



**SHATTERED SELVES, BORROWED CAUSES:  
PASTICHE, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE  
FRAGMENTED POSTMODERN IDENTITY IN FATIMA  
BHUTTO'S *THE RUNAWAYS***

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**Abstract**

This research paper investigates the representation of the postmodern identity crisis in Fatima Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways*. It argues that the novel's two major protagonists, Monty and Sunny, are emblematic of 'shattered selves,' individuals whose identities are fragmented, unstable, and decentered by the cultural logic of late capitalism and the collapse of traditional metanarratives. The study posits that their turn to radical extremism is not a product of pure ideological conviction but rather a desperate attempt to assemble a coherent self through 'borrowed causes.' Employing a theoretical framework grounded in the work of Fredric Jameson, Zygmunt Bauman and Jean Baudrillard, the paper analyzes this phenomenon through the concepts of pastiche and simulacra. The methodology involves a qualitative textual analysis of purposively selected passages from the novel. The analysis reveals how the characters construct pastiche identities, stylistic imitations devoid of historical depth, and are seduced by the hyperreal simulacrum of a virtual ideological movement. Key findings indicate that the novel portrays the search for authenticity as a paradoxical journey that leads to profound inauthenticity, mediated entirely through digital screens and borrowed rhetoric. The paper concludes that *The Runaways* serves as a powerful literary diagnosis of a contemporary condition where the absence of a stable inner self creates a vacuum filled by the most readily available and aesthetically potent ideologies, regardless of their substance. This research contributes to the literary scholarship on contemporary South Asian fiction by offering a synthesized theoretical reading that connects the postmodern crisis of self to the specific socio-political pressures of the post 9/11 era and the humanistic understanding of radicalization.

**Keywords:** *Authenticity, Identity Crisis, Liquid Modernity, Pastiche, Postmodernism, Simulacra.*

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## 1. Introduction

The global discourse of the 21st century has been indelibly impacted by the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent 'War on Terror.' This period has produced a complicated and often contested narrative landscape, predominantly concerning Muslim identity. As postulated by Edward Said (1978) in his first famous articulation of Orientalism, the Western imagination has long rendered the 'Orient' as a one-dimensional and often menacing stereotype, a process which took on renewed and dangerous momentum following 9/11. In the view of scholars like Mahmood Mamdani (2004) who critically analysed the political division between the 'good Muslim' and the 'bad Muslim,' asserts that such a bifurcation places huge social pressure on both persons and communities, currently occurring in both the Muslim world and in the diaspora. This geopolitical circumstance offers a distinctly unsettling backdrop to Fatima Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways* (2018), which looks beyond the political headlines to the intimate existential crises that grow in the fissures of a fractured world order. Her narrative, all the way from the starkly stratified metropolitan city of Karachi, to the disenchanting suburbs of Portsmouth, UK, pays much attention to the 'why' of radicalization whilst locating its roots in a profound crisis of the self.

The disparity of the novel's two protagonists: the aimless affluent Monty and the diasporic, isolated Sunny is the product of what Zygmunt Bauman (2000) termed 'liquid modernity'. The similar experiences that they both went through, growing up in Karachi's elite circles and Portsmouth's isolated suburbs, uncover a shared crisis that stems from incredibly different realities. Bauman's idea claims that society has reached a point in which the 'solid' structures that previously anchored us (for example, the stable jobs, and lifelong communities) have begun to dissolve into a fluid, uncertain, and increasingly individualized condition. This 'liquidity' points towards their social leveling to reveal a condition whereby their stable social structures, identities and communities dissolve into flux, uncertainty and individuation. The social realities that previously contained their

identities; nation, religion, family, meaningful work, and relational ties, have become compromised and weak for these characters. It is the context of 'liquid identities' alongside the demise of grand narratives, noted by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) that offers the gap which the novel chillingly offers to explore. The current study, therefore, critically analyses *The Runaways*, as an appropriate literary case study of identity formation or failure, in a late capitalist, post 9/11 context.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

