

“Nae blond wigs in Glasgae”: Urban Imaginaries and Affective Relationships in Suhayl Saadi’s Short Fiction

Eva Pataki

Abstract

*According to Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender, “the city is located and continually reproduced through [...] orienting acts of imagination, acts grounded in material space and social practice.” (2007: xii) As imagination creates and recreates urban spaces, it bestows upon them a host of atmospheric and emotional qualities resulting in a multitude of urban imaginaries of the city. Or is it the city – illusory and shape-shifting as it may be – that triggers acts of imagination and thus generates its own images and imaginaries through the moods and emotions it arouses in people? Does the city have a million faces or is it its inhabitants who, through the masks they hide behind, incite this image? To find an answer to these questions, the present paper maps the atmospheric qualities and urban imaginaries of contemporary Glasgow as portrayed in Scottish Pakistani author Suhayl Saadi’s fiction. Through a close reading of “The Queens of Govan” (2001c), “Bandanna” (2001a), “The Naked Heart” (2001b) from the collection *The Burning Mirror* and excerpts from *Psychoraag* (2004), I explore the characters’ social practices, memories, visions and hallucinations, as well as their bodily experiences and mental perceptions of and affective relationships with the city. I shall argue that there exists a deeply phenomenological and mutually constructive relationship between the body and the city, through which Saadi’s characters are both affected by and affecting the emotional qualities and urban imaginaries of Glasgow.*

Key words: the body, the city, Suhayl Saadi, urban imaginaries, affective relationships.

Introduction: Suhayl Saadi’s Glaswegian Fiction

In an essay on ethnicity, writing and identity, Saadi referred to his short story collection *The Burning Mirror* (2001) as “high-octane, hallucinogenic, urbanised fiction.” (2006: 118) The most exciting questions arising from this claim is what or who makes these stories about cities hallucinatory, and what the connection between hallucinations (vision, illusions, phantasms), urban space and the individual experiencing both is. One starting point for analysing this connection is provided by Anthony King, who contends that the city is impossible to be taken in in its entirety, as our experiences are always already confined to certain segments and aspects of a city, and are necessarily influenced by our own perspectives and perceptions. As King claims, “what is referred to as ‘the city’ exists only in our heads” (2007: 2) – that is, what we perceive is an imaginary space and we are in fact the creators of urban imaginaries. What follows is that

What is real about cities, then, is also their intangible qualities: their atmospheres, their personalities, perhaps ...Something about city life lends itself to being read as if it had a state of mind, a personality, as having a particular mood or sentiment, [...]These commonplace experiences of the personality of a city may feel real, yet also they are phantasms that vanish as soon as light is cast upon them.

(Pile 2005: 2)

Steve Pile's claim emphasizes the phantasmagoric and illusory nature of cities, which may derive both from their phenomenological and spatial character, and the feelings and emotions they generate in the people who experience them. One person's experience can differ considerably from that of another and may as well be totally different from any previous experience of the same city by the same person, as a result of several internal and external factors (some of which I shall examine in this paper), thereby creating a myriad of urban imaginaries, "both emotional and unconscious" (Pile 2005: 2) by definition.

Such individual, affective relationships with the city are at the core of Suhayl Saadi's fiction. Although, as Bettina Jansen points out, Saadi's literary representation of the Pakistani diaspora in Scotland may be labelled as British Asian fiction, Scottish-Asian fiction, and (post-) devolutionary Scottish fiction, thus producing "a triple positionality" for both their protagonists and the narrative (2018: 188), due to their setting, language and characters I see the majority of his stories primarily as love letters to Glasgow, representatives of the contemporary Glasgow novel and short stories, through which Saadi redefines Scottish identityⁱ and puts Glaswegian fiction back on the map of British Literature.

In the 1980s, the major problematics of the Glasgow novel was that, in Christopher Whyte's words, "Glasgow lacks, in cultural terms, context and collocation" (1990: 318) and the place itself "induces a kind of amnesia" as a result of which the characters in a Glasgow novel rarely have a sense of coming from somewhere" (Whyte 1990: 318). While Saadi's Glaswegian characters sense a loss of identity (Stotesbury 2010: 99), I shall argue that his Scottish Pakistani protagonists may, in fact, use this hiatus to construct a new cultural and regional identity for themselves through their affective relationship with the city of Glasgow.

As a representative of the "New Weegies" (Bisset, 2007: 66), Saadi both follows the traditions of the Glaswegian novel and expands its boundaries. Linguistically, his fiction presents a unique blend of standard English, Scottish demotic and Glasgow Patter, interspersed by Urdu and Punjabi phrases, while the setting and characters in the majority of his writings call for the construction of a regional identity. Joining Louise Welsh, Anne Donovan and Alison Miller, Saadi portrays the rebranding of "The Friendly City" (2004: 202),ⁱⁱ but with an ethnic twist: presenting Glasgow as a postcolonial territory reterritorialized by the Pakistani diaspora in *Psychoraag* (critically acclaimed as the first Scots Asian novelⁱⁱⁱ) and his short story collections, such as *The Burning Mirror*.

Psychoraag tells the story of a Scottish-Pakistani immigrant, DJ Zaf, and the six hours he spends in his cubicle at the final night of Radio Chaandni, playing songs, talking to his listeners and, first and foremost, remembering. Zaf embarks on a mental journey recalling his parents' "epic voyage" (Saadi 2004: 129) from Pakistan to Scotland, their early days of settlement and the creation of diaspora space in Glasgow. He also laments on the past events and loves that have defined him. Recording Zaf's journeys through time and space, the novel is thus, to borrow and paraphrase David Harvey's (1990) term, a literary "time-space compression:" a story woven from overlapping and interconnected time scales, physical and mental spaces, to create an intricate, flexible and fluid pattern of music, mood and memory, or, as Saadi puts it, "states of altered consciousness [...] efflorescence of liminality" (Mitchell 2006: n.p.), which overrule and transgress temporal and spatial boundaries and may be interpreted as Saadi's metonymy of Scottish identity, itself a time-space compression.

