‘Burminggaon? Nottinggaon? Biradforrd?’: British Asian Noir Depictions of Bradford

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**Abstract**

In this article, I examine noir representations of ‘Biradforrd’, that important West Yorkshire city which, as one British-Punjabi character’s mispronunciation suggests, has been transformed by South Asian Muslim migration. I examine a trilogy: M. Y. Alam’s Bradford noir novels *Annie Potts is Dead*, *Kilo* and *Red Laal* (1998−2012), and a tetralogy: A. A. Dhand’s *Streets of Darkness*, *Girl Zero*, *City of Sinners* and *One Way Out* (2016−2019). These novels explore the *biradari* or kinship system evoked by Atia Hosain’s character in her neologism ‘Biradforrd’. They also focus, among other matters, on Bradford’s predominantly Mirpuri community from the Azad Kashmir region of northeast Pakistan. I argue that despite their different religious backgrounds, Alam and Dhand are both from the ‘myth of return’ class and portray from the inside Bradfordians’ ghettoized deprivation, drugs problem and vulnerability to racist and Islamophobic abuse.

*Keywords*: Bradford; noir; British-Asian; crime fiction

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In her unfinished novel about Britain ‘No New Lands, No New Seas’, written between the 1950s and 1970s, the Indian author Attia Hosain (1913–1998) described a migrant character’s arrival in Britain in the following way:

Munnay had arrived in London […], with two pounds and a friend’s address. When he got there his friend had long left for some distant northern place.

‘Burminggaon? Nottinggaon? Biradforrd?’ The stout, suspicious Punjabi woman who had answered his knock recited the words as she kept the front door half-shut […].[[1]](#endnote-1)

This quotation recalls the ‘three pounds in my pocket’ story that is often told by members of the first generation of migrants to come to Britain.[[2]](#endnote-2) Hosain’s portrayal hints at the outsider’s and metropolitan’s dismissive and condescending view of the midlands and the north of England as ‘some distant northern place’ about which little is known.

In this article, I scrutinize ‘Biradforrd’, that provincial but pivotal West Yorkshire city that, as Hosain’s British-Punjabi character’s mispronunciation suggests, has been transformed by migration. South Asian Muslims have contributed very positively through their cuisine, music, religious practice and entrepreneurship to making Bradford what it is today. The ‘Birad’ in ‘Biradforrd’ signifies *biradari*, the kinship networks that are so strong in the city, and in Mirpuri (Pakistani-Kashmiri) culture more broadly. And the suffix ‘gaon’ in ‘Burminggaon’ and ‘Nottinggaon’ means ‘village’, suggesting the tightly-knit and interconnected nature of British Asian communities outside London, and their frequent maintenance of strong links to Pakistan.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In what follows, I trace Bradford’s multicultural history before examining recent noir representations of the city. I train a wide-angled critical lens and then zoom in on one trilogy: M. Y. Alam’s *Annie Potts is Dead*, *Kilo* and *Red Laal* (1998−2012), and one tetralogy: A. A. Dhand’s *Streets of Darkness*, *Girl Zero*, *City of Sinners* and *One Way Out* (2016−2019). Despite their different religious backgrounds, Alam (a Muslim) and Dhand (a Sikh) share much in common as second-generation Bradfordians who create noir novels that depict the city’s ghettoized crime from the inside. Both novel series activate the following aspects of noir: they feature morally ambiguous protagonists from migrant backgrounds; question authority and the British justice system because of their underpinning racist assumptions; and expand the scope of the classic noir beyond the isolated (white) male individual to encompass a broader community made up of diverse, marginalized subjects.

Not only do these series build on canonical noir’s content, but they also implicitly interrogate noir as a designation. The term has a contested history, and has been applied retrospectively to many films and novels.[[4]](#endnote-4) The genre’s visualization of good and evil clearly contains racialized and sometimes racist overtones. By way of an example, Raymond Chandler’s comment in *The Simple Art of Murder* that ‘the streets were dark with something more than night’ is one that immediately springs to mind.[[5]](#endnote-5) Perhaps the supersaturated, stylistically experimental noir of David Peace is the closest point of comparison to these two authors’ work, especially as his vision of West Yorkshire stretches across four books too.[[6]](#endnote-6) Lee Horsley describes Peace as James Ellroy’s and Walter Mosley’s ‘closest equivalent’ in Britain, commenting on the bleakness of his worldview and his tormented prose.[[7]](#endnote-7) But when Peace examines Leeds’s Harehills and Chapeltown in his novel about the Yorkshire Ripper *Nineteen Seventy-Seven*, for instance, he turns these areas pallid, despite their long and proud histories of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian migration.[[8]](#endnote-8) Investigating the linked murders of local prostitutes and other vulnerable women, *Nineteen Seventy-Seven*’s policeman protagonist Bob Fraser sees ‘[t]hree Pakistani women in black’ cross the road, and at the same moment Bob thinks, ‘The sun goes behind a cloud and I can feel the night, the endless fucking night I’ve always felt.’[[9]](#endnote-9) Like Chandler, from its roots Peace’s noir is entangled with racial politics. Characters’ casual racism, offensive language and police brutality towards ethnic-minority suspects reflect the 1970s context in deeply shocking ways. However, despite his alertness to racism, Peace’s primary focus in the quartet is on white working-class men. The novelist’s non-white characters largely serve as foils to the narrative unfolding of the damaged psyches of Bob and his alcoholic journalist counterpart Jack Whitehead. By contrast, the British Asian noir writers Alam and Dhand cross national borders and social divisions while considering a range of skin tones, cultural backgrounds and psychological profiles.

In terms of its form, noir has elastic generic boundaries and is capacious and inclusive, as Paul Duncan explains: ‘Noir can be applied to any work – especially one involving crime – that is notably dark, brooding, cynical, complex and pessimistic.’[[10]](#endnote-10) Unlike its close relative the hardboiled crime novel, noir fiction does not need to feature an investigator, even an unorthodox and ethically questionable one. Indeed, in three of Dhand’s four novels (the exception being *City of Sinners*), his maverick policeman Harry Virdee is not supposed to investigate the series of murders that unfold, due to his suspension, recusal or annual leave. Meanwhile, Alam’s protagonists are not involved in law enforcement at all but are instead reluctantly drawn into a criminal underworld. Alam and Dhand are thus selected as this article’s key authors for their development of a Bradford noir − Alam’s novels in particular being closer to noir than to the hardboiled detective novel. The two novelists’ regional version of noir is highly politicized and generically experimental, as it questions and subverts the white loner noir hero while echoing the tenebrous tone identified by Duncan.

In his ground-breaking monograph *Dwelling Places* (2003), James Procter explores the way in which during the 1980s and 1990s Bradford reimagined itself through a nostalgic lens as a tourist destination and the heritage site of Haworth and Baildon, dales and moorland, Brontës and J. B. Priestley. He tracks 1990s tourism campaigns’ bleaching out, ruralization and depopulation of the local history of migration and tense race relations, writing: ‘the white countryside was allowed to replace the multicultural metropolis as the essential image of Bradford’.[[11]](#endnote-11) Earlier in the same work, Procter argues for the need to provincialize London in order to focus on a ‘devolved cultural geography of black [or brown] Britain’ through literature.[[12]](#endnote-12) This is one appropriate way of viewing Alam’s and Dhand’s work, as authors who are unashamedly devolved and Bradfordian, and who counter the isolated white noir anti-hero of yesteryear.

