Imposed Silences, Subversive Voices: (Re)Reading Selected Pakistani Anglophone Writing through the Bodies of Pakistani-Muslim Women

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In the loving memory of my father, Sheikh Abdus Salam, who left this world before seeing our dream come to fruition. His love, humility, generosity, and wit will always be cherished.

To my mother, Tahira Salam, who always told me to strive for the best and showed that there can be strength in love and sacrifice. Her legacy is a celebration of my womanhood in all its imperfect perfections.

Abstract

This dissertation is a personal and political act of resistance. Through a centralisation of the female body as an analytical construct, my research offers a feminist intervention to discussions about contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writing thereby challenging the often overtly political and nation-driven attention these texts have received. My analysis focuses on the inscription and framing of the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* (2005) and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004). A central claim in this dissertation is that these novels complicate and challenge (if not always deconstruct) popular discourses which define Pakistani-Muslim women in essentialist terms as a homogenous group of passive and voiceless victims of male oppression or of a misogynist religion. Instead, I argue that the female bodies represented in the novels occupy a broader range of positions. While some are "silent" victims, others are highly subversive civic subjects and individuals. The novels portray historically and culturally-specific materialisations of womanhood, born out of a complex interplay between the discourses of religion, politics, desire and sexuality. I also claim that these novels address and write back to both indigenous and global actors. They engage and disrupt neo-Orientalist discourses of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism. At the same time, these novels question the privatisation and domestication of Pakistani-Muslim female bodies in local nationalist and religious discourses.

While many of the female characters in these novels resist appropriation in (masculine) discourses of nationhood and religion, I nonetheless observe a problematic

tendency to portray motherhood, and the maternal body, in ambivalent or even negative terms. I note, too that the implied audience of these novels is a global readership and/or a globalised elite, English-reading audience within Pakistan. In addressing this readership, these novels risk ignoring or even silencing the voices, issues, concerns and aspirations of a local population that is non-cosmopolitan, non-transnational and regional. Despite their challenges to monolithic assumptions about Pakistani women, then, the notion of agency attributed to the female subjectivities in the texts I have considered seems to be refracted through a neo-liberal lens which equates modernity/progress with individualism and secularism.

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Introduction

> Though Pakistan's women are, in temperament, probably more powerful than its men, they are also almost entirely absent from the structures of power—and on the rare occasion when they do enter those structures, it is often as some man's wife or daughter. Small wonder, then, that when they enter the public sphere with any gesture of defiance—be it progressive or regressive—their femaleness attracts particular attention. (K. Shamsie "Misguided" 35)

Kamila Shamsie's assertion is a useful reminder of the political nature of visibility—that being present does not always mean being seen. When particular bodies and stories go from invisibility to being seen, it is important to ask why, and why now? These questions frame my research.

In the last decade, Pakistani Anglophone writers have produced realist, gritty and politically committed fiction that "offer[s] a series of responses to the problematic image of Pakistan [and Islam] in the globe"(G. K. Khan "Narrating" 31). These are not apologetic narratives: they question the complicity and amnesia of national (official) histories and negotiate formulations of collective identifications and belongings (Cilano *Contemporary*). These stories bear witness to an "excess of identity, experience, and genealogy" (Minai 6) the malleable and fluid nature of which cannot be "contained within the categorical structure of nation-sate"(Mufti 237).[1] These fictions can thus be read as attempts to open the notions of *Pakistaniyat*[2] and Muslimness to multiplicity.

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[1] I draw upon insights offered by Minai and N. Khan who argue that instances of excess, often materialising in form of the failure(s) of the State, nationalism and (national) sovereignty, draw attention to the constructedness and artificiality of the

The commercial success of writers like Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie and Nadeem Aslam in global literary markets has been rewarded by new-found, growing critical interest in exploring and mapping this (allegedly) new body of literature—in literary and academic circles. The relatively recent arrival of Pakistani Anglophone literature on the international literary scene is not accidental. Nor has this writing been driven into the global limelight solely by the sheer force of artistic talent. In fact, its recognition and success can be partly attributed to interest in Pakistan due to its complicated but, nevertheless central, role in contemporary geo-political conflicts. As Pakistani Anglophone writing gains currency in the global literary scene, its increased visibility has exposed it to scrutiny. Some recent academic work attempts to engage with this body of literature in terms of questions such as who is a Pakistani Anglophone writer and who does s/he speak for and/or speak about? How is Pakistani Anglophone writing (PAW) characterised in terms of its themes, technique, stylistic, structural and linguistic approaches and aesthetics?

Equally pertinent is the question concerning who or what it omits, who or what does it silence or ignore? I argue that the overwhelming interest in narratives that centralise history and politics (both national and geo-political), by many Pakistani Anglophone authors and their critics, inadvertently creates certain elisions and gaps. The sustained focus on the nation—combined with the "worlding"[3] of this literature by the publishing-advertising industry and literary pundits—has obscured the Pakistani female subject. If not wholly invisible, her representation is partial and, at times, compromised. In particular, there are limited voices that inscribe the Pakistani female body in terms of the diversity of its

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idea of Nation-State. The negative connotations evoked by excess in terms of signifying a lack or failure can be (re)read as opportunities to rethink and re-negotiate the parameters of belonging and identification for (in this context) the term Pakistani. See also N. Khan's *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan.*

[2] An Urdu adjective of the word Pakistani—meaning what does it mean to be a Pakistani in terms of identity and culture.

[3] See Spivak ("Three"); and Benjamin Graves.

experiences and locations; or deal with the lived and experiential realities of their corporeal existence. Clearly, there is *not* a complete absence or silence surrounding the Pakistani female body in Pakistani Anglophone writing, but the bodies of Pakistani women are typically intrumentalised, explicitly or implicitly, to engage with other more 'significant issues' such as geo-politics (the partitions of 1947 and 1971, tensions with India, 9/11 and the War on Terror), identity (cultural, ethnic, religious, national, migrant), multiculturalism/race and class. This is true, too, of the body of criticism that PAW has amassed. Despite a flurry of enthusiastic engagement with PAW by critics, reviewers, scholars and academics worldwide, emphasis is typically on the political aspects of this body of work. Of course this is not surprising given the centrality of political concerns in much PAW. Women appear in these texts, but attention to representations of their bodies is absent or tangential, subservient to political analysis and discussion. This research project is a personal and political act of resistance. I offer a sustained engagement with the representation of the female body in some representative Pakistani Anglophone fiction, thereby challenging the often overtly political and nation-driven (masculine) attention it has received.

I begin this introduction by discussing the recent rise of PAW to international prominence, focussing on questions and concerns raised by its propulsion into the global literary market-place as representative of Pakistani and/or Muslim voices. I then suggest why, in the context of these concerns, a closer focus on the representation of the female body in this writing is warranted. This is followed by a brief engagement with the theoretical contours and underpinnings of the construct, the female body, which forms the core of the critical framework of this dissertation. I conclude by providing a brief outline of the chapters that

follow, each of which closely analyses a novel: Hamid's *Moth Smoke*, Shamsie's *Broken Verses* and Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*.[4]

Blood-soaked Pakistani Anglophone Fiction Takes Centre Stage

In 1980 South Asian (Indian) Anglophone writing exploded on the international literary scene with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie's phenomenal success was followed by that of other Indian writers who continued to captivate and dominate the global literary market with, what has been called, the *Midnight* inspired "Indo-chic" fiction (Huggan 67-77; Chambers "Comparative").[5] In contrast, literary voices from Pakistan, "Partition's other child" (Chotiner 35), existed on the margins as an 'insignificant other'.[6] In 2001 the Twin Towers fell and the world changed. The (Muslim) voice of dissent—questioning freedom of speech, liberalism and secularism—which had first made its presence felt across Europe after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) *,* now assumed the faces of Osama-bin-Laden, Taliban and the Muslim Rage Boy.[7] The West's literary response to the changed reality of this world was labelled "9/11 writing" and included Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005). As the West wrestled with the

[4] Here and elsewhere, Shamsie refers to K. Shamsie. Muneeza Shamsie will be mentioned as M. Shamsie.
[5] Including Amit Chaudhuri, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Jumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga.
[6] This absence can partly be attributed to the relatively few numbers of writers actively writing in English at the time. However, I posit that the critical reception of these works is a more significant factor in its invisibility. Until quite recently, Pakistani writing was largely absent from international anthologies and/or companions published on South Asian literature, dismissed as India's "poorer cousin across the border" (Tharoor n.p.) and lacking merit. Alternatively, it was subsumed under the label of Indian writing. Cilano argues that South Asian literature at this time was "the Indian voice that sp[oke] first and the Pakistani voice that rebound[ed] as the echo" ("Writing" 186).
[7]Geo-political events like the Iranian revolution, the hostage crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, the Rushdie affair and the Gulf-War also mark the appearance of this dissenting voice. In the UK the race riots of 2001, the 7/7 bombings and the Rotherham Scandal became the face of a hostile Muslim presence.

question "why do they [the Muslims] hate US?",[8] Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) offered a Muslim response. The reception of this novel seemed, almost single-handedly and immediately, to shift international literary focus from the spice-infused and "chutnified" flavour of Indian writing to the blood-soaked, exploding canvasses of Pakistani fiction. The interest in Pakistani fiction was cemented by the arrival, in quick succession, of Mohammad Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangos* (2008), Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2010).

The politically-charged, emotionally-tough and edgy fiction of these writers was typically reviewed in equally sensationalist terms. Hamid, Shamsie, Aslam, Hanif and Mueenuddin, dubbed the "Big Five" by Claire Chambers ("Comparative" 123), became the face of a Pakistani "national literature …struggle[ing] to be born" (Nolen). Racking up various awards and nominations, the arrival of these Pakistani writers was equated to a "Pak-pack taking over the world" (B. Shah "Pack" n.p.)[9] in a "corona burst of talent" (*Granta* qtd. in B. Shah n.p.).[10] Their fiction was applauded for "finding new and dynamic ways to chronicle the many different realities of the country" (Singh n.p.); for opening up the eyes of the world "to a whole lot of new experiences" (Datta n.p.); extinguishing an (alleged) "literary drought" (Dalrymple n.p.) in Pakistan and ushering in a "major cultural renaissance" (Asia House qtd. in B. Shah "Pack" n.p.). According to Saeed Shah, these writers produced a "grittier" and "more engaged style of work" which an international readership "hungry for books about Pakistan" embraced (n.p.).

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[8] Borrowed from the title of an article by Hamid ("Roots"). I have substituted Hamid's generic 'us' with US as a pun to signify the more specific form of anti-western sentiment found usually in Pakistan.

[9] The big five's depiction as a pack or a movement is a misnomer and an artificial yoking together of heterogeneous voices, as the only things they share with others are the label 'Pakistani' and politically themed writing. These writers differ vastly in their writing styles (magical realism, surrealism realism, satire), narrative structures, and treatment of and approach to their subjects. See Mueenuddin ("Pakistani") and B. Shah ("Pack").

[10] It is more of a big three: Hamid, K. Shamsie and Aslam consistently appear in reviews, academic and critical research and discussions. Mueenuddin, comparatively speaking, has received the least attention.

Kamila Shamsie refers to these novelists as writers of “General Zia’s generation”("Dark" n.p.), keenly interested in mapping and exploring their country’s turbulent past and present. For them, writing is a political act and the personal always remains entangled with the political and historical. Unlike their predecessors (or even cousins across the border), they claim to be less interested in the trauma of partition and/or the legacy of colonisation.[11] Instead, the political and historical terrain of Pakistan since the 1980s (or since Zia) has been their primary concern and point of reference.[12] Issues such as democracy and dictatorship, Islamisation, extremism, violence (political, ethno-linguistic, sectarian, and communal), the 1971 war, the persecution of minorities (religious and ethnic), nuclearisation, and the incursion of capitalism and globalisation have featured prominently in the writings of Hamid, Shamsie, Aslam and Hanif. Historicising and contextualising various conflicts and issues, their fiction reaffirms that Pakistan remains “a hard country” (Lieven), constantly caught in the “eye of the [geo-political] storm” (Jones). In their writing the nation is beset by violence, sectarianism, extremism and corruption; it is mostly dominated by a militant religious far-right, poverty and misogyny. While such things do occur and are apparent in Pakistan, this is not the complete and only *story* that can be told about it. Contrary to popular opinion it is not (yet) a failed state requiring Western intervention.

The affiliations and affinities of these writers as global citizens and their (familial, literary, cultural) associations with an Islamic world add a transnational and transcultural dimension to their writings.[13] When these authors write about Pakistan’s history and politics, their

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[11] K. Shamsie explicitly expresses her frustration with postcolonialism as a frame of reference for decoding and understanding PAW. She states that postcolonial studies, “seems like a hankering back to 1947 and even pre-[colonial times], when you feel that the problems of your nation are so far past that already …. It’s so not relevant” ("World" 156). See also Jay (*Global;* "Post").

[12] The majority of these writers grew up under Zia’s military dictatorship and view his rule as a watershed moment in Pakistan’s history. They argue that most of Pakistan’s present problems, such as internal chaos and extremism, are rooted in Zia’s regime. See K. Shamsie ("Dark"; "Claire" 216 ff.); Aslam ("Life"); and King.

prime audience is not Pakistani. Indeed, as writers in English their work is intended for an international readership and, perhaps, a small Pakistani Anglophone elite with the ability to read English. In many respects, they can be understood as attempting to contextualise, historicise and even explain Pakistan's rather complicated involvement and positioning in contemporary global conflicts.[14] In Aslam's words, "Pakistan seems to be at the centre of some of the world's problems right now and Pakistani writers and artists are actually trying to explain this mess. And the world is interested also because some of the problems of nations like India and America are rooted in this mess" (Bhatia n.p.).[15]

Postcolonial critics of a materialist bent (like Timothy Brennan, Graham Huggan, Sandra Ponzanesi, Lisa Lau and Om Prakash Dwivedi) argue that cosmopolitan writers from formerly colonised nations are engaged in a process of re-orientalising their (birth) nations via the recirculation of exoticising images, motifs and plot-lines. According to Brennan, they also indulge in what he refers to as "politico-exoticism" because "to be political has become a selling point" (41). Brennan's argument has been adopted as a form of criticism by some Pakistani literary critical commentators. B. Shah, for example, asks, "is violence and terrorism sexy to Western readers, and are Pakistani writers pandering to that trend?" ("Paperback" 151). The heightened international interest in PAW at the global literary stage is linked to what Priyamvada Gopal notes as a "renewed [Western] public interest" in Muslims, political Islam and regions such as Afghanistan-Pakistan ("Capitalism" 21). At

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[13] See G. K. Khan ("Hideous"; "Narrating"); Chambers ("Comparative"); and Clements (*Writing*).

[14] King remarks that Pakistani Anglophone authors are willing to engage in these conversations even though their loyalties might be questioned: "[w]ith American drones hitting large areas of the Muslim world this generation feels its affiliation with Islamic culture even if those bombed are likely to regard them as heretics" ("Dangerous" 120).

[15] The positioning of these writers as explanatory cultural commentators is both a construct (a marketing gimmick) and a conscious choice on the part of some writers. The publishing world continues to frame these writers as informants and their works as authentic representations of local cultures. Shamsie and Hamid appear to recognise the problematic nature of such packaging, but also accept and reinforce it in their non-fictional publications such as Hamid's *Discontent and Its Civilizations* and K. Shamsie's *Offence: The Muslim Case*. G. K. Khan notes that between 2007-2013 K. Shamsie published 61 articles, in *The Guardian* and other international newspapers and magazines, about Pakistan's various socio-political issues ("Narrating" 25).

present, PAW continues to be canonised, through published reviews, anthologies, criticism and academic projects, predominantly in terms of its thematic focus on political issues. For instance, when *Granta* published its special issue, *Granta 112: Pakistan* (Freeman *Granta*), on PAW in 2010, its representative spectrum of Pakistan consisted of articles on Jinnah on one hand and Faisal Shehzad (the Times Square bomber) on the other (Pinkaj Mishra n.p.).[16] The creative writing was, as B. Shah argues, focused almost exclusively on "the War on Terror years, the political upheaval, the instability, the danger and death" ("Paperback" 152). Similarly, when *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing* released its special issue on PAW it was, unsurprisingly, titled "Literature, Violence and Politics in Pakistan" (2011).

Before 2007, there was a dearth of literary criticism on PAW in general, with only a few articles published. Full-length studies of PAW included only a handful of titles: a very dated historical overview by Tariq Rahman, *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), and several anthologies compiled by Muneeza Shamsie: *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English* (1997), *Leaving Home, Towards a New Millennium: A Collection of English Prose by Pakistani Writers* (2001), *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women* (2008).[17] As I have noted, the majority of critical work on PAW is focused on national and geo-political concerns in the literature. Another area of interest has been the politics of identity. Most often, the focus has been the writers' (political) engagement with notions of post-9/11 Muslim identity. In the past decade or so, several book length studies have been published, such as Cara Cilano's *National Identities in*

[16] John Freeman, the editor of *Granta*, states that for the first time in the history of the magazine, *Granta 112: Pakistan* was reviewed by prestigious publications like the *New York Times Review of Books,* The *Wall Street Journal* and *Time Magazine* (Coreno n.p.). This reception speaks of the marketability of what Mueenuddin refers to as "brand horror" ("How" n.p.).

[17] This lack of criticism speaks volumes about the politics of reception, especially when considered that Hamid's first novel was first published in 2000 and Shamsie had already written four novels before the 2010 publication of *Burnt Shadows*. Similarly, Aslam's first novel failed to generate critical attention, while his second novel about honour killing in a British Muslim community, which appeared in 2005, continues to generate interest and criticism to date. Apart from the works of the big five, the other major novel receiving notable critical attention is *Cracking India* (1988) by Sidhwa.

Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction (2011), *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State* (2013) and *Post-9/11 Espionage Fiction in the US and Pakistan: Spies and "Terrorists*" (2014); Aroosa Kanwal's *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11* (2015) and David Waterman's *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millennium* (2015). These tend to treat PAW in terms of national politics (present and past) and the 9/11 context. There have been three special journal issues dedicated to Pakistani writing in English, the afore-mentioned special issues of *Granta* and *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* and one by *The South Asian Review* entitled "Pakistani Creative Writing in English: Tracing the Tradition, Embracing the Emerging" (2010). Madeline Clements, in *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective* (2016), situates the fiction of Hamid, Aslam, K. Shamsie (and Rushdie) as "part of a post-9/11 attempt to revise modern 'knowledge' of the Islamic world" (2). She reads them in the context of the "affiliations and affinities" (*Writing* 2) their fictions draw with Islam and the Muslim worlds in terms of literary heritage, thought, rhetoric, style and aesthetics. Similarly, other studies by scholars like Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin, Rehana Ahmed, Claire Chambers, and Caroline Herbert engage with PAW as a post-9/11 Muslim attempt to reorient global understanding(s) of Islam and Muslims.[18] Pakistani Anglophone writers have also appeared in two collections of interviews. Recently, there have been two major publications on PAW—*The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing* (2019), edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam, and M. Shamsie's comprehensive anthology, *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2017).

[18] See *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Morey and Yaqin, 2011); *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing* (Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin, 2012); *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and the Diaspora: Secularism, Religion* (Chambers and Herbert, 2014); *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (Ahmed, 2015) and *Islamophobia and the Novel* (Morey, 2018).

The relatively new body of Pakistani Anglophone writing has not been immune to the familiar charges of "literary tourism" (Dowd n.p.) often laid against "postcolonial" or "third World" literature. Questions have been raised about the credibility of the fictional representations of Pakistani culture, religion, gender and politics found in these novels. The need to explore the politics of presentation within these works (and their reception) becomes apparent if one pauses to ask for *whom* novels like *Home Fire* (K. Shamsie, 2017) or *The Wasted Vigil* (Aslam, 2008) are written, and *why* readers find them "interesting" and "gritty" (two common descriptors of this fiction). If PAW is a national literature, then "'Whose Pakistan? Whose Picture?'"(Sabri n.p.) do we find in these works?[19] During times of conflict and unrest, official narratives become fixated on recording the larger picture: history becomes synonymous with the story of the nation (community).[20] Gopal warns us that "[i]f the nation is the dominant story, then individuals are constitutively subaltern" (Gopal *Indian* 157). This is particularly true for women. Historically speaking, Pakistani (and "third world") women have had a contentious relationship with the written word—histories, official narratives—and nationhood. In writing of official national his-stories, the category of woman often disappears, is subsumed or displaced within the larger body of nation or the community. In the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

[19] The representative authority of these writers to act as cultural, political and anthropological commentators is rooted in the polemics of their fiction and derives its credence from their associative links (even if nominal) to the categories of Pakistan and/or Islam. For many of these writers, the term Muslim is an assigned political identity or affiliation rather than a mode of identification rooted in faith. Interestingly, it is assigned to these authors irrespective of their self-identification. Indeed, some of the writers who have engaged with the politics of Islam or offer interventions in the geo-political discourses on Islam/Muslims are professed atheists. Moreover, the majority of the writers come from a privileged class who live (partially or completely) in the West. Their engagement and interaction with Pakistan—in terms of class, locations (urban/rural), languages, ethnicities, sub-cultures etc.—remains highly localised or limited. While it is within their artistic purview to write on whatever subject they desire, awarding them representative or "insider" status is problematic.

[20] For instance, P. Chatterjee ("Colonialism") points out that in the clash between colonialism and nationalism, the women question gradually disappeared from public discussions. Similarly, Menon and Bhasin (*Borders;* "Recovery"; "Body"; "Abducted") have extensively recorded how, during the 1947 Partition, the stories and voices of women violated on both sides of the border failed to find any place in official histories which focused on the struggles of the newly independent States.

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figure of the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernisation. ("Subaltern Original" 306)

I contend that the figure of the Pakistani-Muslim woman has been largely overlooked in critical discussions of PAW. Pakistani women are not completely absent from—a "pristine absence in"—these debates. However, in critical scholarship "the woman question" is either dealt with tangentially—as part of larger discussions on politics, history and/or identities[21] —or discussed within the framework of a single author/book.