The key problem the current paper investigates is the framing of the contemporary self as unstable and derivative as depicted in the novel. Instead of framed as a coherent ideological conversion, the journeys of the protagonists toward radicalism is framed as the result of an underlying postmodern existential crisis. With no authentic, internal self or being, the protagonists are impelled to form identities externally. This aspect around assembly, taking the components of cultural and ideological fragments that is available to them, is a perfect representation of Fredric Jameson's (1991) concept of pastiche, the imitation of a style that lacks substance or critical distance. The protagonists' radicalization is the most extreme performance of a 'borrowed cause,' an identity kit with aesthetics, pre-organized meaning, and a virtual community.

The research problem, is an analytical enquiry of how Bhutto fictionalizes this crisis. How does the novel illustrate that, in a world filled with hyperreal images (Baudrillard, 1994) and liquid anxieties (Bauman, 2000), the search for an authentic self leads one to embrace the most mediated and inauthentic identities? This study tracks radicalization as a cultural and existential phenomenon and a desperate attempt to find solidity in a liquid world.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

The primary objectives of the current study are:

1. To analyse how the characters of Monty and Sunny illustrate the fragmented 'shattered selves' characterising liquid modernity.
2. To unravel motivations, and highlight the stylistic, depthless nature of 'borrowed causes' of the characters.
3. To critically examine the role of the digital world in the radicalization of the characters.
4. To evaluate the overarching critique of the novel in search for 'authenticity' in the contemporary era.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The research paper has the following research questions.

1. What are the unique experiences of Monty as an elite and Sunny as a diasporic subject associated with the postmodern crisis of identity as shaped by their distinct social positions?
2. Why the characters engage themselves with 'borrowed causes,' and how do such causes demonstrate the stylistic, depthless nature of their identities?
3. How does the digital world influence the radicalization of the characters, and what role does it play in shaping their identities and ideologies?
4. How does *The Runaways* critique the contemporary search for 'authenticity,' and what does this critique reveal about the complexities of identity formation in the modern era?

### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This research is important for many reasons. For literary studies, this research facilitates one of the first in-depth theoretical readings of a major text by Fatima Bhutto, beyond the often surface-level political commentary. The study highlights the value of humanistic inquiry and, alongside crisis, emphasizes that extremism is driven by multitude of issues, rooted in existential and psychological crises (Zaidi et al., 2017) that literature is exceptionally positioned to explore. For sociology and radicalization studies, this research presents qualitative, character-driven accounts to complement quantitative data and demonstrates, how postmodernity theories at the macro-level reflect in the intimate lives of individuals. In connecting literary studies, sociology and radicalization studies, this research offers a richer, more nuanced vocabulary for discussing the anxiety facing our youth globally today.

### 1.5. Delimitation of the Study

The research paper is delimited to a close textual analysis of *The Runaways* (2018) by Fatima Bhutto. This study regarding radicalization is not empirical in nature but a literary interpretation of its fictional representation. The theoretical framework is primarily confined to the postmodern theories of Jameson (1991), Baudrillard (1994), and Bauman (2000) synthesized with the postcolonial concepts of Bhabha (1994), to ensure analytical depth and coherence.

## 2. Literature Review

This investigation brings together scholarship from three interlocking domains: foundational postmodern conceptions of identity; interdisciplinary works on radicalization; and literary criticism of South Asian fiction and more specifically, Fatima Bhutto's work.

### **2.1. The Postmodern Self: A Theoretical Triad**

The postmodern conception of identity has at its center an overwhelming sense of crisis. The unitary, autonomous self of the Enlightenment is gone, replaced by the discontinuous, decentered, and contingent subject. Psychologist Erik Erikson (1970) first identified this sense of crisis through his observations of soldiers in World War II trying to reconcile from their past civilian selves to their present roles and developing a massive 'identity disorder.' Today in a post-modern society, crisis is not a rare state, but a widespread condition. This research paper builds its analytical framework out of a triad of theorists whose ideas, when synthesized, produce a comprehensive model for analyzing the crisis in *The Runaways*.