The West Yorkshire metropolis had a thriving status as an industrial centre for the textiles industry (especially wool) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Booming employment opportunities in the production of worsted cloth attracted German Jewish, then Irish, and finally South Asian migrants – this last group changing the city so substantially that it is sometimes known colloquially today as ‘Bradistan’.[[13]](#endnote-13) Many of Britain’s and especially Bradford’s so-called Pakistani communities actually came from Mirpur in the underdeveloped region of Azad (‘Free’) Kashmir. First ‘pioneer’[[14]](#endnote-14) migrants and later their families moved to Bradford from the early 1960s onwards, due to the pull factor of the British need for factory workers and the push factor of displacement back home because of the construction of the Mangla Dam in Mirpur District. The contemporaneous demand for menial labour in northern England’s textiles factories, combined with a relative ease of movement prior to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, encouraged the relocation of thousands of Kashmiris to Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and other regions.

Since their arrival in large numbers in the 1960s to work in the booming textiles industry, pioneer migrants experienced difficulties settling into often brusque and insular West Yorkshire.[[15]](#endnote-15) They and many of their descendants continue to come under pressure to assimilate; experience everyday racism, discrimination and structural inequality; are vulnerable to an escalation of far-right activity; and fear the loss or dilution of their Islamic identity. As of February 2017, Bradford was ranked the fifth most income-deprived local authority in England,[[16]](#endnote-16) making it an urgent place in which to conduct research into the cultural production of socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Bradford’s population is also unusually young, with 30% of its inhabitants under twenty years old, which presents problems of unemployment. The 2011 Census revealed that Bradford district has the highest rate of Pakistanis and Kashmiris in England and Wales, at approximately 20%, with Asians as a whole at nearly 27%. Muslims amount to 25% of the city’s population, making them the second largest religious group after Christians (by contrast Sikhs constitute less than 1% of Bradford’s population).[[17]](#endnote-17)

Bradford’s wool industry unravelled rapidly, as it were, with Irene Hardill writing, ‘During the 1970s and 1980s, the industry […] simultaneously contracted and passed through a structural and technological revolution […]. Nearly 70 per cent of jobs and worsted spindles disappeared along with 76 per cent of all looms.’[[18]](#endnote-18) Deteriorating economic fortunes and the hostile and alarmist rhetoric of politicians such as Enoch Powell contributed to a surge of racist violence in Bradford, and in 1976 the so-called Battle of Bradford took place. In this incident, as Seán McLoughlin explains, the far-right National Front party, ‘having organised a large “anti-immigration” march through the city, were eventually chased out of town by an angry crowd of West Indian and Asian youth’.[[19]](#endnote-19) This signalled the worsening race relations that would taint Bradford’s history over the coming decades.

In the 1980s, further clashes occurred between the National Front and young British Pakistanis. In 1981, that landmark year of nationwide riots from Brixton to Toxteth, a group of Asian leftist men who became known as the Bradford 12 were acquitted after standing trial for making petrol bombs for deployment against violent racists in the city.[[20]](#endnote-20) The jury agreed with the argument made by the defendants and their lawyers Ruth Bundey and Gareth Peirce that ‘Self-Defence Is No Offence’. [[21]](#endnote-21) The court acquitted the men, accepting that the unused explosives were only intended for the protection of their communities from racist aggression in the face of a lack of police action.

Salman Rushdie’s publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 was the last straw for many members of the impoverished British Muslim community, coming as it did after smaller-scale disputes such as the Honeyford affair[[22]](#endnote-22) and the halal school meals controversy.[[23]](#endnote-23) On 14 January protestors, almost all of them men, soaked a copy of the book with fuel and burnt it in front of (and egged on by) the world’s media. They then set fire to an effigy of Rushdie outside Bradford’s imposing City Hall in Centenary Square. This inadvertently served as a tool for tabloid newspapers and the far right, allowing them to deal in caricatures of toxic Muslim masculinity. Some British Pakistanis of that generation discovered in the Rushdie affair and its media coverage the catalyst to become more radical and politically active. [[24]](#endnote-24) Fifty-nine people were killed globally, and retailers came under pressure to remove *The Satanic Verses* from their shelves. The book polarized society and shone a spotlight on Muslims. Previously they had been a barely-noticed minority group in Britain, folded into the broader category of ‘British Asians’. From 1989 onwards, British Muslims, and those of Pakistani heritage in particular, were cast almost as folk devils. Bradford, the city with the highest percentage of Pakistani-heritage inhabitants in the UK, was demonized as a violent place – notwithstanding that the violence was bidirectional and asymmetric.

In 1995 intense British Pakistani campaigning over two months to evict prostitutes from the streets of Bradford’s Muslim-majority locality of Manningham culminated in July when riots broke out.[[25]](#endnote-25) These protests were not only inspired by conservative disdain for the area’s red light district but also by ‘unemployment, distrust of the police, a generation gap and a power struggle’.[[26]](#endnote-26) More recently, members of the National Party and British National Party marched on Bradford only to meet fierce resistance from around a thousand British Asians in the ‘northern riots’ of 2001. This event and earlier protests in the similarly divided northern towns of Oldham and Burnley were overshadowed a few months later by 9/11 and the onset of the War on Terror. This was accompanied by a rise in Islamophobia that spiked further after the London bombings of 2005, the Brexit Referendum of 2016, and 2017’s Manchester Arena and other attacks.

Bradford’s present-day realities include grinding poverty, social exclusion, segregated schools and white flight. Gentrification has led to an embarrassing ‘hole in the ground’ eventually being filled by a ‘posh new shopping centre’,[[27]](#endnote-27) the Westfield mall. Social enterprise organizations like the QED Foundation are fostering skills and job creation opportunities in a city kneecapped by high unemployment. Finally, the Bradford Literature Festival, now in its seventh year, has increased local and Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) engagement with arts and culture, as well as launching the careers of a growing number of younger-generation Bradford writers.[[28]](#endnote-28)

Despite some positive developments for the city, the popular imagination fuelled by hysterical newspaper headlines continues to associate Bradford with a criminal underworld of terror networks, Asian grooming gangs, violence, drugs and extortion. Yet, as Marta Bolognani observes in *Crime and Muslim Britain*: ‘Bradford Pakistanis are less angry, “other” and disenfranchised than most of us would expect.’[[29]](#endnote-29) She points to a journalistic and academic preoccupation with the conurbation’s young male working-class population, which comes at the expense of the voices of women, older people and members of the middle class. Writing of the broader British context, Sadek Hamid reinforces Bolognani’s argument about the diabolization of young Bradford Pakistani men. He argues that, for the mainstream media, Islam functions as ‘*the* explanatory mechanism for public debate about immigration, crime, and terrorism’,[[30]](#endnote-30) when the reality is much more complex.

As my historical outline indicates, the city has long suffered from industrial decline and a lack of investment, proving a magnetizing hub for fascist violence. These are features which make Bradford ripe for exploration through a noir lens. Noir frequently examines deprived, run-down areas populated by disaffected youth, and more broadly considers societies striated by deep social divisions. The predicament for the city’s British Asian noir writers like Alam and Dhand is how to paint an honest picture of Bradford without playing into the stale pathologization narrative.

The reason I have decided to focus on these two authors for this Special Issue entitled *Shades of Noir in World Literatures* is that they both adapt noir aesthetics amid textured explorations of Bradford’s underworld. What makes their works noir is their depictions of an unlit and dangerous urban landscape; the morally tarnished heroes and pessimistic worldview; and a shared interest in the drug-dealing enterprise and other forms of organized crime, which include human trafficking and prostitution. However, perhaps the most important links between Alam’s and Dhand’s novels are their sustained excoriation of racism, their expansion of noir beyond the white loner towards a more communal figure, and the fact that both series sprinkle some post-secular spice on the noir genre. First, racist violence might be seen as giving rise to a new form of noir, one that takes seriously the genre’s colourist vocabulary in order to fashion ‘a darker shade of noir’[[31]](#endnote-31) than the normatively white genre to which readers are accustomed. And second, whereas traditionally there was a glaring absence of religion in noir novels,[[32]](#endnote-32) these two novelists discuss Islam (and in Dhand’s case Sikhism too) from various standpoints, including the spiritual.