This research project attempts to offer a feminist intervention in the dominant readings and positioning of PAW. I challenge the dominant reading of PAW in terms of a near hegemonic preoccupation with nation and its geo-politics by using the body of the Pakistani/Muslim woman as a primary point of reference to study the selected texts. I explore how this female body is inscribed and framed in these texts and ask what spaces and positions are made available in the narratives for these women to inhabit? How do the politics of resistance, agency and oppression play out in relation to this figure? The terms of the feminist engagement of this project derive from the works of scholars like Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Lila Abu-Lughod, Saba Mahmood, Leila Ahmed , Amina Jamal, Shahnaz Rouse, Saadia Toor, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin—women who have in various capacities written

[21] For instance, in her discussion of Aslam's *Maps* Yaqin talks about the depiction of various female characters (Kaukab, Suraya) in the novel as part of a larger argument about the politics of representation—that of British Muslim identities. This partial engagement is evident in other scholarship, for example R. Ahmed (*Writing;* "Unsettling"); Clements ("Orienting"; *Writing*); Bhanot; and C. Lemke. Exceptions include Ranasinha's *Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation* (2016), which offers a comparative analysis of the novels by South Asian women writers with a special focus on Desai, Anam, K. Shamsie and Lahiri. Similarly, S. Rahman's *Place and Postcolonial Ecofeminism: Pakistani Women's Literary and Cinematic Fictions* (2019) considers Pakistani women's literary and cinematic narrative contributions through the lens of postcolonial ecofeminism. These explicitly feminist books limit themselves to discussion of women writers. My research expands this research focus by engaging with the gender politics in the works of both male and female writers.

back to and deconstructed the (masculine) metanarratives of neo-Orientalism, Islam and nationalism in Pakistani, South Asian and Middle Eastern contexts.[22]

This is also a project which sits close to my heart—shaped by conflicting personal experiences of agency and subjugation. Being born in an urban, middle-class family in Pakistan I was given privileged access to cultural capital. Surrounded by working women (my mother and maternal aunts) and a supportive father, for whom the education of his daughters and their professional careers was as important (if not more) as his sons, accorded me a certain level of freedom and agency. My naïve perception of seeing this agentive capacity as constitutive of the everyday experiential reality of Pakistani womanhood was challenged when I joined a co-ed university as a student, and later as a teacher. My increased presence and mobility in public spaces was accompanied by the awareness of a male gaze continuously sexualising my body (no matter how covered it was). The voicing and assertion of opinions revealed the presence of a benevolent patriarchal paternalism (and at times overt sexism), patronising me as a professional and an academic. I became aware of subtle forms of sexism embedded in the socio-cultural institutions and discourses around me. I learnt about the hegemony attached to privilege (class, language),

[22] I particularly draw on the following works: Spivak's "Three Women's Texts" (1985), "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988); P. Chatterjee's "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women" (1989), *Nation and Its Fragments* (1997), *Empire and Nation* (2013); Abu-Lughod's "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"(2002), "Seductions of the 'Honor Crime'"(2011), *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013); S. Mahmood's "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and The Docile Agent" (2001), *Politics of Piety* (2004),"Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject" (2009), "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and The War On Terror" (2009), "Can Secularism be Other-Wise?" (2010); A. Jamal "Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice" (2005), "Gendered Islam and Modernity in the Nation-space" (2009), Just Between Us (2011), "Global Discourses, Situated Traditions" (2012), "When are Women's Rights Human Rights in Pakistan?" (2013), "Gender, Citizenship, and the Nation-State" (2014), "Piety, Transgression, and the Feminist Debate" (2015); Rouse's "Women's movement in Pakistan" (1986), "Gender(ed) Struggles" (1994), "Gender Nationalism(s) and Cultural Identity" (1996), "Feminist Representations" (1998), "Nationalism, Gender and Space in Pakistan" (2002), Shifting Body Politics (2004); L. Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992); Toor's "A National Culture for Pakistan" (2005), "Moral Regulation in a Postcolonial Nation-State" (2007), "How not to Talk About Muslim Women" (2011), *The State of Islam* (2011), "Gender, Sexuality, and Islam" (2011), "The Political Economy of Moral Regulation" (2014); Menon's and Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), "Her Body and Her Being" (2001), "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance" (2002), "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour" (2011).

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the politics of colour and of body type, and began to realise the limits of my own feminist engagement. I also experienced women marginalising other women, thereby strengthening discriminating and oppressive structures of power. I vividly remember experiencing a disconcerting rage when (even in discussions with academics and educated minds) religion and/or traditions were used as excuses to rationalise the brutal treatment and/or oppressive domestication of women. Or when equality between the sexes was reduced to statements about women's inability to match men in terms of physical strength. And especially when, in a last dismissive resort, the demand for (women's) rights, agency, and assertion of desire were reductively decoded as my desire to emulate a (misconstrued) Western idea of freedom—sexual promiscuity. I also became weary of instances where feminism was *performed*, via research and development projects, because it was fashionable, and/or for monetary reward.

I am aware that there are many *feminisms*—and my own form of it is hard won (and developing). Through university courses and discussions, an epistemological world of (predominantly white) feminist engagement was revealed. Reading these discourses, I felt represented and, yet, at the same time, invisible. The feeling of invisibility came from failing to find a mode of agency and womanhood that was empowering and yet made space for a subjectivity which regarded religion as a legitimate source of agentive experience. The work by women of colour reverberated with echoes and reflections of familiar concerns. But it was not until I came across literature from Egyptian author Nawal El-Saadawi and Leila Aboulela that I felt a resonance with my own experience. Her work led to my discovery of a feminist tradition of critical scholarship, especially of exegesis of Quran and Hadith, within the wider Muslim world. I also found strength and voice in the literary worlds of indigenous

writers like Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Rukhsana Ahmad, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, and Parveen Shakir, among others.

These experiences collectively translated into an impetus to engage with literature, as a cultural product, from the perspective of a middle-class, Muslim, woman-of-colour feminist.[23] My passion resulted in projects that engaged with texts with an explicit pro-feminist agenda (Salam) and also in the production of counter-readings of non-feminist texts by centralising the female body as the point of reference.

This project extends my previous research, and endeavours to address lacunae in literary critical approaches to PAW. I engage with the representation of the female body in novels by Hamid, K. Shamsie and Aslam, three of the "big five" who have been branded as the face of PAW. By choosing the construction of the female body as the topic of my critical contestation, I wish to (re)open a dialogue about the politics of gender construction (specifically about the female body) within mainstream contemporary literary criticism on Pakistani literature. Through a close-reading of three texts—*Moth Smoke*, *Broken Verses* and *Maps for Lost Lovers*—I intend to contextualise, investigate and critique the terms of each writer's inscription of the female body.

[23] I am aware of the strong Western and neo-Imperialist underpinnings of the term feminist. I am also aware that in the context of countries like Pakistan (Muslim, developing, and part of a third world) it has been more abused than used. I appropriate this term, taking cue from the work of Miriam Cooke (*Women* viii). In this project, like Cooke and G. K. Khan, I unapologetically employ the term feminism as an "epistemology", and as such it stands for "above all an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society" ("Multiple" 143). It provides the tools necessary to decode how historically, materially and culturally specific constructions of the female body (femininities) are tied to the oppressive, marginal and discriminatory treatment of women. It refers to an awareness that regards the corporality of the female body—especially in terms of its reproductive abilities and labour—as a political construct, intimately connected to the notions of power and shaped by factors like culture, class, colour, race, religion, and/or education. I also refuse to view feminism as antithetical to religion: "[t]he most important feature of contemporary Muslim women's struggle for rights is that they reject the proposition that they cannot be both free and equal with men and good Muslims at the same time.…On the contrary, they insist that a woman becomes an authentic Muslim only when she has achieved freedom and equality as an individual and citizen" (Afkhami, Nemiroff and Vazir 7).

The Woman Question[24]

> Leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women. . . . [M]y reference is to a place where the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant . . . . [O]nce in a while, we naturally thought of ourselves as women, but only in some perfunctory biological way that we happened on perchance. Or else it was a hugely practical joke, we thought, hidden somewhere among our clothes.… [T]here are no women in the third world. (Suleri 1 & 20)

Writing of her childhood and youth, Sara Suleri appears to accord with the sentiments of Spivak, quoted above. In the third world "there are no women," Suleri asserts, in much the same way as Spivak argues that in the third world "the figure of the woman disappears". The two differ, however, in that Suleri writes of her lived experience of growing up in Pakistan where the 'concept" of woman was absent, while Spivak writes about the *representation* of women by both "patriarchy and imperialism," "tradition and modernisation". In what follows I call upon Spivak's idea of representational erasure in which women *disappear* under patriarchy but also under *modern* (post)Imperial inscription. Further, I suggest that women are frequently erased in both Pakistani Anglophone fiction *and* in literary critical interpretations of this writing. Given that the representations of Pakistani Anglophone writers are often positioned as *authentic* in discourses on Pakistan, Islam and Muslim identities, what they say about Pakistani-Muslim womanhood (and how they say it) warrants interrogation. Inscribing the normalcy of experience (in the lives of Pakistani women) as simply that of religiously-condoned patriarchal victimhood risks generating reductive, stereotypical and essentialist portrayals. Such portrayals—which

[24] This phrase is borrowed from P. Chatterjee ("Colonialism"). He, in turn, alludes, I suspect, to the use of this term in 19th century England and discussions of 19th century British women's writings.

describe violence and oppression as the norm for women—suggests there is nothing more to Pakistan, and, in particular to its female subjects, than this aspect of its socio-political life. It also risks generating single, uncomplicated storylines which objectify the subjects of these narratives as theocratic, primitive, violent, and misogynist masculinities and/or oppressed, silenced and sexually-repressed femininities. Problematically, such representations risk affirming the dominant (especially, for some of the Western world) "'default position' that views countries like Pakistan, and in particular women from Pakistan under a generic canopy of catastrophe" (G. K. Khan "Narrating" 33). My research explores not only the prevalence of these constructions of Pakistani-Muslim women but also the representation of challenging counter-discourses, as evident in selected novels, which have largely been ignored in critical evaluations.

When read in conjunction with the above quoted lines by Suleri, Shamsie's remarks suggest that to be born female in a country like Pakistan—a developing, third world country plagued by politicised religion—is hazardous for women. This danger arguably derives from being born in a society where women, while demographically the largest section of society, have often not enjoyed the privilege of owning their body or its experiences, and have been prevented, often violently, from (publically) expressing its desires and voice. The bodies of the majority of these women can be equated with empty spaces, their owners often denied proprietorship. Occupancy in reality looks more like the renting out of these spaces, for the pervasive socio-religious or political forces decree that inhabitancy and access is permitted only where owners accept patriarchal, nationalist and religious interpretations of their bodies. These cultural and discursive forces set the rules of bodily (self) 'occupancy' for the majority of Pakistani women; they dictate and decide the legitimacy of their emotions and

experiences, the sanctification or shamefulness of their impulses/feelings and the productive or destructive nature of their desires. Historically speaking, like the Urdu linguistic signifier *aurat* (literally meaning that which is hidden or should be concealed), women have been an absent-presence in the nation's hegemonic discourses. Paradoxically, while often literally hidden or concealed, the female body is also metaphorically and symbolically foregrounded—as a site of ownership and control—in many Pakistani masculine, religious and nationalistic accounts.

I contend that examining the woman question in dominant (representative or carrying ideological force) discourses (literary, critical or otherwise) is a political act. The interpellation of women in (official) narratives has epistemic and material significance. Historically speaking, the figure of the oriental/brown/third world/Muslim woman has been appropriated and instrumentalised in socio-political discourses to serve nationalist, colonial and/or neo-Orientalist agendas. While women figure prominently in these discourses, their voices (and bodies) are nevertheless appropriated, resulting in narratives in which they are *spoken for* (Spivak "Subaltern Original" 307). Referring to the historical displacement of women's voices in South Asian literary, cultural and political discourse, Ellen Brinks notes that "[n]ationalist and colonialist records and discourses have had a history of 'disappearing' Indian women's voices, even when the discussions are about them, as in the sati or the Age of Consent debates" (3). Similarly, the figure of woman has also been a significant signifier in the dialogue between East and West, Islam and non-Islamic forces, modernity and tradition. When positioned as such, women are often exalted as symbols but excluded as persons.[25] They often emerge as a *privileged site* on which contestation between change and traditionalism occurs. Feminist scholars have repeatedly exposed the danger of the symbolic

[25] Adapted from Cooke (*Women* xxiv).

positioning and appropriation of women's bodies within dominant cultural, religious, political and historical discourses. They highlight that caught between opposing narratives (such as nation and religion; Islam and the West), the figure of woman becomes an over-written and overly-determined category. It is reductively (re)configured in essentialist and often symbolic terms that deny its subjectivity and agency. For instance, during the colonial period the body of (Indian/Muslim) woman was symbolically employed in official narratives to signify the backwardness, inferiority and misogyny of the indigenous culture(s). This construction, in turn, was used to justify British Imperialism as a civilising mission in which "white men [and women] sav[ed] brown women from brown men" (Spivak "Subaltern Revised" 50). Conversely, in anti-colonial nationalist narratives, the same body of the Indian-Muslim woman—as a marker and bearer of traditions, religious and ethical values, and cultural essence—was instrumentalised to construct and assert the (spiritual-moral) superiority of indigenous culture. Deniz Kandiyoti observes that "[t]he identification of Muslim women as the bearers of the 'backwardness' of their societies, initially by colonial administrators and later by Western-oriented reformers, is mirrored by a reactive local discourse which elevates the same practices into symbols of cultural authenticity and integrity" ("Reflections" 21). This placed women in a double-bind: the coloniser controlling her body in the name of liberation, and the colonised (male) controlling it in the name of tradition, purity and or nation. When such an ideological interplay occurs, women's voices, issues and concerns tend to be violently displaced. These concerns are simultaneously privatised, becoming unfit subjects for public debate, which also (re)institutionalises traditional socio-cultural structures and forms of domination and control.[26]

[26] See Chatterjee ("Colonialism"; Chatterjee *Nation*); Kandiyoti ("Identity"; "Reflections"; *Women*); Tharu and Lalita; Ray and M. Sarkar.

A resurgence of Orientalist tropes occurred post-9/11, (re)cast and (re)configured in neo-Imperialist terms.[27] Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin argue that "gender has historically been at the forefront of Muslim identification in the West" (4). Jasmin Zine extends this argument, asserting that post-9/11 War on Terror discourse emanating from the West displays a distinctive "gendered Islamophobia", characterised by a deep fixation with the body of the (veiled) Muslim woman (*Introduction* 32; "Between" 1). Bodies of Muslim women, "huddling in refugee camps or sliding along walls enveloped in the burka" (Cooke "Saving" 485), became widely circulated symbols in Western rescue narratives,[28] which (again) endeavoured to legitimise US intervention in countries like Afghanistan, labelling these incursions 'civilising missions'.[29] The agency of the Muslim woman is further threatened and compromised by an opposing, yet in many ways equally limiting, narrative generated by a puritan, Islamist ideology. The figure of the Muslim woman is thus doubly bound: the diversity and variations of her embodied experiences are reductively transfixed into an immutable cultural essence. This finds articulation in the form of the "re-vitalized Orientalist tropes and representations of backward, oppressed and politically immature women in need of liberation and rescue through imperialist interventions"(Zine "Between" 1). Simultaneously, the counter-narratives of the religious right inscribe on her body "equally limiting narratives of Islamic womanhood" which tend to compromise her "rights and liberty" (Zine 1), especially as an independent, civic subject. Miriam Cooke labels this newly visible body "Muslimwoman". She argues:

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[27] Post 9/11, the West's Cold War bogeyman has been replaced by a violent, irrational, fundamentalist and atavistic religious Other—the Muslim. An instance of the verbalisation of this parallelism can be found in Amis' (in)famous assertion that "[a]ll over again the west confronts an irrationalist, agonistic, theocratic/ ideocratic system which is essentially and unappeasably opposed to its existence. The old enemy was a superpower; the new enemy isn't even a state" ("Fear" n.p.).
[28] Or that of a young Malala shot in the head by Taliban: see Afzal-Khan ("Politics").
[29] Cooke adds, "Imperial logic genders and separates subject peoples so that the men are the Other and the women are civilizable. To defend our universal civilization we must rescue the women. To rescue these women we must attack these men. These women are to be rescued not because they are more 'ours' than 'theirs' but rather because they will have become more 'ours' through the rescue mission" ("Saving" 485-6).

> Muslimwoman is both a noun and an adjective that refers to an imposed identification the individual may or may not choose for herself. The Muslimwoman is not a description of a reality; it is the ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image. … The neologism Muslimwoman draws attention to the emergence of a newly entwined religious and gendered identification that overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical and even philosophical diversity. (Cooke "Muslimwoman" 140)

Ambivalently positioned in the often contradictory and polarising discourses between Muslim and Western feminists, Muslim and non-Muslim states, nationalism and neo-Imperialism, the figure of the Muslim (Pakistani) woman, thus, can be read as a political, politicised and policed construct.

In this context, I contend that the bodies of Pakistani women portrayed by Pakistani Anglophone writers need to be positioned and read as "dense transfer point[s] for relations of power," a term I adopt from Michel Foucault's theorisation of sexuality (Foucault *History* 103) and to which I return in my discussion of Shamsie's *Broken Verses* in Chapter Two. Through the representation of these bodies, significant (intra and inter-national) dialogues with religion, history, politics, race and nation are staged. It is the notion of this discursively produced female body which I employ in my analysis of the ways in which Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam portray and complicate Pakistani-Muslim woman.

In literature, especially post-9/11, this politicised Muslim (Pakistani) female body is in danger of being narrativised in formulaic, politically-oriented ways: visible, yet absent; speaking, yet silenced (unheard or misunderstood); seen, yet faceless (veiled, non-individualised); and sexually repressed, yet an object of desire. Arguably, in the international literary market there is a demand for formulaic stories featuring (third world) female

characters who are either objects (oppressed, victimised) or have become subjects (agentive and free) through "self-liberation from culture and community" (Nash 29). Uzma Aslam Khan, commenting on the high salability of such narratives, suggests that writers from Muslim countries, including Pakistan, are often guilty of inscribing discriminating storylines in anticipation of a Western readership. They write, she claims, of:

> … silent, submissive [female] protagonists, preferably liberated by the West. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is an obvious example. If the narrative falls outside the box—if a female character is not freed by the West but by her own determined spirit on her own land—then how can war on her land be justified? If she doesn't need liberating, why read her? ("Pakistan" n.p.)

Shafiq Naz, the founder of the Pakistani publishing house Alhamra,[30] makes similar claims:

> In America and the Anglo-Saxon world, the problem is that people have certain ideas and preconceptions about Pakistan, about Islam.… Anything that is negative, anything that would corroborate what they think about a certain society, that would interest them. They are not really interested in portraying the society as it is with its negative and with its positive. (qtd. in Cilano "Writing" 184)

If this is so, then the very process of literary production by Pakistani writers seeking international acclaim is complicit in the reproduction of gendered stereotypes that reconfirm Western assumptions about the nation, and Islam. Ironically, the claims made here, which generalise the readership of the entire "America[n] and … Anglo-Saxon world," are themselves deeply stereotypical and simply reinforce and reconfirm a stark binary

[30] Alhamra is a local press set up in Islamabad, Pakistan which, along with Oxford University Press, has regularly published literature by Pakistani authors since 2000.

conception of East and West or Muslim and secular (or Christian?) societies, their readers and their readers' assumptions and interests. Precisely such binarism characterises a great deal of the critical responses to Pakistani Anglophone fiction that has been produced to date, from both *local* and *Western* literary critics.

There is perhaps another way to approach questions about the portrayal of women (and their bodies) in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, without simply conceding to the idea that this corpus simply "*sells out*" in the desire to accommodate the *interest(s)* of Western readers. This line of argument has not only become somewhat trite but locks responses to this literature into predetermined contours. What is needed, I suggest, is a return to some of the *representative* PAW texts that ostensibly "corroborate what [Western readers] think about [Pakistan]" and a close and careful analysis of how women's bodies are represented within these. In what follows I undertake such an analysis.

My impetus to engage with the representation of the female body in selected Pakistani Anglophone fiction is also driven, partly, by the positioning of PAW within Pakistan's mainstream literary scene. While Pakistani writing in English has been winning acclaim internationally, interestingly, within Pakistan, creative writing in English is yet to establish itself as part of the mainstream literary canon. In a society which is predominantly multi-ethnic, with a polyglot population speaking more than 70 languages (T. Rahman "Language" 4556; "Role" 220), literary writing in English only "occupies an emerging position within Pakistan" (Cilano "Writing" 184). This writing faces some significant competition from strong, well-established literary traditions in indigenous languages such as Urdu, at the national level, and Punjabi/Sindhi/Pashto/Saraiki at provincial or ethnic levels. Therefore, the writers who choose English as a medium for expression of their creativity speak from

the "extreme edges"[31] (M. Shamsie *World* xiv) of the Pakistani literary scene. Their marginality within the mainstream literary milieu is unsurprising, given that only 2–4% of the population is fluent in English according to the last census records (T. Rahman "Role" 220-21).[32] Given the small local readership it is probable that Pakistani Anglophone writers primarily write for an international (English-reading) audience. However, to suggest that these writers only and simply write to reconfirm *Western assumptions* is surely mistaken. While many PAW writers have benefited from the heightened attention of the global community on Pakistan in the past decade, they nonetheless appear to be willing, primarily, to strike up conversations and dialogue about their nation with the West through their fictions. Commenting on the novels of Hamid, Shamsie, Aslam and Mueenuddin, G. K. Khan argues that their writing is transnational, offering a simultaneous critique of home (the nation) and the West:

> … contemporary Pakistani fiction in English is transnational in scope even when its focus is on urban and rural Pakistan. The universal and the local remain in balance and inextricably connected. The narratives remain cognizant of Pakistan's on-going tribulations with politics, fundamentalism and corruption … [and] are equally aware of the universality of these experiences. (G. K. Khan "Narrating" 249-50)[33]

While such a claim appears to precariously position these writers as powerful representatives and spokespersons on behalf of Pakistan and the larger Muslim community,

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[31] Though M. Shamsie uses this term with reference to Pakistani women writers writing in English, like Cilano I also believe that this phrase can be employed to refer to the positioning of Pakistani writers writing in English in the overall literary landscape of Pakistan.