As for the three short stories from *The Burning Mirror* to be analysed here, "The Naked Heart" focuses on a white Scottish character, John, a defrocked priest and his emotional crisis, while "Bandanna" and "The Queens of Govan" both contest the simplified

image of Celtic Scottishness by foregrounding the hybrid identities of their young Scottish Asian protagonists – Sal, the ‘gangsta,’ and Ruby, the waitress, respectively – and by presenting a “vision of a new, all-encompassing unity of Glaswegians” (Jansen 2018: 188). The latter two stories also serve as predecessors of *Psychoraag*, connecting them through some of the characters and revealing the racially diverse, hybridised nature of Glasgow: for example, the Qaisara Kebab House where Ruby works is “in the heart ae Govan which wis gie unusual fur an Asian-run Carry-out. Maist ae those were in the slightly safer territory ae Kinnin Park, where broon faces outnumberd the pink and where the Changezi family held an easy sway wi machetes an hockey sticks” (2001: 23). As depicted in *Psychoraag*, the ‘safety’ of Kinning Park (also known by the hybrid name of “Wee Faisalabad,” named after the village the immigrants came from) is ensured by criminal activities and territorial behaviour: it is a place where the Kinnin Park Boys, a youth gang from the “baratherie”^{iv} (2004: 102), took over the crime scene and “the Changezi Family ruled [...] The pavements hereabouts were all Punjabi” (2004: 373). Although the description of the place and its inhabitants may refer to a kind of immigrant ghetto and foreground a distinctive cultural identity, the use of language gives away the hybridity of both space and self: “Wee Faisalabad” is a name coined from a Scottish slang and an Urdu word, while bhangra denotes the British Asian youth culture and their hybrid musical style of traditional Punjabi dance and Western electronic music. The description of Kinning Park and Govan thus highlights the multi-ethnic heterogeneity of Glasgow, calls attention to hybrid Glaswegian subject positions, and points to the possibility of inextricable links between the identity of Glasgow and its inhabitants.

The Postmodern City

When DJ Zaf of *Psychoraag* claims that “[i]n our hearts, we are all Glaswegian” (2004: 360), his words not only display a degree of local patriotism but also underlie the idea that “[t]he *experiencing* of a spatial environment is characterized by *emotional* participation” (Hasse 2016: 52) [original emphasis]. Zaf’s emotional relationship with the city is complex and continually fluctuating between different personal and communal perceptions and experiences. When Zaf is on the air, wishing to “share himself with the whole of Glasgow” (2004: 330), he sees the city as an enabling place for building a bridge between East and West, a community with a shared sense of belonging. From the point of view of his parents and their fellow Pakistani immigrants, Glasgow is “Migra Polis, the deepest layer ae hell” (2004: 310), where the first-generation’s immigrant experience involves a sense of alienation, isolation, and rootlessness.^v Most of the time, though, especially when contemplating his own past, present and future in parallel with that of the city, Zaf experiences Glasgow as a transitory place: “the liquid city” where “time wis always out of joint” (2004: 395, 8), the spatial embodiment of “metempsychosis” (178). These urban imaginaries evoke different feelings in Zaf and convey different atmospheres of Glasgow for the characters and the reader alike.

According to Gernot Böhme (1993: 114):

Atmospheres are indeterminate above all as regards their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them. We are also unsure where they are. They seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of this theory is the link it suggests between bodily experience, emotions and spatiality. Atmosphere seems to have both mental and physical connotations, connecting people and spaces/places through what Elizabeth Grosz calls “mutually defining relation between bodies and cities” (1992: 242), as a result of which the city is embodied and the body is “citified” (1992: 242), that is, urbanised and, in the case of immigrants, also hybridised. Transformation thus happens through the bodily experience and mental perception of Glasgow, and plays out in different contexts and forms and with various connotations in both the novel and the three short stories analysed here, thereby producing a multitude of specific and highly subjective atmospheres and spatial imaginaries of the city.

One urban imaginary of Glasgow is created by John of “The Naked Heart,” who describes the city as “the anonymous conglomerate” (2001b: 135) with “the postmodern streets filled with grey figures and emptiness” (2001b: 137) and admits that he feels “out of place in that cold, northern city with its weeping walls, its glass soul” (2001b: 133). In contrast with Zaf’s sense of community, John and his fellow city dwellers appear to be isolated and unconnected, but beyond this common portrayal of urban space characterised by anonymity and alienation, the image of the city is much more alive and atmospheric than expected. The weeping walls evoke the religious symbolism of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, an emotional place of prayer and pilgrimage; the glass soul generates associations with fragility, clarity and soulfulness; while both images involve personification: Glasgow as a space coming to life through its own emotional spaces/places and a space that embodies the hidden emotions of the protagonist. Although John claims that he is “whole, pomegranate-like” and that “[e]ach segment of his being [is] a world in itself and, yet, each [is] a part of a greater existence” (2001b: 136), his religious belief apparently does not save him from a sense of emptiness and guilt, generated by the love and lust that he feels for Terri and which made him move away to “lose himself in the metropolis” (2001b: 134). Hiding in a flat like a cell, John portrays the world outside with phrases such as “the indifference of the city” and “callous streets” (2001b: 134), “the wailing emptiness of urban foxes outside” (2001b: 137) and “spunk-infested alleys” (2001b: 138). His choice of words displays an ambiguous sense of being detached from yet also responding emotionally to the postmodern city. This may be due to what Tonino Griffero calls the “atmospheric affordances” of space: the messages spaces send out about their possible uses and functions (2014: 4). Drawing on this concept, for John the city seems to be a limited and limiting space: uninviting, consciously rejecting any relationship with its inhabitants, keeping him at a distance. Furthermore, in Griffero’s view, “to an atmospheric affordance indeed one reacts not necessarily with a behavior” but “at times also with an aesthetic distance,” that is, “the perceiving of an atmospheric affordance seems to ‘demand’ a special objectivity” (2014: 4). John’s physical distance from public spaces of the city may indeed offer the possibility of objectivity but his references to crying, coldheartedness and anger give away a strong emotional reaction and a unavoidable subjectivity in his perception and bodily experience which, however, he tries to counterbalance by fleeing into the realm of hallucinations and vision, where there is “[n]o sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no will, no intellect, no memory” (NH 141), just pure presence, a transcendental existence. Shutting out the physical city, all there is left is its atmosphere, which Böhme explains as a “*Zwischenphänomen*” [phenomenon of in-between] (2001: 55), deriving from a “*Spüren von Anwesenheit*” [feeling of presence] (2001: 45) situated between subjectivity and objectivity or, in John’s case, between physicality and spirituality.