My central point about questioning and subverting the solitary noir hero should again be stressed. As we will see, Dhand’s policeman is married, and his siblings, parents and in-laws make regular appearances through the pages of his books. Even Alam’s younger and defiantly single protagonists are often depicted in the company of family members, and Kilo eventually enters into marriage with no regrets. In the British Asian diaspora − unlike in mainstream society, which is often more atomized − lives are usually tangled up with other lives in a way that means it is hard to separate a person from their family, friends and wider milieu. That said, even if these British Asian heroes achieve a certain degree of relational integration, in other ways they are the typical ‘protagonists who are figures of exclusion’[[33]](#endnote-33) foregrounded in noir. Marginalized by white society because of their ethnicity, both male characters also have fraught relationships with their parents and the wider Asian community in Bradford. These features mean that the British Asian protagonists can at once be accommodated within, while osmotically leaking through, noir’s porous borders.

The trilogy under scrutiny is by M. Y. (Mohammed Yunis) Alam who, as well as writing fiction, is also a researcher and teacher in Social Sciences at Bradford University. In 2006 he produced a counter-narrative to the predominantly negative discourses about Bradford, especially since the riots of 2001, in the shape of a book of interview transcripts with British Pakistani men entitled *Made in Bradford*.[[34]](#endnote-34) Another of Alam’s important works of nonfiction, his PhD by Publication,[[35]](#endnote-35) is about the intersection between the arts and the humanities. In this scholarly work, he argues that creative writers of prose are sociologists, deploying quasi-ethnographic skills to create their fiction and plays. The borderlines between ethnography and creative writing are indistinct and easily penetrable. Alam has a long career in qualitative research, but periodically comes to feel that his academic voice obstructs those of his respondents. As such, he aims to give space for people to speak for themselves – including when it comes to his take on the noirgenre.

Challenging stereotypes, in his first two novels, *Annie Potts is Dead* (1998) and *Kilo* (2002), Alam keeps depictions of Islam to a minimum and instead tends to focus on ethnicity and culture. He only examines religious practice in so far as it relates to communitarian behaviour such as the ‘abstinence, inner reflection and devotion’ associated with Ramadan.[[36]](#endnote-36) Even ostensibly devout elders are sketched as reaching for a grab-bag of those parts of Islam that fit with their worldly ambitions, as for example Kilo’s father ‘got pretty skillful at picking and choosing the bits of Islam he deemed relevant and just as good at forgetting or overlooking the bits that didn’t tie into his needs’ (*Kilo*, p. 41). However, in *Red Laal* (2012), his only fully post-9/11 novel, readers witness Alam’s developing interest in what has happened ‘since Tommy Taliban and Betty Burkha had taken centre stage’,[[37]](#endnote-38) namely the twenty-first century rise in Islamophobia and apprehensions about terrorism. The trilogy therefore traces a post-secular turn in the British Asian noir novel, something that will be taken for granted and built upon by the later novelist A. A. Dhand.

Alam’s three works of fiction delineate the *biradari* or ‘extended family’ support system[[38]](#endnote-39) that was evoked by Attia Hosain in her neologism ‘Biradforrd’; and they specifically focus on Bradford’s Mirpuri community. To take one example, from *Red Laal*, the sometimes oppressive strength of *biradari* is portrayed as a type of old boy network. ‘You are Ayub’s son,’ an elder says to the protagonist Khalil Khan (known as Kilo), and the latter reacts with tacit indifference:

Never favoured the old *biradari* name-dropping game, never really followed the point of it or saw its essence. He knew my old man. And so what? Didn’t mean a thing. As he stood there, eyes pleading, I believed it never would. […] I didn’t owe anyone anything on account of genes […]. (*Red Laal*, p. 10)

Here the relevance of ‘genes’ and community has eroded for Kilo and other British-born South Asians, who believe *biradari* to be a meaningless throwback to the era of what is later described as the ‘Generation Ones’: the first generation to come to Britain (*Red Laal*, p. 151).

Hosain belonged to this first generation, resided in London, and came from an aristocraticmigrant background – what we might call the ‘England-returned’,[[39]](#endnote-40) cosmopolitan class. She and others like her often looked at northern England askance and from a comfortable distance. By contrast, Alam is from the north and from the ‘myth of return’ class and a later generation.[[40]](#endnote-41) It is therefore easy to see why he portrays the city’s abandoned mills and dark corners with knowledgeable familiarity and, at times, deep affection. In the three novels, one of Alam’s main themes is the problems faced by, and sometimes the criminalization of, second-generation British Asians in Bradford. Compared with his hard-working father who still struggles with the English language after decades living in Britain, Kilo ‘knew things by virtue of being born here’ (*Kilo*, p. 79). Unlike his parents’ generation, he is not deferential or grateful to Britain as a ‘host’. Instead, as a Yorkshireman born and bred, he is confidently critical of his country’s social inequality and racial discrimination, and his ties to Pakistan are uncertain and distant.

Alam’s debut novel, *Annie Potts Is Dead*,centres on a crime (the murder of the eponymous old lady), the false leads that point suspicion at our hero, and his eventual escape. In this text, Alam focuses on a different protagonist to his later two. Amjad Mahmood, known as Ammy, is a corner-shop worker and aspiring writer. Kilo, the protagonist of *Kilo* and *Red Laal*, makes a brief appearance as a friend of Ammy’s, who was given his nickname ‘because he went around telling everyone he smuggled in a kilo of powder every time he came back from Pakistan’.[[41]](#endnote-42) What Ammy and Kilo have in common to give the triptych a sense of continuity is their tough backgrounds, brushes with criminality, and outsider nature. This, then, is noir in broader terms, rather than its subgenre of hardboiled crime fiction, as noted earlier. Neither of Alam’s protagonists work as policemen or private investigators, unlike in A. A. Dhand’s police procedural noir featuring D.I. Harry Virdee.

The plot of *Annie Potts Is Dead*, as with Alam’s other two, largely unfolds in Bradford. The novel’s very first sentences and a few other sections, however, are set in Ammy’s ancestral homeland of Pakistan:

The second best thing I ever did was coming here. […] This idea of return that I’d dreamt about for so long simply had to be fulfilled. That, more than anything, was the best thing.

I was given all those warnings but I didn’t really believe any of them. About the food, the climate, the people, and of course, a triple dose of a thug called Culture Shock would leap out from some shit-filled alley and begin to kick my head in. (*Annie Potts*, p. 7)

Ammy has gone back to the Islamic Republic and made ‘return’ something more than a myth. The novel’s indebtedness to the noir genre is signalled in the passage’s first-person perspective, wry tone, pithy sentence structure and streetwise diction, which recalls Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and even the foul-mouthed Mickey Spillane.