[32] English language serves as cultural capital in Pakistan and its position is intrinsically tied to questions of power, economic mobility, privilege and nationalism. On the politics of (English) language in Pakistan see T. Rehman (*Politics;* "Language"; "Muslim"; "Passports"; "Role"); Baumgardner; A.R. Haque; Mahboob (*Future;* "No"; "English"); and Kachru.

[33] Daniel O'Gorman argues that even when Pakistani Anglophone writers like Hamid, Aslam, and Shamsie write about Pakistan, their works are not simply or completely about Pakistan, "[r]ather, they all attempt to decentre preconceptions about the nation, or … to 'deterritorialize' it by calling both its metaphorical and literal borders into question"(n.p.) Similarly, Tariq Rehman claims that the worldview of Pakistani Anglophone writers is not Islamic, but rather secular and anthropocentric (*History* 231).

notably, this status is born out of privilege. Typically, PAW writers were raised in elite circumstances in urban centres in Pakistan and offered extensive opportunities to study English. Many no longer live in Pakistan, having relocated to the USA or Britain. Furthermore, international lack of awareness of the indigenous literary scene, and even of the rest of PAW, frequently positions them as the lonely voices of enlightenment and reason that are bravely (often at a danger to themselves) chronicling the darker truths and realities of a chaotic Pakistan and/or oppressive religion.[34] Given the often political nature of the writing itself and its reception, it is important to ask about the terms of engagement of these texts. In their dialogue with politics, history, gender, nation, class and religion who (and what) gets framed as oppressive? Who offers resistance and how is this resistance materialised?

In an attempt to answer such questions, representations of the body of the Pakistani-Muslim woman are my point of reference in this thesis. Several considerations determine my selection of texts. My interest is in texts marketed and consumed in the international literary market as mainstream Pakistani voices, which use Pakistani society and culture as their primary point of reference, rather than novels with a transnational focus. Focusing on the *Big Five*, Shamsie is an obvious choice as she is the only female writer in this group. I focus on *Broken Verses* because it partially deals with the politicisation of religion and women's bodies during the regime of General Zia. I exclude Hanif who, at the time I started this project, had published only *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*—a political satire.[35] The focus

[34] For instance, after the publication of *Maps*, some reviewers complimented Aslam for his courage in writing a harsh anti-clerical novel, fearing that he might be courting a fate similar to Rushdie: see R. Charles. English translations of indigenous literatures have failed to generate attention. Even critics and scholars focusing on PAW within Pakistan have not set these bodies of literature in dialogue with one another. Surprisingly, critics have also failed to engage with the larger body of PAW, even in the articles of critics or reviewers (for example Dalrymple) who reviewed fifty years of Pakistani English literature.

[35] Hanif's second novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), does not fit my criteria of mainstream representations as it deals with the marginalisation and mistreatment of minorities.

of the project also required me to choose fiction in which female characters had a substantial role. For this reason, I chose Hamid's *Moth Smoke* rather than *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (*Maps)* instead of *Season of Rainbirds* (1993), *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). I explore each of the selected texts in a self-contained chapter, offering a detailed discussion of the representation of the female body by engaging with the textual and narrative aspects of the fiction. Importantly, I connect the representation of the female body in each novel to overarching concerns with religion and nation, as these are driving forces in all three.

Theoretical Overview

This section offers a brief introduction to some aspects of the theory on which my textual analyses draw. What follows is necessarily brief but is more fully explicated and complicated in the main body of my thesis. Fundamentally, I employ the epistemological category of the *body* to analyse the representation of Pakistani womanhood in selected texts—in terms of its victimisation, resistance and agency. This approach places the material, physical body at the centre of the discursive and ideological processes involved in the formulation of (nationalist/religious) subjectivities and identities. As a middle class, feminist critic belonging to a third world country I have been trained and educated in Western terms as well as in a South Asian version of Islamic knowledge.[36] My indigenous knowledge and learning marks the point of entry in my critical engagement with the representation of the female body in Pakistani fiction, while the theoretical concept of the body, as explicated and developed in

[36] I acknowledge that the use of labels like postcolonial (or post-colonial), Neocolonialism and first world/third world are problematic. However, the use of *Third-world country* is advantageous in drawing attention to the economic status of the region under discussion, which is a significant contributing factor to the oppression, exploitation and victimisation of women in Pakistan.

Western philosophy and literary criticism, signifies my point of departure. Theorists of the body assert that corporeality is a construct intrinsically tied to questions of knowledge and power.[37] The theorisation of the (female/subaltern) body as "pliable flesh … the unspecified raw material of social inscription that produces subjects as *subjects of a particular kind*" (Grosz *Space* 32) has proven to be highly productive in developing critiques of power, knowledge and social institutions in the last several decades. I develop such ideas in my discussion of selected Pakistani Anglophone novels.

The representation of the female body in Western tradition is relevant and related to the South Asian context, in spite of differences (often glaring ones in terms of ethics, morality or religious perspectives). The philosophical and socio-political discourses in both contexts share similarities in relation to the construction of femininity and the female body. In both traditions the female body has been historically marginalised, manipulated and denigrated in terms of its corporeality. Similarly, in both South Asia and the West, the female body is appropriated as a metaphor for the nation and home in nationalist discourses, with a concomitant subsumption of feminist concerns into discourses about national solidarity and progress.[38]

Recent scholarship that places emphasis on the body demonstrates the ways in which analysis of corporeal subjectivity can expose, challenge and deconstruct the philosophical, linguistic and cultural institutions that have historically disempowered social subjects, especially marginalised or disenfranchised ones such as women and racial or religious

[37] The work of Foucault, especially his discussions of "bio-power", are particularly influential.

[38] Katrak argues that the construction of womanhood in contemporary South Asia reflects residual elements of the (British) Victorian morality and mentality institutionalised in South Asia through education, language and literature in the colonial period. It would be reductive to suggest that (often oppressive) contemporary South Asian conceptions of womanhood are simply the result of colonisation, nonetheless many scholars agree that colonisation had deleterious effects on the gender relationships and understandings of colonised people, not least via the feminisation and/or juvenalisation of colonised men.

minorities. Such institutions have denied women a role in the production of knowledge, privileging the male perspective and constructing the perfect and/or standard human subject in masculine terms. A focus on the body has gained currency in many attempts to (de)construct accounts of subjectivity and power in disciplinary areas like sociology (Howson *Body; Embodying;* Scott and Morgan; Hancock; Turner; Shilling *Body; Body Social*), cultural studies (Synnott; Armstrong; Dijck; Featherstone et al.), archaeology (Hamilakis et al.), sexuality studies (Fausto-Sterling), philosophy (Lakoff and Johnson *Philosophy;* Welton *Body;* Welton *The Body*) and, most notably for these purposes, in feminist/gender studies (Conboy et al.; Grosz *Volatile; Space;* "Contemporary"; Shildrick and Price; Gatens; Cahill and Hansen; Colebrook; Spelman; Gunew; Bordo "Feminism"; *Unbearable;* Butler *Bodies ;* Katrak; Mohanram; Weitz; Puri; Orr et al.; Hesse-Biber et al.; Caine et al.; Braidotti "Becoming"; *Nomadic;* Witz; Davis).[39]

Many feminists and gender theorists argue that the Western tradition of knowledge, as far back as the distinction drawn by the Greek philosophers between form and desire, has been plagued by a strong somatophobia which has been responsible for the physical and epistemic marginalisation, oppression, denigration and disempowerment of women (Spelman; Shildrick and Price). Arguably, this culminated in René Descartes' dualistic privileging of the mind over the body. Elizabeth Grosz argues that because of the lateral association of this binary with men and women, respectively, the somatophobia characterising mind/body dualism was transmuted into a predominantly misogynist epistemology. Within this tradition, woman came to symbolise all that was derivative,

[39] Multiple reasons have been suggested for this growing prominence of the body in academic discourse. Turner attributes it to the rise of a "somatic society" in the West (6), while Grosz claims it is the result of "a crisis of reason" (*Space* 27) arising from the post-Cartesian privileging of the mental over the corporeal and concomitant disavowal of the role of the body.

deviant, negative or the *Other* through the hierarchal pairing of culture/nature, reason/emotion, self/other, activity/passivity, strength/weakness, subjectivity/objectivity, public/private, sanity/insanity, masculine/feminine, and man/woman (Grosz *Space* 63) . Arguably, the binary association of mind with men and body with women is further strengthened because of the latter's ability to reproduce. Women seem to be "more biological, more corporeal and more natural than men" (Grosz *Volatile* 14) because, unlike the apparently self-contained male body, women's bodies lactate, menstruate, excrete vaginal fluids, conceive and give birth. These endocrinological, physiological and reproductive functions of the female body appear to offer sufficient proof of "a potentially dangerous volatility, in which the body is out of control, beyond, and set against the force of reason" (Shildrick 63).

The reductive construction of women's identity in terms of the reproductive or biological function of their bodies, or in relation to the limitations, inadequacies, and fragility of their bodies, is not exclusive to the West, of course. Nor are theorists who focus on the body only Western; an increasing number of non-Western scholars pay attention to the ways in which bodies are gendered. While the exact signification of the female body "varies by culture, by century and by social group" (Desmond 92), as well as by class, colour, caste, religion and sexual orientation, studies of South Asian (largely Indian) womanhood, by scholars like Ketu H. Katrak and Lisa Lau ("Women"; "Victim") have shown that for the majority of South Asian women, biology dictates the destiny or purpose of their existence. According to Lau, in such regions female bodies amount to "metaphysical nothingness" ("Victim" 370)—a claim that accords with that of Western feminists. As Grosz argues, reducing women (Western or Eastern) simply to bodies, is significantly problematic: the "presum[ption] that *only*

anatomical, physiological, or biological account[s] of bodies are possible, obscure[es] the possibility of *sociocultural* conceptions of the body" (*Space* 31). It is on these "sociocultural *conceptions* of the body" that I focus, thus disavowing the binary division between mind and body.

Feminist critics emphatically argue that what we understand as *bodies* are in fact discursive conceptualisations or descriptions of their various materialisations naturalised and institutionalised through repetition and reiterated performances: "there are thinkings of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body. The body as such cannot be thought" (Spivak qtd. in Kirby 154). Feminists note that every perception or understanding we form of the body is rooted in the spatio-temporal specificity of its location and circumstances:

> To say that the body is a discursive construction is not to deny a substantial corpus, but to insist that our apprehension of it, our understanding of it, is necessarily mediated by the *contexts* in which we speak….It is then the forms of materialisation of the body, rather than the material itself, which is the concern of a feminist that must ask always what purpose and whose interests do particular constructions serve. (Shildrick and Price 7)

My analysis of the fictional construction of the female body in Pakistani literature adopts such approaches, understanding the body as *an inscriptive surface*. It is seen as a text that is both constituted and read through the intersection of its materiality and the various

cultural, religious, and/or political forces that *write* upon it within a specific spatial/temporal context.[40]

I follow the approach of theorists who construct and read the body's corporeality both in terms of its local specificity and as a source for social organisation and authority. Like Pierre Bourdieu or Anthony Giddens, Grosz expresses dissatisfaction with theoretical models which posit personal agency and social structures as opposite or mutually exclusive categories. This, according to them, results in the creation of an artificial dualism which voids the subject of the capacity to engage in social process. Just as Bourdieu has claimed that "the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body" (qtd. in Shilling *Body* 61), Grosz similarly sees both (female) sexuality and bodies as constitutive *of*, as well as constituted *by*, society. She uses the image of an inverted Mobius strip to highlight that just as society acts upon the surface of the individual's body and inscribes meaning on it though language, literature, traditions, law, religious or nationalist discourse (for example), similarly, the psychical interiority of the individual (rooted in the experiences of his/her corporeal being) invests the body with the potential (if also limited) agency to rename, accept, or reject external social influences that seek to name or *assign* it. In this way, the corporeal body not only acts or performs as the location for the expression of social organisation and authority, at the same time, its psyche, constructed though interaction with others and social reality, is empowered to act in ways that might result in the reconfiguration of the social or the political *body* itself.

[40] Scholars like Turner and Butler (*Bodies*) claim that in any given social situation, power is not only exercised (inscribed) on bodies but also through them. They are interested in unveiling the implicit and explicit mechanisms employed by dominant hegemonic structures (like patriarchy, church or the State) to discipline, regulate and control individuals and communities. Shilling suggests this is problematic because it tends "to erase any ontological existence the body has apart from society, thus making it impossible to evaluate institutions in terms of their beneficial or detrimental effects on the body" (*Body 17*).

In analysing representations of the female body in selected Pakistani novels, I draw on these ideas. Given that all three authors are writers of political fiction, it is unsurprising that the female body in their texts is located at the somewhat explosive nexus of nation (local and global), religion, gender and, to some extent, class. I propose that the stories they tell about women, especially Hamid and Shamsie, cannot be dismissed as merely formulaic or exoticised productions by third world writers. In my analysis, I demonstrate that, contrary to the popular (critical and otherwise) reception and positioning of these writers, the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women are central to the dialogue and negotiations staged in these novels. Not all the female bodies in these texts can be relegated to the position of mere passive and scripted objects—empty spaces for symbolic and ideological battles to take place. The majority of them are instead situated as subjects invested with varying degrees of agentive power and possibility for self-inscription.

The Lay of the Land

My thesis comprises five sections: an introduction, three chapters of close fictional analysis and a conclusion. Chapter One offers a reading of *Moth Smoke* that centralises the figure of Mumtaz, the female protagonist. Hamid's novel has been predominantly read as a harsh internal critique of contemporary Pakistan that dramatises the effects of the intrusion of globalised capitalism. I instead situate Mumtaz—and her body—at the intersection of nation and history within the praxis of the novel. I argue for a shift in critical focus from the male protagonists (and the economic and nationalist concerns they represent) to the character of Mumtaz. Doing so, I suggest, enables a reading of the novel that offers an alternate model of citizenship and belonging that challenges masculine notions of both the

nation and women, especially the traditional construction of the latter as symbolic capital for the Nation-State.

Chapter Two offers a close-reading of Shamsie's *Broken Verses*. I return to the notion of the politicised figure of the Pakistani-Muslim woman, elaborating on some of the ideas briefly sketched in the introduction. Shamsie claims to write from a feminist perspective and this approach dictates the terms of her engagement with Pakistan's politics and history, notably the period of General Zia's dictatorship. This period is most often remembered (and portrayed in literature) for his censorship of free speech, political persecution, corruption, instrumentalisation of religion, and the legislative changes (Hudood Ordinance) which severely impinged on the rights, freedom and mobility of Pakistani women. Shamsie does not shy away from this history of violence. However, I argue, she offers a counter-narrative that suggests the presence of challenging voices—not least those of women—that undermine(d) Zia's authority and legacy. Shamsie's novel also highlights the ways in which Pakistani women *reclaimed* and *refigured* the positioning of their bodies and the stories told about them in the official narratives. I suggest that Shamsie's location of this (revisionary) history in women's bodies is a refusal to eulogise these women or to reduce them to the asexualised heroes of national histories. She is careful to foreground the body of the Pakistani woman in terms of its corporeality—whether in relation to desire, motherhood or loss.

The focus of Chapter Three is Aslam's *Maps*. Aslam's narrative is a multi-layered critique of a British migrant Pakistani-Muslim community. The (alleged) feminist agenda of the novel foregrounds the forms and nature of institutionalised violence and oppression which (desiring) bodies, especially those of women, are made to endure in the name of religion,

tradition and culture. This violence ranges from honour-killings (the ostensible impetus for his novel) to everyday injustices, silences, tragedies and losses. The female bodies are not altogether divested of agency and his strength lies in humanising even the most violent and uncompromising female figure. I argue that despite this, the feminist (and ostensibly anti-Muslim) agenda of his novel is compromised because only men are cast as saviours. His paradigm of resistance and agency remains problematic because it oscillates between ascribing the violent treatment of women as, on the one hand, something endemic to Islam and, on the other, as a product of compromised masculine egos. He complicates his critique by incorporating the pernicious effects of race and class in structures of oppression. However, I contend that his attempt at complication ultimately fails as *Maps* reinforces a correlation between (Islamic) religion and gendered violence.

I conclude by arguing that Pakistani Anglophone writers, as represented by Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam, do not simply reproduce dominant neo-Orientalist images and syllogisms about Islam/Pakistan and Muslim-Pakistani female bodies. The stories they tell complicate neo-Orientalist claims that brown women require rescuing by an enlightened West. These authors are as interested in chronicling the forms and faces of resistance as they are in confronting and naming the forces which perpetuate and institutionalise the marginalisation and oppression of female bodies. In their confrontation with these religious, cultural and political forces, the approach of these writers remains unapologetic and far from overtly simplistic. However, these politically engaged (and aware) fictions are not entirely unproblematic. Hamid depicts Mumtaz as a powerful, agentive character. But at the same time, the form of agency ascribed to her seems to suggest that the only way a woman can exercise and assert her corporeality is by moving outside or to the margins of society.

Shamsie's novel, unsurprisingly, strongly vindicates female corporeality: she refuses to resort to the binary of the whore (read desiring, undomesticated female body) and the good-wife. An erotic desiring body, sacrificing wife, loving daughter, political activist and housewife—all are presented as equally legitimate avatars of womanhood. However, simultaneously, the novel's conclusion privileges the written word as the preferred form of resistance (and engagement), which in turn, largely remains the domain and legacy of men (the Poet, Mirza), while the physical form of resistance is materialised through the female body (Samina). Aslam sympathetically protests against the "spectacle of pain" (*Maps* 271) which characterise the lives of the female characters in his novel, and yet he seems unable or unwilling to invest and assign any (coloured) female body in his narrative with transformative or generative power—this power, to save, to rescue and to represent, remains the purview of men.

Chapter One: (Re)figuring Pakistani Nationhood in *Moth Smoke*: Inserting the Feminine into Masculine Nationalist Narratives

> I believe that the personal and the political are deeply intertwined. … I try to explore the places where they intersect most powerfully. People and countries tend to blur in my fiction, both serving as symbols of the other. (Hamid "Harcourt" n.p.)

Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* has most often been read as an imaginative rendering of a significant moment in Pakistan's national history—the political and socio-economic milieu of 1998 when the country went nuclear. Structural elements (such as the narrative framework and plot), stylistic devices (especially metaphors and symbols), and key thematic strands (historical, socio-economic and political) appear to encourage interpretation of the novel as a national allegory and/or a critique of the pernicious influence of capitalist materialism on the nation in the late 1990s. In many critical accounts *Moth Smoke*'s socio-political critique appears to progress as a result of the conflicting desires and interests of its two key male characters, Daru and Ozi. However, Mumtaz, the female lead constituting the third part in the novel's triangle of desire and destruction, has been largely overlooked unless in discussion relating to these male concerns.

I offer an alternative, perhaps subversive, reading of the novel that repositions Mumtaz at its centre. In this reading, the emphasis is less on issues of political praxis or the pernicious effects of capitalism in an age of globalisation, than on questions about how gendered identities inform Pakistani nationalist narratives. My specific focus is on how *Moth Smoke* positions the (figurative) female body at the nexus of nation, history and culture. I

take the above comment by Hamid as an invitation to treat his fictions as multi-layered, symbolic artefacts. I approach his texts—including *Moth Smoke*—as ones in which material bodies and geo(political) spatial entities function as powerful, intersecting sites of what Michel Foucault calls "biopower" or "biopolitics"(Chloe Taylor 41 ff.). The terms refer to the ways in which (modern) states exercise "numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations"(Foucault *History* 140). He refers to biopower as "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (Takács 7). As Thomas Lemke notes, Foucault's work pays particular attention to the kinds of control exercised over sexuality and reproduction in order to achieve this "subjugation" (T. Lemke 38).[41] Foucault's understanding of the ways in which the control of sexuality and reproduction reinforces *political* power is central to my analysis of *Moth Smoke*. I argue that Hamid's revisionist and experimental narrative invites readers to consider the emphatic gendering of bodily *subjugation* in the (modern) Pakistani state. I suggest that a change in emphasis on the relationships between historical personages, as they are unmoored from their Mughal origins and transplanted into the context of late-1990s Pakistan, encourages a (re)reading of *Moth Smoke* as a novel that emphasises gender issues. At stake is the (allegorised) body of Mumtaz.

This reconsideration of Mumtaz' relationships with Daru and Ozi not only stresses her role as a foil to the two male protagonists, but as an alternative model for inscribing citizenship and belonging as a political subject and "agent of nation" (Jolly 1). Her cameo in the novel as an investigative journalist symbolically challenges hegemonic constructions of

[41] See Rabinow (16-18); Chloe Taylor; Deveaux; Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem (13).

Pakistani polity (overtly masculine and exclusionary), epitomised in the portrayal of characters like Ozi, his father and Mr Jiwan, who all understand sovereignty and power in terms of a capital-hungry, irresponsible and ruthlessly aggressive *fraternité* or brotherhood. Antithetical to the narcissistic and self-absorbed Daru and Ozi, Mumtaz invites an alternative, more inclusive reconsideration of the nation and its subjects—one rooted in the values of self-reflection, accountability and (feminine) principles of care, empathy and responsibility. She refuses to accept the prescriptive cultural and familial dictum that regards motherhood as *the* primary mode of experiencing her body and embodied self; she challenges the dominant (essentialist and reductive) construction of *woman* in terms of maternal subjectivity. Indeed, her dis-ease and rejection of the anointed status of motherhood (and the substitution of a mother's milk with the ink of a journalist's pen) disrupts the familiar allegorical imaging of women as "mothers of the nation" in masculine-nationalist histories in Pakistan and elsewhere. Furthermore, while Mumtaz is positioned in the novel as a love interest for both Ozi and Daru, she is not reduced to the object of their erotic imaginings: she is given voice and, in speaking (for) herself, she emerges as a desiring, sexual being. This problematises essentialist, monolithic notions of Pakistani womanhood and the figure of the asexualised mother.

1.1 Contextualising *Moth Smoke*: Critical Responses and Dominant Readings

Before elaborating on these claims, it is necessary to discuss not only the plot, structure and narration of the novel, but also dominant trends in recent critical responses to it as a means of positioning my reading.