The phenomenon of in-between and the sense of in-betweenness also play a vital role in “Bandanna.” Here Glasgow is portrayed through the eyes of the young Scottish Asian Sal, choosing to roam around the city with his gang instead of helping out his parents in their corner shop. At first, the description is rather minimalistic and realistic: the images of “the suffocating rhythm of the morning. Plastic on tarmac. Spittle. The big sky” (2001a: 109) project an urban reality that may characterise any city in general. However, as Sal crosses the streets and contemplates the gap between the lives, fates and desires of his parents’ generation and those of his own, the image of the city becomes increasingly complex. A vision of his gang’s future, turning into their own parents living on the border and stuck in the past, makes Sal recall the Mullah’s words: “*Behind every image, there is always a jagirdaar.*^{vi} *Just as [...] in ever Coca Cola tin there is a naked Amrikan slut, her legs overhanging the metal*” (2001a: 115) (original emphasis). Since *jagirdaar* means big landowner in Punjabi, the claim may sound out of context and place in contemporary Glasgow but still gives away a kind of rootedness and inability to perceive life outside the immigrant’s own cultural roots and traditions. Furthermore, the idea of Glasgow being merely an image with such an improbable meaning behind it points to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum, “a real without origin or reality” (1994, 2000: 1). This interpretation is further complexified by the reference to a prevailing American culture, which may not only signal the influence of the West on immigrants in the form of temptation and contamination but also on Glasgow and Scotland itself, forcing them to wear the mask of American consumerism, which Sal portrays as follows: “The Great White Superstores, solid bastions thrown in a ring aron the city. His father often railed against the toilet-friendly conglomerates [...] the Safeways, the Sainsburys, the ASDAs besieging Glasgee, attacking Scola” (2001a: 116).

The commodification of postmodern life and urban space can produce a simulacrum of authentic environments and traditions (Harvey 1990: 87) but may, in fact, also denote the loss of authenticity for both the city and its Scottish Pakistani inhabitants. As Alan Bisset points out, “Glasgow as a signifier is now detached from any lasting and definite signified beyond consumerism itself, that is, beyond the eternal ingestion of images, the purchasing of objects divested of their history, the exploitation of anonymous, unidentifiable bodies” (Bisset 2007: 61). It may as well be this detachment that Sal fears the most: the possibility that he, “too, had been there [...] between the jag-scarred thighs of the slut and had swum around (beard, frown-and-all) in the great fizzy vacuum of the west. Of Amrika, of Glasgee” (2001a: 116). Sal’s words indicate that the first generation’s belief of the unavoidable dangers of the west permeates his own perception of the postmodern city and generates a sense of ‘nowhereness,’ an in-between space of vagueness, unbelonging and emotionlessness. Since in Heiko Schmid, Wolf-Dietrich Sahr and John Urry’s view “[a]n atmosphere is an emotion with spatial character” (58), Sal’s sense of a physical and emotional vacuum may be both generated by and actually creating the atmosphere of Glasgow as a cold, detached, in-between postmodern metropolis.

The Hybrid City

The postmodern atmosphere and urban imaginary of Glasgow is revised and contested by the immigrant experience of DJ Zaf’s parents, for whom “this wis the end, this city, aifter here, there wur nae mair crossins, nae mair lang loops across the waruld” (2004: 72). The image of

the end, of spatial limitations is in direct collision with the hopeful vision of “the land of the open sky” where “anything would be possible” (2004: 123) but where the parents end up leading “hermeneutic lives” (2004: 205) in a self-induced immigrant ghetto, giving a physical shape to the difficulties and problematics of the postcolonial situation. As Zaf sees it, the “Friendly City” is but a mask: for the immigrants, Glasgow is not the land of endless opportunities but “the desert of the soul” (2004: 390). Ambivalent as it is, this image of the city gives away a host of emotions, wavering and fluctuating between the what ifs and the should haves, the extremes of hope and hopelessness, loving and loathing. Zaf reveals the inextricable links between the Pakistani immigrants and the city the following way:

These were ... the *kisaan*^{vii} who had powered the buses, the underground trains, the machines of the sweatshop underwear-manufacturers. The whole of Glasgow had walked in their footsteps and worn their clothes. With bare soles they had 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 wis the case, then Glasgae wis Faisalabad a hundred times over.