Yet the excerpt packs a lot of ideas into the deceptively simple form. Its opening sentence immediately hints at mystery: if this is the second-best event, then what is the best, and where is the ‘here’ of which he speaks? We quickly find out that Ammy’s favourite aspect of his present circumstances is his unusual realization of the myth of return; and the current locale is of course Pakistan, where he has gone on the run. The final discussion of a viciously personified Culture Shock is perhaps the most evidently noir*-*like section of the passage. Interestingly, in the early 1980s psychologist Philip Rack took the term ‘culture shock’ out of its mid-twentieth century origins describing Americans’ experiences of living in ‘Third World’ countries, and adapted it for his study of diasporic communities and the alienation they go through in Britain.[[42]](#endnote-43) Alam adds an extra permutation with his exploration of a diasporic subject’s discomfort with the lifestyle ‘back home’. When Ammy describes Culture Shock as ‘leap[ing] out from some shit-filled alley’, one cannot but think of Chandler’s approving assessment of Hammett’s steely transformation of the earlier, mostly British genteel tradition of crime fiction when Chandler wrote that Hammett ‘took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley’.[[43]](#endnote-44) In this vein, we might say that Alam takes murder out of Agatha Christie’s village greens and southern English drawing rooms and drops it into Bradford’s syringe-strewn gutters and ginnels.[[44]](#endnote-45)

From the novel’s outset, then, Alam alludes to his noir predecessors, but the novelty of his approach is intimated in the very different mean streets described (those of Bradford and Pakistan, as compared with the more typical locations of urban America or, increasingly, Scandinavia[[45]](#endnote-46)). By positioning his protagonist as a victim who is figuratively ambushed and actually arrested in the broader plotline, Alam establishes the polar opposite of Chandler’s virile image of Hammett actively dropping the metaphorical vase. More broadly, through his humorous picture of a guileless outsider in Pakistan being beaten up by a personified Culture Shock, Alam destabilizes the dominant image of the tough-guy investigator as someone who is usually in control of situations.

*Annie Potts Is Dead* is narrated from the perspective of the apparent villain, given that the police enter Ammy’s home and arrest him and his brother on suspicion of murdering an elderly and ill customer. We are shown Ammy being brutally interrogated in the cells, his experiences with unscrupulous solicitors, and his brushes with ‘real’ criminals including burglars, drug dealers and other wideboys. Like his American hardboiledforebears, Alam describes the disintegrating urban milieu in a satirical style full of wisecracks and word-play, as when Ammy boasts: ‘I spoke English, probably better than any of the pricks in this shithole of a place did, and what’s more, I could write, twist and abuse this English like a motherfucker’ (*Annie Potts*, p. 60).[[46]](#endnote-47) Departing from those earlier writers, though, Alam demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism and the virulence of present-day racism make it impossible for a falsely-accused British Pakistani in a bigoted society to remain within Raymond Chandler’s model of the besmirched but ultimately virtuous street crusader. Ammy and his brother are hardworking small businessman whose only crime is ‘committ[ing] commerce’ (*Annie Potts*, p. 24). This does not deter the police from manhandling them and calling them ‘paki[s]’, ‘black cunts’ and ‘wog[s]’ (*Annie Potts*, pp. 15, 16, 28). Small wonder, then, that Ammy embraces his criminal reputation, gives up on Britain, and finds safe(r) haven in Pakistan. Since the authorities remain antagonistic and the real murderer walks free, the noir solution to such social corruption is to abscond.

Alam’s next novel, *Kilo*, is set entirely in Bradford and goes into greater detail about the British Asian drug-dealing underworld. Even in the commoner scenario portrayed in *Kilo* where return remains a myth (this is the only novel of Alam’s three which is entirely contained within Britain), communities continue to be highly connected to the subcontinent. They make regular trips back to see family, and sometimes embark on transnational marriages.[[47]](#endnote-48) Indeed, Kilo only narrowly avoids a life partnership arranged by his mother as both a punishment and a solution when his work selling narcotics is suspected, since ‘[a]t the first sign of trouble, the one word that gets mentioned is marriage’ (*Kilo*, p. 40). God, duty, *izzat* (honour) and culture are all evoked as justification, and Kilo thinks: ‘[S]omeone like me marrying someone from the home country strengthened a weakened bridge to an otherwise dying culture’ (p. 41). He resents and ultimately resists this forcible traversing of the cultural chasm by moving out of his family home to live on his own, much like the resolutely single outsider of classic noir.

One of the foremost topics on the lips of both Alam’s sociological interviewees and his fictional characters is Bradford’s drug problem. Dogged by unemployment or low-paying jobs, some young British Pakistani men turn to Class A drug dealing. Between 2013 and 2014, this ethnic group made up 20% of the just over 1,000 people convicted for the offence in Yorkshire and Humberside, even though British Pakistanis account for a mere 4.3% of the region’s population.[[48]](#endnote-49) Mohammed Qasim therefore undertook ethnographic research in Manningham to talk to drug dealers there about their motivations, concluding that dealing ‘is an attractive line of work in deprived areas […] because there are few legitimate avenues for success in these places’.[[49]](#endnote-50) Inner-city kids like those portrayed in Alam’s three novels and the nonfictional book *Made in Bradford* see drug lords driving around in ‘the best cars […] able to do anything’.[[50]](#endnote-51) The dream of one day becoming dealers as an escape route out of destitute areas is therefore to be understood though not condoned.

Another possible avenue to make quick money that often goes hand in hand with desperation and the drugs trade is prostitution. Unfortunately, most of the money-making opportunities in this arena fall not to the prostitutes themselves but their handlers, as Alam recognizes when he writes of ‘the ever waiting, ever itching, money grabbing hands of […] pimps’ (*Kilo*, p. 32). Later on, he looks through Kilo’s eyes at the notorious episode in Manningham, discussed earlier, when locals ‘chased out the prostitutes and dealers back in ’96. And when I say *chased*, that’s just what I mean: ran them out, with bats, petrol bombs and God knows what else’ (p. 123; emphasis in original). The young British Pakistani narrator is chary of characterizing these vigilantes as ‘fanatical Muslims’, a label he is careful to explain comes ‘from the press, not me’ (ibid.). On the one hand, as a drug dealer himself, Kilo could fall victim to any future acts of urban cleansing by local activists. But on the other, the press would pigeonhole Kilo within the monolithic group of ‘Muslims’, alongside these judgemental older men, as if there were no difference between them. It is therefore unsurprising that he reacts with even-handed condemnation of both the anti-prostitution zealots and the right-wing journalists who flatten out Bradford’s complexity.

Despite the interest in issues associated with women, such as prostitution and marriage, *Kilo* is a hypermasculine text. In it, men exaggerate their masculinity to show, as one of Alam’s interviewees puts it, ‘I’m not a girl, I’m not a pussy, I’m a bad boy me.’[[51]](#endnote-52) Women characters barely feature in the narrative, Kilo’s mother, for example, appearing as a shadowy figure compared with the well-drawn, increasingly alcoholic, prematurely aged and ill father. Younger women are nameless ‘birds’, ‘slapper[s]’, ‘slag[s]’ (pp. 29, 38, 44), ‘*biatch[es]*’ (p. 73; emphasis in original), ‘[b]its-on-the-side’ (p. 228), or actual prostitutes. This chauvinist diction reflects the demographic makeup of the first generation of South Asian migrants, the working-class members of which tended to be Muslim and male. The men usually brought their wives and children over only after they had spent many years in Britain. What is more, the sexist blind spot in these novels chimes with that of the genre as a whole. Maureen T. Reddy points out that ‘the treatment of women in male hard-boiled detective fiction results in a simple, clear pattern – women are all potentially destructive and predatory, with some women redeemed by their willingness to submit to patriarchal rule’.[[52]](#endnote-53) Thus, while Alam is innovative when it comes to race and religion, his approach to gender conforms to noir’s masculinist norms.