Set in the context of a blistering Lahore summer when Pakistan conducted its first atomic test in a game of political one-upmanship with its neighbour India, *Moth Smoke* is a polyphonic novel dramatising the trial of Daru, a young middle-class Pakistani man accused of murder. The novel follows a seedy, tabloid-worthy tale of drugs, sexual promiscuity, unfulfilled ambition and corruption involving a love triangle between the two (supposedly brother-like) friends Daru (Darashikoh) and Ozi (Aurangzaib) and Mumtaz—Ozi's wife and Daru's lover. Daru lacks monetary and cultural capital, hailing from an average middle class family without any social and/or political connections. As a result, despite his brilliant academic career and intelligence, Daru loses his job, the electricity to his house, his social status and, eventually, his freedom. In contrast, Ozi thrives on the connections, money and power of his corrupt father, obtains a foreign degree from an American Ivy League university, marries beautiful and intelligent Mumtaz, and ultimately successfully skirts the law and avenges his honour by sending his wife's lover (Daru) to jail for a murder he himself committed. If read with the conflict between Daru and Ozi as its focus, *Moth Smoke* emerges as a socio-political novel dramatising the struggle between the wealthy and the impoverished in Pakistan. In these terms the novel critiques the socio-economic inequalities created by an intrusive global (capitalist) economic system which allows a privileged and largely corrupt section of society to enjoy power and control over the country's resources, policy-making and infrastructure. The chosen few are shown as possessing unmediated, unidirectional and unquestioned access to the country's (cultural and monetary) capital, while effectively preventing the majority of the population from realising their dreams and progressing beyond economic hardship.

Moth Smoke has rightly been read as a harsh internal critique of contemporary Pakistan's socio-political and economic institutions, what Claire Chambers refers to as the "millennial Pakistan's voluptuary, ecstasy-taking social whirl, as well as more familiar scenes of violence and stark class divisions" ("Heart" 145). Using Lahore as a microcosmic representation of Pakistan, the novel exposes a dark and blistering dog-eat-dog world in which drugs, corruption (financial, moral, physical), injustice, lack of accountability, nepotism, and violence run rampant. Betrayals are common and human lives are inconsequentially and silently extinguished by events as insignificant and arbitrary as stray bullets shot to commemorate a wedding or a speeding Pajero running a traffic light. Featuring images of a partying, globe-trotting, drug-using and sex-addicted crème de la crème Gen X, in stark contrast to the impoverished masses, *Moth Smoke* fictionalises a version of urban Pakistan which may unsettle Western readers who expect an exotic portrayal of a non-Western, non-Christian populace.[42] The novel portrays a "morally unhinged" (Medovoi 645) society (or city) not unlike those in novels such as Jay McInerney's *Bright Light, Big Cities* (1984), Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), or the classic refutation of the American Dream, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). While the cosmopolitan "alcohol-drinking, dope-smoking, party-going" (Elia 60) elite of Lahore is the principle target of Hamid's sharp critique in *Moth Smoke*, he also paints an unforgiving picture of the actions of non-reflexive, blind, self-righteous and indulgent members of Pakistan's middle class. This is evident in his representation of the self-destructive tendencies of individuals like Daru who tend to decimate (self-immolate) themselves when the reality of their existence fails to measure up

[42] My reference here is to the stereotypical images of a spice-infused, chuttnified, and colourful South Asia—a world characterised by saris, *zenana* (female quarters), bangles, henna-tattoos, paisley designs, siestas during long hot summer days, elaborate food (and cooking) scenes, servants—that often adorn the pages of English fiction, written in and outside of South Asia.

to the imagined potential of their lives and they lose themselves to a heady but deadly mixture of self-righteous anger, envy and lust.

When first published *Moth Smoke* received little international attention, but was read widely in Pakistan and India, where it gained something of a cult following. It was only after the enormous (popular and academic) success of Hamid's second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that retrospective (Western) popular and scholarly discussions of the earlier novel appeared. The initial international inattention to the novel was likely because, at the time *Moth Smoke* was published, Hamid was an unknown foreign author. Moreover, Pakistani Anglophone writing was not widely read before the first decades of the twenty-first century. Many commentators note that there has been significant focus on writing in English from Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan since 9/11, arguably as a result of readers' desire to learn more about the countries from which Muslim "fundamentalist terrorists" originate. Published just six years after 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* rode this "wave" of international interest, receiving significant attention and acclaim. Subsequently, *Moth Smoke* also gradually gained attention—first as Hamid's debut novel, shadowed by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s success, and later as a significant novel in its own right.

Many discussions of *Moth Smoke* appear to be influenced by responses to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and its thematic critique of capitalist "fundamentalism". Hamid's Pakistani protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* moves to the West (the US) to study and take up postgraduate employment. However, following 9/11, and the resultant anti-Muslim racial profiling he experiences, he decides to (reluctantly) renounce his American dream of financial progress and globalisation and return to Pakistan. *Moth Smoke* urges the same

renunciation of capitalism and its pernicious effects as Hamid's second novel. Arguably this sets *Moth Smoke* apart from works by many of Hamid's South Asian contemporaries who, according to Paul Jay, seem to engage rather "tangentially with [issues of] economic change" (*Global* 51), viewing challenges imposed by a global capitalist system as a relatively new development, somewhat secondary to the cultural displacements and fractured subjectivities colonisation creates.[43] Indeed, the author has positioned himself (in rather ungainly terms) as a "post-post-colonial" writer (Hamid "Mohsin Chronicle" n.p.), refusing to write simply in response to the certainly traumatic effects of the British Raj and Partition. As Jay suggests, he is "less interested in foregrounding the persistent effects of British colonization than dramatizing how economic globalization has transformed Lahore and the characters populating his novels" ("Post" 52). Similarly, Bryant Scott claims that unlike many multicultural novelists, Hamid refuses to mobilise ethnicity and/or racial divides "to manufacture conflict" (5). Instead, he is far more concerned in portraying "access to monetary and cultural capital" (B. Scott 3) within a globalised economic system as the most influential element in creating dislocations, anomie and discord.

Such a reading is certainly invited by the novel and many readers have made this the focus of their commentary. Oft-noted is Hamid's use of the backstory about Ozi's and Daru's formative years to build his critique of the materialist, hedonist and narcissistic nature of contemporary urban Pakistan. The friends appear as arch rivals in the opening trial scenes. However as the trial proceeds Hamid shows his readers, through the recollections and flashbacks of Daru, that the two men were once close. At various points Daru recalls how the two grew up together in Lahore, completing the rites of passage to adulthood. In rare

[43] P. Jay ("Post"; *Global*) and B. Scott discuss the politics of Hamid's choice to centralise economics as *the* source of cultural and subjective dislocations. For a counter argument see Perner.

instances of nostalgia over their lost friendship, Daru reminisces about driving around the city with Ozi on long, lazy summer afternoons, chasing after girls, secretly experimenting with drugs and other similar experiences of youthful abandonment and curiosity (25). Before the reality of their socio-economic situation drove them apart, they were comrades and partners in crime.

Daru recalls that his first rude awakening to the correlation between familial money and social (educational) success comes when Ozi and his rich friends leave to go abroad to pursue higher education, something Daru's family cannot afford. Daru feels disillusioned and frustrated:"[t]hat night I was the angry one, angry because he [Ozi] was leaving me behind … because I'd done better than he at school, on the tests, and he was the one going abroad for college.…money had never really felt like a chain until the[n] …" (139). This foreign education, supported by the influence and financial standing of his father, in turn sets up Ozi (and others like him) for success. The tag of being educated at an Ivy League university secures him employment in a prestigious New York firm, making it possible for him to woo and win an educated, beautiful and strong cosmopolite like Mumtaz as his wife. Even when he is forced to return to Pakistan to help his father (to protect him by doing his money laundering), the same attributes result in him successfully joining "Lahore's urban hip" (Sundip Bose n.p.). Ozi—cognizant of the machinations of success in a capitalist global economy (like his father)—not only enjoys the privileges and power engendered by his socio-economic status, he also unabashedly endorses and practices the corrupt ways of his father to further accumulate wealth and add to his social influence:

> Some say my dad's corrupt and I'm his money launderer. Well, it's true enough…. You have to have money these days. The roads are falling apart, so you need a

> Pajero or a Land Cruiser. The phone lines are erratic, so you need a mobile. The colleges are overrun with fundos who have no interest in getting an education, so you have to go abroad…. It goes on and on. People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller, so if you love your family, you'd better take your piece now … That's what I'm doing. And if anyone isn't doing it, it's because they're locked out of the kitchen. (184-5)

While his father's money and powerful connections propel Ozi towards success, Daru, with the relatively little privilege afforded by his middle class background and a local degree, is unable to secure a good job himself: the banker's job that he finally secures is courtesy of the influence of Ozi's father. While Ozi immerses himself in Lahore's elite class, Daru undergoes an emotional and existential crisis prompted by losing his job. The precariousness of his socio-economic status, along with a heightened awareness of the increasing gulf between the wealthy and impoverished in Lahore, is painfully thrust upon Daru when he is unceremoniously dismissed for failing to treat a powerful client with reverence and obsequiousness. Daru's failure to indulge the megalomaniac egoistic whims of his client, Malik Jiwan—"a rural landlord with half a million U.S. in his account, a seat in the Provincial Assembly … [whose] pastimes include fighting the spread of primary education and stalling the census" (20)—is rewarded with a "You're fired, Mr Shezad" (22) from his manager. In the days following his dismissal, Daru is unable to find employment because, "in a country infested by cronyism, only the cronies, like Ozi, are connected enough to succeed" (Stracher n.p.). In a society where "it's all about connections" (40)—as Murad Badshah astutely summarises—when Daru is finally called for a bank job interview (this time due to his uncle), he is informed that it is futile to hope for a job: "the boys we're

hiring have connections worth more than their salaries. We're just giving them the respectability of a job here in exchange for their families' business … [u]nless you know some really big fish … no one is going to hire you" (53). Daru realises his naïve idealism, acknowledging that the route to success is dictated by money and influence instead of ethics, abilities, qualifications or morality. As Umber Khairi claims:

> The society that Daru exists in is depicted as one where might is right and money is power.… It is a society where the rule of law signifies nothing and where the law is simply a tool used to oppress the enemies of the influential. Daru's slightly middle-class morality is shown to be completely out of place in a system of which he simply does not understand the rules, amoral as they are…. As such, Daru is of course, the proverbial misfit, the rebel without a cause … (n.p.)

Furthermore, Hamid also seems to imply that given the competitive, individualistic and materialistic underpinnings of capitalist societies, human relationship(s)—such as the bond between Ozi and Daru—are doomed from the start as "economic and social advantage continuously undermines [them]" (B. Scott 22). Readers learn that Daru and Ozi's childhood brother-like bond is a remnant of the close friendship between their fathers, who trained together in a military academy and then served in the Pakistan army. However, the ethics and aspirations of Ozi's and Daru's respective fathers, Mr Khurram and Mr Shezad, set them on two different paths during the political chaos and entropy which characterised Pakistan during the 1970s.[44] Daru's father, unfortunately, proves to be as ill-fated as his son. Led by a nationalist fervour and a sense of ethical or moral responsibility for his country, he joined the Pakistani army as a soldier and fought during the 1971 war. As a result of his middle

[44] 1971 was a year of intense political upheaval, destruction and bloodshed for (united) Pakistan. A bloody internal civil war was fought between East and West Pakistan, resulting in division and a declaration of independence by East Pakistan as Bangladesh.

class, nationalist idealism he was captured behind enemy lines, and died of gangrene in a prison-cell in Chittagong. His friend Khurram Shah (Ozi's father) proves to have a more pragmatic, unsentimental and prudent understanding of Pakistan's socio-political situation. After his stints in the military academy and the army, motivated by a different understanding of the machinations of success and power, he joined the more lucrative and politically significant platform of Pakistan's bureaucracy and used his position to amass wealth and influence through corruption. In the words of Ozi, "Why do you think my father got into it? … He saw what was going on. And he decided that he wasn't going to wait around to get shot in the back while people divided up the country. He wanted his piece" (184). Like his father, Daru's mother (a nameless figure in the novel) also dies a senseless death; she is killed by a stray bullet while sleeping on the roof of her house on a hot summer night (108). While the death of his father symbolises the price for naïve nationalism and, in particular, the failure of the State to protect its citizens, the death of Daru's mother is directly attributed to their precarious financial circumstances. For characters like Daru, his mother or Dilaram,[45] limited financial resources and connections result in serious corporeal consequences: "[Daru] knew that his mother would not have died if the AC had been cooling her room that night" (109). For the Darus and Dilaramas of the Global South, lack of financial and cultural capital results in tragic circumstances.

Hamid employs two key extended metaphors to develop his commentary on the class differences in contemporary Lahore: air-conditioning and large cars. As Elia notes, the metaphor of air-conditioning works as a "proxy for class status, wealth, privilege, but also

[45] Dilaram is a prostitute Mumtaz meets in Lahore's red light area while doing research for an article she was writing. During their meeting Dilaram tells Mumtaz that as a young village girl, she was repeatedly raped by her landlord (and later prostituted to his sons and friends). She was forced to abort when she became pregnant, and was sold to one of his friends from the city (Lahore). That man brought her to the red light area and forced her into prostitution. She took over his brothel/business after his death.

by the same token, poverty and deprivation" (65). Daru's old university teacher, Prof Julius Superb, delivers a scathing yet witty exposé on the economic reality of Lahore:

> There are two social classes in Pakistan....The first group, large and sweaty, contains those referred to as the masses. The second group is much smaller, but its members exercise vastly greater control over their immediate environment and are collectively termed the elite. The distinction between members of these two groups is made on the basis of control of an important resource: air-conditioning. (103)

Being able to afford air-conditioning represents the power to manipulate, alter and control the material and even cultural reality of one's life and circumstances. It is also indicative of the power of Lahore's elite autocrats to isolate and insulate themselves from the "sweaty" masses: "[a]ccess to air-conditioning measures the degree to which 'elites' are plugged into a global economy characterized by class division and homogenization. … Money buys comfort, distance from the masses working at the margins of the global economy" (Jay "Post" 59). The lived reality of the "great uncooled" (Hamid *Moth* 103) is suggested in many descriptions: "mounds of rubbish [smoldering] in front of the neighbours' houses" (216); "[d]irty water stretch[ing] across the road" (230) and people getting baked in Lahore's sweltering heat (11) which radiates out of their "damp and smelly" (40) bodies. While the rest of the city (and country) suffers from broken-down infrastructure, the rich cosmopolites of Lahore—comprising of an eclectic mix of "Punjabis and Pathans, Sindhis and Baluchis, smugglers, mullahs, soldiers, industrialists" (103)—escape what Daru calls the "almost unbearable drudgery of the … struggle to subsist" in a developing country like Pakistan by transforming local spaces into "the utopian vision of Over There or Amreeka" (79). Hamid uses the attitude of various characters towards air-conditioning to reflect their

ideological assumptions in relation to their environment and society in general. For instance, Ozi's obsession with "mastering his environment" (105) by controlling the temperature of his bedroom is reflective of his ambition to establish himself, like his father, as an influential member of Lahore's elite club. Similarly, his refusal to reduce his use of air-conditioning in response to Mumtaz' complaint of wastefulness is indicative of the self-absorbed and hedonistic nature of his desire, and that of his class: "'We have to conserve electricity', she would say. 'The entire country suffers because of the wastefulness of a privileged few.' 'I couldn't care less about the country,' [he] would reply" (106).

Moreover, the meaningless death of Daru's mother functions, for him, as a haunting reminder of the insignificance of his own existence. Daru's sense of the precariousness of self is reinforced by the loss of his job, evoking intense feelings of alienation, disillusionment and a debilitating feeling of emasculation. Socially disconnected and marginalised, Daru turns to drugs and falls into "an abyss of emotional depression, moral turpitude, and criminal activity" (Goldsmith 116). As Daru's financial situation worsens, he becomes acutely aware of his inability to control his fate. He watches, more "acted upon than acting" (Null and Alfred 90), as his social status is gradually reduced to that of a *persona non grata* and a pariah who is, politely and strategically, ostracised from his social circle—even by his so-called best friend Ozi. He recalls an instance of this strategic exclusion with Ozi:

> Ozi embraces me hard, like a friend preventing a fight … "I'm so sorry yaar. I know it was just supposed to be the three of us tonight but there's been a change of plans. I hope you don't mind." … And with that he steps aside and lets me pass, and I begin to understand what's he's talking about. I have arrived at a full-fledged invitational dinner only semi-invited. That is, I was told to come late for drinks while other

> guests came early … I know a snub when I see one, and this is a serious snub … The introductions begin.… They've sized me up, figured out I'm a small fish, and decided to let me swim by myself for the evening. (77)

As Daru loses the privileges associated with employment (such as electricity and the ability to purchase supplies), he becomes increasingly aware of how different contemporary life in Lahore is for members of different socio-economic groups. He becomes sensitive to the growing sense of dissatisfaction, indignation and anger among the masses over the expanding hierarchical gulf between the rich and the under-privileged. He is increasingly aware of the failure of the State to hold its non-state agents (represented by old feudal lords or *zamindar*s like Malik Jiwan, and/or a corrupt military and bureaucracy) accountable for their actions. Daru comes to view contemporary Lahore as a cartographic palimpsest representing a "complex materialization of social and cultural relations" (Fernandes 6). The exclusivity and privilege of Lahore's elitist/urban centre is constantly threatened and challenged by (the existence of, and) its interaction "with its Punjabi rural hinterland" (Chambers *British* 176). And as the face and culture of the city is transformed by the influence of an "unrestrained free-market capitalism" (Chambers *British* 188) and a corresponding uneven distribution of its benefits, modern Lahore becomes embroiled in a class system which is *more about money* than an individual's character or abilities.

The second extended metaphor which Hamid employs to reflect the impunity of Lahore's privileged class from moral, ethical and state law is that of cars. The "nervous cough" of Daru's Suzuki in comparison to the "deep thuds" (81) of the Pajeros and Land Cruiser driven by Ozi and his kind are reflective of the power and security afforded by their socio-economic status. In 1990s Lahore, large cars charge down the streets of the city like bulls,

and their drivers, importantly, always possess "the right of the way" (25). As Graeme Wood suggests, rather disparagingly, "the novel at times seems like a huge smear campaign against Range Rovers and Pajeros—the characters who drive them are spoiled, corrupt, evil, stoned, sometimes all of the above" (n.p.). Breaking traffic rules is just one example of the ways in which the elite are immune from the consequences of their criminal actions. Readers are repeatedly shown that the entire state system—whether it is the accountability bureau trying Ozi's father on charges of corruption, the police safeguarding "illegal revelry" (81) at a farmhouse, or the judiciary trying Daru for a murder committed by Ozi—is corrupt. Instead of offering protection or justice to victims, it persecutes the weak, while rewarding and protecting the corrupt and powerful.

Commenting on the representation of Lahore (read Pakistan) in *Moth Smoke*, Aamer Hussain points out that it is a city of stark economic contrasts "where the poor and the rich (read very rich) exist side by side, and the dirty, mean streets of its cities are as much at ease with its cordless phones and Pajeros, as its humble hand-pulled carts for a living" (n.p.). While this seems to be primarily accurate, *Moth Smoke* does not simply portray these contrasts but also draws attention to the dangerous consequences of such social stratification. In highlighting the increasing economic disparities in Pakistani society and the corresponding marginalisation, exploitation and powerlessness of the less privileged sections of society, Hamid stresses a growing, and dangerous, spread of disillusionment, indignation and agitation. Feeling trapped and isolated, people like Daru and Murad Badshah are shown to resort to extortion and violence to balance the odds in their favour.

Like the character of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Daru undergoes a gradual transformation (which in his case is unfortunately for the worse) as his economic

circumstances change. Through Daru's former university teacher Prof Julius Superb, readers are informed that Daru had great potential (as a student and a boxer) and there were significant hopes for his future success. However, as his circumstances deteriorate during his unemployment, and his emotional fragility increases, he gradually comes to embrace violence. Anita Desai claims that Murad Badshah acts as a Mephistophelian figure, playing (and praying) on Daru's existing sense of entitlement and indignation (n.p.). His musings about Pakistan's corrupt elite, especially their complicity in the servitude and exploitation of working class people, act as enablers for Daru. Together they plan to rob boutiques in Lahore, and Badshah provides Daru with a gun for this purpose. For an emasculated Daru, this weapon becomes a penile appendage symbolising power. Though Daru cannot fire the weapon accurately, he relishes the fact that it gives him potency, the ability to take life: "There's something appealing about it, something wonderfully casual in the knowledge that when you squeeze the trigger you might kill someone or miss them completely" (222-3). The symbolism of the gun as proxy for masculine power is strengthened in the scenes after Mumtaz ends her affair with Daru. Daru drives around Lahore with a gun in his lap, visiting each place that played a role in his symbolic emasculation. He starts with a visit to the bank from which he was dismissed, then goes to the house of the *zamindar* where he was beaten for selling drugs to his son and he then follows Muazzam, Mumtaz' son, who he suspects is the reason behind Mumtaz' decision to leave him.

Individual anomie and disempowerment, financial dislocations and violence are not the only by-products of economic disparity in Pakistan. Hamid complicates his critique of the moral turpitude and brash disregard of the upper-class by linking this attitude to the threat of a rising religious far-right in Pakistan. The text foreshadows and subtly hints at what has

emerged as a major problem for Pakistan in the first decade(s) of the twenty first century, namely an increased susceptibility and affinity among the disenfranchised for the extremist rhetoric of right-wing religious groups.[46] At the beginning of the novel, the hip, Western-educated members of the elite class (or the bourgeois like Daru and Raider emulating them) condescendingly stereotype this relative minority of religious-enthusiasts as "fundos". However, in the concluding section of the novel Daru converses with an educated, well-groomed, likeable, middle-class version of this stereotype, Mujahid Alam. Daru surprisingly reports that although he "could tell" that Alam "was a fundo from the moment … [Daru] saw him" there was something in Alam's demeanor and words which made him feel "comfortable, drawing [him] in" (225). Daru finds himself eventually agreeing to go to a meeting with Alam of "brothers who believe … that the time had come for change" (225). Daru is susceptive to the allure of "brothers who believe", highlighting the dangerous liaison between economic hardship and religious fundamentalism. While characters like Daru and Badshah solicit guns and robberies to reclaim power, others—too disenfranchised or oppressed to resort to such physical/direct means of violence—find the rhetoric of bearded religious figures like Alam extremely attractive. In the words of Alam, religion promises them paradise in the form of "a system … where a man can rely on the law for justice, where he's given basic dignity as a human being and the opportunity to prosper regardless of his status at birth" (225)—an earthly paradise that can only be achieved through the implementation of the Sharia. Thus, right-wing Islam is portrayed as a means by which oppressed/exploited men may acquire power and reclaim their masculinity.

