Contesting Familial Bonds: (Af)filiative Relationships in Pakistani Anglophone Writing

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Abstract

Following Edward Said's theorization of filiation and affiliation, this paper maps transformative itineraries of second-generation Pakistani immigrants in Britain who negotiate their personal identities on the basis of choice and affiliation instead of filiation. I argue that, as a result of the changing relationships of migrant parents with their British-born children, either because of a clash between nostalgia for the culture of origin and the host culture, between racial discrimination or the changing social structures of multicultural Britain, familial bonds within Pakistani families in Britain are severely affected. In other words, public or "external debates" in the diaspora, that Ralph Grillo describes as migrants' imagined cultural practices, interact with internal debates that occur within migrant families. Against this backdrop, I explore the tensions, informed by a filiation-affiliation dialectic, that exist between first and second generations and the way these affect the personal struggles of an embittered anglicized Asian second generation and dramatize the metaphorical birth of a subject outside the confines of the familial order.

Edward Said, in *The World, the Text and the Critic,* usefully examines the difference between 'filiation' and 'affiliation' as two types of affinity based on genealogy and choice respectively (1983, p. 20). Since Said's concept of filiation is linked to biological ties, it would not be wrong to say that it is family bonds and paternal authority that largely define where an individual belongs. However, with reference to second-generation Pakistanis in diaspora, these patterns of filiation, instead of strengthening familial ties, are seen to cause estrangement from both cross-cultural communication and parental ties. As Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia note: "patterns of filiation (heritage or descent) which had acted as a cohering force in traditional society became increasingly difficult to maintain in the complexity of contemporary civilization and

were replaced by patterns of affiliation" (1999, p. 25). Moving away from a relationship based on 'exclusive' filiation, Said proposes a more inclusive dynamic system of relationships that helps to forge bonds between biologically unconnected people:

> What I am describing is the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, or a set of beliefs, or even a world vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which I have been calling affiliation but which is also a new system. (1983, p. 19)

Drawing on Said's idea of a new "compensatory order", I would argue that the second generation characters, in three novels by writers of Pakistani origin, assert their freedom from necessary filiative pressures in order to affiliate themselves with a new system that not only helps to achieve intellectual freedom but also allows them to become more truly themselves. As Said also notes, the "breaking of ties with family, home, class, country and traditional beliefs ... [is a necessary step] in the achievement of spiritual and intellectual freedom" (1983, p. 9). Nevertheless, I argue that Said's distinction between filiation and affiliation often seems to be on the verge of collapse and in the complex cross-cultural world, filial and affiliative relations may also coexist. This is precisely what I analyze in three fictional works: *Émigré Journeys, Maps for Lost Lovers* and "My Son the Fanatic". While *Émigré Journeys* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* feature a passage from nature (filiative relationships) to culture (affiliative relationships), "My Son the Fanatic" shows how affiliation reproduces filiation, sometimes making its own forms.

Among mainstream Pakistani first-generation writers, Abdullah Hussein's second novel, *Émigré Journeys* (2000), developed from his Urdu short story *Wapsi ka Safar,* is emblematic of the struggle of Pakistani immigrant community in Britain that is presented as caught between two worlds. Hussein's narrative captures the dilemma of two generations at once trapped and nurtured by their heritage. The plot of *Émigré Journeys* consists of two narratives which alternate between Amir, an illegal immigrant, who in the early 1960s comes from a small village in Pakistan to an exotic yet hostile Britain to make his way in the world, and his nineteen-year-old daughter, Parvin. The two narratives never intersect, yet they enrich each other. Amir's narrative "encapsulates perfectly the particular diasporic, Islamic, Punjabi masculinity that defines Amir's world of namaz, poverty and Sunday sex in 1960s Birmingham". He is indubitably the voice of "a generation that left the subcontinent in search of 'progress.' His is the story of men . . . who lived in cold, damp, dusty and dark conditions" (Nobil, 2000, p. 84). When Amir came to Britain 30 years ago as an illegal alien, he embarked on a life of dodgy jobs, cheap housing and endless dreams of belonging. After 30 years, Amir now has a home and a family. He is a British citizen and his economic dreams are realized, but he has achieved all this at the cost of what Said calls the 'natural' ancestral values and traditions. On the other hand, through Parvin's narrative, Hussein limns the typical clash that ensues between first-generation immigrants and their British-born children. In contradistinction to her father, who happily embraces both Western