What triggers Kilo’s descent into dealing and his ultimate emergence as one of the most important gangland players is Bradford is a traumatic childhood experience. When he was a boy, his father was extorted in his corner shop by white thugs who repeatedly called the patriarch a ‘paki’. Eventually these hard men beat up Kilo’s father so badly that he turned to alcohol and gave up the shop, selling it for much less than its value to a Sikh drinking mate. Like Ammy and his brother in *Annie Potts Is Dead*, Kilo discovers that hard work, passivity in the face of aggression, and clean living do not pay off. This is a trait of noir, alert as the genre is to a lack of opportunities for the law-abiding working class. However, Alam shows that the situation is far worse for the working-class brown man in a discriminatory society. As a result, teenage Kilo decides not to tread the same ‘sure fire road to misery’ taken by his quiet and well-behaved ‘old man’ (*Kilo*, p. 30). Refusing to stay within the bounds of the law, he joins the anarchic world of Bradford’s drug trade. Yet even there Kilo encounters unfair hostility, with many white dealers believing the received wisdom that ‘pakis took their jobs, their women, their shops, their homes, and now […] their criminal activities’ (p. 70). Kilo’s revenge is to keep his temper, stay sober, and outwit these prejudiced drug dealers. The outmanoeuvring is easy to do, for most of his white peers prove increasingly stupefied from sampling their own wares. Kilo’s sobriety is another personality trait that distinguishes him from the hard-drinking private eye of the noir tradition.

The final novel in the triptych, *Red Laal*,centres on Kilo trying to leave his drug-dealing past behind. Amid an attempt to re-enlist him into the criminal enterprise, Dullah, a gangster, asks Kilo what he thinks of Bradford, and Khalil gives a terse answer: ‘It’s home’ (*Red Laal*, p. 70). Yet while he identifies Bradford as his home, Khalil recognizes the significant otherness of Pakistani-heritage Bradfordians:

The fear, of beard and burkha alike, it’s not gone away yet and maybe it never will. It’s not just the obvious ones to fear, it’s all of us. If we’re not white, we sure aint [*sic*] right. So this is where we’ll stay. Not quite human, incapable of being painted normal and we can’t be ignored. […] *Are you sure you don’t want to blow yourself up? You sure you’re not on Jihad? You sure you don’t hate everyone who’s not like you?* (p. 221; emphasis in original)

Regardless of his attempts to blend in, the British-born Kilo is stigmatized as ‘the enemy within’ (ibid.). This internal monologue occurs onboard a plane to Azad Kashmir, as he sits with some upstanding British Pakistani citizens, three students who hail from Keighley. Yet racism does not discern the chasm between these morally upright aspiring professionals and Kilo, with his checkered past. All are wearily familiar with the perils of ‘flying while brown’, and airport staff’s Islamophobic questions about explosives, jihad and hatred. Like Homi Bhabha’s colonized subject, who is ‘*almost the same but not quite* […] *almost the same but not white*’ when compared to the colonizer,[[53]](#endnote-54) Alam’s postcolonial, post 9/11 hero is ‘not white’, which ‘sure aint right’. Conforming to generic conventions, Kilo is not accepted by society, but Alam deviates from convention by inserting religious identity into the noir landscape.

Expanding on this post-secular approach to the British Asian noir novel with his inclusion of Sikhs as well as Muslims is the younger novelist A. A. Dhand. Like Alam, Dhand examines Bradford in forensic detail and with heavy emphasis on its seamy side. It is in his tetralogy’s descriptions of specific locations around the city, such as Waterstones bookshop, Lister Mills and a thinly-disguised Mumtaz Restaurant, as well as the neoclassical splendour of St George’s Theatre and Cartwright Hall’s Bradford baroque, that Dhand’s writing – which can be rather pedestrian and hackneyed – begins to soar. This is another writer intimately connected with and shrewdly observant of his local area, though his politics are more reactionary than Alam’s. Under Dhand’s pen (or keyboard), Alam’s preferred locales of the corner shop and newsagent are once again highlighted. He dedicates *Girl Zero* to ‘“Dhand News” 1981–2016. Gone but never forgotten’.[[54]](#endnote-55) In interviews, Dhand reveals that this was a ‘convenience store that also rented out videos’, which was run by his parents until their retirement.[[55]](#endnote-56) Yet he diversifies the range of urban settings to encompass, for example, boxing clubs and a chemist’s shop. Dhand himself has worked in a chemist’s since being awarded his MPharm from the University of Bradford in 2002. In his byline on Twitter (@aadhand), he describes himself as: ‘Writer / pharmacist / corner shop keeper. In whichever order you like.’ Here Dhand’s disruption of conventional hierarchies around the craft of writing and the graft of shop work signals the sense of self-worth (as well as insider’s perspective) he derives from his working-class roots and migrant routes.

Dhand for the most part limns Bradford as a rough, crime-ridden place. The metropolis is grim, grimy and derelict – even being compared to Batman’s corrupt and mobster-led Gotham City (*Girl Zero*, p. 6).[[56]](#endnote-57) In his debut novel, *Streets of Darkness* (2016), Dhand compares the metropolis to its near neighbours with rightful anger:

Bradford had become the cesspit of Yorkshire, cowering next to the thriving rival cities of Leeds and Harrogate. You could buy a three-bedroom house in the centre for sixty grand. That wouldn’t even get you a shed in Leeds.

For over a decade, Bradford town centre had decayed and regeneration had dwindled. False promises, a crippling recession and poor planning had ruined the city. […] Bradford was more suited to pound shops than designer stores. […]

The side street was consumed by shadows from the towering buildings on either side. There were no street-lights and it felt like a sinister step into the unknown. The street was a dead end and looked utterly bereft of life.[[57]](#endnote-58)

The first paragraph’s images of a cesspit, decay, ruin and pound shops suggest Dhand’s near-despair about the state of his surroundings. Elsewhere in his fiction, the grounds of Bradford Grammar, Fulneck Independent School and Ilkley Moor provide occasional flashes of green affluence. The city comes across as a difficult, divided, deprived place, with crimes constantly being committed. Exaggerating Bradford’s problems, the quartet of novels identifies whites-only and Asians-only areas (little sense is conveyed, though, of the Sikhs being outsiders – Dhand importantly claims them as very much part of the Asian community). In the second paragraph, noir’s characteristic chiaroscuro aesthetics come into play, and the protagonist’s emergence out of the penumbra is a quintessentially hardboiled trope. Dhand’s representation of Bradford as a labyrinthine, baleful and rundown realm makes the metropolis an appropriate setting for his noir novels.

*Streets of Darkness* introduces readers to another son of a corner-shop owner, Dhand’s British-born Sikh detective Hardeep Virdee, who is known as Harry. Early in the debut novel, readers learn that Harry has been suspended from the police force for assaulting a Sikh elder. The old man, a friend of Harry’s estranged father, was rude to Harry and his Muslim wife Saima, whose interfaith marriage is still contentious in Bradford’s South Asian communities even after five years. In contrast to his orthodox father, Harry does not wear the turban since, unlike Kilo in *Red Laal*,he shows little interest in religion. Saima is a practising Muslim, though, who derives solace for her social isolation from her faith. Dhand portrays Bradford’s small Sikh community as equally if not more opposed to Harry’s and Saima’s union as the Muslims in the city are. Through this depiction, Dhand reminds us that conservatism often associated with Islam has as much to do with minoritarian attempts to maintain cultural purity in a hostile land as with religious extremism and Islamism.

Until the altercation, Harry had been on an upward career trajectory within West Yorkshire police circles, but in keeping with noir conventions he is prone to self-sabotage and has a fiery temper. Horsley points out that noir protagonists ‘tend to be isolated and estranged, existing on the margins of society and [… imbued with] imperfections, […] human weaknesses and self-distrust’.[[58]](#endnote-59) During his suspension, Harry inadvertently discovers the crucified body of first-generation British Pakistani businessman Shakeel Ahmed. Ahmed had tried to reverse Bradford’s economic decline, initially being compared to Bradford’s most illustrious industrialist Titus Salt,[[59]](#endnote-60) although as the novel progresses it becomes clear that the truth about the murder victim is less salubrious.