First, Fredric Jameson (1991), in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, introduces the concept of pastiche. He argues that in a late-capitalist cultural environment, originality and independent style are impossible. What is left is pastiche: 'the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language' (Jameson, 1991, p. 17). Pastiche is different from parody, which retains some critical or satirical relationship with the original. Pastiche is neutrally mimetic, a 'blank irony' that denotes the death of the individual subject in favor of a collage of stylistic tics. This is particularly useful for understanding how the protagonists approach radicalism as a style that can be adopted rather than a sincere belief system.

Second, Jean Baudrillard (1994), in *Simulacra and Simulation*, maps the progressive abstraction of the image until it no longer holds any relation to reality whatsoever. He quickly outlines the precession of simulacra and simulation leading to what can be called hyper-reality, where the simulation happens before the real and makes the real. In hyper-reality, the divisions between truth and fiction and authentic and simulated disappear. This is useful for how we analyze the role of the internet and digital propaganda in the experiences of characters in *The Runaways*, as an aestheticized 'digital ideological movement' becomes more real and compelling than their own chaotic, mundane lives.

Third, Zygmunt Bauman (2000), in *Liquid Modernity*, offers a sociological perspective on the lived experience of this condition. In his view, we have transitioned from a 'solid' modernity characterized by robust institutions, to a 'liquid' modernity in

which all social bonds, identity categories, and structures are fluid, fragile, and temporary. The 'liquidity' of the social world creates remarkable freedom of individuals but also profound levels of existential anxiety and a 'fear of being left behind' (Bauman, 2000, p. 38). The 'liquid self' is a self under constant movement, putting together and pulling apart cultural resources in a desperate pursuit of temporary anchor. Bauman's theory captures exactly the anxiety and homelessness propelling Bhutto's characters. Importantly, these are linked: Bauman's liquid modernity generates the unmoored subject, who constructs identity via pastiche, as Jameson suggested, and who is most susceptible to the seduction of the hyperreal, as Baudrillard would argue.

## **2.2. Radicalization: A Socio-Psychological Process**

Recent academic research represents radicalization as a complex developmental process that recognizes multiple social and psychological factors and does not fall into the trap of simplistic ideologies. Leading scholars in radicalization research Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2011) have identified some universal mechanisms that can pull an individual into an ever-increasing realm of political and social radicalization. A personal grievance, in the topography of radicalization, is an essential part of the process: when an individual goes through a personal crisis, for example when undergoing discrimination, loses their job, or experiences extreme social alienation, they can become vulnerable with a need for a way out of their situation. This stage of possibilities often overlaps with what Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to with the need to seek 'ontological security', in stabilizing a sense of highly dynamic order and personal continuity in an unpredictable world. It is precisely at the stage marked by personal vulnerabilities that social processes enter. Social connections as a mechanism; experiencing individuals who can exert influence via friendship, family or a somewhat charismatic recruiter, can provide an individual accessing an ideological group, with a social world that appears to provide a connection of belonging, a sense of purpose, and an explicit answer to the grievances correlated with their personal experiences (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). Moghaddam (2005) suggests that feelings of relative deprivation and perceptions of injustice are important precursors to an individual's endorsement of radical solutions. So, radicalization is treated here not as a quick conversion, but as a long process regarding deep psychological needs and social processes that push someone who is disaffected towards a group that offers renewed meaning and belonging.

## **2.3. South Asian Fiction and Critical Context**

The Runaways belongs to a growing collection of South Asian 'radicalization novels.' Others that examine the multifaceted relationship of identity, estrangement, and

extremism include Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). Critical readings of these novels usually address themes of postcolonial hybridity and the 'clash of civilizations' (Hussein, 2019; Anjaria, 2015). This paper argues that Bhutto's novel is unique in its profound pessimism surrounding the grounds for a stable self.