(2004: 242-43)

What the quotation implies is that the immigrants’ social practices transform Glasgow into some ‘immigrant city,’ the urban imaginary of a marginal space which may provide a chance for reterritorialization^{viii} and a consequent acquiring of a sense of belonging, but it also disempowers and dehumanises the diaspora subject. The process of dehumanisation makes the presence of first-generation immigrants basically invisible, metonymic – they may have been the predecessors of current native Glaswegians, but they have already vanished physically, leaving behind nothing but the paths they had trodden out, the clothes they had laboured on, and their cuisine to feed ‘Scottish stomachs.’ According to Bissett, the quotation also implies the immigrants’ interaction with the natives, as well as a mutual transformation, that is, by highlighting the interconnectedness of Glasgow’s ‘white’ history with Scots Asian history, Saadi demonstrates the ways in which “either group interacts with, informs and ultimately transforms the other. Glasgow literally consumes Asian culture, while Asians become assimilated into Glasgow” (2007: 65). In my view, however, interaction here is strongly metonymic, since the word consuming suggests that Glaswegians may assimilate into Asian culture, but their transformation into ‘immigrants’ is, in a way, an act of cannibalism.

The invisibility of the first Pakistani immigrants in Glasgow may also be read as a ghost-like quality: ‘haunting’ the white Scots through the cultural products they have left behind, permeating urban space with their imperceptible but palpable presence, they create an atmosphere of haze, and turn the city into a phantasm or an urban uncanny. As Lucy Huskinson explains, “The urban uncanny denotes the slippage or mismatch between our expectations of the city [...] and often surprising and unsettling experiences it can evoke within [us]” (2016: 1). The presence and social practices of Pakistani diasporians in the city, and the consequent transformation of the cultural space and atmosphere of Glasgow may indeed turn it into an urban uncanny for both the immigrants and the ‘natives’: for the former, it is not what they expected to be; for the latter, it is not what it used to be or what they remember it to be. As a result, although the immigrants have marked out their territory with “bhangra boots,” making the cultural space Punjabi (2004: 373), it simply does not feel like home. Similarly to Kinning Park, Zaf’s home, “the Shiels” (i.e. Pollockshields) is described as the exclusive territory of a tribal group, a “town enclosed within a town” (2004: 115),

where the immigrants protect their own kind, keep others out and imprison themselves. As Zaf recalls, “the Shields wis a skin of sorts, an armour against the scaldin winds of an all-white Alba. [...] Halaal butchers, subcontinental grocers [...] religious bookshops [...] Silent churches with no visible congregations. *Masjids*^{ix} secreted in tenement flats devoid even of Glasgow light” (2004: 379). Interestingly, while the neighbourhood is a shield – both literally and figuratively – it does not seem to be able to provide a sense of security for its inhabitants, since while the shops can ‘come out’ as Pakistani and provide something familiar in an alien city, the mosques and, by extension, religious beliefs have to be hidden to be protected from the West or for the sake of avoiding trouble. The Shields is thus both visibly culturally other and wearing a mask to conceal its otherness – or at least a certain aspect of it. It may, in fact, be this ambiguity that is (partly) responsible for the immigrants’ ambivalent affective relationship with the city, as well as their identity crisis and fears, which points to another aspect of the urban uncanny:

The urban uncanny [...] reveals the urban subject as one alienated from himself or herself, as a divided, repressed subject who reflects the situation of their environment as a place that promises the security and familiarity of a home but cannot provide it. The urban uncanny thereby denotes an existential gap or mismatch between city and citizen. It is as if the urban subject searches for a promised city that cannot be found, whilst the city that is accessible to the subject withholds and conceals the home that is expected of it.

(Huskinson 2016: 5-6)

Relatively secure but alienated and not at home in their new hometown, the first-generation immigrants close themselves off to the opportunities of the immigrant city they created themselves: the inhabitants of the Shields spend their whole lives behind closed windows, Zaf’s father loses his memories and connection to reality, and Ruby’s father (in “The Queens of Govan”) turns to alcohol.

The second generation’s reaction to their parents’ situation and the atmosphere of Glasgow as the city of immigrants is diverse, but a closer look may reveal certain recurring patterns in their behaviour. In *Psychoraag*, the Kinnin Park Boys’ aggressive territoriality, “a set of behaviours and cognitions [...] based on perceived ownership of physical space” (Bell et al. 304), means that the gang treats Glasgow as their personal territory, confined by invisible yet clearly marked boundaries, signifying “the power of defining space” (Madanipour 2003: 55). As Ali Madanipour points out, a sense of territoriality is also “derived from emotional attachment and familiarity” (2003: 44), that is, by reterritorializing the city the immigrants achieve emotional attachment, which then enables them to appropriate and control the place as their own primary territory and may generate a feeling of “distinctiveness, privacy and a sense of personal [and cultural] identity” (Bell et al. 1996: 306) – in other words, a sense of belonging. In a somewhat similar fashion, Sal’s gang in “Bandanna” also conceive of Glasgow as their own territory, marked out by movement, as well as sound and action:

They were on the film-set, they were living in total. There were no spaces in their existence. No gaps of silence. The Gang turned west, away fae the mosques, towards Maxwell Park. That’s where they were heidit. To the pond and the trees. To muck up the quiet. To fill it wi gouts ae Bhangra and Baissee. They skatit past the tenement closes, each one a blink in the Gang’s eye. The sound of generations carved into each

corniced ceiling [...] The black slaves had bled in blue: R'n'R, hip-hop, reggae, and now the swastika-daubed Paki shop-owners would disembowel the air of syncopation. Together, with night torches, they would fire the swastikas and, in the fractured air, would spin them around in great wheels up and down the streets of Glasgow.