secular culture and Pakistani traditionalism, Parvin categorically refuses to straddle these two worlds. Amir accepts the ways of the host land, while maintaining links with the homeland, but fails to inculcate this in his daughter. Now Parvin has a mind of her own, a voice of her own. She answers back and refuses to do as her father says. She not only refuses to marry a person chosen by her father, thus turning against traditionalism, but also dates an English man, Martin. For Parvin, who steps "outside of the house to different sounds and smells", the first generation is composed of "women with peasant faces in parachute shalwars, and men in ill fitted suits", all with "no sex on them, no sex at all, non-people" (p, 100–101). This generational conflict concludes the story with a grim note; Amir's wife and his children turn away from him and he keeps wondering: "what I have done wrong . . . ?" (p. 247).

It is important to note here that although Hussein's narrative highlights the British-born second-generation's struggle between the traditional expectations of their parents and their own desire to enter the life of the adopted country, it does not accentuate the emerging new identity (a phenomenon that began in the late '80s against the backdrop of the Rushdie Affair) that this second-generation youth tends to identify with. As Ali Nobil notes:

> Hussein's portrait of generational conflict fails to appreciate the ways in which cultural exchange and syncretism between 'Asian' and 'British' cultures produces an alternative set of identities. And the notion of the 'second generation' – whatever that is – being neither British nor Asian and having no identity of its own lacks credibility in the context of the now clearly identifiable British Asian youth cultures that have emerged in recent years. (2000, p. 84)

This is why the filial pull of parental cultural ties is shown to be completely replaced by non-familial connections. The novel is rife with broken familial bonds, cleavages incurred by severe limitations imposed by parental authority and by what Said calls "the quasi-religious authority of being at home among one's people" (1983, p. 16). For example, the father-daughter relationship in particular in the novel illustrates Said's filiative model of family relationships, which Parvin finds suffocating. Despite Amir's admiration of British culture and ways, which he himself strives to embrace and also encourages his children to internalize, there are certain lines in his patriarchal male-dominated home that must never be crossed.

When Amir discovers that his daughter is "fraternising with English boys" (p. 205), he is infuriated and prevents her from leaving home. After a few days, Parvin overhears her father's conversation in Punjabi with someone from home and it dawns on her that her father is making arrangements for her wedding among their "very own respectable people, [his] sweet, people who will give [her] respect" (p. 229). When Parvin confronts her father about forcing her into an arranged marriage, Amir comes to believe that his daughter is possessed by *Jinns* and *shaitan* (Satan). Pressurized by his parental and filial role, he grabs his daughter's neck, shouting, "I will make you run, you cursed shaitan, how dare you enter my daughter, lahaulawahha quwwat – lahaulawallah quwwat" (p. 240). A *maulvi* (religious cleric) is called to free Parvin's

body of *Jinn's* spell. Feeling helpless among men and women, who are all shown to be attempting to exorcise the Satan inside her with God's words, Parvin starts tearing off her clothes. She "keeps throwing them off one after the other until there isn't a stitch left on [her], [her] body exposed head to foot, hair down below and all." She further tells her father, "Look at me . . . look at my arms, I am a virgin, nothing has entered me" (p. 243). This emblematic scene in the novel proves to be the final blow to the dynastic authority of fatherhood; and Amir is left wondering "What I have done wrong? Give me an answer, Salma" (p. 247), as his son leaves the house and as Salma and Parvin also move away to stay with aunt Shirin. Amir's violent attempts to restrict Parvin's movements and to assert his parental rights over his children are repudiated by both Parvin and Hasan, who receive repeated warnings from their father about the unnaturalness of cross-cultural relationships, which Amir considers deeply problematic against the backdrop of his traditional allegiances.

It would not be wrong to say that the children's rejection of biological ties with their father tends to allow them to become more truly themselves. This is illustrated in the novel through Parvin's affiliative bond with Jenny, which marks the end of Julie and her gang, who used to tease Parvin with a filial label "Parvin the milk bottle" for carrying a milk bottle in her bag to be used in a toilet. Finally, it is Parvin's relationship with Jenny that offers her shelter from the exploitative filial label. As she says, "It was a prison in which I spent three whole years, from which I was freed with the arrival of Jenny" (p. 77). It was her bond with Jenny that transformed her and helped her be her true self, which is shown by Parvin's gesture of leaning out of her window to say 'fuck' out loud. The novel shows how after quitting ancestral allegiances, affiliative connections enable Parvin's survival in the new land, as she finds them less exploitative than filial ones.