Critical reviews of *The Runaways* appreciated its empathetic characterizations and political daring (Akbar, 2018), but there remains a lack of sustained academic analysis. Current scholarship tends to focus upon Bhutto's critique of Pakistani feudalism connecting her fictional work to her non-fictional writing (Khan, 2020). There is still a notable lack of reading the novel through a coherent postmodern theoretical lens. The current research paper will argue that the most salient contribution of the novel is its diagnosis of the postmodern condition, and uses radicalization as the most dramatic symptom of postmodernity.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research follows a qualitative, interpretive research design. This approach is based on the tradition of literary criticism and textual analysis, which enables us to develop a deep, nuanced interpretation of text. This approach has a hermeneutic, which aims to investigate the complex relationship between themes, character, and form in the novel.

#### 3.1. Research Theory/Framework

This research paper employs the framework that is an interdisciplinary synthesis of three strands of thought:

1. Postmodern Cultural Theory: This approach primarily relies on Jameson's (1991) concept of 'pastiche' along with Baudrillard's (1994) 'simulacra' and Bauman's (2000) 'liquid modernity.' This lens allows thinking through the cultural and existential conditions that help create the 'fractured' or 'shattered' self.
2. Postcolonial Theory: The concept of hybridity, mimicry, and the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) can be seen as a critical layer critical to this framework, examining the often painful experience of the characters when in the 'in between' state of postcolonialism, somewhere in the middle of colonialism in a globalised world.
3. Sociology of Radicalization: Concepts such as 'cognitive opening' and search for 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991) provide a framework to

explain the characters' underlying psychological motivations prior to radicalization.

This synthesized frame is necessary because the novel operates at the intersection of these domains. It would be too limiting to merely apply a postmodern reading of the work in a way that could omit the postcolonial context. Likewise, one could read the work from a sociological perspective, but this offers a limited social contextualization without diving into the aesthetic and representational strategies coded into the work.

### **3.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The current study takes into account 'The Runaways' by Fatima Bhutto (2018) as the primary source for data. The data collection was a multi-step process of close reading. The first reading identified broad thematic concerns. The second reading was more focused, cataloging specific textual evidence (passages, dialogue, and narrative description) of participants' identity, consumption of media, and adoption of extremist rhetoric for the two protagonists.

Data analysis is thematic and interpretive. The discussion is framed by two main sections of the analysis, structured as a case study of each protagonists. The two sections employs the theoretical framework with evidence from the selected text. For example, Monty is read as pastiche and Sunny's experiences online are read as simulacrum. This method provides a systematic and exact process of applying the framework to the text, using the specific textual evidence to develop a larger thematic interpretation.

## **4. Data Analysis: The Anatomy of Shattered Selves**

This section provides a thorough close reading of the two protagonist's journeys, examining them as unique, yet interrelated manifestations of the postmodern identity crisis.

### **4.1. Monty: Pastiche, Privilege, and the Anomie of the Void**

Monty, the heir to a wealthy family in Karachi, is the primary expression of Jamesonian pastiche in the novel. His existence is dependent on a 'depthlessness,' which is a direct result of his privilege. Living on the money his father has accrued, his life is frictionless, and thus, devoid of meaning. He is an aficionado of surfaces, and his identity consists of a collage of borrowed styles. Bhutto writes, "He lived without consequence. It was the heaviest burden of all" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 54). This is the crux of his crisis; a life of utter freedom from material want has become a prison of existential irrelevance. This state of flagging existential despondency is a textbook example of the anomie that Bauman

(2000) describes in liquid modernity, whereby the absence of solid constraints leads not to happiness, but debilitating anxiety.