[46] In *Maps*, Aslam similarly associates an increased pull towards religiosity (which is predominantly negative in both novels) with feelings of individual and communal precarity. For instance, when the Hindu genecology of Shamas' father is revealed, his elder brother counters this attack on the integrity of his self and identity by seeking refuge in a conservative version of Islam. For Aslam, the answer to the question "why are the younger generation of Muslims becoming radicalised" lies in discerning religion's symbolic functionality as a refuge for a dissatisfied, disappointed, and disillusioned youth ("Writing" n.p.).

Hamid also alludes to similar patterns of masculine compensation at the State level. The atomic bomb detonated by Pakistan in response to the Indian nuclear tests is dubbed an *Islamic* bomb, hinting at a similar pattern of Pakistan's use of the atomic bomb to assert (masculine) power. Ironically though, the novel shows that Pakistan's nuclear engagement appears to have been undertaken with a seemingly irrational disregard for the (economic) fallout of its incendiary politics. Commenting on the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, Ashis Nandy writes:

> Many years ago, Brian Isley argued in his book, *Fathering the Unthinkable*, that nuclearism went with strong masculinity strivings. … [Psychologists] show not only the language and ideology, but the entire culture of nuclear weaponry is infiltrated by hard, masculine imageries and those participating in that culture usually suffer from deep fears of emasculation or impotency. ("Epidemic" 126)

Hamid suggests a link between large scale political destabilisation, economic hardship, political exploitation and the recent rise of a jihadist mind-set in the Muslim world: "[t]he effective emasculation of entire populations has resulted in a hyper-masculine response. Suicide bombing, for instance, is the ultimate response to fearfulness: it's perceived as the ultimate 'masculine' response" (Hamid "A Conversation" n.p.).

Of all its challenges to the dangers of nationalism, *Moth Smoke* gestures towards the debilitating effects capitalism can have on the economy of a developing country like Pakistan. Hamid questions the success and developmental benefits associated with the phenomenon of capitalist globalisation for a country like Pakistan. The overall disastrous effects of the uneven flow of global capital in the markets of Lahore (and Pakistan) are incorporated through various characters, as P. Jay suggests:

> The more Daru struggles to find a way back into the system the more he is ground down by it. Murad has been marginalized by the global economy but thrives on it through extortion and burglary.… Ozi thrives on forms of illicit trade related to global flows of capital, but he is arguably the most corrupt figure in the novel. Hamid's poorer characters seem trapped in a world where … [t]he wealthier ones, like Ozi, make money from the global economy, but in ways that contribute to the poverty of the middle and lower classes. ("Post" 62)

However, Hamid's perspective on globalisation and capitalism is arguably problematic. His social critique of the influx of global capital in Pakistan is slightly ambivalent which may appear hypocritical. Paradoxically, Hamid himself is part of the same globe-trotting cosmopolitan class of citizens subject to criticism in his novel. He has repeatedly mentioned that the reason his novels are not populated by exotic (read Orientalist) "rustic characters who live in a utopian prehistory, calmly toiling the soil" (B. Scott 9) is because this is not the Pakistan he knows. Hamid's Pakistan is a place where "young people were running around doing all sorts of unsavoury things. And I wanted to write about a world of crime, drug use, sexuality, urban noir, and not about sort of the rustic countryside, or magic and these kinds of things" (*Believe*). Similarly, the existence of *Moth Smoke* has been made possible by Hamid's own privileged background, foreign qualifications and high-paying employment, something he acknowledges: "[i]t's a bit paradoxical to be somebody from a country like Pakistan—which you can sort of see being ground up by the global system—and to be working at the core of that system.… You can't blindly accept that if everyone plays by the rules, all men will be equal and all countries will be better off" ("Novelist" n.p.). Hamid's position is further complicated because he claims that he is not against globalisation,

declaring that Pakistan needs *more*, rather than less, access to "jobs and … to the markets and knowledge and entertainment of the wider world. … We need access to purchasers for our goods, investors in our industries. With these things come greater growth and stability, which then become self-reinforcing" (Hamid "Mistrust" n.p.). However, what we see in *Moth Smoke* is that, due to widespread corruption, this flow of international capital in Lahore ultimately increases class division.

Importantly, Hamid sees the globalised system of capitalism as a recent problem, firmly delinking it from any association with the colonial past of the country. Critics and literary writers (read third-world, postcolonial) are divided in their epistemological categorisation of globalisation. One group presents globalisation as an over-arching historical process in their writings, contesting that "conquest, colonization, decolonization, and the postcolonial condition … [are a] part of the long history of globalization" (Jay *Global* 95). The second group reads globalisation as "a contemporary phenomenon, a dramatic rupture in the history of modernity to which colonialism and postcolonialism belong" (95). Hamid seems to belong to the latter, firmly distinguishing the contemporary socio-political and economic problems of Pakistan from any residue of its colonial past. He also, like K. Shamsie, fails to see postcolonialism as a relevant frame of reference for situating Pakistan's problems or for understanding his literary oeuvre:

> I certainly think there is a post-post-colonial generation. I'm sure a lot of voices you're seeing coming out now are people who never had a colonial experience. We don't place a burden of guilt on someone who's no longer there. So it's like, what are we doing with where we come from, and how can we address issues here. It's our fault if things aren't going well....Also, people are writing about the subcontinent with eyes that are not meant

> to be seeing for someone who doesn't live there, people who are not exoticizing where they come from. I try not to mention the minaret, because when I'm in Lahore, I don't notice it. (Hamid qtd. in Jay "Post" 51)

Hamid's choice to use a post-post-colonial perspective to historicise his fiction (and approach) is interesting. Cara Cilano, for instance, sees the *zimandari* (feudal) system put in place during the colonial system to be pivotal in shaping the country's politics. He also maps the links between this system and the (corrupt) bureaucratic and military leadership of the country.[47] Similarly, many postcolonial critics have queried the "post" in the term *postcolonial* (or in Hamid's case the post-postcolonial):

> If the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism. A country may thus be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time. (Litvak 63)

Theorists like Roland Robertson, Malcolm Waters and Masao Miyoshi historicise globalisation from the beginning of modernity, especially from the rise of trade across continents and the modernisation of telecommunications. Many suggest that the contemporary global economic system is an (indirect) extension of Western colonisation that fosters the neo-colonial exploitation of developing countries. In *Moth Smoke* Hamid appears to endorse such an understanding, one that cuts against his other claims that engagement in global markets offers opportunities for Pakistan. If globalisation is to be read as neo-Imperial or Imperial in its character, how much it can benefit a country like Pakistan? Jay suggests,

[47] Post-independence, India reformed and weakened the power of the feudal lords, but Pakistan did not. See Cilano (*Contemporary*).

> In his social criticism Hamid seems to be torn between seeing globalization as a potentially productive force and one that is simply grinding down his own country. His novel dramatizes the latter view, so that taken together, his writings present a profoundly ambivalent relationship to globalization. (*Global* 62)

A refusal to recognise (or down-play) the routes of contemporary globalisation—its link with Western capitalism, modernity and the colonial past—categorises Hamid's critique as lacking in depth, sophistication and complexity. This critique reads, in some ways, like Ozi's rather over-simplified critique of the Nobel Prize and the Rhodes scholarships in the novel.

In the preceding section, I offered a reading which situates *Moth Smoke* as a harsh indictment of Pakistan's socio-economic condition. I highlighted that in *Moth Smoke* Hamid continues to locate the roots of individual and societal dislocations, fragmentation and dissonance within the world of international finance and globalisation. The novel can be read as a Global South writing back to a Global North.[48] Importantly, he suggests that continued corruption and injustice has the potential to push the masses towards radicalised solutions such as violence and a fundamental Islamic system (disguised in the name of *Sharia*). The novel also treats globalisation ambivalently: Hamid sees it as a necessary process to gain access to the global market, cultural and financial capital and yet the system appears to be rigged. This approach to the text centralises male characters and their voices, while the female character of Mumtaz is marginalised. Such a reading is also supported by the novel's allegorical framework which, through its reference to the Mughal war of succession between Aurangzeb, his brothers and father, posits the story as a masculine

[48] Within the category of terms like third-world, periphery, centre, Global South (and conversely Global North) "marks a shift [in categorisation] from a focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical power relations" (Dados and Connell 12) .

narrative about power, corruption, violence and disregard for human life (and environment).

1.2 Unpacking the Allegory in *Moth Smoke*

1.2.1 An Idea Takes Roots (Routes): The Genesis of the Novel

The structure and narration of the novel is complex, adding further layers to Hamid's critique of the (neo)colonial impact on Pakistan. His creative use of a double-framing device, the manipulation of the narrative structure to stage the story as a trial, the heteroglossia and dialogism of the narrative voices, along with the use of three young adult focalisers, results in a palimpsestic, multi-layered text. Despite its realism, the multiplicity of voices and ambiguous ending resists and subverts any attempts to ascribe any singular *meaning* to the text. As Cilano notes, *Moth Smoke* "both invites an allegorical reading and resists such a reading's determinism" (*Contemporary* 183).

Hamid explains that the most significant thematic and structural changes occurred when his interest gradually evolved from rendering a familiar reality/world of socio-economic injustice towards a more expanded, nuanced, political and even metaphysical concern with how truth is understood and (re)created through narratives. Hamid claims that he initially started this book because he wanted to write a novel that captured the hitherto absent experience of growing up in a Pakistani city like Lahore. In a South Asian literary scene which was (then) dominated by *writing back* to the Empire, he wanted to bring to life the urban realities of a Pakistani cosmopolitan city which he, himself, had experienced and observed.

He wanted to showcase that for some in Pakistan, the transition into adult life was similar to that of youth in other parts of world:[49]

> I thought of this as a world I hadn't seen much of in literature and I wanted to characterise it....The other unsaid thing in all this was that kids in Lahore, like teenagers everywhere, were experimenting with drugs.…I wanted to write about this sort of world, so *Moth Smoke* became an attempt for me to capture this city … [I wanted] it to project a kind of urban reality that probably only a very small proportion of people in Lahore ever experience. ("Mohsin" 45)

However, during his time at Harvard Law School, he developed an intense fascination with the nature of truth, how it was perceived and the way it was often manipulated and constructed through various forms of discourse and narrative to fit, or create, a certain representation of reality. *Moth Smoke* acquired its present structure—that is, the polyphonic trial format—when Hamid opted to write and submit a novel or creative piece for one of his law school papers, under the guidance of his Law and Literature course teacher, Prof. Richard Parker. He elaborates: "The book explores the idea of how you arrive at truth with conflicting narratives, which is what you do in law … it was one of the issues I found most interesting in law school" (Hamid qtd. in Rice n.p.). Elsewhere Hamid notes that he reworked *Moth Smoke* in the form of "a trial" offering "contradictory narratives where the reader will be a kind of judge, trying to figure out what happened. In a sense [it is] an investigation into how litigation works and whether we can find truth through the judicial process" (*Believe*).[50]

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[49] I do not wish to homogenise cultural differences and disregard the socio-cultural specifies of life in Pakistan. However, I argue that Hamid has tried to convey that certain emotional/psychological experiences, lifestyles (especially in terms of class affiliation/position), spatial locations (urban or cosmopolitan) resonate across cultures.

[50] Hamid's interest in narrative form is a defining feature of his writing: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is structured as a dramatic monologue; *How to Get Filthy Rich in Asia* (2013) humorously mimics the stylistic features of a self-help book; *Exit West* (2017) juxtaposes realism and "science fiction".

As B. Scott notes, “the emphasis [is] on perspective and subjectivity; the proposal that there can never be a singular ‘truth’” (13). At a time when magical realism dominated the literary scene in South Asia, Hamid became interested in writing a (realist) novel which drew readers in, not allowing them the luxury of experiencing the text from a safe distance. He wanted to engage his readers in an active partnership, drawing their attention to how the illusion of reality and/or truth was manufactured and maintained through the narrative itself:

> I think I've always been drawn to the second person … I was amazed by the potential of the "you", of how much space it could open up in fiction. The book I was writing then, back in 1993, became *Moth Smoke* … You, the reader, are cast as his judge. The story has what might be called a realistic narrative … but the frame of the trial … is something else: make-believe, play, with "you" given an active role. ("Enduring" n.p.)

Hamid suggests that second person narration (in the trial scenes) offers a unique perspective in *Moth Smoke*: “rather than my telling the reader ‘you are encountering my wisdom’, it makes us joint players in a game” (Hamid "A Conversation" n.p.). This allows for the narrative to be read with different thematic foci, ranging from a political allegory about power struggles in South Asia, a tragic love-story, a tale of fraternal rivalry, a critique of globalisation’s unilateral benefits for third world countries, to an exploration of “the relationship of an emerging adult, a nation, and a mythology, all of which are threatened by the reach of late capitalist culture” (Costin 33). Moreover, as I contend, it enables a repositioning of gender in relation to nationalist politics and a demystification of the idea of motherhood.

1.2.2 Of Empires, Nations and Fratricide: Setting up the Allegory

A key aspect of *Moth Smoke* is Hamid's use of allegory. Certainly, the overarching frame of the novel is allegorical, and can be read as "project[ing] a political dimension" (Jameson 69). Rebekah K. Costin argues that this novel, like other postcolonial fictions, employs young adult characters and their coming of age experience as an allegorical device "to illuminate the postcolonial positions of their nations and their relationship with the rest of the world, especially the affluent and culturally and politically pervasive West" (31).[51] Costin's analysis is an extension of an earlier (rather dismissive and highly contested) argument by Fredric Jameson that suggests that the "libidinal investment" in third-world cultures needs to be "primarily [read in] political and social terms" (Jameson 72). He insists that, unlike the literature(s) of First-world countries, "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory" (69).

Hamid employs allegory but not entirely in the limited Jamesonian sense.[52] The allusions to Mughal history that establish the allegory in *Moth Smoke* ensure that the text is more than a postcolonial literature of protest. Hamid divides the weight of his allegorical structure between three characters—Daru, Ozi and Mumtaz. The inclusion of a female character in the symbolic and allegorical arch of the novel is a significant structural choice that opens up the possibility of a gendered reading. Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple actors within the allegorical framework allows it to work on multiple levels: (a) as a tragic story of fraternal rivalry between Daru and Ozi; (b) as a socio-economic critique of Pakistan's

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[51] Other examples include Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) and Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* or *Shame* (1993).
[52] Refutation of Jameson's reductive claim about Third-world literature is found in A. Ahmad ("Jameson's" 6) and Neil Lazarus.

economic framework, as well as of global capitalism and its questionable influence on developing countries like Pakistan; and (c) as a political allegory involving the history between Pakistan and India, and the idea of Pakistan as a nation—the dream at its inception versus its present day reality. In the following section, I contend that *Moth Smoke* can be interpreted in a fourth way.

In the majority of extant readings (reviews, blogs and critical readings) *Moth Smoke* is primarily discussed as a story about Daru and Ozi (as I have shown), with Mumtaz often relegated to a secondary or supporting position. However, I claim that close attention to the allegorical structure of the narrative opens up an alternate reading which decentres Daru's and Ozi's interactions, replacing them with Mumtaz (their shared object of desire) as the focus. Such a reading understands *Moth Smoke* as a novel that explores gendered identities, especially the meaning of Pakistani womanhood and the demystification of its construction. When read with Mumtaz as the focal point of the story, the centrality of the female body can be seen to challenge and subvert not only patriarchy's notion of what it means to be a woman and a mother but, more importantly (given the political allegory that operates in the novel) also reimagines Pakistan's (predominantly) masculine narratives of nationhood and history.

The short, terse and dramatic prologue of the novel—set in italics—invites readers to travel back to a momentous chapter in the history of the Mughal Empire in South Asia. Shah Jahan,[53] the famous Mughal Emperor, is portrayed in conversation with a Sufi saint about the future of his sons and his empire. This ominous conversation prophecies a bloody war of

[53] Shah Jahan ruled the Mughal Empire from 1628-58. South Asian historians view his reign as the Golden Age of the Mughals. Although considered more orthodox than either Jahāngīr or Akbar (his grandfather), he is credited for his tolerance to non-Muslim subjects. He is also well known for his love of construction which resulted in the Motī Masjid (Pearl Mosque), Jāmiʿ Masjid, Red Fort and, most importantly, Taj Mahal.

succession fought between his four sons, most significantly between Muhiuddoin (later known as Aurangzeb), the youngest, and Darashikoh, the eldest and likely successor to the Mughal throne. The fraternal rivalry over succession results in the political assassination by Aurangzeb of his three brothers—Darashikoh, Murad and Shuja, along with the imprisonment of Shah Jahan in his fort at Agra. Aurangzeb ascends to the Mughal throne in a narrative tainted by betrayals, political intrigue and fratricide. Historians generally agree that Mughal Empire's downfall could be traced back to his reign:

> *It is said that one evening, in the year his stomach was to fail him, the Emperor Shah Jahan asked a Sufi saint what would become of the Mughal Empire.*
>
> *"Who will sit on the throne after me?" asked Shah Jahan.*
>
> *"Tell me the names of you sons", replied the saint.*
>
> *"Dara is my eldest son".*
>
> *"The fate of Dara should be asked from Iskandar".*
>
> *The Emperor's toes curled beneath him. "Shuja is my second son. But Shuja is not shuja* [brave]".
>
> *"What about Murad?"*
>
> *"Murad will not fulfil his murad* [wish or desire]".
>
> *The Emperor closed his eyes. "Aurangzeb is my youngest son".*
>
> *"Yes," said the saint. "He will be Aurangzeb* [ornament of the throne]".

> … *The truth of the saint's words became apparent. Aurangzeb was crowned Emperor, and he obtained from the theologians a fatwa against his defeated brother, charging Dara Shikoh with apostasy and sentencing him to death….When the uncertain future becomes the past, the past in turn becomes uncertain.* (3-4)

Like the prologue, *Moth Smoke*'s epilogue returns readers to the history of the Mughal Empire, exposing them to a similar story of murder and fratricide over the throne, but this time the point of focalisation is Aurangzeb: "*The war of succession was again bloody, and the empire left the victor by his father too frail and too rigid to contain its own people*" (247). This intertextual reference adds significant historical depth and dimension to Hamid's main (trial) plot by signifying that certain events—such as the consistency of destruction precipitated by blind ambition and lust for power, particularly between brothers—repeat throughout history despite differences of actors, time or circumstances. Reviewers and critics of *Moth Smoke* have commented on Hamid's choice of Mughal history to formulate the metanarrative structure of his novel. B. Scott, for example, suggests that this element of the novel enables "the thematic questioning of the nature of truth and subjectivity to broaden historically, moving beyond the scope of the current historical causalities" (17).[54]

The text suggests a keen awareness of the persistent correlation between a self-serving, blind lust for power and the occurrence of extreme violence and murder written into the historical narratives that inform Pakistan's past. Fratricide, in particular, is foregrounded throughout, and emphasised in the concluding section of the novel. Hamid's omniscient narrator reminds the reader about this historical curse that was the downfall of the once-

[54] According to Hamid, the Mughal historical framework lends a playful edge to his narrative, whilst adding a localised—non-colonial—historical dimension to a contemporary socio-political situation in South Asia (Pande n.p.).

great Mughal Empire. The narrator laments, emphatically, the dire implications of historical repetition when fathers "fai[l] at the task of fathering sons unlike [themselves]":

> *At the ends of their stories, Emperors like empires have the regrets that precede beginnings….[M]erciless Aurangzeb … failed at the task of fathering sons unlike himself. The war of succession was again bloody, and the empire left the victor by his father too frail and too rigid to contain its own people*. (309)

What seems at stake is not only the legacy of this "bloody" "war of succession" but also its repetition through time, right into the (narrative) present: consider the blood shed on both sides of the border at the time of Partition, in which *brothers* killed *brothers* and women were pawns in their murderous actions; or the continuous political/military standoff between the two *new* nations, Pakistan and India, not least over the territory of Kashmir that has resulted in three wars, innumerable losses on both sides and a dangerous nuclearisation of the region. These, set against the novel's contemporary rendition of internal (mainly socio-economic) conflicts faced by late twentieth-century Pakistan, suggest that the same cyclical pattern of (interfamilial) violence and destruction continues in South Asia.

Hamid, like many historians, appears to regard the fraternal strife between Aurangzeb and Darashikoh over the Mughal throne as a defining moment in the history of South Asia because the resultant fissures led to the destabilisation and eventual demise of Muslim rule in the region. The novel suggests that a similar pattern of disintegration and destabilisation plagues contemporary Pakistan, courtesy of a small yet powerful group of self-serving and self-indulgent people.