The similar nature of fractured filial ties engenders a sense of alienation between mother and children in Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers,* which features a British-Pakistani community in *Dasht-e-Tanhai*, a fictional town in the north of England with a name meaning 'Desert of Loneliness'. At the heart of the novel, we encounter Kaukab, her husband Shamas, and their three children, Mah-Jabin, Ujala and Charag, all torn between filiative and affiliative bonds. Kaukab's religious orthodoxy and a filial attachment to her country of origin distance her from host country, a "dirty country, an unsacred country full of people with disgusting habits and practices", but her dilemma is that she fails to prevent her liberal children from assimilating into "[t]he decadent and corrupt West" (p. 63). Cocooned in the small world of her family, built in the spirit of filial cultural values, Kaukab is not exempt from racial prejudice and hostility, which further adds to the generational conflict with her children. As she grumbles: "My Charag, my Mah-Jabin, my Ujala. Each time they went out they returned with a new layer of stranger-ness on them until finally I didn't recognize them any more" (p. 146). Kaukab's complaints about the white community are the pathetic outcome of her deterministic notion of filiation as she is often found mourning the loss of her *Sohni Dharti* (beautiful land), "a country of the pious and the devout" (p. 63). As Aroosa Kanwal in *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani*

awaits all the beleaguered Pakistani women but what a price, Mother, two decades of your life wasted . . . What a waste when instead of conniving for all these years you could just walk away" (p. 114). After being humiliated at the hands of her children, Kaukab realizes that it was the biggest mistake of her life to come to this country – "a country where children are allowed to talk to their parents this way, a country where sin is commonplace" (p. 324). We hear her melancholic cry: "Get away from me, you little bitch" (p. 114). As a result of Kaukab's violent attempt to claim her naturalized rights over her daughter, Mah-Jabin breaks her ties with her family and refuses to live in an unhomely home.

Therefore, Kaukab's narcissistic preoccupation with natural ties, based on myths of purity, whether racial or religious, serves as a metaphor for relationships in her house that have come to be largely defined as exclusive. Responding to family cleavages in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, David Waterman notes:

> [T]he parents' memories do not correspond at all to their children's lived experience, meaning that the parents' cultural map, created out of a traumatic past and clung to out of a sense of familiarity and security, has in fact done a great deal of harm to their children, which explains the parents' abject, suicidal loss of hope at the end of the novel. (2010, p. 30)

Reading Waterman's argument in the light of Said's filiative/ affiliative dialectic, I argue that Kaukab's filial binding has a tendency to limit the possibility for her children to move freely between two spaces: religious and secular, Eastern and Western. This is quintessentially illustrated in the novel through a conversation between Charag and Kaukab when she sees the naked and uncircumcized, *The Uncut Self Portrait,* of Charag, published in a Sunday paper. While Kaukab describes this as a mockery of her religion, Charag envisions it as a marriage between art and real people, "one of several possible ways of seeing the world" (Baer, 2002, p. 7), something which Kaukab's filial attachment denies. On seeing the distress on his mother's face, he tries to explain that "I can't paint with handcuffs on . . . Jugnu taught me that we should try to break away from all bonds and ties that manipulative groups have thought up for their own advantage. Surely, mother, you can see the merit of that" (p. 321). Kaukab remains silent. Realizing their mother's sterile and absolutist approach towards life, Charag, Ujala and Mah-Jabin know that if they follow what their mother expects from them, there is a danger of failing to recognize cross-cultural communication. It is because of Kaukab's rigidity that her children fail to understand that the implied clash between traditional Islamic values and contemporary Western culture, "while indeed present in some cases, cannot always explain the multifaceted relations between British and Pakistani ways of life." This is particularly relevant when we consider that "Pakistan does possess modern institutions and habits, such as a nation-state, market economy and industry, transportation, (irregular) democratic elections and modern means of communicating and disseminating information" (2010, p. 19). This representation is opposed to what Kaukab presents to her children. Since their mother fails to negotiate polarized versions of cultural identity, Mah-Jabin, Ujala and Charag categorically

declare their freedom from this failed idea of filiation and consciously affiliate themselves with a new system, a system that actively constructs new channels of influence.

While embracing this new system, Charag is becoming "aware of his responsibilities as an artist" (p. 319); he feels more responsible for his relationships with the whole community, white or non-white. This is precisely what Said suggests when he proposes the accretion of affiliation and unspoken connections borne out of "the pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships" (1983, p. 17), which connect biologically unconnected people. This is why Shamas is shown to be proud of his son for forging bonds that develop with a shared sense of sorrow: "*Which to hold dearer: my love for you, or the sorrows of others in the world? They say the intoxication is greater when two kinds of wine are mixed. Good artists know that society is worth representing too*" (p. 319–320; italics original).