(2001a: 112, 116-17)

Sal's focal point reveals the second generation's determination to leave the roots, both cultural and religious, behind and, as opposed to the first's generation's efforts to hide away, to indicate their presence as visibly and loud as possible. One particularly interesting aspect of this quote is how it uses historical and musical references to add a new shade to how the immigrants permeate and hybridize the cultural space of Glasgow. Looking back on the oppression of black people in the USA, Sal (or, more precisely, Saadi himself) emphasizes the power inherent in music to unite individuals through their shared experience and to generate change. His words suggest that if the first generation could accept their own hybridity and learn from the battles and victories of the oppressed of the past, they could successfully fight racism and claim the city as their rightful home. Furthermore, by turning Glasgow into a home, *their* home, the immigrants could do away with the prevailing sense of the urban uncanny.

Drawing on Huskinson's assertion that [t]he city is uncanny when it reveals itself in a new and unexpected light; when, for example, its familiar streets and buildings suddenly appear strange, even hostile" (Huskinson 2016: 1), it is also possible that by claiming and hybridizing Glasgow, the immigrants, many of whom were rural people back in the subcontinent, may get rid of the formerly perceived uncanniness of urban space for a more rewarding emotional relationship. Furthermore, they could subvert the formerly perceived hostile atmosphere of the city and make the 'natives,' too, feel the urban uncanny, which could lead to a better understanding of each other's situation and offer a chance of becoming a community – hybrid, yet distinctively Glaswegian.

On the other hand, the phrase "film-set" suggests that the vision of the immigrants taking up the fight is a mere phantasy, perhaps never to be realized due to their fears and weakness, or to the atmospheric affordances of Glasgow, an illusion created by the city itself, while all along the urban uncanny feeds their anxiety that "the city is playing a game according to undisclosed rules" (Huskinson 2016: 6). No wonder, then, that the second generation also play a game, that of masquerade, not necessarily for the sake of protecting themselves from discrimination and racism, but to appear more street-wise and powerful than the city would 'expect.' In *Psychoraag*, the Kinnin Park Boys borrow the looks and persona of American gangsters, posing as a "[k]ind of Al Pacino in a shalvar kamise," a "mini Cosa Nostra" (2004: 104), while in "Bandanna," Sal and the gang exchange "Bronx palm-slaps" (2001a: 111). Although, as Zaf notes, this choice is not conscious, the young Pakistanis eventually become what they pretend to be: feared and fearless. Their transformation may be explained by Judith Butler's theory of performativity, according to which "[c]onceiving identity as performative means that identities are constructed by the 'very "expressions' that are said to be [their] results" (1990: 45). The marginalized second-generation immigrants can thus take centre stage and become larger than life as the Kinnin Park Boys, the 'crime lords' of the city, and the Black Bandannas, the 'gangstas' of Glasgow.

As Sal admits, the Black Bandannas wear black "because it made their faces look whiter" (2001a: 112-13), which is thought-provoking from two aspects. On one hand, their wish for a perceived whiteness gives away their awareness of the disadvantages of being visibly other, as well as a sense of identity crisis, manifested in a desire to shed their

complexion as a racial marker. On the other hand, wearing a bandanna is in itself a manifesto of a culturally different collective identity, a deliberate attempt to grab people's attention and become a visible force, a "hundred-strong barathierie" (2001a: 110) with a power integral to unity, the embodiment of change, which Sal describes the following way: "They were all small time, forming and disbanding from one year to the next in tenuous hierarchies of slang and spittle [...] Nothing was static. Life was movement, juddering, twitching, filmi-star movement. Peasant to refugee, refugee to kisaan, emigrant to immigrant, Paki tae dhokandaar, shopkeeper tae gang-member" (2001a: 113). The change described evokes a sense of fluidity for city dwellers and, by extension, urban space as well: as the former become Scots Asians, hybrids hiding behind a mask but speaking Scottish, the latter comes to be seen as the hybrid city.

The Phantasmagoric City

Besides change and hybridity, fire and water are also characteristic tropes and metaphors of Saadi's description of contemporary Glasgow in the stories analysed. One aspect of this portrayal may, in fact, derive from the history of the city itself, which the heroine of "The Queens of Govan" refers to as "the rage that simmered beneath the skins ae Govan. The rage ae the dead ships an the closed factory gates an the games lost and won, an the rage of the marchers wi their blue-an-orange banners which had been hauled, blood-spattered, fae houses ae God" (2001c: 31). Ruby acknowledges the changes her native neighbourhood has gone through after the decline of its shipbuilding industry, and witnesses how the despair generated in its working-class community is manifested in rage attacks at lost Ranger matches and Orange Order marches (Jansen 2018: 194). She can relate to or identify with these emotions, just as much as with her own anger following racist assaults (e.g. the catcall she receives as an exotic other) (2001c: 25), but decides not to act on them: "And sometimes Ruby felt herself tae be a part of that inchoate fury but she had shied away from it because she knew that, like the great, black waters ae the Clyde River, it would sweep her away, not to the sea but to a darkness from whence there would be nae return" (2001a: 25). For Ruby, fire and water feel similarly dangerous, as they signal an inability to control herself and her situation. Furthermore, both are directly connected to the city and its uncanniness, this time in a Freudian sense, which Huskinson explains as follows: "the uncanny is the subject's encounter of unconscious contents (such as experiences, feelings, memories, or ideas) that he or she has attempted to disown and neglect, but which have suddenly reappeared" (Huskinson 2016: 2). But what is it that Ruby suppresses and that reappears in these images of (self-) destruction?

