinates of cultures, class, gender, and education, he camouflages himself behind several voices depending on his target listeners. For instance, at the beginning of each chapter, when he addresses his audience over the microphone, he uses a demotic Asian Scots, complemented by Urdu expressions, which are defined by Saadi in an unorthodox appendix. As an alienated subject in Pollockshields, as well as within his family and, especially, in white Glasgow, he uses his language politically. However, as the narrative advances towards his interior monologue, one of his “masks” falls off and his language loses most of his Asian distinctiveness, while retaining its Glaswegian character.

Glasgow is the polyrhythmic space for Zaf’s journey and his night performance, where, by means of “[w]anderin soangs”, he creates “a narrative ae the night” (401), a time when the observers, the explorers of the urban who are the *flâneurs*, as Edensor argues, “may walk whilst the city sleeps, amongst the denizens of the night, where different perspectives and sensations present themselves in a landscape of limited visibility, where an alternative order might exist unseen in alleyways and other unlit spaces” (2000: 131). Zaf’s *flânerie* is metaphorical and rhythmical, connected to the power of invisible radio waves which transcend the city’s architectural — and therefore social, ethnic, and gendered — barriers; it can carry the transcultural voices of Radio Chaadni and their sometimes hyper-positive portrayal of hybridity to unexpected corners of Glasgow from

the heterotopian space (Foucault, 1967/1984) — the simultaneously abstract and physical space of subversion — represented by the radio station, which is unspecifically located “toward the west end of the city” (14).

Zaf’s cubicle in the radio station is located at the top of the Asian community centre — a deconsecrated church — where other acquaintances meet as part of their experience of the city, performing what David Seamon conceptualizes as “place ballets” (1979), that is, the repetitive collective choreographies of work and leisure activities that map a group’s movement — and rhythms — in urban space. These synchronized movements are controlled by the community and “peer pressure to follow a co-ordinated choreography may oblige participants to conform to group norms” (Edensor, 2000: 123). Lefebvre argues that “everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*” (1992/2013: 25; emphasis in original). Rhythms are based on repetitions, but as Lefebvre remarks, “[n]ot only does repetition not exclude differences, it also gives birth to them; it produces them” (1992/2013: 17); namely, everyday life interferes to introduce variations to the dominating pattern; what Edensor describes as the “enfolding of multiple rhythms”, which create “a tension between the dynamic and vital, and the regular and reiterative” (2010: 10). In this collective scenario of ongoing performances and unstable meanings, Zaf has reached a point of crisis that will be projected on his participation in the rhythms of the city, where he will experience illustrative states of arrhythmia, and sometimes even paralysis over the course of the night. Such crises will pave the ground for his final epiphany after becoming aware of the rhythms of the city:

The city seemed to be shifting constantly — not just in that sense of the frenetic automobile turbulence which confers to a place the illusion of excitement but in the slipping of time through brickwork and concrete, the film of dark days across stone-broken windows, the erosion of layers of paint and somethin more than that — a feeling which Zaf couldn’t pin down, a frontier sense of exhilaration, of riding the west wind on the back of this city of light and dark where everything was an illusion. (372)

In this shifting scenario, a sense of belonging is doomed to be illusory, especially for Zaf, who cannot articulate his connection with the material, emotional, or pedagogic side of Glasgow’s collective life. The rhythms of the city are experienced differently depending on several parameters, among which class and gender differences are pivotal, not only in the framework of the novel and its portrayal of Zaf’s incapability of negotiating them, but also in relation to the wider form of representation of gender identities that predominates in late twentieth-century Glasgow. Saadi has declared that he “did not wish to parrot the machismo urban style” which, according to him, “was already becoming hackneyed, gratuitous and denuded of power” when he wrote the novel, and that instead he wanted to explore “mystical transcontinental vistas” (Saadi, 2007: 30). Nevertheless, it could be argued that *Psychoraag* “digs in” — using Saadi’s own terminology — this urban tradition in several ways, one of them being its portrayal of Pakistani violence in the streets of Glasgow — the Kinning Park Boys and the Shields gangs — which is associated with specific areas: on the one hand, “Wee Faisalabad” (102), historically controlled by the Orange gangs and now in the hands of young men united by family bonds and religion; and on the other, Pollockshields, a lower-middle-class area where the gang

members have shifting alliances that transcend ethnicity and religion. The violent actions carried out by these groups can also be interpreted in rhythmic terms. As Lefebvre contends,

for there to be a change, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner. In the course of a crisis, in a critical situation, a group must designate itself as an innovator or producer of meaning. (1992/2013: 24)