While the filiative and affiliative relationships in *Émigré Journeys* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* are in binary opposition, the two categories coexist ambivalently in Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic" (1997). This story suggests that polarized versions of cultural identity can be negotiated. This means that unlike the failed idea of filiation, visibly informed by the authority of parenthood and the purity of a specific (Pakistani) culture, *Émigré Journeys* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* propose a more inclusive and democratic affiliation of second-generation immigrants to the host community and culture. It would not be wrong to say that it is the first generation's rigidity and orthodoxy that force the second generation in the two novels to rebel against filial ties and instead choose a far more democratic affiliative system. But it is interesting to note that "My Son the Fanatic" deconstructs Said's distinction of filiation and affiliation, which I argue is fraught with conceptual difficulties in decoding certain problematic terms, such as fundamentalism and fanaticism, associated exclusively with Muslim cultures in contrast to modern and secular Western cultures. Stephen Watt's concern over Said's "excavation of affiliation's roots in modernism" is pertinent here. Watt asks: "Is affiliation really a kind of compensation born in modernism out of filiation's decline?" (Di Leo, 2003: 116). Watt's question draws our attention to a problem that Said himself flags up in *The World, the Text and the Critic*; while affiliation is fundamentally expected to be democratic and emancipatory, Said warns that it can "easily become a system of thought no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself" (1983, p. 20). This is precisely how Kureishi's story complicates a dichotomy between filiation and affiliation, as I intend to discuss.

Set in London, "My Son the Fanatic", later turned into a film, deals with Pakistani immigrants in the UK who are struggling to negotiate their diasporic identities against the backdrop of growing Islamization among second-generation youth in the UK. As Kureishi notes in the introduction to the story: "It perplexed me that young people, brought up in secular Britain, would turn to a form of belief that denied them the pleasures of the society in which they lived" (p. vii). This growing apprehension about second-generation British Asians is captured by Kureishi in the

short story through the character of Ali, the son of a Pakistani taxi driver, Parvez, who not only struggles to provide for his family but also chooses to be assimilated by giving up his Pakistani background and adopting British ways. In contrast to his father's obsession with western liberalism, it is Ali who is completely disillusioned with his life in the UK and evinces disgust towards capitalistic culture, which, he believes, is sterile and hegemonic instead of democratic. Bart Moore-Gilbert's observation is pertinent here: "[Ali]'s abandonment of his accountancy studies [also] signals his refusal to be part of an economic system in which humans, too, are simply commodities to be bought and sold" (2001, p. 167). For Parvez, it is shocking how his British-born son, Ali, fails to appreciate what the modern world offers him and is mindlessly lost to filial ties in the form of religious dictates of the old world. Most importantly, in this short story, it is the father who breaks his filial ties to form non-filial ones in order to be successful in the host country. His son Ali's affiliative bond with other young second-generation immigrants, who have turned to Islam, brings him close to the filial ties of Islam. In other words, the lives of both characters suggest a move towards affiliation, which is expected to be more inclusive and democratic, but this affiliative model works differently for Parvez and Ali, as I explain below.

Parvez has given up his filial ties, his religious and cultural values, for the sake of, in Ali's words, the West's "sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug users, and prostitutes" (p. 294). Parvez, for him, is "too implicated in Western civilization" (p. 293) to understand the existential crisis of his own immigrant community in Britain. This animates the conflict between Ali and Parvez. Parvez looks at Ali in astonishment, unable to believe that they are in London. Parvez's affiliative allegiances in the diaspora are selective and revolve around all the possibilities of a promising future in the new land; his relationships with Bettina and other prostitutes make him oblivious to the stammering existence of his own son, as well as other immigrants in Britain. Whereas Parvez's affiliation revolves around personal history, Ali's (af)filiation concerns his endeavours for communal and racial history in an alien land.