As we have seen, the far-right National Front, British National Party (BNP), English Defence League and Britain First have come to Bradford at regular intervals over the last four decades or so to make xenophobic speeches and cause disturbances, and the BNP plays a significant part in *Streets of Darkness*. The narrative arc follows the attempts of Ahmed’s murderers to frame a BNP member, Lucas Dwight, who has just been released from prison after fourteen years. Yet it transpires that Dwight has converted to Islam in jail and now renounces his earlier racist worldview. Harry feels some affinity with the former BNP activist because of the latter’s new-found interest in the numinous and in transcendence. This inspires Harry to hide Dwight even though a pressing deadline has been set for the fugitive’s capture. The driving purpose behind Ahmed’s murder and Lucas’s framing appears to be that the gang involved are trying to instigate a riot at the city’s annual mela[[60]](#endnote-61) in order to assemble a white supremacist Bradford out of the ashes. However, it later emerges that Harry’s brother Ronnie is a major drug dealer who is working with a local political ideologue to take over the West Yorkshire city’s dark streets by together controlling crime and narcotics. In accordance with the noir formula, therefore, Harry’s reputation is blemished. However, innovatively this is less about his individual moral code than his close family connections.

Harry teeters at the edge of acceptable behaviour because of his troubled attachment to his brother, but on balance the relationship helps him as a policeman, keeping him well-informed and wily. This tessellates with the established image of the hardboiled detective as a ‘tough guy […] hard-bitten, street-savvy’.[[61]](#endnote-62) Where Dhand (and Alam[[62]](#endnote-63)) depart from the established narrative is through their dismantling of assumptions that the noir protagonist should be ‘white’ and ‘very much alone’.[[63]](#endnote-64) Ronnie is involved in organized crime and the heroin trade, but Harry feels that he has a better control on policing when he can keep his brother on side. However, these underworld connections, as well as his own bending of rules and violent proclivities, mean that, like Kilo, Harry is not an unequivocally appealing character.

Dhand’s next novel, *Girl Zero* (2017), tackles the prominent current issues of grooming and human trafficking. Indeed, a concern with refugees, asylum seekers and modern forms of slavery has been increasingly prominent in contemporary crime fiction and noir.[[64]](#endnote-65) Personal and professional lines again become blurred in Dhand’s text when Harry’s niece, Ronnie’s daughter, is murdered, and he is banned from the case due to the conflict of interest. Harry fears the crime lord may try to seek vengeance. The young woman has been killed for uncovering a trafficking operation whereby white mothers are being slain and their daughters sold. The novel centres on Harry’s race against time to rescue a kidnapped mother and her daughter, who are being held in a house in the leafy nearby suburb of Ilkley. A gang of mostly Asian men does the work, orchestrated by the Pakistani foreign minister, who wants to use the girls for himself. Sairish Hussain is rightly alert to the fearmongering and crowd-pleasing politics here, writing of the novel’s denouement that it ‘paints specifically Pakistani men as particularly savage and villainous when compared to others’.[[65]](#endnote-66) What could have been a fine-grained approach to the ways in which women and girls, often from ethnic minority backgrounds, experience sexual exploitation and violence because of poverty, migration or internal displacement turns instead into a headline-grabbing depiction of the Asian grooming of white girls. However, it should also be noted that the highlighting of political corruption is a common feature of noir fiction. In its exposure of the Pakistani politician, then, *Girl Zero* purports to be speaking truth to power. However, by following crime fiction protocol, Dhand simultaneously lays himself open to charges of native informant sensationalism.

*City of Sinners* (2018) is the only novel from the tetralogy in which Harry acts straightforwardly as a detective, for he is back at work after his suspension and recusal. The text opens with the gruesome murder of a British Muslim girl in her late teens, whose cadaver is found suspended from the glass ceiling of Waterstones at the Wool Exchange, one of Bradford’s most beautiful and iconic buildings. The killer hopes through this and other murders to reel in Harry, who is his prime intended target. Italicized text written in the first-person from the murderer’s focalization indicates that he is motivated by a personal vendetta. A series of murders ensue; each time the British Asian girl’s corpse has the word ‘SINNER’ attached to it, and when dissected, rare wasps fly out of their eye sockets. The killer taunts Harry, inviting him to meet in a nightclub on Manningham Lane. At a bhangra, or Punjabi dance night for students at the Maestro club, Harry receives text messages asking him if he sees the sinner. Shortly afterwards the body of a Sikh girl is discovered on the dance floor.

The next target is Aisha, the daughter of Tariq Islam, Britain’s first Muslim Home Secretary.[[66]](#endnote-67) When Aisha Islam is kidnapped, her father’s powerful position means that MI5 operatives and other bigwigs head up to Bradford to help with the investigation. The killer leads Harry on a night-time wild goose chase to the canal, where another dead girl with ‘SINNER’[[67]](#endnote-68) carved on her chest is thrown into the murky waters. Through a subplot involving prescriptions, Harry works out that the connecting tissue binding the dead women was that they were secretly in relationships and – stretching readers’ credulity more than a little – all had allergies to wasp stings. Harry traces the only pharmacy worker who knew about and was able to manipulate their need for the morning-after pill and antihistamines to a shed in an allotment amid wintry Bradford’s ice and snow. There the Pakistani man keeps his weaponized wasps, along with Aisha, who is still alive.

It transpires that this man has a revenge motive against Harry because Saima had a quickly-annulled marriage over the phone with him when she was just seventeen. As with *Girl Zero*, Dhand disappointingly plays on stereotypes of the traditional, censorious and misogynist Pakistani man, and the furtive, sexually-downtrodden British Pakistani woman. Yet despite the novel’s arranged marriage and religious extremist (‘SINNER’) motifs and the city’s incessant rain and violence, Bradford briefly appears as a buzzy, multicultural space in *City of Sinners*’ Maestro club scene.

This more positive depiction of Bradford occasionally resurfaces in *One Way Out* (2019), which opens on a rare sunny day in the city, where Harry is happily spending some of his annual leave. Amid the fountains and the ice cream-eating revellers of City Park − which had, of course, been the venue for Rushdie’s book-burning three decades earlier − comes a bomb warning and then a relatively harmless blast. A far-right group known as the Patriots promise to give no further such warnings. The group go on to hold Bradford’s 105 mosques hostage in order to smoke out their real enemies, four members of the extremist group Almukhtaroon. The mosques are portrayed as being awash with community spirit, ‘collective responsibility’ (*One Way Out*, pp. 74, 95) and generous charitable giving. Trapped in one of these besieged places of worship, the fictional al-Mehraj mosque, Saima is enlisted to help root out a Patriot sleeper cell. On the outside and desperately worried about his wife, Harry tries to infiltrate Almukhtaroon. Home Secretary Tariq Islam makes another appearance in this novel, determined as he is to work with Harry to bring the crisis to resolution, and in the process realize his ruthless ambition to become Britain’s first Muslim prime minister. Dhand carefully constructs the standoff as a ‘clash of fundamentalisms’,[[68]](#endnote-69) rather than pointing the finger solely at Muslims. He also shows that racism is not an aberration but goes all the way to the top, to the ‘men running the country’ (*One Way Out*, p. 323). Despite his antiracist motivations, though, it cannot be denied that as well as amplifying the city’s crime statistics as fodder for his plots, Dhand now moves down the well-trodden path of associating Bradford with terrorism.