In *Psychoraag* these rhythms are clearly violent, they seek dominance by intimidating not only other ethnic or religious groups, but also — and more so — those members of the community that refuse to follow their beat. The gangs portrayed by Saadi have their own particular hybrid rhythms: “Kind of Al Pacino in a *shalvar kamise*” (104). Their involvement in criminal activities of various kinds is in opposition to the previous generation of hard-working migrants, the main difference between them being the lack of a meaning in their existence in an urban space of uncertainty:

These were the sons and grandsons ae the *kisaan* who had powered the buses, the underground trains, the machines of the sweatshop underwear-manufacturers. [...] With bare soles had they trodden out new, hard paths along the Clyde and they had clothed the lily-white bodies of whole generations of Scots and then, later, they had filled their stomachs too. You eat what you are. If that was the case, then Glasgae wis Faisalabad a hundred times over. But their sons and daughters had gone in the opposite direction and had become Scots. Right down to their gangs and their dancin and their chip-bhatti *sahib* footba tops, they had sipped of the waters of the Clyde and had become cold killers. (242–3)

The parodic use of “kissan” and “sahib” engages the reader in the process of self-definition problematized throughout the novel. Their italicization, which was decided upon by the publishing company against Saadi’s will (2007: 330), makes them stand out in the text, unlike the Scots words, indicating their non-normative status. Yet, at the same time, such visibility is a signpost of the ambivalent space occupied by these young men, who have to decide whether to negotiate their contradictions and perform them positively, or to accept the collective definition the gangs can provide them with. Such depiction follows the parameters of discrimination described by Peter E. Hopkins in his study of gender and generational relations for young Muslim men from post-devolution Scottish cities: “violently patriarchal, unemployed and involved in crime [...], and in conflict with their parents’ generation. [...] Associated with deviance and violence, young Muslim men suffer due to the triple pathology of race, gender and generation” (2006: 338). In this context, developing a contemporary urban identity becomes particularly problematic for Zaf, as too does escaping from such a rhythm of violence, and from the anomalous rhythm of the previous generations: “As immigrants, they existed well outside of any indigenous tribal social dynamic. They danced outwith the music of the folk. Or, rather, they did not dance at all” (237).

Hopkins contends that “[t]he complexity of local frameworks may [...] work to exclude and segregate the young men and lead them to use alternative spaces and times in order to negotiate greater freedom and personal choice” (2006: 349). Zaf’s alternative

is offered by the radio station, by his cubicle, where he feels “safe from gangs and girlfriends, past and future, safe from sticks and stones and from those he loved” (8). Indeed, love — much more than hatred — is at the core of his crisis, the source of his insecurity that condemns him to a particular “purgatory” (134), and sometimes hell. His fragmentation becomes evident at the ending of the novel, in particular in the section where he talks to an apparition of his repressed self, an imaginary gangster that evidences his internalization of the rhythms of street violence, which has obvious gender implications. Kirstin Innes establishes a connection between Zaf’s unresolved hybridity and his unconscious self’s use of strong language in certain passages of emotional intensity. For instance, he insults the two women in his life as: “[t]he *goree* and the *Paki*” (393). According to Innes, this demonstrates that:

Zaf’s subconscious condemns his desire and tentative sense of bicultural belonging by mobilising the racist potentialities of two different languages. Clearly also, each language has the power to reduce women to the status of mere sexual commodity and male identity-descriptor, just as vehicular to the maintenance of Zaf’s individuality as his microphone and music. (2007: 308)

Zaf’s purgatory is associated geopolitically with the southern parts of Glasgow where he has grown up — Pollockshields, Queens Park, Govanhill — and which he admits are inscribed on his body: “there were lines which you wouldn’t find on any map. Boundaries drawn in blood. Well, in *bhlang* and spittle anyway. The lines were burned into his back [...] it wis like a tattoo” (114). This tattoo will never abandon him in his urban performances — it will move with him — and will be essential to understanding his relationships, which also have a symbolic spatial and rhythmical quality. Furthermore, the specific association of his lovers with parts of Glasgow parallels the differentiation made by geographer David Sibley (1988) between purified and heterogeneous spaces, namely, between spaces inhabited by “normative” citizens and strongly controlled by social regulations, and their antithesis of chaos and lack of structure. From the point of view of the novel, what is most interesting in this analysis of the segregation of urban space is the blurred border between such areas of the city and their imagination “as realms of desire, permitting of interconnection, hybridity and possibility by virtue of their ‘weak framing’” (Edensor, 2000: 124). In *Psychoraag*, such an oppositional representation becomes complex in the articulation of the abject, since Zaf projects his self on the lived and performed spaces of the city, on its rhythms. They become “representational spaces”, where the symbolic, the imaginary, interacts with the physicality of the space (Lefebvre, 1991), invested with fluid meanings of belonging, desire, and denial by the protagonist.