Additionally, his internal emptiness is aggravated by a post-colonial disposition that lacks substance. Akbar Ahmed, his father, frequently recalls a decayed aristocratic background for Monty, exclaiming "we are nawabs and recounting tales of a magnificent haveli" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 29). This is simply a heritage hold over him, a version of mimicry in Homi Bhabha's (1994) terms, but on a dead past. Again, Monty receives freedom, not an identity, but another vacuous aesthetic, allowing him to completely recognize the lack of a genuine story.

Monty's rebellion is purely aesthetic. Upon falling in love with the activist Layla, he adopts the style of a leftist revolutionary and travesties himself as a protestor, attending protests as a tourist and chanting slogans whose history he does not understand. This is not parody; he has no element of critical distance. It is pure pastiche, or 'the wearing of a stylistic mask' (Jameson, 1991, p. 17). His engagement is ultimately a performance to elicit affection, another consumer choice in a life rife with consumer choices. Bhutto's notion of detachment is reflected in Monty's self-reflections: "Monty felt as though he was an actor in a film about his own life: a life that belonged to someone else" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 62). Here, we see a powerful expression of the postmodern condition; this idea resonates true to Jameson's (1991) concept of the 'waning of affect,' in which the individual's emotional relation to his or her own reality becomes less immediate and emotionally energized. The very sense that Monty is an 'actor' speaks to notions of the collapse between lived experience and mediated image, which is a significant concept in Baudrillard's (1994) work. His existence is not something he lives, authentically from the inside out, but a script he views from the outside in. This alienation is more profound than boredom; it is the indication of a self so saturated with surfaces and images that reality itself may be experienced as a simulation.

When this performance does not establish a stable sense of self, Monty seeks a more potent, more 'authentic' style, to seek deeper meaning and purpose. The act of Monty's radicalization is articulated as the most recent acquisition for the consumerist subject. The recruiter in the dilapidated corner of the city does not provide Monty with complete theology, but instead a simple hypnotic aesthetic of masculine power: "You are a lion, they have made you a mouse" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 221). This appeals to Monty's own 'waning of affect,' hearkening back to primal feelings and purpose. He takes on a stoic demeanour, and learns the rhetoric. The ideology is entirely borrowed. A pre-packaged identity that fills the void of self. Monty's journey illustrates the notion that for the privileged postmodern subject, even the most extreme ideologies can ultimately be

reduced to consumer choices, stylistic accessories, to aid in the desperate project of self-invention.

In conclusion, Monty's journey shows that in a liquid privileged world where real meaning has disappeared, the self turns into merely another surface, and radicalism is only embraced not as a belief, but as the last, most shocking consumer brand.

#### **4.2. Sunny: The Digital Simulacrum and the Diasporic Self**

Sunny, the British-Pakistani youth of Portsmouth, is the most interesting case study throughout the novel of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. His alienation is one of being in the diaspora, caught between his parents' nostalgic and static conception of Pakistan and a British society that views him with suspicion. This positions him in the 'Third Space' described by Bhabha (1994) as an in-between space of cultural hybridity. In Sunny's case, though, this is not an area of creative potential, but instead of deep dislocation, a sense of belonging nowhere at all. This deep alienation is expressed in his internal thoughts while he walks the streets of his hometown: "Why hadn't Pa stayed in India, with his people, where they would have belonged? ... instead of coming here, where they were nobodies?" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 51). This excerpt poignantly establishes the 'push' factors that leave Sunny exceptionally vulnerable. The contrasting pairs of 'belonged' to 'nobodies', juxtaposing a romanticized past of communal identity against his current reality of social marklessness in Portsmouth, his statement captures a profound existential malaise. The experience of being a 'nobody' constitutes a very significant articulation of what Giddens (1991) calls 'ontological security'. He perceives his life in Portsmouth as a 'wasteland' due to lack of any sustainable narrative about his existence. It is this deep-seated subjective experience of worthlessness and non-existence that creates the 'cognitive opening' (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011) for a new, compelling narrative to take root.