Islamic terror is an area which Scandinavian noir has also explored,[[69]](#endnote-70) so in itself this does not represent deviation from the genre. Where *One Way Out* is most inventive is in the novel’s further probing and subverting of the usual white loner protagonist. Redrawing the noir ‘hero’, Dhand presents Harry as having reconciled with his mother, who is making up for the long rift by getting to know her four-year-old grandson. Yet Harry’s father is still incandescent about his son’s marriage to a Muslim, indicating as Dhand recognizes that ‘[t]he stereotypical depiction of Muslim women and their culture was not confined to white society’ (*One Way Out*, p. 49). The Sikh paterfamilias’s Islamophobia is later explained (though not justified) as stemming from his trauma when, as a boy fleeing newly-created Pakistan on the subcontinent’s chaotic partition in 1947, he witnessed the death of his younger brother. Saima is figured in the novel as a ‘good Muslim’ in contrast to the ‘bad’, hate-filled Muslim mobs of partition.[[70]](#endnote-71) A hospital nurse by profession, she is shown regularly murmuring prayers for her family members’ and her own safety in the course of the ordeal portrayed in the novel, and is full of care rather than hatred for others. Thus, deviating from ‘the conspicuous absence of religion in the genre’ typically found in noir,[[71]](#endnote-72) Dhand gives Saima’s unobtrusive version of Islam an important position in *One Way Out*. Her faith stands in counterpoint to the terrorists’ grotesque twisting of the Qur’an to endorse mass murder.

The novel contains theological discussion not only about Islam but also on Christianity and Sikhism. The Almukhtaroon leader evokes the Bible to argue that just as God coexists with His antithesis the Devil, so too does Islamic extremism rely for its self-definition on the far right. Speaking of the South Asian context, Harry’s mother reminds his father that ‘Sikhism and Islam [a]re more closely linked than most people realize’ (*One Way Out*, p. 313). To reinforce her argument, she points to historical Muslim support for the Sikh Gurus, and the other group’s respect for Sikhs’ scriptures and their holy site, the Golden Temple. This is a far cry from the secularist assumptions of most noir fiction of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, from the 1990s onwards writers from British Asian backgrounds have increasingly branched out from literary forms to adapt and subvert genre fiction’s conventions. I have examined the ways in which Alam and Dhand engage in the genre-bending of popular fiction. Both novel sequences, I submit, may be viewed as examples of British Asian noir, given their gritty renditions of the ‘mean streets’ of Bradford (and occasionally South Asian towns), and given too their terse style replete with witty one-liners. In rewriting noir from an Asian diasporic perspective rooted in Yorkshire, Alam and to a lesser extent Dhand follow in the footsteps of many writers of colour and feminist writers, recognizing that the subgenre’s transgressive potential[[72]](#endnote-73) can be stretched further still to encompass racism, religious identities, and non-white, non-loner protagonists. While Alam represents the police in post-Thatcherite, pre-northern riots Britain of the late 1990s as corrupt and racially prejudiced, for Dhand noirproves less successful as he trespasses into Islamophobic territory. Alam depicts crime from the point of view of the interrogated, incarcerated, runaway Muslim male in hostile Britain. And after a promising debut, Dhand becomes preoccupied with topics including grooming scandals, murderous religious fervour and terror, which are phenomena which the mainstream stereotypically associates with Muslims. It is to be hoped that these fresh voices will bring a wider range of subjects into their future Bradford noir novels. In the meantime, women writers such as Almas Khan and Sairish Hussain are producing their own versions of ‘domestic noir’ set in Bradford,[[73]](#endnote-74) pushing against their male colleagues’ masculinist assumptions. But Alam’s and Dhand’s understanding of community, racial and religious tensions is multi-stranded and innovative. As such, despite their flaws, the work of these writers remains foundational.

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NOTES

1. Attia Hosain, ‘No New Lands, No New Seas’, in *Distant Traveller: New and Selected Fiction*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (Delhi: Kali/Women Unlimited, 2013), pp. 28–71 (p. 67). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See, for example, ‘Three Pounds in My Pocket’, *BBC Radio* 4, 19−21 May 2014, 11:30 p.m.; A. A. Dhand, *One Way Out* (London: Bantam, 2019), p. 56. Further references to *One Way Out* will be given in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Badr Dahya, ‘The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain’, in *Urban Ethnicity*, ed. by Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock, 1974), pp. 77–118 (pp. 82–86). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. On the history of the term, see William Marling, *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 237–69; Andrew Pepper, ‘The American Roman Noir’, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Catherine R. Nickerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 58–71 (pp. 58–59). On the application of the term noir to films, see, e.g., Bran Nicol, ‘In the Private Eye: Private Space in the *Noir* Detective Movie’, in *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions*, ed. by Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 121–40. For the term’s application to novels, see Marling, *The American Roman Noir*; Pepper, ‘American Roman Noir’; Gary Davenport, ‘Review of Crime Novels: American Noir of the 1950s’, *Sewanee Review*, 107.1 (1999), 126–33. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. xii. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. David Peace’s Red Riding quartet consists of: *Nineteen Seventy-Four* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999); *Nineteen Seventy-Seven* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2000); *Nineteen Eighty* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2001); and *Nineteen Eighty-Three* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Lee Horsley, *The Noir Thriller* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 255. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. ###  For academic research on these histories, see Max Farrar, *The Struggle for Community in a British Multi-ethnic Inner-city Area: Paradise in the Making* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002) and John Stillwell and Deborah Phillips, ‘Diversity and Change: Understanding the Ethnic Geographies of Leeds’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32.7 (2006), 1131–52.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Peace, *Nineteen Seventy-Seven*, p. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Duncan, *Noir Fiction: Dark Highways* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square, 2003), p. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 172. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 175; Zaiba Malik, ‘Bradistan’, *Granta* 2 November 2010, <<http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/Bradistan>> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Here I speak as an affectionate insider: someone who was born in and have spent all but five years of my life in the county. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, ‘Poverty and Depriviation’, *Understanding Bradford District*, 2 February 2017, <<https://ubd.bradford.gov.uk/media/1289/poverty-and-deprivation-ubd-20170206.pdf>> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Office for National Statistics (2011), ‘2011 Census: Aggregate data (England and Wales)’ [computer file]. UK Data Service Census Support, <<http://infuse.mimas.ac.uk>> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Irene Hardill, ‘The Recent Restructuring in the British Wool Textile Industry’, *Geography: Journal of the Geographical Association*, 75.3 (1990), 203–10. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Seán McLoughlin, ‘Writing a BrAsian City: “Race”, Culture and Religion in Accounts of Postcolonial Bradford’, in *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*, ed. by N. Ali, V. S. Kalra and S. Sayyid(London: Hurst, 2006), pp. 110–40. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. McLoughlin, ‘Writing a BrAsian City’, p. 120. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto, 2013), pp. 120–47. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See Mark Halstead, *Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity: An Examination of the Honeyford Affair, 1984−85* (London: Falmer, 1988). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See Claire Chambers, *Britain Through Muslim Eyes: Literary Representations, 1780–1988* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 218. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. On Rushdie’s novel and the affair, see, for example, Talal Asad, ‘Ethnography, Literature and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 5.3 (1990), 239–69; Amin Malak, ***Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (**Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 91–111; Anshuman A. Mondal, *Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech After Rushdie* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 97–146; Rehana Ahmed, *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 64–92; and Claire Chambers, *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. xiii–xxiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Phil Hubbard, ‘Community Action and the Displacement of Street Prostitution: Evidence from British Cities’, *Geoforum*, 29.3 (1998), 269–86; Marta Bolognani, *Crime and Muslim Britain: Race, Culture and the Politics of Criminology among British Pakistanis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 31, 66–67. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Paul Vallely, ‘An Islam of Slogans Fed the Riots, So Did White Islamophobia’, *Independent* (13 June 1995), <[http://www.independent.co.uk/news/an-islam-of-slogans-fed-the-riots-so- did-white-islamophobia-paul-vallely-reports-1586197.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/an-islam-of-slogans-fed-the-riots-so-%20did-white-islamophobia-paul-vallely-reports-1586197.html)> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. A. A. Dhand, *Streets of Darkness* (London: Transworld, 2016), pp. 92, 24. Dhand again mentions the ‘hole in the ground’ in *One Way Out*, p. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. For example, Sairish Hussain’s fine novel manuscript was discovered by a literary agent at the Bradford Literature Festival, and is due to come out soon as *The Family Tree* (London: HQ, 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Marta Bolognani, *Crime and Muslim Britain: Race, Culture and the Politics of Criminology Among British Pakistanis* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Sadek Hamid (ed.), *Young British Muslims: Between Rhetoric and Reality* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. #  Robert Christgau, ‘A Darker Shade of Noir’, *The Nation* (20 April 2006), <<https://www.thenation.com/article/darker-shade-noir/>> [accessed 12 November 2019].