Moreover, Parvez's affiliative Englishness is as orthodox and authoritative as any filial connections; he compels his son to live his life according to his expectations and wishes, which make Ali think that he is dangerously striving to become someone other than whom he should be. Although Ali's filial ties can be interpreted from the perspective of what is generally stereotyped as the performativity of Muslim identity, such as growing a beard, the observance of prayers and recitation of the Qur'an, his religious moorings are centred on his sociopolitical positioning in Britain. Ali's affiliative bonds with other young second-generation immigrants help him develop intellectual freedom. His filial attachment to Islam via affiliative bonds with his community in Britain makes him realize that "[m]y people have taken enough. If the persecution doesn't stop there will be jihad. I, and millions of others, will gladly give our lives for the cause" (p. 294). Here, it is important to note that Ali's affiliation introduces him to the idea of communal solidarity via (a)filiation to Islam. Therefore, Ali's passage from affiliative to filial ties with Islam is more to do with the politics of recognition than Islamic fanaticism. Ali realizes that while evil is all around, his Muslim

brothers have given him the strength to save himself. "In the midst of corruption there can be purity" (p. 276). After discovering a spiritual dimension through his interaction with a group of young Muslims, Ali directs his efforts towards "poor Muslims who were struggling to maintain their purity in the face of corruption" (p. 295) and Muslim communities who felt disenfranchised in the West since their faith-based identities were not accepted as part of the national fabric for years. Ali's bonding with other Muslim brothers is also largely informed by experience of racism, citizenship and economic struggles of Pakistani diaspora in Britain. As Chambers too illustrates, Kureishi's story accentuates "how alienation due to [immigrants'] experiences of racism might cause young Muslims to turn to religion" (2011: 229). Therefore, Ali's return to the filial order can be interpreted as his natural ties with the larger Muslim community (globalized Islam) and its striving for acceptability in Britain instead of fanaticism. As Maurice O'Connor rightly observes, this globalized Islamic positioning of Ali, "this new affiliation [informed by his return to his filial religion, Islam] helps boost the self-esteem of those who feel alienated, not just by secularism, but from a society that does not fulfil their economic aspirations" (2015: 45).

This simultaneous collaborative conjunction of filial and affiliative ties shows how affiliation reproduces filiation, sometimes making its own forms. This is indeed an outcome of those models of affiliation that can "easily become a system of thought no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself" (Said, 1983: 20). It is interesting to note that Parvez's affiliative ties fail to replace the 'old authority' that lies at the centre of the filial model of the family, with a new voice. Therefore, his affiliative system of thought is as orthodox as the filial model. This is foregrounded in the story through Ali's encounter with his father on the issue of Bettina's insult at the hands of Ali. Parvez physically assaults Ali at prayers, which Ali describes as "threatening his Islamic birthright and the possibility of an Islamic existence in England" (p. 42). Ali's final response to Parvez, "So, who's the fanatic now?" (p. 298), complicates Said's dialectic of filiative and affiliative models of relationships in the sense that it debunks the narratives associated with Muslim fanaticism. It is Parvez, emblematic of Western liberalism, who finally turns out to be a fanatic instead of Ali. It is Ali's (af)filiation that suggests alternative ways of conceptualizing communal tolerance. In so doing, filiation and affiliation can be seen to be mutually enriching as they become tinged with ambivalence. Nahem Yousaf suggests that "Kureishi does not represent Britons of Asian origin as a homogeneous group, but rather he seeks to illustrate the diverse forms of membership in any community", as I discuss with reference to father-son relationship within a family" (qtd in Holmes, "Postcolonial" p. 311). Therefore, Yousaf maps a "dialogic tendency" in Kureishi's short story which not only suggests complexity of British Asianness as diaspora community but also gestures towards multiple voices of diaspora people (Yousaf, 1996: 22).

No wonder then that, with the arrival of non-white immigrants in Britain, the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, accentuated the need for a public policy and programme aimed not simply "at a flattening process of assimilation but at equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance"

(Jenkins, 1967). I do not intend to go into the details of Jenkin's speech and the criticism it invited for its liberal approach to multiculturalism, but rather the ways in which "it is notable for drawing attention to a significant phenomenon created by immigration—the 'second generation' . . . who will not be immigrants but coloured Britons expect[ing] full opportunities to deploy their skills" (qtd in Gabrieal et al, 2012, p. 268). It is indeed interesting to see how this second generation in Britain has played a significant role in transforming and synthesizing an identity that is emblematic of intertwining of filial and affiliative allegiances, which corroborate Said's "contrapuntal consciousness" (1994, p. 366). And this contrapuntal awareness gestures towards a dynamic multi-voiced intellectual responsibility and process of cultural negotiation that I have explained with reference to second generation in, *Émigré Journeys* and *Maps for Lost Lovers* and "My Son the Fanatic" albeit in different shades and contexts.

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