Throughout the story, Ruby appears to be well aware of her own in-betweenness: "Ye couldnae hide in Govan. It wis pubs and carry-oots an alleyways where dogs an hookers plied their trade. Dark places, amidst the neon. It wis either wan, or the other. If ye tried tae live between the two, you would split apart like the moon. Or like Pakistan" (2001c: 26): Ruby's words are intriguing on several levels. First, they suggest that leading a double life, living in the in-between is unavoidable and necessarily leads to an identity crisis, as she is forced to be either this or that but never both – this points to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity as the "third space" of the "in-between" (1994: 38), that is, a metaphor of cultural difference, "a metonymy of presence" (1994: 115). Ruby's 'absence' and invisibility is a result of her ability and choice to steer between lives: at home, she puts on a "Mashriki mask"^x (2001c: 23) to please her parents, suppressing her self that is not Pakistani, whereas outside, in the

cultural space of Glasgow, she enjoys more freedom to express herself and appear to be whoever she wants to. However, the image of whiteness she tries to achieve through wearing black and working out to look thinner and thus more western proves to be yet another illusion, a mask she puts on, a role she plays. As Ruby herself recognises, roleplay has its limitations: “Nae blond wigs in Glasgae. Aw that stuff wis for them in London, where ye might pretend tae be anything and no one would give a shit. Sometimes she longed fur that kindae anonymity, fur the chance of jist droppin off the edge of the world and seeing where y’ended up” (2001c: 24). Ruby’s words suggest that although she is free to wear any mask she chooses, her sense of in-betweenness cannot be eliminated by mimicry, a partial representation which thus becomes a mockery (Bhabha 1994: 120). Apparently, Glasgow enables masking – after all, it is also wearing masks itself, especially that of the friendly city for the sake of tourists – but it does not allow deceit and mockery, the denial of a true self, no matter how multiple or fluid that self may be. It is one thing to slightly adjust one’s looks for the sake of blending in, and quite another to almost completely disappear under a literal or metaphorical wig – thus Ruby also has to face and publicly show off the part of her self she wished to suppress. This, however, may prove to be a more fruitful way to reconstruct her identity as regional, rather than cultural or ethnic. If there is no anonymity in Glasgow, then the character of the city and its inhabitants can shine through the mask, creating the uniquely Glaswegian atmosphere of urban space and identity of the people. From this aspect, Glasgow as “the liquid city” is not only ever-changing, but also transparent, like water.

Perhaps it is the recognition of this transparency that makes Ruby opt for a kind of subversion of her hybridity: instead of the stasis of in-betweenness, she appears to exist in a fluidity that she derives from the city and which simultaneously creates an atmosphere of fluidity in Glasgow, as well. Putting out fire and rage, water permeates the city in the form of the June rain that makes people tipsy and the Clyde that Ruby perceives as seeping through the bricks of the kebab shop, having “burst its banks an [...] washin doon the Copland Road, but the waters it brought would not be pure” (2001c: 21). Interestingly, there is a certain ambivalence about the image of water here, pointing to both purification and abjection, which may symbolise the white Glaswegians’ fear of changes brought along by the immigrants, as well as the immigrants’ fear of losing their pure, fixed identity through a process of hybridisation. Likewise, depending on her mood, Ruby experiences the presence of water in two ways: in the rain, she feels alive, but once she becomes unable to control her anger, she feels “the cold waters ae the Clyde flow around her and take her down intae a darkness without end” (2001c: 35). What is described here is an inextricable link between emotions, bodily experience and atmosphere, underlying the claim that “emotions are not private states of the inner world of the soul, but they are spatially extended atmospheres” (Schmid, Sahr and Urry, 2016: 58) involving corporal feelings. The atmosphere created embodies and strongly influences both Ruby and Glasgow, unifying Glaswegians through their shared experience and creating yet another unique urban imaginary.

Ruby’s vision of the Clyde permeating the buildings and pulling her down in a whirlpool may also be read as a phantasmagoria, a real or imaginary image as if seen in a dream (Benjamin (1927: 40), explained by Pile as either “an experience of movement, of a procession of things before the eyes” (2005:3) or something “beyond the immediately visible or tangible” (3), a dream the underlying processes of which are imperceptible (2005: 19). Since Ruby’s experiences seem to take place on the elusive border of reality and illusion, both of these interpretations may explain the phantasmagoric qualities of Glasgow, played

out in a host of various images and affective relationships in the three short stories and *Psychoraag*.

In “The Naked Heart,” John has recurring dreams of his love, Terri standing on a field in the sunset wrapped in a breeze that is at times “skin- scathing” (Saadi 2001b: 139), other times the embodiment of Christ she is waiting for. Eventually, Terri becomes “nothing” as she has “lost the will to knowledge and the knowledge to will” (2001b: 139) and John’s dream also dissolves in the cold, unwelcoming urban space. What remains is a lingering emotion that both transcends the physical shape of the city and forms it, exemplifying how “phantasmagoria is highly suggestive of the importance of particular kinds of emotional work for city life” (Pile 2005: 3). In “Bandanna” the emotional and dream-like qualities of Glasgow are portrayed through Sal’s parallel vision of his parents’ past and the gang’s unavoidable future:

They were on the border. Along the silent razor. Between the dots. Sepia, again. Short-haired men with wives. Babies, dead – already. Visions of the past, of past lives. A long, Hindu cacophony. [...] An image of a large bonfire. The Gangs, all throwing their bandannas into the flames. Black, red, blue. Even the Kinning Park Boys. All sprouting long, grey beards and adopting a bow-legged walk.