The prologue (the first framing device) gives way to the main story of the novel in which Hamid introduces his readers to contemporary versions of the warring Mughal brothers: Daru and Ozi. A second framing device, depicting a scene set inside a prison cell forms the most immediate and up-to-date moment of the story. The opening section of this second frame (which is essentially a single scene split into two parts) rather ominously introduces readers to a sullen, unnamed character sitting alone in a prison cell: "My cell is full of shadows. Hanging naked from a wire in the hall outside, a bulb casts light cut by rusted bars … I sit alone" (5). Written from the first person narrative perspective of a nameless prisoner, the entire scene (both parts) reports a single action, almost like a single shot in a movie—his receipt of a mysterious white envelope. In subsequent sections, readers realise that the nameless character is the protagonist Daru, whose story is being presented before them (the readers) in the format of a trial and that the envelope contains a journalistic exposé entitled "The Trial, by Zulfiqar Manto" (245). Readers later learn that Zulfiqar Manto is a pseudonym used by Mumtaz as an investigative journalist and her exposé challenges the *official* or judicial narrative about Daru's guilt by telling his side of the story. As I will highlight, the positioning of the second frame highlights the thematic (gendered) meaning of the text. The symbolism employed in the scene, created primarily through interesting visual contrasts and juxtapositions, turns this envelope into the dominant presence. The setting is littered with images of darkness, despair and fear—for instance, Daru sits in a cell "full of shadows", where light can only enter in the form of "thin strips" which "snake along the concrete floor", people are reduced to "stains [which] dissolve into greyness", Daru feels his nostrils are charged by the "drying smell of a man's insides", the footsteps of an approaching guard cause a prisoner to "scuttle into a corner" and when Daru is asked to approach the guard he walks wearily with "[his] elbows tucked in close about the soft lower part of [his] rib cage, his

fingers holding the envelope stain the envelope with “grime” (5-6). Daru’s repeated reading of the letter makes him cry, causing the ink to blur “into little flowers” (245). In juxtaposition, the envelope is described as “smooth and sharp”, “white” (5), it “glows” (245) in Daru’s hand and, most importantly, although he wants to tear it apart, he is unable to destroy it. The visual description of the colour and texture of the envelope encourages readers to symbolically read it as an emblem of *the* truth, of goodness, innocence and purity. Indeed, Daru asserts that its contents are “the story of my innocence” (245). This centralisation and foregrounding of Mumtaz’ exposé restructures the text in terms of its vocal and affective centre. This restructuring reflects a plotline which begins as a masculine narrative about history, politics, nationhood, and power involving the conflict between male protagonists, but experiences a discernible shift as the ownership of history, as well as the agency and the ability to name and tell truth transfers to a counter-hegemonic, critical, reflexive, ethically responsible/vulnerable and, crucially, female voice.

Set within these two narrative frameworks, the central plot unfolds through the retrospective narration of those involved in the trial and takes the form of a modern day version of the Mughal story set in Pakistan. Instead of being blood-brothers, the warring protagonists are childhood best friends; the *throne* over which they struggle is transmuted into the notion of *capital*, that is, human, cultural and monetary resources and the body of a woman, Mumtaz. Daru, like his historical namesake, is manipulated by Ozi to stand trial and ultimately receive punishment for a crime he did not commit. Hamid’s use of names that echo those found in this chapter of Mughal history prompts readers to align the brothers, and their characteristics, with their historical counterparts (Ozi, Daru and Mumtaz). The names also encourage readers to anticipate the probable trajectory of their fate. This

creates a main narrative in which the possibility of constructing alternate future(s) and meaning(s) is seemingly foreclosed by allegorical historical determinism. This is further foregrounded through a repetitive (narrative) emphasis on the trope of the "constancy of destruction resulting from the desire of power" (Cilano *Contemporary* 183).

However, there are also many subtle differences to the historical narrative, primarily created through ironic reversals which function to create a revisionist subtext that works against the allegorical determinism of the narrative, making alternate readings possible. There is no straightforward direct correlation between the characters/relationships/events in the historical intertext and the contemporary fictionalised version. Multiple ironies are embedded in the novel at thematic, structural and linguistic levels (each supporting and reinforcing others) which undermine the *truth* or *reality* that is foregrounded by the Mughal frame. These ironies create an uncertain fictional reading experience which, by frustrating readers' expectations, invites an active engagement with the novel's structural matrix. Moreover, the continual act of decoding works in various ways to implicate the reader in the trial of the various characters and their versions of truth(s).

When Hamid transforms Aurangzeb and Darashikoh into their contemporary Pakistani versions of Ozi and Daru, he introduces a slight shift in the symbolic architecture of the relationship between the characters in the two versions of the story. The conflict between Aurangzeb and Darashikoh has most often been interpreted by historians as involving more than fraternal jealousy over the Mughal throne. It is often construed as emblematic of a much broader ideological conflict that threatened the stability of the Mughal Empire itself: a clash between religious orthodoxy (Islamic fundamentalism) and secularism, dramatised in the brothers. In the majority of historical accounts, Darashikoh is remembered as a tragically

wronged "sympathetic, secular, pantheist" (Jay, "Global" 109) who epitomised the expansiveness of South Asia's grand composite culture. Aurangzeb, in contrast, is maligned as an austere, intolerant, "rigid and thoroughly repressive Islamist" (Jay, "Post" 64) whose despotic religious intolerance led to the dilapidation of the Mughal Empire.[55] His (largely religion-driven) policies and their single-minded execution proved to be controversial and ineffective in accommodating and dealing with the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of his South Asian subjects. The fictionalised versions of the Mughal brothers, Daru and Ozi, cannot be neatly divided along the lines of secularism versus religious obscurantism. Daru appears as a wine-drinking, pot-smoking liberal who feels victimised because he believes that he—though possessing talent and potential—has been cheated and robbed of his chances of success in life by the Ozis of a moneyed Lahore. However, unlike the historical version of his character, Daru displays no affinity for the mystical (Sufism) or liberal arts and has no interest—intellectual or otherwise—in any radical ideology (like communism) or form of activism which might challenge the status quo. Various events in the narrative highlight that his disdain for the rich and their corruption is born out of his envy, resentment and failure to join their ranks. He is having an illicit affair with his best friend's wife, he skims off the drugs he is selling, he is a snob who sneers at less privileged people, and he masks his attempt to acquire easy money by labelling his attempted robbery as a kind of modern Robin Hood-ism. Similarly, Ozi, like Aurangzeb, is powerful, well-connected and proves to be resourceful when he exacts revenge on Daru for having an affair with his wife. But, unlike his historical namesake, he is not religious and certainly not a puritan (ironically, towards the end of the novel, readers learn it is Daru who agrees to attend a meeting of "fundo" "brothers", attracted by the rhetoric of Alam.) As Elia notes, Ozi "bears no resemblance to

[55] For an account that challenges this dominant historical portrayal of Aurangzeb, see Truschke.

the Emperor Aurangzeb, who was merciless but, unlike Ozi, also virtuous and austere" (63). The Aurangzeb in *Moth Smoke* is a pragmatic, modern-day Machiavellian character who is acutely aware of the immense power associated with his privilege. He shows no shame or hesitation in pursuing money, power and influence by any means necessary (corrupt or otherwise).

Given these character revisions it is unsurprising that Hamid is criticised for creating an analogy which does not convincingly translate history to fiction (Elia 63). Desai, among others, regards the allegorical schema of Hamid's novel as one of its weaknesses, referring to the flimsiness of its conceit: "[t]he names have resonance for anyone familiar with Mughal history, but they sit oddly upon their namesakes …The analogy proves fragile and, like a glass goblet put to rough use, shatters" (n.p.). Countering Desai, I propose that a close reading of the prologue and epilogue, and the trial scenes that book-end these, invites a different reading of the fall and destruction of empires, states and societies—one rooted in money, economics and the politics of its distribution. Hamid has also gestured towards a similar causality:

> A reference to Mughal history is integral to my plot. … [The] conflict over succession [between Aurangzeb and his brothers] took Mughal India in a direction that was not sustainable. The rigidity of Aurangzeb's puritanical fundamentalism could not contain the diversity of India. My story posits that Pakistan faces a similar choice today. But my Aurangzeb represents the entrenched elite—an impediment to the country's development. Darashikoh in my story is his opposite, the violent backlash to that system. He's secular, but his angry reaction stands for Pakistan's religious movements, its violent crime. ("Call" n.p.)

Hamid's explanation for using the Mughal allegorical frame emphasises the perhaps over-determined intertextuality of the novel, foregrounding similarities between the two historical *epochs* portrayed. It is not religion or fraternal jealousy that is at stake in the novel, but rather blind, self-indulgent, irresponsible individualism. It is the self-destructive romance of individuals with power and wealth, with a blatant disregard for consequences that results in a cataclysmic legacy of betrayal, violence and bloodshed that ruins lives and families—and, the allegory implies, even empires/countries. Hamid teases out the contrast between the hope of a grand future (whether it is envisaged by an individual, a country or a society) and the failure of that dream once it is materialised—in particular, referencing the disillusionment and alienation resulting from the collision of idealism with the harsh and unforgiving forces of reality.

The prologue and epilogue focus on two rulers, two fathers, who envision a grand future for their children and for their empires but their lust for power results in a history of destruction and betrayal. Hamid closes his novel with a succinct statement ostensibly summarising (historical) Aurangzeb's final words, enjoining his sons "not to fight" (247). However, Hamid's concern does not simply centre on *this* emperor and his sons: Hamid gestures here towards far larger, multi-generational cycles of destruction that have been the legacy of South Asia across several centuries:

> *As he lay on his deathbed, exhausted by half a century of rule, Emperor Aurangzeb dictated a final letter to his favourite daughter...."Tell my sons not to fight as we did. To each I will leave a portion of my lands" … The war of succession was again bloody, and the empire left the victor by his father too frail and too rigid to contain its own people.*

Fission of empire, a new fusion, then fission again as children parted ways. (247)

Hamid's choice of words is precise, and telling. Aurangzeb's legacy was a fissured Mughal empire which, ultimately, was too weak to stand against the British colonisation of the sub-continent. The discriminatory and Orientalist polices of the Raj ultimately ended in another fission—this time in name (and hope) of a grand dream of independence. Unfortunately, the joy of freedom was tarnished by the worst ethnic killings in the history of the region. As "Midnight's Children"[56] (Pakistan and India) parted ways, the murderous rage of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs created fissures so deep and permanent that their echoes continue to reverberate. Simultaneously, the dream of the formation of Pakistan—a cartographic materialisation of the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims, pure of faith[57]—led to a new geographical fusion, in the form of a united geopolitical entity called (East and West) Pakistan. But the exclusionary political policies and self-indulgence of the powerful again succeeded in igniting another bloody war which, pitting (Muslim) brother against brother, resulted in the separation of East and West Pakistan, into Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively.

When read in this context, *Moth Smoke*, like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, emerges as a political allegory which pitches the idea of Pakistan (and its utopian dream of "Land of the Pure") against its materialised reality. Unlike Rushdie or other South Asian writers, Hamid suggests a different causality for socio-political schisms and dissensions (as discussed): an increasingly capitalist and globalised economic system. Lahore is depicted to be experiencing a socio-economic shift—from an old agrarian and feudalist mode of life to a contemporary

[56] The allusion here is to Rushdie's novel.
[57] Pakistan is Persian for "the Land of the Pure".

globalised, capitalist market—which is increasing class stratification.[58] Seemingly encouraged by Hamid's direct authorial commentary, the vast majority of critical accounts of the novel read it in precisely such terms: a single-minded, self-centred, and unreflective pursuit of power which engenders a self-destructive civil (and religious) unrest, ultimately leading to the "fissure" of the nation.

1.2.3 Deconstructing the (Fe)Male in the Fraternal-National Allegory

Whilst acknowledging the validity of such interpretations, this emphasis on fraternal conflict largely excludes the figure of Mumtaz. When considered at all in critical discussions of the novel, she is most often reduced to a possession over which Ozi and Daru fight. Instead, I reposition Mumtaz at the centre of discussion of the novel. I argue that the politics of Hamid's work should be examined through critical reflections on the allegorical figuring of female bodies in narratives of nationhood. Such scholarly interventions highlight the extent to which writers—particularly men—historically tend to employ gendered figurative language (allegory, symbolism, metaphor, etc.) when portraying nationhood, or localised communal/ethnic and cultural identities. The insights offered in such discussions encourage caution when dealing with texts (literary or otherwise) which endeavour and claim to chronicle political history by using the female body as an allegorically-positioned inscriptive surface, one that serves to advance, or thwart, male desire.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's assertion is a provocative place to begin: "[m]etonymized as nothing but the birth-canal, woman is the most primitive instrument of nationalism"("Nationalism" 80). Similarly, Belén Martín-Lucas claims that "the metaphor of

[58] Historically speaking, the feudal lords or the *zamindars* have been highly influential and key power-players in Pakistan's State politics. For a discussion about deterritorialisation, economic reforms and the links between feudalism and religious militarist/fundamentalist groups see Schmidt; Haque and Gardezi; Perveen and Dasti; Lieven; and Herring.

the motherland, whereby Mother Earth is regulated as a nation or state, constitutes one of the most persistent and pernicious metaphoric uses of the female body" ("Hostage" 60). Elleke Boehmer makes a similar point, but limits her focus to "the Third World text", claiming that "the 'national allegory' which allegedly structures these texts is subtended and supported by the standard 'sexual allegory' that plays on the binary terms of male/female … [thus making] the first allegory … inconceivable without the second" (*Stories* 30). Rubina Saigol extends these ideas further in discussion concerning the construction of nationhood and the female body in a South Asian context:

> The nation is narrated on the body of women who become an emotionally-laden symbol of the nation, self, the inner spiritual world and home…. The country comes to be appropriated, represented and contained within words which have strong romantic, erotic as well as maternal connotations. The desire for this land/woman/*dharti* is constructed as masculine desire; the desire to possess it, see it, admire it, love it, protect it and die fighting for it against rivals. ("Militarization" 165)

Importantly, for my purposes, Saigol not only considers the figurative deployment of female bodies in narratives of nationhood, but also conjoins the "erotic" and "maternal" as conflicting, conflicted male descriptors of the symbolic female body, for which men will "die fighting … against rivals" (165).

(Re)reading *Moth Smoke* through this critical frame is advantageous because it unearths the "politico-libidinal" (Medovoi 657) crevices and fault-lines implicit in the allegorical structure of Hamid's narrative and exposes its problematic deployment of the "trope-laden female body" (Zacharias 32). Hamid unveils and deconstructs the gender biases and

limitations of allegorical nationalist projects by inviting readers to focus on the figure of Mumtaz. He does so by foregrounding the individual and material nature of Mumtaz' experiences, especially in terms of her sexuality and reproductive function. Mumtaz is portrayed as not simply the product of male erotic imaginings, but as a woman motivated (in part) by her own sexual needs and desires, her own attempts to claim autonomy (personal and professional) and, significantly, her ultimate refusal of the reduction of her body to reproductive parts: her womb, her "birth-canal" (in Spivak's terms).

1.3 (Re)imagining the Nation: Mughal History and the Unsettling Figure of Mumtaz

Hamid appears aware of the danger inherent in constructing stories about third world countries like Pakistan with an overtly symbolic political subtext that deals with the nation's politics or history. He seems to acknowledge that doing so risks reducing individual characters to mere vessels within the narrative's symbolism, "empt[ying] them of analytical purchase and critical edge" (Mahmood "Interview" n.p.). Attending to the *individual body* of Mumtaz within the double narrative framework of the novel, I suggest, encourages an unveiling and deconstruction of the gender biases and limitations of nationalist projects. Such attention is invited by the narrative in *Moth Smoke*. Careful consideration of the portrayal of Mumtaz' experiences, especially in terms of her desire, sexuality and reproductive function, disrupt typical imaginings of the Pakistani nation. Framing Hamid's text by way of the critical commentary offered by scholars like Spivak, Boehmer and Martin-Lucas invites readers to consider whether, despite its often gender-progressive and subversive agenda, *Moth Smoke* is haunted by the spectre of masculine anxiety.

As discussed, in the novel's prophetic prelude, a brief exchange between Shah Jahan and a Sufi saint foretells the tragic war of succession which results in the murder of three of his sons by their brother Aurangzeb. This fraternal jealousy—and eventual fratricide—is replayed in the story of Ozi and Daru in contemporary Pakistan. Structural and linguistic choices suggest that Hamid sees the persistence of the same pattern of *familial* betrayal and violence at work within Pakistan *and* in Pakistan's relationship with its former *brothers*, India and Bangladesh. But what of Mumtaz, who has no place in the historical frame of the novel except in an oblique reference to the "Taj [Shan Jahan] had built" (Hamid *Moth* 4)? She appears as a central, contested figure as the novel progresses. Mumtaz is introduced at the very beginning of the novel. However, for approximately the first half of the text, she is filtered through the perspectives of others, perhaps most significantly that of Daru, but also that of the omniscient narrator and, ultimately readers, who effectively become—given the novel's framing trial structure—judges. It is not until the latter half of the novel that readers hear Mumtaz speak from a first person narrative perspective, directly addressing the implied reader when she supposedly takes the stand as a witness in Daru's trial (of course, actual readers are still met with the challenge of interpreting and assessing her first person narrative). She begins her first person narrative by explicitly and emphatically asserting her identity and narrative authority:

> I'm sure we've already met, Lahore being such a small place and all, but let's reintroduce ourselves so there's no mistake. *I am Mumtaz Kashmiri.* You're probably anxious to know about Daru and me, everyone else is, but you'll have to be patient because *I'm going to tell my story my way* and Daru doesn't appear for a while. (147; emphasis added)

Mumtaz' reintroduction attempt might initially seem peculiar and redundant. Nonetheless the (re)introduction serves to assert her agency as a speaking subject. Significantly, she emphatically declares that the account of events (history) the readers are about to read are strictly *her-story,* narrated in *her way*. Mumtaz is characterised as wanting to counter, or add to, the stories that have been told *about* her: "*I am*", she says, in the most fundamental assertion of self-identity. When she states that "Daru doesn't appear for a while", she deliberately disengages herself from the narrative framework or referential contexts in which she has been read so far—most of which, unsurprisingly, are masculine. Moreover, readers learn that her story will be an unhurried and deliberate account ("you'll have to be patient").

Mumtaz states her full name on the pretence of avoiding any confusion: "let's reintroduce ourselves so there's *no mistake*. I am *Mumtaz Kashmiri*" (147). This is a significant literary ploy. In stating her full name, Hamid coaxes readers to consider her in allegorical (political), extra-literary and inter-textual terms. Her first name, *Mumtaz*, immediately links her to the allegorical historical framework of the novel—this was, of course the name of Shah Jahan's wife, in whose memory he built the famous Taj Mahal. Perhaps more significantly, her surname, *Kashmiri*, places her at the heart of a national-political allegory about Pakistan and its relationship with India. Her name alludes to the disputed territory of Kashmiri over which Pakistan and India battle. In this way the fraternal in-fighting of the Pakistani *brothers* (Daru and Ozi) is widened to a transnational conflict between South Asian countries that formerly shared a familial bond.[59] Highlighting the

59 Since 1947, the region of Jammu and Kashmir has remained a source of geopolitical contention between the two neighbouring countries (Zinck 143; Jones; Haqqani "Pakistan"; *Between;* Sumantra Bose; Howley; P. Kapur; Schofield; Ganguly *Deadly; Conflict*) resulting in major wars (1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999), several minor military skirmishes, political-military standoffs, and alleged episodes of espionage and terrorism. This explosive relationship resulted in a

metaphorical signification of Mumtaz, Hamid notes that “the feuding ‘brothers’ fight over her just as India and Pakistan do over Kashmir” (Hamid "Call" n.p.). While the actors in the Mughal history commit literal fratricide for power and crown, their contemporary allegorical counterparts are guilty of committing continuous figurative fratricide in the form of wars, terrorism and in particular, the nuclear-arms race: “rather than the threat of literal fratricide, the characters inhabiting Lahore … carry around the anxiety of nuclear conflict with India, a figurative fratricide (Cilano "Writing" 188).

The “balance of terror” (Haqqani "Pakistan" 38) following the mutual acquisition of nuclear arms was viewed as a means of deterring further violence between the two states, along with the potential of working towards a peaceful resolution of the situation in Kashmir. However, this has not eventuated. Instead, nuclearisation has further destabilised the region, amid claims from Pakistan that “Kashmir runs in our blood. No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir” and India’s counter-claim “[w]e wish to state once again that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India. It will remain so” (Haqqani "Pakistan" 27). Symbolised through the fall and incarceration of Daru, the novel implies that the continuous stand-off between India and Pakistan might ultimately prove to be detrimental for both countries, especially for the relatively smaller and economically weaker Pakistan.

In the main plot of the novel, Mumtaz walks away from both Ozi and Daru, a decision that gestures towards the failure of the national projects of Pakistan and India in relation to Kashmir. Both sides claim that they are fighting the war on behalf of the Kashmiris, but both are actually exploiting the region of Jammu and Kashmir to wage a proxy war for strategic and military advantage (just as Ozi and Daru attempt to use Mumtaz’ body to establish their

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dangerous nuclear-arms race in the region in which Pakistan, ostensibly haunted by a “security dilemma”(Ganguly *Deadly* 2) soon followed India’s *Hindu bomb* with a *Muslim Bomb*.

respective superiority). Like Ozi and Daru in their relationships with Mumtaz, both India and Pakistan refuse to acknowledge their dehumanisation of the people of Kashmir in the service of their respective nationalistic agendas. Mumtaz' narrative reveals that she is aware of being objectified in order to validate Ozi's and Daru's narratives of desire and power. Hamid's portrayal of her rejection of both men implicitly dismisses the sanctification and justification of the feud between the two countries.

1.3.1 Meet Mumtaz: Woman, Mother and the Gendered Nation

Interestingly, Hamid does not present the events from Mughal history as mere fiction; instead the voice of the omniscient narrator in the framing metanarrative is accorded the authority and weight of history (and thereby the *Truth*). Hamid appeals to *the* historical truth about Mughal history: *Moth Smoke* contains a simple reference to the record found in the official court history *Alamgirnama*[60] about Aurangzeb's manipulative use of religion as a ruse to legitimise the murder of his brother Darashikoh. Historiographers with poststructuralist tendencies argue that history is political—not because it is affected or moulded by political events or because it chronicles them, but because it renders them in narrative (Brooker, Selden and Widdowson 181).[61] Who writes history, and from what ideological perspective, is just as important as who/what is represented or omitted. The story of the Mughal Empire, when imagined and recorded as a narrative about Shah Jahan, Aurangzaib and their respective sons, emerges as an overwhelming masculine, political-

[60] *Alamgirnama*, by Munshi Muhammad Kazim Bin Muhammad Ameen, offers a record of the first ten years of Aurangzeb's reign. It is the only known official court history of his reign. See the bibliographical essay in Truschke or chapters eight and ten in R. Burn's *The Cambridge History of India: The Mughul Period*.
[61] History, therefore, "is not purely referential but is rather constructed by the historian" (J. W. Scott 681).

familial drama, a *his-story*. This is evident in both *Alamgirnama's* and Hamid's fictional account. Similarly, when this his-story is grafted onto the socio-economic and political landscape of a relatively contemporary Pakistan, the thematic, structural and rhetorical thrust of the central plot main plot reinforces the narrative as a "hetero-male project" (Mayer 6), a fraternal-familial all "male drama" (Boehmer "Mothers" 22). It is about male actors/agents engaged in a violent pursuit for power. Women, in this male-dominated world of political intrigue, are either absent as subjects or positioned outside the main narrative, as is Mumtaz.