Thus, Zaf’s development as a complex transcultural character partially relies on his negation of love, on his inability to maintain stable relationships with the two women that in the novel act as symbols of separated cultural groups: the integrated, middle-class Irish-Scottish Catholics in the case of his most recent affair with very light-skinned middle-class nurse Babs, and the Pakistani community in the case of Zilla, his drug-addicted ex-girlfriend, and her blackness. Sara Ahmed’s analysis of the discursive manipulation of collective emotions serves to illustrate the constant negotiation of the character’s self in his interaction with others, as well as the fluctuating closeness or distance he keeps with

them, since, as Ahmed argues: “emotions are not simply ‘within’ or ‘without’ but [...] create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (2004: 117). Both Babs and Zilla represent sentimental failure in *Psychoraag* and, in a wider sense, so too does Zaf’s love, hatred, and fear towards the various discourses that define him externally and with which he tries to define himself internally. In both cases the relationships are depicted as hierarchical and using war images often associated with whiteness and blackness. Thus, for example, Zaf confesses of Babs: “she needed his brown-ness just as he needed her white. They were both conquering territories” (27). He even admits his feelings depend on the signification of her body as an object of desire: “He wondered just how much of his love for Babs wis merely love for her as an icon” (198). Babs has access to parts of the city denied to her lover. She drives her motorbike, another symbol of her freedom of movement and the control she has over the relationship, being as she is in charge of taking Zaf to different places when they are together. Instead of experiencing a sense of union with him, Zaf comes to stand for the object of fear — in Ahmed’s terms — a menace to her whiteness, and it is only when they leave the city and the overwhelming influence of its rhythms behind that the tension between them relaxes: “out ae the city, it wis jus him an her an he liked it that way” (316). Yet, as soon as they return to Glasgow, “the illusion of unity would evaporate mair quickly than dew aff ae granite” (318).

In contrast, Zilla’s disturbing presence evokes Zaf’s own fear of, but also his unrestrained love — and desire — for his Pakistani roots now that he has moved to a flat in “North Kelvinside or South Mary Hill, dependin on which social class you wanted to impress” (338), where, as Kirstin Innes points out, “he launches an attempt at self-reinvention” (2007: 308). Zilla is a sort of dark alter ego (47), even more alienated than Zaf, existing “in fragments. Broken mirrors. Shattered glass. Sivin years ae bad fortune” (317). She dwells in Glasgow’s East End slums, the area of “Celtic supporters” (176), and therefore separated from the Asian neighbourhoods and their rhythms that are familiar to Zaf:

It wis as though he wis in another country. As though, somewhere along the bus route, they had been taken backward in time and now were half-runnin, not through the Glasgow, City of Architecture, City of Culture, City of Kak, but along the roads of somethin from Dickens’s time but without the corny consciousness. (177)

Zilla acquires progressive importance as the story unfolds and Zaf loses control over himself under the effect of drugs, giving way to the emergence of his unconscious feelings. She reappears in his life in a surrealist passage after he has drunk absinthe, to attack, threaten, and remind him, in his little cubicle: “Ah’m yer shadae. Ah’m yer soul” (184). Zilla becomes an uncanny presence, but at the same time is essential in the bringing about of Zaf’s final crisis, after which his psyche splits and, in a vision, he roams the streets of Glasgow deconstructing the various historical significations of the space and its rhythms, claiming his right to appropriate them in a final passage of reconciliation with the rhythms of his self.