(2001a: 115)

The trope of fire, thus, may both symbolise the second generation’s rage (as in the phantasm of setting the swastikas on fire), and the dismay of all that made them different from the first generation. Although the burning of the bandannas may also denote the end of gang warfare, it more emphatically calls attention to the possibility that in the end anger and violence, the gang’s primary tools to control and shape the city, will give way to acquiescence and sinking to inertia, into oblivion, which resonates with DJ Zaf’s bleak vision of the transforming power of the city:

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. He had allowed it to enter him and, like some dissolute whore, he had welcomed it, had allowed it to fester within him and he had held back nuthin. And so, now, when he needed some of this spirit back, just for a while, just for tonight, the city wis not forthcoming. It turned its hard Presbyterian face away from its own children, it averted its thin lips. So why on earth should it bother to acknowledge a changeling like Zaf? He no longer recognised himself in this place. The city had changed. Or mibbee he had changed.

(Saadi 2004: 199)

Although the change Zaf describes here is by no means positive or welcome, as he feels betrayed by the city, this transformation may be attributed to the mutually transformative relationship of the body and the city. It seems that the city has come to life owing to the emotions it generated in Zaf and a concomitant bodily transformation. Furthermore, the materialisation of the atmosphere of urban space and personification through phrases like “Presbyterian face” and “thin lips” reveals a decidedly emotional or affective relationship between Glasgow and Zaf, a complicated ‘love affair’ that touches and transforms the soul of both man and city, and which involves affection, obsession, jealousy and betrayal.

Similarly to Zaf, Sal goes through a palpable transformation in the matter of few hours in and because of the city. Saadi’s portrayal of the teenager reveals a degree of identity

crisis, generated by Sal being “fair-skinned, almost white” (2001a: 110) but not white enough to avoid discrimination, as well as a hybrid self that he perceives being “a freedom-within-freedom” (2001a: 112), that is, his hybridity results in and also lends itself to wearing a mask, performing his identity in a way that he becomes the embodiment of rage and all the changes that it may bring along. When Sal reaches Maxwell Park with the aim “to orgasm in vandal with the Gang” (2001a: 111) and “scream in blood and banghra” (2001a: 117), his rage suddenly disappears and he feels at peace with his surroundings and himself:

The sun was streaming into his eyes and he could feel its golden brilliance flood through the coils of his brain. [...] [I]t occurred to him that one day, not far in the future, it would be his fingers that would be pushing up the grass and that what he thought, felt, did, created during that minuscule pause in his fate might live beyond him, his family, the tribe to which he happened to belong, and that the only constant in the whole of Maxwell Park – the trees, the birds, the water, the kids – the only beat that dumped all other rhythms was the beat of love. Salman took a deep breath, the deepest he'd ever taken; it filled parts of his lungs which had never before breathed, not even at the moment of his birth. He felt a great swell of happiness explode infinitely slowly from the centre of his being. His love spread across the grass, the trees, the chunks of dead elephants and returned to him sevenfold. [...] Ripping off his bandanna, he ran his fingers through his long hair. Felt free. [...] [H]e faced towards Grobals Cross and began to pray.

(2001a: 118-20)

Since Sal's eyes are closed, his perception of urban space around him is limited to a pure bodily experience of the atmosphere of Glasgow, which generates a rush of positive emotions, pointing to Böhme's (2001) claim that the atmosphere of the city is mainly sensually perceived, and intrinsically, bodily felt since it is “scripted in emotional states of being” (Plesske 2014: 139). Whether it is the warmth of the sun filtered through his eyelids or the sudden realization of belonging, the understanding and sense of love appears to be more of a phantasmagoria than a real feeling, especially in light of the closing scene, Sal's unexpected turn to religion, which may even seem hypocritical (Upstone 2010: 195). As Pile assert, “phantasmagoria implies a peculiar mix of spaces and times: the ghost-like or dream-like procession of things in cities not only comes from all over the place (even from places that do not or never will exist), but it also evokes very different times (be they past, present or future; be they remembered or imagined).” (2005: 3) Drawing on this interpretation, Sal's emotional state may, in fact, be generated by Glasgow, the phantasmagoric city, which acquires an atmosphere of warmth, love and solace in return.

As Sal, the gangsta disappears in the phantasmagoria of love to give its place to Salman Ishaq, so does DJ Zaf eventually dissolve, turn into music or into something other than human – “immortal. Invisible, formless, perfect” (2004: 85) in the phantasmagoric space of Glasgow, “the liquid city [that] would sink aw intae nuhin.” (2004: 395) Zaf attributes the transformation of self and atmosphere to the Clyde, to the endless movement of the water:

[E]verythin seemed to be regressin – not so much into the past as into essences, sensations, concepts [...] The city seemed to be shiftin constantly [...] in the slippin of time through brickwork and concrete – a feelin that Zaf couldn't pin down, a frontier sense of exhilaration of ridin the west wind on the back of this city of light and dark where everythin was an illusion.

(2004: 372)

Zaf's dream or vision of change in the form of regression to essences and sensations suggests that the complex and ambivalent but decidedly affective atmosphere of the city may, in fact, reveal its core behind the multitude of masks, its soul as an ever-changing "liquid city" that refuses to be stuck in time but takes up the everyday challenges posed by the change of the times, and by its inhabitants, both old and new.

Conclusion

Through the individual and collective experiences of the characters of "Bandanna," "The Naked Heart," "The Queens of Govan" and *Psychoraag*, as well as their bodily perceptions, emotions and imagination, Suhayl Saadi offers a host of urban imaginaries of contemporary Glasgow. His portrayal reveals the complexity and ambiguity of affective relationships and the mutually transformative power of these relationships for the city and its inhabitants alike. My analysis of the characters and the depiction of Glasgow found that whatever the emotions the first generation of Pakistani immigrants, DJ Zaf, John, Sal and Ruby derive from Glasgow's atmosphere they may in fact be the exact same emotions they give a physical shape to as they constantly construct and reconstruct the image and atmosphere of the city – that is, the individuals are both affected by and is affecting the emotional and atmospheric qualities and Glasgow, creating its urban imaginary as the postmodern city, the hybrid city and the phantasmagoric city. While the characters' self-expression, and the impermanent and illusory nature of Glasgow tends to be manifested in phantasmagoria and suggests that both are wearing masks, I argued that what these masks represent and what lies behind them may in fact point to the same fluid identity that makes the city and the people – and, by extension, Saadi's fiction – uniquely Glaswegian.