In the Mughal story of Shah Jahan and his sons, Mumtaz appears only tangentially as a wife and mother. In Hamid's framing reference to Shah Jahan she is depicted similarly. Readers are told that after listening to the Sufi's prediction about the fate of his sons/empire, Shah Jahan "gazed across the plain at the incomplete splendour of *his wife's* mausoleum and commanded his workers to redouble their efforts" (3; emphasis added). In this instance Mumtaz is evoked through a (phallocentric) structure, the *Taj Mahal* that celebrates *the emperor's* love for *his wife*—Mumtaz Mahal. Her key claim to posterity is, thus, being the woman whose love inspired the Taj Mahal, the "noble embodiment of unparalleled marital devotion and a monument to undying love" (Begley 7-8). The figure of Mahal that is most commonly portrayed in popular public imagination and/or historical references is a romanticised one. She is most often recalled as Shah Jahan's loyal and devoted wife, his confidante who accompanied and supported him in all his endeavours, inside the Mughal court as well as on the battle field. Mahal, whose real name was Arjumand Bano Begum,[62] bore fourteen children (seven of whom survived) to her husband during nineteen years of marriage and is widely acknowledged for the excellent execution of

[62] Mumtaz Mahal, literally meaning "The elect of the palace", was the title given to her by Shah Jahan.

her motherly responsibilities. She died due to complications a few hours after giving birth to her fourteenth child, while accompanying her husband on one of his military campaigns in Burhanpur, Deccan. Discussing Mumtaz' personality, Khurram Ali Shafique states, "[o]ut of the four of her sons who survived, the three elder ones who had an opportunity to grow under her supervision were the best disciplined … Murad, the youngest, who got the fewest years to spend with his mother, turned out to be a hopeless alcoholic…" (qtd. in Rehman 106). Shafique's comments are symptomatic of the kind of discussions about Mahal in popular records.[63] In many accounts her character is circumscribed by domesticity, as Shah Jahan's beloved consort and as a devoted mother. As a person or woman, however, she is predominantly absent.[64]

Shah Jahan's reaction to his wife's death was widely recorded by historians of his time, though often in rhetoric which has been cited by modern historians as largely hyperbolic (in keeping with the Persian style of writing of the time) and improbable, suggesting that his love and devotion to his wife has been exaggerated. While the Taj Mahal continues to be marketed and celebrated as a monument of undying love, it is often forgotten that it is, in fact, a mausoleum built in the memory of a woman who died relatively young (she was 38), in childbirth, and that her body repeatedly underwent pregnancy and childbirth. For women, whose bodies are continuously exploited in matrimony for their fecundity, this monument also signifies peril, death and grief. Another curious silence in historical accounts is the lack of documentation of her grief in response to the multiple deaths of her children. The voice of Mahal—the mother who lost seven children—has disappeared forever. I

[63] In mainstream historical discussions, Mahal continues to appear as a secondary character. However, a few attempts have been made (mainly by female scholars) to excavate details of Mahal's life beyond a wife and mother. See S. Mukherjee; R. Mishra; Sudha; and S.R. Das.

[64] For such limited historical discussions of Mumtaz Mahal's activities and role, see Schimmel and Waghmar; Eraly (*Mughal; Emperors*); Balabanlilar; Richards; Fisher; and Berinstain.

suggest that Hamid highlights such absences and omissions in his narrative. Although barely acknowledged except in passing as a "wife" in the prologue and epilogue, Mumtaz is refigured as a person in her own right in the main body of the narrative—and given voice.

When Mumtaz first appears before the (fictitious) court in *Moth Smoke*, she is introduced in relational, familial terms which highlight the domesticated positioning of the female in Pakistani politico-judicial discourse. In the trial scene (which brackets the main plot as a second framing device), the reader, manipulated into playing the role of the judge through the structural choice of second person narration, is introduced to the cast of the drama played out in the main plot. Mumtaz, the third character to enter the court room, after Murad and Ozi, is described as "radiant, moth-burning Mumtaz: wife, mother and lover" (5). In contrast, the male characters are described in terms of their personalities or physical traits. For instance, Murad is sketched as "remorselessly large, staggeringly, stutteringly eloquent" (5); Ozi (Aurangzeb) is presented as "righteously treacherous, impeccably dressed, unfairly sexy' (5); and Daru is described as "[a] hard man with shadowed eyes … dishevelled, proud, erect. A man capable of anything and afraid of nothing … [The t]errible almost-hero of a great story: powerful, tragic and dangerous" (6). If the main plot of *Moth Smoke*, following the foreshadowing in the first narrative frame, is a story of fraternal rivalry between Ozi and Daru, then figuring Mumtaz in relation to the male actors (as "wife, mother and lover") indicates the essentialist, derivative and *domesticated* position of the female body within the dominant socio-political discourse of the Nation-State. This positioning reduces the strife between Ozi and Daru over Mumtaz to a (masculine) nationalist reclamation project as both men (symbolically representing India and Pakistan respectively) use her body as a battlefield to fight a proxy *war*.

Mumtaz' symbolic (albeit later undermined) role in the kinds of nationalist allegories discussed above is prefigured in the description of her first meeting with Ozi, at a Halloween party in New York. Mumtaz is ironically dressed as Mother Earth: this, when read in conjunction to her surname, suggests that Mumtaz represents, if not "Mother Earth", then at least a contestable earth, the disputed South Asian territory of Kashmir. The character of Mumtaz, in this configuration, thus becomes a structural tool to foreground the "domestic nature of both statehood and the female sphere" (Costin 39). However, the fact that Mumtaz is *impersonating* Mother Earth, knowingly adopting this persona, mocks assumptions that she is somehow reducible to this role. Mumtaz' deliberate and ironic mimicry of this persona reflects allegorical conceptions of women in constructions of nationhood.

Symbolically, the Ozi-Daru-Mumtaz triangle also represents the socio-economic strife visible *within* Pakistan at a national level, at the time in which the novel is set. Mumtaz' body emerges as the literal, corporeal site which the two "sons" of Pakistan—symbolising two opposing socio-economic classes—attempt to inscribe their meanings upon, according to their own (his) stories and subject positioning. Ozi wants to fix and circumscribe her body within a (seemingly modern/emancipated and yet rather traditional) discourse of maternity and wifehood; whilst Daru wishes to (re)position and reduce her to the object of his material, sexual desire. In the conflicting imagining and demands of the two "brothers" that are imposed on Mumtaz, the ostensible homogeneity of the imagined community of Pakistan is exposed as an artifice, created through a variety of state apparatuses, especially the media.

Since the 1980s, the concept of nation (and citizenship) as an ideological construct has been the subject of intense scrutiny within feminist scholarship. The critical investigation into how nations (and states)—have been constituted and articulated during various historical periods and regions has led (feminist) critics like Anne McClintock to argue that "[a]ll nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous" (McClintock "Family" 61). This danger, suggests McClintock, is the result of gendered inequity: "[n]o nationalism in the world has granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state" ("Longer" 105). In what has been described as the predominantly, hierarchical (and racialised) "male drama" (Boehmer "Motherlands" 233) of nationhood, men have conventionally been categorised as ideal citizens (see Nagel "Masculinity" 252; Boehmer *Stories* 29). Men constitute nations and represent them: they *are* nation—"*women may symbolize the nation, but men represent it*" (Delaney 190), whereas women are "in the nation but not of it … present but not seen" (Eisenstein *Hatreds* 41). Women give birth to the nation, but are usually "excluded from direct action" and are mainly "subsumed symbolically" in the national polity as its "metaphoric limit" (McClintock "Family" 62). They are cultural transmitters and guardians, biological reproducers, boundary markers and tokens of the nation's (ethnic/racial/religious/cultural) difference (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 7). Rejecting the idea of nationhood as an "effect of false consciousness", Benedict Anderson defines "nation" as an "imagined political community" and "a variable cultural artefact"—less like ideological constructs and more like kinship or religious systems in nature (4-5). Modern nations are characteristically *limited* and defined by their limitations. Large or small, all nations define themselves by the literal and imagined boundaries which separate them from other nations and circumscribe their area of influence and power. As *imagined* entities, while all members of an affiliate nation cannot

know each other, they nonetheless share a sense of mutual belonging and communion premised on their difference from other nations. Anderson argues that "[t]he nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal *comradeship*. Ultimately it is this *fraternity* that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7). Anderson's choice of nouns here may not be deliberately gender-exclusive, but is telling. Feminist scholarship suggests that it is precisely such conceptualisations of nation as a brotherhood, as a "distinctively homosocial form of political bonding" (Parker et al. 6), which has proven detrimental for women. When the idea of nationhood is conceived as a fraternity, citizenship for women becomes relational and refracted, meditated through male kinship.[65] They are often "imagined by many nation-states as being lesser or unequal citizens who rarely transcend domesticity and whose relationship to the state is vicarious and meditated by men—as the wives or mothers" (Jolly 14). As Zillah Eisenstein notes, nationhood in its traditional form exists as a "phallocratic construction, with brotherhood … at its core" (Eisenstein "Writing" 42).[66]

Nation-states inscribe "the symbolic bodies of women into the nation" (Zacharias 30) in multiple and complex ways, however, commonly, the female body is signified, in a "primitive" (Spivak "Nationalism" 80) manner, as land or earth (Martín-Lucas "Most" 91 ff.). Martín-Lucas discusses this as "the conceptualization of territories as female bodies to be explored, penetrated, cultivated, rescued and, in any case, always invaded" ("Hostage"

[65] McClintock points out that "[i]n modern Europe … A woman's political relation to the nation was submerged as a social relation to a man through marriage" (*Imperial* 358). Pateman similarly argues that in modern nation-States citizenship is implicitly based on a sexual contract of (heterosexual) marriage and familial relationships (1). See Mosse; Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem; Silva ("Introduction"); and Nagel.

[66] I concede that nation-States, in their genealogies, practices and structures, exist in multiple, varied and complex forms. While no singular approach or theoretical model fully elucidates the notion of nationalism in all its varieties, I concur with A. Ahmad that "an essence is given to it, in particular situations"("Culture" 48). Following Eisenstein, I use the emphasis on the gender exclusivity of nation-States as a strategy to "divest nationalism of its masculinist borders" ("Writing" 35).

60).[67] In the genealogies and rhetoric of nations, the familiar metaphor of nature as female easily elides into tropes which construct nations as “spatial, embodied femaleness” (Peterson 7). These iconographies of the female body convey a distinctively “possessive male-centered sense of territory” (Ramaswamy "Maps" 110) which posits men as active actors in the nation’s political drama. The metaphoric motherland or maternal body is homogenised, and idealised, stripped of its materiality and historicity to inscribe the myth(s) of nations. Allusions to the maternal body in accounts of nationhood draw on a collection of reiterated images: home, umbilical cord, womb, roots, hearth, birth, and family (Boehmer *Stories 26;* Saigol "Militarization"; Natarajan). The figure of “mother,” and associated tropes, is essential and integral in organising and legitimising the story of nation in familial terms: conjured up as a trope for ideal femininity, this “fantasmatic” figure “secures male-male arrangements and an all male history” (Goldberg 63).

Many contemporary literary-theoretical discussions argue that metaphors are powerful cognitive-linguistic devices which allow us to talk about the world and also influence the way we think, perceive and act (Baider and Gesuato 9). George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that by focusing attention on a particular connotation/denotation of its signifier, a metaphor (as sign) “can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (*Metaphors 10*). The nationalist metaphor of woman as mother(land) as a sign relies on evoking the naturalness and given nature of the mother-child bond for its signification and naturalises the relationship between state and citizen. This normalises the state’s power and control of its subjects (especially women). Additionally, this metaphor of motherland (and family) creates the relevant affective grounds for defending her when the nation (as mother) is under threat. The naturalisation

[67] See also Layoun; Ramaswamy ("Goddess"; "Demoness"; "Visualising"; "Martyrdom"; "Maps"); and Gupta.

and normalisation of the woman-earth-mother metaphor, in all its variances, elides its mechanism of control. It belies the instrumentalisation of the female body as a political metaphor made possible because of its "phantasmatic investment and phantasmatic promise" (Butler *Bodies* 191).

In the schema and rhetoric of a "uterine nationalism" that is literally and figuratively rooted in "the recesses of the womb" (Heng and Devan 349), women, as political subjects, are positioned primarily as "procreators and not the citizens" (Slobin 249). Their citizenship is contingent upon their role and performance as mothers. For Neluka Silva, "good citizenship" is "synonymous with being a good mother" (*Gendered* 35). This signification hijacks the materiality of the experience of motherhood for women by constructing the womb as a site of nationalist service and duty: "if the woman does not want to be mother, Nation is on its way to die" (Msg. Karaman qtd. in Yuval-Davis *Gender* 1). Employing a heterosexual and maternal body to signify the nation results in a perverse ideology that stigmatises and excludes childless women as well as other "nonproductively-oriented sexualities from the discourse of nation" (Parker et al. 6).

When the female body is metaphorically evoked as a political signifier to symbolise "the inner coherence and outer boundary" (Zacharias 32) of the national body, it opens up the (literal and metaphoric) womb to regulation and control by masculine national-state powers or their representatives (fathers, brothers, and husbands). According to Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, questions about "under what conditions, when, how many, and whose children women will bear … [are] issues of national importance (to men) and civic duty or outright oppression (to women)" (173). For representational efficacy, the trope-laden symbolic body of *woman* is stripped of its specificity and individuality. It becomes a homogenised and

desexualised body that "displac[es] historical women, consolidating hybridity into totality and erasing the doubled border into a single sign" (Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem 6), while concomitantly negating an "embodied historical [female] subject, enmeshed in exploitative material relations" (Shetty 50). Hamid's portrayal of Mumtaz highlights some of the serious repercussions such symbolic appropriations of the female body, as nation, may have for women.

Political and cultural theorists note that modern nations function and are organised around inherent ideological ambivalence and contradiction. Tom Nairn theorises that modern Nation-State—"the modern Janus" (123)—is characterised by an ambivalent character .[68] This ambivalence is reflected through a "regressive, jingoistic, militaristic 'warfare state' visage" on one hand and "a progressive community-building 'welfare state' countenance" on the other (Nagel *Nation* 401). McClintock suggests that "one face [of the nation] gaz[es] back into the primordial mists of the past, the other into an infinite future" ("Family" 65). Boehmer redefines this Janus-faced quality, noting that nations can be "progressive" *and* "reactionary" or "oppressive". In addition, she calls nations "protean, adaptative and affiliative rather than derivative, taking on different forms at the hands of different groups and classes … exert[ing] a hold on emergent geopolitical entities in quest of self-representation" (*Stories 4*). A nation can be progressive and emancipatory by advocating agendas of social justice and sovereignty for its people. Such constructions of nationhood may be highly influential (particularly in the context of postcolonial nations), by filling out the ruptures in memory, self and culture of the colonised, transforming local socio-economic and political infrastructures and forging new emancipatory identities. Simultaneously, nationalist projects can become oppressive by serving the interests of a powerful, and often elite hegemonic group. Boehmer argues that as

[68] See chapter nine for details.

nation-states are products of modernity, they tend to set and follow "rationalist objectives" in relation to "social organisation and political representation" (*Stories* 31). However, many also seek to reaffirm the past, especially when seeking ways to legitimise their specific agendas. This can—and often does—result in the reinstitutionalisation of family (along with its accompanying discourse of its private, non-political, hierarchal, and sacred nature) as the basic structural- functional unit which is used as "an ideal way to sanction its structures of power and to impose its boundaries" (Boehmer *Stories* 31).[69]

Ozi's character reflects this Janus-faced quality of nations. Though born into a Muslim family in Pakistan, he is—much like Aasmaani's character in Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* or the pre-9/11 Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*—a cultural Muslim for whom religion (and religious identity) is a label rather than a way of life. He has been educated in the most prestigious institutions, both at home and abroad and, like Changez, happily does "sixty hours a week of trusts and estates for a big law firm" (149). He falls in love and marries Mumtaz—a foreign-qualified, sexually secure, independent woman—after meeting her at a Halloween party. He lives in wealthy areas, both in Pakistan and New York, dabbles in drugs, drinks, throws parties and enjoys dancing. He admires and supports Mumtaz' editorial work at a Washington magazine. And later on, back in Pakistan when she starts writing journalist exposés under the pseudonym of Manto (without telling him), he lets her keep her secret, and does not confront her about it nor tries to stop her. In fact, he claims to be "thrilled that she was having adventures" (192). Mumtaz herself testifies to his liberalism and broadmindedness in her trial testimony: "Ozi was magnificent. He was gorgeous, a fantastic lover, open-minded, smart, charming funny" (148). But more importantly for her, the pre-pregnancy Ozi was an attentive listener and a loving *partner*, "[b]ut the best part …

[69] See also Chaterjee ("Colonialism"); Sangari and Vaid.

was the talking. I was completely open with him … Ozi made me feel known. He made love to my insides, filling gaps and calming unbearably sensitive places…. We were growing together, and I was happy" (149-50).

Things change when Ozi learns of Mumtaz' pregnancy. He manipulates her emotionally to have the baby even when she tells him that she is considering abortion. Without consulting Mumtaz, Ozi tells his mother who immediately flies to New York "bringing gifts and advice" (150)—an indiscretion for which Mumtaz refuses to forgive him. Nira Yuval-Davis suggests that "biology, conjugal relations and kinship obligations can override women's freedom to decide their own fertility" ("Women" 17), and this appears to be confirmed in the novel. Mumtaz, in spite of her individualism, liberal outlook and access to material resources, surrenders the control of her reproductive rights to her husband.[70] Margaret Abrahams reports manipulation of reproductive rights as one of the key forms of violence experienced by South Asian women in their marriages. She understands this as a form of sexual abuse in which men "contro[l] a woman's body by controlling choice and access to contraceptives, the decision to have a child, or the right to an abortion" (605). Ozi's emotional manipulation, which leads Mumtaz to keep the baby, can be read as emotional espionage, sexual and psychological violence committed against her, which objectifies her as a womb and a vehicle for the fulfilment of Ozi's paternal desires. Mumtaz experiences her forced pregnancy as an invasion of her body, a psychological violation of her interiority which alienates her from her *self,* and fills her with angst, anxiety and shame. Ozi's feelings of ecstatic joy at fatherhood contrast sharply with Mumtaz' experience of violation and defilement. She reports that she began having nightmares, "visions of being

[70] Notably, Mumtaz says she married Ozi also because of "what every mother, aunt, sister, cousin, friend, every women from home I'd ever known had always told me: that an unspeakable future awaits girls who don't wind up marrying" (148-9).

eaten alive by larvae" and, while "most mothers glow when they're pregnant," she "sweated" (151). After the birth of their son, Muazzam, when Mumtaz wants return to full-time work, Ozi again stops her by manipulating her emotionally:

> I decided I wanted to work full-time again. Ozi was shocked. He said Muazzam was too young. I said if he felt so strongly he could ask for paternity leave…. He looked at me like I was a stranger and asked if I loved our son at all. The question destroyed me. I started sobbing and I couldn't stop. (52-3)

Ozi's shock highlights that in spite of all his apparent modernity and liberalism, Mumtaz is inferior to him: for Ozi she remains, first and foremost, a wife and mother. Feminist scholars claim that with all the proliferation of rhetoric of women's rights, agency and empowerment, the institution of motherhood continues to be problematic for many women. In fact, the "neo-liberal privatization of responsibility" (Phipps 125) in the postmodern age has reaffirmed the onus of child-rearing for the mother. Things like natural birth and breast-feeding are now promoted as informed "consumer choices", and women who fail to "achieve" these are marked as ill-informed or selfish (Phipps 125-8). Advances in maternal studies have failed to counter the construction of motherhood as a child-centred relationship in which the figure of mother (and her needs) is inevitably secondary.

Given Ozi's symbolic positon in the novel, his attempts at fixing Mumtaz, as an object, in his script of matrimony and motherhood become a reflection of reductive, essentialist (masculine) nationalist ideology. This ideology prescribes and naturalises motherhood and domesticity as the primary mode of experiencing subjectivity for women. Ozi's attempt to prescribe domesticity or the family as the primary site for Mumtaz to construct her identity and subjectivity reflects "patriarchal familialism" (Eisenstein "Writing" 41) and reduces

Mumtaz, like the symbolic female body construed during times of conflict, "from being a person who is an end, an autonomous subject, someone whose feelings count, into being a mere ground for the expression of male desire" (Nussbaum n.p.). Interestingly, it is not merely Ozi who sees domesticity and motherhood as the natural subject positioning for Mumtaz. Daru, unwittingly, does too. When Mumtaz breaks up with Daru, he starts fantasising that Mumtaz' rejection is rooted in her motherhood and her refusal to abandon her son.

Ozi's traditionalism exhibits itself more powerfully once the couple return to Pakistan. Back in the relatively more conservative and patriarchal context of his home country, Ozi's attitude becomes more traditional in relation to Mumtaz. Interestingly, while Ozi and Mumtaz continue with their liberal public lifestyle, privately Ozi wants Mumtaz to perform as the traditional (docile, accommodating, sacrificing, nurturing and devoted) wife and mother.[71] Significantly, unlike a strict patriarch, he does not curtail or control Mumtaz' mobility: she moves around the city, drinks, smokes, socialises and, even when Ozi finds about her double life as an investigative journalist, he does not object. The agency that Mumtaz enjoys in terms of the freedom of movement and expression is allowed because it presents Ozi as a modern man in the public eye—the liberal face of national polity. However, when this liberalism intrudes into his private world (home), he openly embraces traditional gender assumptions:

> In fact, now that they were back in Pakistan, Aurangzeb was far less conciliatory toward her than he had been before. For his part, he felt that she should be grateful for the style with which he (actually his father) supported them. He felt that the cars

[71] For discussion on the traditional construction of womanhood in South Asia, see Jackson, Lau ("Women"; "Equating"; "Emotional"); and Rajan.