Lefebvre claims that:

[i]n order to analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely; be it through illness or a technique. [...] [T]o grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration. (1992/2013: 37)

Zaf's relation to the rhythms of Glasgow is extremely problematic until the final part of the novel, when his crisis allows him to be grasped by the rhythms of the city, hitherto denied to him:

Zaf had wandered through this city his whole life. He had given his spirit to the buildings, the parks, the broken neon signs and the people. The soul of Glasgow had penetrated the core of his being. [...] And so, now, when he needed some of that spirit back, just for a while, just for tonight the city wis not forthcoming. (199)

In his individual perception of urban rhythms, Zaf's body becomes "an instrument, his life a certain music" (366), and thus an imperfect metronome in its incapacity to establish an authoritative time,⁷ but equally important, a map that is compared, at the ending of the novel, with the creased and worn paper where his improvised play list

wis almost black with the various stains of the night. Wine, blood, spunk, vomit ... skin, one, flesh, brain ... Zaf had emptied his body on to the clean white surface of the paper. But that was the way a map should be. Used and crumpled, like a person. (374)

The connection between the body and the city as "mutually defining" has been highlighted by authors such as Elizabeth Grosz, who also argues that "their interrelations involve a fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments" (1995: 108). *Psychoraag* stretches these tensions to the limit by interrogating the selective fixing of past flows of interaction among Glasgow's citizens and its inscription on the city's architecture and rhythms: "This city is a great auld city. Iviry brick, iviry slice ae stane wis carved in the shape of equality. Iviry block wis cut wi a soang. He paused. D'ye believe me? You shouldnae believe iviryhin ye hear oan the radio" (348–9). This becomes particularly clear in the final episode, where Zaf's consciousness splits into two selves: one of them remains "on air", speaking from Radio Chaadni's microphone, while the other haunts the streets of Glasgow revealing what Michel de Certeau defines as "the invisible identities of the visible" (1984) that must be deciphered and negotiated by its citizens. Zaf becomes a ghostly urban nomad — a more suitable term than *flâneur* because of its subversive connotations (Cresswell, 1997) — creating a multiplicity of "spaces of enunciation" (de Certeau, 1984) for his fluid self. This projection of the self on a relatively incorporeal subject walking on the streets of Glasgow allows Saadi to provide his character with the necessary "tactics" (de Certeau, 1984) to subvert spatial normativity, granting him access to otherwise inaccessible areas in this symbolic Glasgow.

His allegorical route through the city marks a personal rhythm that Zaf describes as a "carnatic ballet",

not linear A to B to C — but wis more akin to the pattern traced out by the body — the arms the twirlin fingers, the broadened, stampin feet of a Classical South Indian dancer [...] it wis a voyage on more than three dimensions, the points of its trajectory defined yet invisible and transient. (364)

It starts with a failed attempt at going back to his flat in the West End, which leads him, first of all, through the Botanic Gardens to the Victorian glass palaces and their colonial content, “giant specimens which had been uprooted from far-off countries and which, like caged aliens, contorted and seeped their way across the insides of the windows” (342). He walks down the park, to the river Kelvin River and the red sandstone bridge above it, whose pillars are covered in graffiti. These are defined as “personal messages” (344) fusing the commemorative plaque for the opening of the bridge in 1900 with the names of people whose “memories had been forgotten” (345). Under the bridge he discovers a mysterious half-hidden passageway leading to a dark chamber he recognizes as part of the obsolete train tunnels under the Botanic Gardens that were part of “a network that had spanned the undersurface of Glasgow” (350). In this claustrophobic space, Zaf has his vision of reconciliation with the history of Glasgow’s inequalities and with his family’s history of translocation; with the city’s infinite rhythms. This experience allows him to go back to Pollockshields, “the place of his beginning. The end of himself” (365), over the River Clyde to revive his childhood memories and face “the stranger” within — in Kristevan terms (1991) — in his encounter with the past and present of his acquaintances and the spaces of the neighbourhood: “The Shiels wis a ghetto of sorts, a mental ghetto, and, yet, there was succour and a certain type of strength in that. In returning to the burning arc of its arms. To his *maa*. In the seed lieth redemption” (383). After this act of reconciliation, Zaf will be ready to visit his father in the old people’s home located in Maryhill where he is confined, lost in his dementia.