ⁱ Saadi describes his redefinition as follows: "With my pen, I draw refrains from the sighs of the dead and trumpet them as tales of the new Alba. My long, hirpling fall is a supra-mythic Scottishness which I cannot explain. Neither tribal or territorial, it is an Albannach shroud which emerges liminally through fiction" (2002: 239).

ⁱⁱ For a discussion of how Glasgow was compelled to become more attractive for tourists, see Bisset (2007: 60).

ⁱⁱⁱ In his review Nick Mitchell labels *Psychoraag* "the first ever novel of Scottish-Asian identity" while Saadi himself calls it a "significant contemporary Scottish rock 'n' roll novel" ("*Psychoraag*"), thus refusing a hyphenated identity.

^{iv} A *barathrie* is an Urdu word denoting a person's extended family or a clan.

^v Simone Weil's concept of rootlessness marks the decline of a political spirit; it is a so-called *déracinement*. Based on Thucydides' idea of stasis, the concept also refers to the loss of a collective communal spirit, that is, the loss of a common past and common ancestors (see Dietz 1988: 154).

^{vi} Big landowner in Punjabi.

^{vii} A peasant or peasants.

^{viii} Employed in diaspora studies (not entirely in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari), *detransformation* and *reterritorialization* denote the loss of an old territory (in the homeland) and taking possession of a new one (in the host country).

^{ix} Mosques.

^x *Mashriki* means eastern and connotes respectability and sophistication.

References:

- Baudrillard, Jean. 2000. *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1994. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP.
- Bell, Paul, et al. *Environmental Psychology*. 1996. 4th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project* (ed. Tiedemann, R.) 1972. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Bissett, Alan. 2007. The New ‘Weegies’: The Glasgow Novel in the Twenty-first Century. In Schoene, B. (ed.) *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, 59–67. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bohme, Gernot. 2001. *Asthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*. München: Fink.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Cinar, Alev, and Thomas Bender. 2007. Introduction: City Experience, Imagination, and Place. In Cinar, A., Bender, T. (eds.) *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, xi-xxvi. London: U of Minnesota P.
- Dietz, Mary G. 1998. *Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman.
- Griffero, Tonino. 2014. Architectural Affordances: the Atmospheric Authority of Spaces. In Tidwell, P. (ed.) *Architecture and Atmosphere: a Tapio Wirkkala—Rut Bryk design reader*. 15–47. Espoo: Tapio Wirkkala-Rut Bryk Foundation.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1992. Bodies-Cities. In Colomina, B. (ed.) *Sexuality and Space*, 241–53. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA : Blackwell.
- Hasse, Jürgen. 2016. Emotions in an Urban Environment: Embellishing the Cities from the Perspective of the Humanities. In Schmid, H., Sahr, W.-D., Urry, J. (ed.) *Cities and Fascination: Beyond the Surplus of Meaning*. London; New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Huskinson, Lucy. 2016. Introduction: The Urban Uncanny. In Huskinson, L. (ed.) *The Urban Uncanny: A collection of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Basingstoke: Taylor and Francis.
- Jansen, Bettina. 2018. *Narratives of Community in the Black British Short Story*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- King, Anthony. 2007. Boundaries, Networks, and Cities. In Cinar, A., Bender, T. (eds.) *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, 1–14. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Madanipour, Ali. 2003. *Public and Private Spaces of the City*. London; New York : Routledge.

-
- Mitchell, Nick. Psychoraag: Suhayl Saadi. In *Spike Magazine* [online]. April, 1, 2006. Accessed February, 13 2013. <<http://www.spikemagazine.com/0406-suhayl-saadi-psychoraag-interview.php>>.
- Pile, Steve. 2005. *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life*. London: SAGE.
- Plesske, Nora. 2014. *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Saadi, Suhayl. 2001a. Bandanna. In *The Burning Mirror*, 109–20. Edinburgh: Poligon.
2002. Being Scottish. In Devine, T., Logue, P. (eds) *Being Scottish: Personal Reflections on Scottish Identity Today*, 239–41. Edinburgh: Polygon.
- Saadi, Suhayl. 2004. *Psychoraag*. Edinburgh: Black & White.
- Saadi, Suhayl. 2006. Songs of the Village Idiot: Ethnicity, Writing and Identity. In McGonigal, J., Stirling, K. (eds.) *Ethically Speaking: Voice and Values in Modern Scottish Writing*, 117-38. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi.
- Saadi, Suhayl. 2001b. The Naked Heart. *The Burning Mirror*, 131–42. Edinburgh: Poligon.
- Saadi, Suhayl. 2001c. The Queens of Govan. *The Burning Mirror*, 2-36. Edinburgh: Poligon.
- Schmid, Heiko, Wolf-Dietrich Sahr, and John Urry. 2016. Cities and Fascination: Beyond the Surplus of Meaning. In Schmid, H., Sahr, W.-D., Urry, J. (eds.) *Cities and Fascination: Beyond the Surplus of Meaning*, 1–13. London; New York: Routledge.
- Upstone, Sara. 2010. *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-first Century Voices*. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Eva Pataki
The University of Miskolc, Hungary
e-mail: vicapataki@yahoo.com

In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2019, vol. 1, no. 1 [cit. 2019-06-24]. Available on web page http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/SJLCS01/pdf_doc/06.pdf. ISSN 2644-5506.