The novel makes this psychological need overt, "But the recognition, the reckoning, the being seen that Sunny so desperately wanted, never came" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 44). This longing to be 'seen' is the principal emotional fuel behind Sunny's radicalization. The social reality around him rendered him invisible, but the digital world offered him the ultimate promise to be 'seen'. It is this existential void, rooted in psychological insecurity, that the hyperreal simulacrum of the extremist movement is designed to fill.

He exists physically in England, but he lives online. The internet is not for him a tool, but rather the main reality he interacts with, which makes him uniquely vulnerable to the appeal of the virtual ideological movement. This phenomenon is mirrored in Sherry Turkle's (2011) study of digital life, which argues that virtual communities can feel as

authentic and welcoming as face-to-face interactions, contributing to a powerful experience of being ‘alone together.’

For Sunny, the extremist cause is not something he encounters through lived experience, but rather as edited content and streams of digital media; “the videos of fighting in faraway lands, the feeling of brotherhood in chat rooms” (Bhutto,2018, p.112). This is a perfect simulacrum, images that have sprung loose from any connection to reality and exist now as a self-referential system of signs. The online world of struggle is clean, heroic, and packed with visual and aesthetic vigour and possibilities. It is a hyperreality that is infinitely more alluring than the grey and lonely reality of his life in Portsmouth. As Baudrillard (1994) argues, the simulacrum comes to precede the real; Sunny’s desire is not for the actual and the real but for the image that he has absorbed through the digital mirror of the internet.

His identity is solely by this digital content. He is a ‘keyboard warrior,’ his value now indelibly linked to his digital performance. He is a citizen of a cyber-community; a classic case of the ‘echo chamber,’ constantly validated through a self-affirming loop of information (Sunstein, 2017). When he finally visits Mosul, the digital simulation evaporates. The actual materiality of the virtual ideological movement, the dirt, the random barbarism, the fright, is a profound betrayal of the hyperreality he once occupied. The tragedy of Sunny is the quintessential postmodern tragedy of mistaking the map for the territory. He sacrifices his life for a borrowed cause that was never real to begin with, a phantom in the world's digital information and propaganda machine.

Consequently, Sunny's tragedy is a genuinely postmodern tragedy, as he attempts to escape the alienating condition of the diaspora, only to find himself in even more extreme forms of inauthenticity in the hyperreal cause of which he becomes a soulless investment, sacrificing his very life in the process.

#### **4.3. Key Findings**

The in-depth textual analysis of *The Runaways* results in a number of interrelated major findings:

1. Fragmentation is Everywhere: The novel demonstrates that the postmodern ‘shattered self’ is not a single phenomenon. It takes different forms across lines of class and geography, such as the anomie of privilege for Monty and the diasporic dislocation experienced by Sunny.
2. Radicalism as Pastiche: The characters adopt extremist ideologies not only consistently, but in all cases as not a serious intellectual or spiritual transformation into a new person. Rather, it is pastiche in the Jamesonian

sense; like a stylistic, aesthetic, or performative choice, a ‘borrowed cause,’ used to cover over the void of no identity of value, or failed identity, for these people.

3. The Dominance of the Hyperreal: The digital space may be portrayed as a powerful engine of radicalisation precisely because it operates as a Baudrillardian hyperreality. The digital space provided a simulated perfected version of belonging and purpose that is more appealing than the complexity and disappointments of real life.
4. 4.The Paradox of Authenticity:
5. The novel presents an outlook that is deeply pessimistic about the modern search for authenticity. In a world of surfaces and simulations, the characters in finding a ‘real’ and stable self often find themselves attracted and embracing the most mediated, performative persona, and arguably, the most inauthentic identity on offer.