This projection of the self in motion on the city is only possible because Zaf “appropriates” time while he is abstracted in his vision. This allows him to detach himself from Glasgow and its rhythms, which pause momentarily for his examination. Lefebvre describes “appropriated time” as

a time that forgets time, during which time no longer counts (and is no longer counted). [...] It arrives when an activity brings plenitude [...] [and] is in harmony with itself and with the world. It has several traits of self-recreation or of a gift rather than of an obligation or an imposition come from without. It *is* in time; it *is* a time, But does not reflect on it. (1992/2013: 85; emphasis in original)

Zaf’s unstable harmony is in fact anticlimactic, after the excess of his night performance. It implies an eventual reintegration in the rhythms of his life and those of the people he loves most. When his split self reaches his father’s room, Zaf realizes that, among the few personal belongings he keeps, there is the old radio that his mother had brought with her all the way from Lahore and kept ever since. In Zaf’s dream, his father opens his eyes and seems to recognize him, even if he calls him by his other son’s name, Qaisar, the name of Zaf’s half-brother whom Jamil left in Pakistan when he ran away with Zaf’s mother to Scotland: “Qaisar, *mera beyta*?” (419). This act of imperfect reunion marks the end of the fracture and Zaf, having achieved a temporarily unified consciousness, finds himself at Radio Chaadni again, where he wants to imagine that his father will receive the waves of the station, the plea for forgiveness and simultaneous reaffirmation of the self that Zaf is now ready to transmit; that is, his willingness to synchronize with all that his father represents: “Zaf turned the volume up to full, pushed the fade switch back as

far as it would go and then some. Leaned forwards into the microphone. Whispered. Sang. ‘*Haa ji, Papa. Qaisar hai*’” (419).

Zaf’s journeys through Saadi’s novel show the association between the consumption of collective rhythms and the re-staging of their signification by an individual who embodies the contradictions faced by a new generation of Pakistani-Glaswegians. In order to do so, he is confronted with characters whose bodies are inscribed with the fluctuating meanings of love, hatred, anxiety, and fear on which the interpretation of the other relies. The urban dimension of the novel allows Saadi to provide these bodies with a set of amplified significations that saturate them, creating moments of crisis and arrhythmia to unveil the interstitial spaces of signification that facilitate the ultimate act of — provisional — reconciliation of Zaf with the rhythms of Glasgow, with the contradictions and historical disavowal of this post-imperial city.

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Notes

1. James Kelman, a member since 1990, defined their aims accordingly: “The name ‘Workers’ City’ [...] was chosen to directly challenge ‘Merchant City’, highlighting the grossness of the fallacy that Glasgow somehow exists because of the tireless efforts of a tiny patriotic coalition of fearless 18th century entrepreneurs and far-sighted politicians. [...] The personal wealth of those earlier individuals may have been founded upon slavery but the city of Glasgow wasn’t” (1992: 1–2).
2. Saadi has stated his affinity with Kelman’s political attitude towards language and celebrated “the positioning of [his] work within the post-Kelman context of contemporary Scottish literature” (2007: 30).
3. Liam Connell’s critique is perhaps one of the clearest instances of these reactions. From a materialist standpoint, he contends that there are three reasons for the adoption of postcolonial theory by the Scottish academe: “first, changes to the Scottish economy and to British political structures, which made such an explanation more palatable to Scots than it was earlier in the twentieth century; second, developments in the economy of the university as an institution which prioritized academic publication and made the marketability of research a more pressing concern; and finally, a structural nationalism in the concept of Scottish literature that conceives the relationship between Scottish and English culture in antagonistic terms, and which identifies liberationist nationalism as quintessentially postcolonial” (2003: 42).
4. Subsequent references are to this 2005 edition of *Psychoraag* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
5. Zaf’s eventual interest in obtaining a permanent licence for the station has also been interpreted in post-devolutionary terms: “The concept of a threatened minority pirate radio station

conveys the main thrust of *Psychoraag*'s political objectives: the cultural vitality of this voice is compromised by its representative vulnerability. This is compounded by a pervasive temporal and spatial anxiety: Zaf wonders if his 'illegitimate' voice will 'last out' and if he will ever be properly accommodated in Scotland. Despite an uncertain establishment, he remains determined to seek a permanent, official licence to remain. The point here seems devolutionary: Scots Asians' concerns are challenged by an uncertain constituency" (Macdonald, 2010: 91).

6. Saadi has confessed the partially autobiographical inspiration for the novel: "A while back I read stories in Asian Community Radio at night [...] — that's how I got the germ of the idea for *Psychoraag*. While reading, I often wondered if anyone was listening. I actually thought nobody was, but I discovered they were, because some people phoned and complained about the language" (Battista, 2006: 121).
7. In his introduction to *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies*, an edited volume that revises the currency of *Rhythmanalysis* in contemporary analysis of urban space, Tim Edensor describes Lefebvre's concept as "the means by which dominant rhythms become legible" (2010: 39).

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