 [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Kim Toft Hansen, ‘Postsecularism in Scandinavian Crime Fiction’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 86.1 (2014), 1–28. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Carolyn Stott, ‘Writing Up Close and From a Distance: French and North-American Representations of Belleville (Paris) in Contemporary *Roman Noir*’, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 53.1–2 (2016), 79–93 (p. 85). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. M. Y. Alam (ed.), *Made in Bradford* (Pontefract: Route, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Mohammed Yunis Alam, ‘Ethnographic Encounters and Literary Fictions: Crossover and Synergy Between the Social Sciences and Humanities. Statement in Support of Application for Doctor of Philosophy by Published Works (1998–2012)’ (Bradford: University of Bradford Thesis, 2012).  [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. M. Y. Alam, *Kilo* (Glasshoughton: Route, 2002), p. 76. Further references will be given in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. M. Y. Alam, *Red Laal* (Pontefract: Route, 2012), p. 28. Further references will be given in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. Bolognani, *Crime and Muslim Britain*, p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-Returned* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Chambers, *Britain Through Muslim Eyes*, pp. 14–16, 143–88. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. M. Y. Alam, *Annie Potts is Dead* (Castleford: Springboard, 1998), p. 22. Further references will be given in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Philip Rack, *Race, Culture, and Mental Disorder* (London: Tavistock, 1982), pp. 56–58. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Raymond Chandler, ‘The Simple Art of Murder’, *The Simple Art of Murder* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. The ‘ginnel’ is a northern English dialect word for an alleyway, widely used in West Yorkshire. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. See, for example, Brian Docherty (ed.), *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Sarah Trott, *War Noir: Raymond Chandler and the Hard-Boiled Detective as Veteran in American Fiction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016); Kerstin Bergman, *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir* (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis International, 2014); and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. Compare G. V. Desani who, in *All About H. Hatterr* (Delhi: Penguin, 1998 [1948]), wrote ‘I write rigmarole English, staining your goodly, godly tongue, maybe: but, friend, I forsook my Form, School and Head, while you stuck to yours, learning reading, ’riting and ’rithmetic’ (p. 37). [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. Katherine Charsley, *Transnational Pakistani Connections: Marrying ‘Back Home’* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).  [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. Max Daly, ‘How Muslim Drug Dealers Square Their Job with Their Faith’, *Vice* (23 February 2017), <https://www.vice.com/en\_uk/article/xymnwz/how-muslim-drug-dealers-square-their-job-with-their-faith> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Mohammed Qasim, *Young, Muslim and Criminal* (Bristol: Policy, 2011), p. 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Alam (ed.), *Made in Bradford*, p. 174. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. Maureen T. Reddy, *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (New York: Continuum, 1988), p. 102. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), p. 89; emphasis in original. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. A. A. Dhand, *Girl Zero* (London: Corgi, 2017), Kindle, n.p. Further references to the Corgi edition will be given in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. Radhika Holmström, ‘Interview: Community Pharmacist-Cum-Crime Writer AA Dhand’, *The Pharmacist* (14 July 2017), <<https://www.thepharmacist.co.uk/interview-community-pharmacist-cum-crime-writer-aa-dhand/>> [accessed 12 November 2019]. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. Additionally, Dhand dedicates *One Way Out* to his young sons, ‘the true Dark Knights of my world’ (p. v), and Saima urges Harry to resign from the police at the end of this fourth novel, declaring: ‘Gotham can find another Dark Knight’ (p. 330) – again showing Batman’s influence on his fiction. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. Dhand, *Streets of Darkness*, pp. 92, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. Horsley, *Noir Thriller*, pp. 23, 31.  [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. James Burnley, *Sir Titus Salt, and George Moore* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2012), pp. 5–66. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. ###  A mela is a festival or gathering. Francophone readers can find out more about Bradford’s mela in Thomas Hodgson, ‘Le mela de Bradford’, *Cahiers d’ethnomusicologie*, 27 (2014), 243–60.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
62. This is particularly true of Aslam’s development of Kilo in *Red Laal*, in which novel, as mentioned earlier, he chooses to marry Rubina. Kilo meets her while he is a patient at the hospital where she works as a nurse. Probably not coincidentally, this is the same way Dhand’s Harry first encounters Saima, the nurse who becomes his wife. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
63. Abbott, *Street Was Mine*, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
64. For example, the late Helen Cadbury’s *To Catch a Rabbit* (Rainton Bridge: Moth, 2013) is another work of northern noir predominantly set in Doncaster and York, but also containing sections set in Moorsby-on-Humber and Sheffield*.* In Cadbury’s York, Karen Friedman works for the fictional Refugee and Migrants’ Advice Centre or RAMA. Meanwhile, in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, our focus is police community support officer Sean Denton, about whom Cadbury went on to write in two further novels (Helen Cadbury, *Bones in the Nest* (London: Allison and Busby, 2015) and *Race to the Kill* (London: Allison and Busby, 2017)). Finally, in Sheffield, Karen’s lover Charlie Moon works for the Human Trafficking Service. In contrast with Alam’s and Dhand’s writing, Cadbury portrays white British citizens who have no doubts about their belonging and are therefore far removed from the other world of the refugees, prostitutes, and trafficked women who so often become victims in this novel. Cadbury’s work draws attention to the apparent invisibility of these subjects in a Europe nonetheless dependent upon their cheap labour. While one young girl, Karen’s daughter Sophie, can sleep innocently in her bed, others of her own age are trafficked into prostitution. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
65. Sairish Hussain, *The Family Tree: A Counter Narrative. Challenging Muslim Stereotypes in Popular Fiction and Media* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Thesis, 2019), p. 515. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
66. Sajid Javid would become the first Pakistani Muslim Home Secretary of the UK in April 2018, just two months before *City of Sinners*’publication. An earlier writer to have predicted just such a rise to power for a Muslim was Kamila Shamsie, in *Home Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
67. A. A. Dhand, *City of Sinners* (London: Corgi, 2018/2017), Kindle, n.p. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
68. Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002). Writing in a similar vein almost two decades after Ali, Dhand demonstrates that the Bradford attacks are caused by a broader national and global conflict between religious extremists and the far right. The latter’s resurgence, he claims, is ‘no doubt aided by troubling messages coming from the United States’, presumably because of the racist presidency of Donald Trump, though the latter remains unnamed in the novel. Dhand, *One Way Out*, p. 323. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
69. Hansen, ‘Postsecularism in Scandinavian Crime Fiction’, pp. 11–13. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
70. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
71. Hansen, ‘Postsecularism in Scandinavian Crime Fiction’, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
72. See, for instance, Maureen T. Reddy, *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (Piscataway:Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 15; Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 198. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
73. ##  Almas Khan, *Poppadom Preach* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011); Hussain, *Family Tree*;Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton (eds), *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). I hope to investigate these women authors’ desensationalization of the Bradford noir novel in future research.

[Claire Chambers

British Asian Noir Depictions of Bradford] [↑](#endnote-ref-74)