## 5. Discussion

The findings from this research strongly affirm that *The Runaways* can be perceived as a literary representation of postmodern and liquid modern conceptions of self. Bhutto’s work redirects the deradicalization discourse away from facile explanations of political grievance and ideological fanaticism towards a more multimodal understanding grounded in a crisis of being. The significance of this analysis perhaps lies in the ways in which the two characters trajectories progress similarly. The novel poses an important question: what does it mean that both the enormous privilege of the elite of the Global South (Monty) and the marginalized struggle of underclass diasporic subjects (Sunny) end in the same existential void and the same destructive ‘solution’ to their crises of meaning? The answer offered in Bhutto’s narrative is that the postmodern condition, with its cultural logic of late capitalism, is a totalizing condition. It shows that the means of alienation is so pervasive that it transmutes even across vastly different socioeconomic conditions. Monty’s crisis is one of immanence, he is trapped in a frictionless, depthless present, and consumerism had deprived all actions of any meaning. Sunny’s crisis is one of transcendence; he is a diasporic subject who cannot connect his present to an unstable past or meaningful future. However, both characters are equally dislocated, equally exposed to pre-molded, hyperreal identities. This indicates that the crisis of meaning is no longer confined to the marginal, but is a condition for the time being among all of us in a world where all solid grounds for identity, i.e., tradition, nation and community, have become liquid.

The novel thus serves as a powerful narrative diagnosis of the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism’ (Jameson 1991) by demonstrating how a global system predicated upon consumerism, saturation of the media, and individualism generates subjects who are fundamentally unmoored.

The characters are all victims of Bauman’s (2000) ‘liquid modernity,’ and they are collectively burdened with creating an identity solely from scratch, without any of the ‘solid’ scaffolding of previous generations. In this context, a rigid and all-encompassing ideology becomes intensely alluring. It supplies everything their lives cannot such as certainty, community, a grand narrative, and a powerful and pre-fabricated identity. This goes along with Roy’s (2017) point in which he labels such ideologies as ‘decultured’ globalized extremism and a marked departure from the lived religion.

Bhutto’s novel compels us to remember that the ‘Runaways’ is not the aberrant other, but in fact a dark mirror of ourselves, an extreme representation of a crisis we each experience. The emptiness that drives Monty and the isolation that defines Sunny, all come from a world that celebrates the individual and collectively lacks meaning. The tragic implication of this novel is that, in a world such as this, the most destructive illusion may be the only available truths. The borrowed cause of extremism provide the only anchor within a liquid sea of anxiety.

## 6. Conclusion

Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* is an essential and unsettling novel for our time. This paper argued that the primary thematic project of the novel is a thorough examination of the postmodern identity crisis. By harnessing the theory of Jameson and the framework of Baudrillard and Bauman, the researchers have shown how the characters in the novel embody the ‘shattered selves’ adrift in the liquid modernity landscape. Their general despair over radical extremism has been positioned not as a journey of faith, but as an act of pastiche, the act of taking on a powerful, aesthetic, ‘borrowed cause’ to fill the void of authentic, stable identity. Their seduction by a digital simulacrum points to the horrific power of hyperreality to replace lived experience.

Ultimately, Bhutto's novel is a powerful diagnosis of an epoch in which the search for an authentic existential self is fraught with peril. It illustrates a world in which, without solid ground, people will cling to any raft to which they can hold, even the most toxic. The tragedy for Monty and Sunny is that their running away from the fragmentation of their lives becomes a catalyst for their total annihilation. They run away from the hollowness of the world only to find there is more existential emptiness in the borrowed cause they belong to. *The Runaways* brilliantly illustrates this tension, leaving the reader with the

chilling reality that, amidst infinite surfaces and simulated reality, the most dangerous void actually resides in the self.

### 6.1. Recommendations

Future researchers could conduct a comparative analysis of ‘The Runaways’ alongside other radicalization novels to establish transnational patterns of fictional representations of the postmodern extremism. Moreover, a robust linguistic analysis of the use of code-switching in the novel is suggested to better understand how the ‘hybrid tongue’ signifies a fragmented identity.

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