> and clothes and dinner parties made him a good husband, and *he resented her inability to demonstrate gratitude through obedience as his wife*. (106; emphasis added)

Ozi's failure to regard Mumtaz as an independent subject echoes the traditional South Asian social structure in which women's ostensibly natural place is that of a devout wife and a self-sacrificing mother. Women in these socio-cultural traditions are objectified "as vessels of men, as part of their husbands, as properties of their families, as producers of heirs and descendants" (Lau "Equating" 370). The acceptance of these traditional domestic and familial positions has traditionally allowed women (especially as mothers of sons) access to the material, social and political means to enjoy (some level of) agency and power. In the case of Mumtaz, Ozi demands that her corporeality and subjectivity as an individual be compromised (or in its more conservative version, fully sacrificed) at the altar of matrimony and motherhood in order for her to acquire legitimacy and (partial) agency. As Sumathi Ramaswamy argues:

> Bourgeois nationalisms in many parts of the world renegotiated and reaffirmed a new sexual division of labor in which man reigned over the public realm of politics and power, while woman was placed on a pedestal as the hallowed essence of the nation, even as she was firmly put in her place, in the home, as the mother of its future citizens. ("Demoness" 2)

Later in the novel when Ozi talks about experiencing the trauma of betrayal, he evokes the power of tradition and culture to highlight its depth and magnitude, "I couldn't put what I endured into words. There's a reason prophets perform miracles: language lacks the power to describe faith. And … its flip side, betrayal" (193). Ozi, in his first person narrative, once

again exhibits the Janus-faced quality of his character as he reveals "the authority of both tradition and modernity" (Costin 41) to legitimise his story. The liberal, cosmopolitan, capitalist character of his personality asserts itself in the form of allusions to the cultural capital, ideological and epistemological traditions of the First World. Simultaneously, the patriarchal influences underpinning his character are revealed through his objectification of Mumtaz as "his wife" and his failure to see her as an autonomous, desiring individual.

The Ozi-Daru-Mumtaz triangle can also be read in the context of an allegorical representation of the socio-economic conflict plaguing Pakistan. In this context, Mumtaz' body once again emerges as the site which both "sons of Pakistan" use to inscribe their ultimate victory over their opponent. Daru does not have the cultural or economic means to confront Ozi directly and therefore he competes with him by trying to win the affections of Mumtaz. Ozi allegedly claims that he wants to avoid a direct confrontation with Daru because he is afraid of his rage. Refusing to openly acknowledge the grudge against each other (their class rivalry), they turn towards Mumtaz, each trying to appropriate her to win legitimacy for their own (his)tories and the rights to write the nation's future. As a member of the elite class, Ozi wants to validate his capitalist, Machiavellian, survival of the fittest mind-set, while Daru wants to return to the dream and the promise on which Pakistan was founded.

When Mumtaz leaves Ozi and her son, Ozi perceives her decision as a betrayal and also, significantly, as metaphoric emasculation. However, Ozi's self-professed position and performance as a liberal and enlightened man means he cannot avenge his honour/masculinity by *harming* Mumtaz. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the absence of the traditional female figure, the weaker (feminised) Daru is framed by Ozi for the murder of

an unnamed cyclist. Daru is pushed outside the folds of sovereign citizenship, thereby, authority and historical significance. The codification of Mumtaz-Daru's affair in the novel adds symbolic meaning to the novel's allegorical structure. Daru's attraction to Mumtaz has been presented in the novel through the classical metaphor of moth (Daru) and flame (Mumtaz), the signification of which is firmly grounded in Islamic tradition. Daru mistakenly fantasizes that Mumtaz shares his attraction. Although Mumtaz clearly rejects his sexual advances, his fascination with her increases, causing him to eventually self-destruct like the metaphoric moth:

> She's drawn to me just as I'm drawn to her. She can't keep away. She circles, forced to keep her distance, afraid of abandoning her husband and, even more, her son for too long. But she keeps coming, like a moth to my candle …
>
> And I, the moth circling her candle, realize that she's not just a candle. She's a moth as well, circling me. I look at her and see myself reflected … And she, looking at me, *must see herself*. (203-4)

In Urdu and Persian literatures and in the tradition of Sufism, moth-flame is a common metaphor predominantly used to signify *Ishq-e-haqiqi*, an intense love for the Creator.[72] Just as the moth burns in its desire for the light, this metaphor implies a process of spiritual enlightenment in which the individual's love for Allah or the Creator is so strong that it melts away all material and worldly associations and desires, allowing him/her to achieve spiritual enlightenment. In the context of the novel's political allegory, this image reflects the nation's desire to become one with the image of the Islamic republic on which the country was founded. While the flame/fire/light (signifying faith) in the traditional literary resources

[72] In *Maps* Aslam also invokes the Sufi notions of Divine love through images of moths and butterflies.

symbolises a generative and positive force of change leading to sublimation and self-realisation, in Hamid's novel it symbolises lust and thus becomes a destructive force which burns and destroys without any hope of regeneration. This is suggested towards the end of the novel when a moth that has been spared by the flame is devoured by a lizard (227).

Furthermore, the novel is filled with destructive images of fire, the most significant of which is of Pakistan's and India's nuclear explosions. These fires, ignited by lust for power, ultimately destroy and consume those that pursue them. When the female body is symbolically used to represent land or country, the association between the sign and signifier invests the geographical area with significant emotional resonance and desire. To recall Saigol's comment, quoted above: "the desire for this land/woman/*dharti* is expressed as masculine desire: the desire to possess it, see it, admire it, love it, protect, and die fighting for it against rivals/enemies" (*Pakistan* 244). The land/country thus emerges as the object of male erotic desire, "eulogized in the mass media, textbooks, and public monuments" (Saigol *Pakistan* 243). This erotic desire is evident in the nation's military discourse, used to marshal tropes/troops for the protection (and in the case of the enemy, rape and destruction) of the land. A speech given by foreign minister of Pakistan Sardar Asif Ali, in relation to the defence of Pakistan's nuclear programme, makes this connection explicit, "to us the nuclear programme is similar to honour of our mothers and sisters, and we are committed to defending it at all cost" (Khattak 79). Mumtaz' relationship with both Daru and Ozi thus symbolically represents the eroticisation that underpins the trope of woman-as-earth/nation. However, the narrative suggests that driven by (masculine) egotism the fire (emotional affiliations), in both romantic relationships (in allegorical and

individual dimensions), fails to perform any transformation for the male actors and the State/class they symbolise.

1.3.2 Enter Mumtaz: the Monster

I argue that Hamid challenges the gendered narrative of nations in his portrayal of Mumtaz. The first challenge comes in the form of Mumtaz' choice to leave Ozi, their son, and Daru. The second challenge emerges through an emphasis on the specificity and historicity of Mumtaz' corporeal experiences. Abandoning matrimony, motherhood and bodily possession, Mumtaz instead chooses the life of an investigative journalist. Unlike the mundane topics (like lullabies, baby-rash creams) she wrote about while living in New Yok, she now writes politically: against corruption, about marginalised sections of the society like prostitutes, and stories which unmask hidden injustices (like the story of Daru's innocence). As a journalist, her "exposés disrupt complacency; they reveal the workings of power and inequity that shape the everyday lives of the elite and the non-elite alike" (Cilano *Contemporary 187*). In this way she challenges the hegemonic and reductive discourses of history created by Ozi and Daru. By embracing the pen against the bane of injustice she symbolically reinscribes history as her-story, offering a more ethical and inclusive way of viewing and organising nation. Hamid himself upholds and asserts her agency in this respect. She is the only character who retains her full name in the novel, while the other male characters' names are reduced: from Aurangzeb and Dara Shikho to Ozi and Daru, and later on Ro and Lain (188) respectively. Hamid proclaims Mumtaz' agency as a subject and political agent entrusted with writing the future of the nation:

> [M]y Mumtaz is the architect of her own vision. She follows a direction that's painful. The steps she takes are the only positive ones taken in the book…. She's self-critical,

> strong, honest and fearless—qualities I see as a way forward. Meaningful change comes from honest self-criticism. She abandons what's not working. ("Call" n.p.)

Arguably, nations present themselves as imagined communities marked by an inner cohesiveness and homogenisation which distinguishes them from other nations/communities. They are constituted through the politics of inclusion and exclusion, and the careful policing of internal and external difference. Commonly, nation-states use violence to administrate and execute difference and/or its internal fissures.[73] Ironically, in spite of the homogenising efforts aimed at managing the differences, internal hierarchies (based on class, language, race, and ethnicity) persist, exposing their constructed nature.[74] Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary A. Tetreault propose that a "nation requires an inside and an outside. … A nation is defined by its unity; differences and particularities within it challenge its universality. Shared commonness is privileged against diversity, which is problematized as disorderly" (37-8). In *Moth Smoke,* the myth of the homogeneity of the nation is challenged, its internal fissures made explicit through the character of Mumtaz. In Chapter 16 where Mumtaz delivers her testimony for a second time, she refers to herself as a monster: "It's me again: Mumtaz. Now commonly called 'the monster.' Sometimes even to my face. *Which makes my story*, I suppose, *a kind of monster story*" (241; emphasis added). Monstrosity represents the symbolic "Other", against which 'normalcy' is contrasted.[75] In terms of nation and its discourse, it presents the fissures, the differences which are not absorbed or which do not fit in the homogenising nationalist discourse. Monstrosity,

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[73] See Tölölyan.

[74] Another description that exposes the internal incongruities of Pakistan as a nation-State is Lahore's Red Light area, where Mumtaz meets Dilaram. This area is incongruously and ironically located next to two of the nation's most significant emblems of identity, the *Badhshahi Mosque* and the *Minar-e-Pakistan*. The latter was built to mark the passing of the Lahore resolution in which the All India Muslim League formally demanded a free Muslim State and named it Pakistan (Land of the Pure). The presence of the Red Light area in this configuration can be read as a literal cartographical question mark on the religious and nationalist moorings of the Pakistani identity.

[75] See Ng; Picken; and Cohen.

symbolically, marks the borders and bodies of the nation's "disorderly" (internal) others—religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and women. When Mumtaz takes up the mantle of a journalist she writes about the disenfranchised, foregrounding stories that challenge the hegemony of the elite and powerful. She writes about money laundering, a menacing "Accountability Commission investigator", policemen potentially involved in the extra-judicial killing of a girl, Lahore's red-light area, and lawyers who "gave safe haven to fugitive women from abusive marriages" (157). Her journalistic exposés undermine Pakistan's myth as the land of the pure, challenge the culpability of its institutions, highlight the ugly truths about the treatment of women (like marital abuse, rape, unlawful killings) which a society—fully invested in perpetuating a hallowed image of family, motherhood and women as its cultural tradition—ignore and attempt to erase. For the hegemonic forces of Pakistan's Nation-State, her narratives are stories of its monsters, its other(s). Writing becomes transformative and generative for her: it heals the disintegration and disassociation of self she experiences because of her forced pregnancy: "[c]hildbirth had hurt me inside, and I was finally starting to heal" (158). Simultaneously, her writings offer potential healing for the fractured nation—through representation and recognition—by reminding it of the plight (and existence) of its others (the disenfranchised and the forgotten) and by questioning those who (seemingly) escape justice because of power and money.

Notably, Hamid assigns the role of an investigative journalist to Mumtaz. When nations are theorised as imagined communities, this inventiveness is not meant to imply that they are a mere fantasy: "To say … that a nation is 'imaginary' is not to consign it to the category of (mere) fiction; if it is a 'dream' it is one possessing all the institutional force and affect of

the real" (Parker et al. 11-2). Anderson adds, "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). One of the key sources which modern nations use to build and perpetuate myths and narratives is print media.[76] Mumtaz' appropriation of the state apparatus to (re)write history is symbolically highlighted by her *nom de plume*, Zulfiqar Manto. This pseudonym adds significantly to the novel's over-all schema of (re)writing the nationalist project. The surname Manto alludes to one of Urdu's short-story maestros, Saadat Hassan Manto. He is (in)famous for his provocative writing style; frank discussion of sexuality; graphically detailed violence (especially during the 1947 Partition); voicing the macabre, monstrous, insane and the non-normative; in short, for addressing taboo subjects which often disturbed and offended the (bourgeois) sensibility of the society of his time. An "anathema to the authorities, political and literary" (Ispahani 183), his writings were censored, labelled as indecent and he was even criminally charged for vulgarity. Women, in particular prostitutes, figure prominently in Manto's prose. He is celebrated for "expressing the human pain of partition" (Flemming "Riots" 100) and for writing about "the socially wronged and sexually exploited woman" (H. S. Mann 128). Interestingly, however, in his writings women predominantly appear as victims whose bodies and sexuality are consistently used against them by men, communities, nations and flag-bearers of religion(s).[77]

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[76] Boehmer argues that "nationalist discourse demands the narrativistic invocation of births and origins, historical continuity and synthetic closure" (*Stories* 27). Literature plays a very significant role in a nation's attempt at "self-articulation" by clearing a "space for the modern national community to narrate itself" (27). See Gopal (*Indian; Literary*) discussion of the role of print media, especially novels, in the formation and articulation of independent Indian nationhood during the independence movement against the British colonisers.

[77] H. S. Mann and Ispahani see this as evidence of androcentric elements in Manto's writings. For instance, Ispahani claims, "Manto's … emphasis on the disfigurement of women's spirits and bodies is rarely relieved by a trait of a woman of whole character, with independent emotions and an undamaged mind … his women suffer sexual humiliation, seduction, domination, rape, pregnancy, abandonment, prostitution, murder. They are almost always victims, with the power only to occasion their own destruction"(186).

Clearly, Hamid uses the blue-print of Manto as a writer to build Mumtaz' profile as a journalist. Notably, the only exposé by Mumtaz that is mentioned in detail is about a prostitute, Dilaram, and their frank discussion of female sexuality. The writings of both Manto and Mumtaz symbolise anti-authoritative narrative[78] which highlights the excess that the nation (its history) fails to contain or relegates to the margins (familial, societal, historical, political) for being monstrous. Like Manto, Mumtaz also addresses topics which uncover inconvenient truths about Pakistan: "I wrote about things people didn't want seen and my writing was noticed," she recalls; "Zulfiqar Manto received death threats and awards" (158) As a result of her writing, she says, "I was finding myself again, and I was being honest about things I cared for passionately" (158).

The first-name Mumtaz adopts is also significant. The word *Zulfiqar* literally means sword, so the name itself can be translated as Manto, the sword. The name implies that she is using her writing as a weapon to wage war against the corrupt or to give voice to the disenfranchised. Moreover, this first-name grounds the novel's narrative in a specifically South Asian Muslim context (as opposed to a postcolonial one). *Zulfiqar* is said to be the name of the sword of one of Prophet Mohammad's most trusted companions, Ali ibn Abi Talib—the fourth Muslim caliph—who was known for his bravery in battle and excellence in swordsmanship.

Feminist scholars have been influential in unmasking the masculine symbology embedded in discourses on creativity (literary and otherwise). In her seminal essay "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" (1981) Susan Gubar discusses the historically masculine

[78] Interestingly, Manto was initially accepted as a member of the leftist Pakistani literary group, Progressive Writers' Association. However, even this anti-establishment group of writers ultimately excommunicated him because of his cynicism, reactionary politics and "for being 'obsessed with the abnormal and obscene'" (H. S. Mann 138). Manto's subversive history (as writer and individual) is echoed in Mumtaz' unconventional choices as an individual.

underpinnings of the matrix of creativity: creativity or writing has been symbolically constructed as a male prerogative which identifies the pen as a metaphoric penis with which the male writer inscribes the virgin pages of the female. This process renders the female body a passive object, assigned a secondary position, endowed with meaning but lacking intentionality (Gubar 247). Read in this context, Mumtaz' *nom de plume* symbolically reflects her appropriation of masculine sources of power (both sword and pen/penis) to write stories that challenge masculine national narratives by accommodating voices from the margins. The emotional response elicited by her writing (her editors received many phone calls after the piece she wrote on Lahore's Red Light Area, death threats were issued and a brick was thrown through the newspaper office) shows that a voice rallying against corruption and oppression can work as an affective centre to rewrite nationhood in ways which are more inclusive, empathetic and ethical.

Furthermore, Mumtaz exposes the failure of Pakistan as a State to deliver on its promise in all its variants: from the initial dream of the "Land of the Pure," the 1970s socialist slogan of "*Roti, Kapra, Makan*" (Food, Clothes, Shelter), the jihad-induced Islamisation of the 1980s, to the 2000s utopian promise of "*Enlightened Moderation*". This is evident in her writing about corrupt autocrat bureaucrats and military personnel, a complacent police force (and in all likelihood a compromised judicial system) and people who suffer at the margins. The exposure of these failures reveals what Naveeda Khan refers to as three forms of national-state crisis, namely "*the failure of the state, the failure of nationalism, and the external influence on the country compromising national sovereignty and security"* ("Introduction" 1). Offering a different interpretation of the nation in crisis, N. Khan opines

that, unlike the popular perception of these moments in crisis studies, these apparent failures can be read as potential opportunities:

> [T]he failure of the state becomes a moment to ruminate on the artificiality of this most modern construct, the failure of nationalism, an opportunity to dream of alternative modes of association, and the failure of sovereignty to consider the threats and possibilities of the realm of foreignness within the nation-state as within the self. ("Introduction" 2-3)

Mumtaz' journalism, if read in the terms invited here by N. Khan, might be understood as the novel's answer to Ozi's irresponsible (corruption inducing) capitalism, Daru's self-pitying game of blame and Murad Badshah's crude/violent opportunism.

Hamid suggests several ways in which the exposure of the "failure of the state" transforms into a productive opportunity to (as N. Khan suggests above) "ruminate on [its] artificiality … and an opportunity to dream of alternative modes of association" (2). Daru's increasingly sadistic behaviour towards his servant Manucci (fuelled by Daru's sense of impotence, failure and frustration) causes Manucci to walk away from Daru and join Mumtaz. Under Mumtaz' tutelage, the Manucci of contemporary Pakistan (unlike his gossip-indulgent Mughal version) is revealed as "a brilliant investigator" (244) who helps her find the witnesses who saw Ozi kill the boy for whose death Daru is framed. Mumtaz is hopeful that one day she would probably "make a journalist out of him" (244). Moreover, in spite of facing severe social and cultural censorship for abandoning her family and having an affair with Daru, Mumtaz refuses to leave Lahore: "I thought I would go home to Karachi, but I haven't. Something keeps me here. Zulfiqar Manto, maybe. My parents' complete inability to understand. *A reluctance to run from where I've been, what I was*" (243;

emphasis added). Realising that matrimony and motherhood threaten her very *self*, she takes responsibility for her choices:

> And then I made up my mind. I decided that I couldn't stay in [Ozi's] house any longer, that I needed to abandon my family to save myself….But as much as I tried, I never convinced myself I wasn't hurting my son by leaving him behind. I just knew I had to. And I felt strong enough to live with it. (242)

Being unable to immolate her agency and desire at the altar of motherhood, Mumtaz suffers intense guilt and shame. Her response can be read as a result of the internalisation of a societal (male) gaze which insists on inscribing womanhood in terms of maternity. However, despite their monstrous effect, Mumtaz refuses to let these emotions (and the social censorship implicit in them) dictate her life-choices. Instead, she rejects the reductive and essentialist circumscription of her corporeality and walks away. Hamid uses Mumtaz' dis-eased experience of motherhood to challenge the prioritisation of domesticity and maternity as fulfilling, normative and prescriptive models for women. Her experience also counters national narratives which seek legitimacy and sanctity through the maternal body. If Ozi's return to Pakistan drives him towards embracing tradition, for Mumtaz the return to Lahore engenders a rediscovery of self through writing. This enables her to move forward by (re)claiming a home for herself, literally as well as figuratively. Her own "monstrosity" (induced by the shame and guilt of abandoning her child) nonetheless encourages and enables her to form empathic relationships with other "monsters": those who, labelled as others by the nation, are pushed to the margins of society as deviants because they transgress societal boundaries or challenge the carefully maintained homogeneity of the nation.

1.3.3 Mumtaz as the Individual: Shame, Guilt, Trauma and Desire

Scholars point to the gendered nature of shame. In Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*, Omar Khayyam Shakil, having never experienced this emotion, has its taxonomy explained by his mothers: "'[y]our face gets hot … but your heart starts shivering.' 'It makes women feel like to cry and die ... but men, it makes them go wild'" (34). In *Cracking India*, Bapsi Sidhwa draws out the gendered aspects of this emotion by portraying its differing effects on men and women. The displaced, raped women helped by Lenny's mother only howl and cry; unable to verbalise their trauma-induced shame, they lose the capacity for language. The Ayah suffers from the same fate. She does not utter a single word in the novel after being abducted by the Ice Candy Man. Contrastingly, the rape and murder of "their" women galvanises Muslim, Hindu and Sikh men to actively and vocally seek retribution by violating women from religious groups other than their own.[79]

Moth Smoke suggests the ways in which shame and guilt are used by male actors to manipulate and control women. Ozi uses guilt to manipulate Mumtaz to maintain her pregnancy and then, when she wants to return to full-time employment, he shames her into staying at home with their son. Daru tries to prey upon the guilt and shame Mumtaz feels for not being a good wife and mother in an attempt to permanently draw her away from Ozi. More importantly, the socio-cultural tradition which prescribes matrimony as the highest achievement and resource for fulfilment for women makes Mumtaz feel ashamed of *herself* for not being able to love her son. Nonetheless, shame and guilt are also portrayed as potentially emancipatory. It is the experience of these emotions that ultimately forces Mumtaz to consider her own *identity* and the psychological trauma of trying to "hide" one's

[79] In *Maps*, Aslam addresses the other half of, what is known as, the shame-honour complex. He highlights how an obsession with maintaining honour (or avoiding shame conversely) can have a devastating impact on female bodies.

self from one's (socially-constructed) "self": she realises, "I'd never been ashamed of anything I'd done in my life. But this wasn't something I'd done. *This was me*. *Not an act but an identity*. I disappointed me, shamed me. So I hid my secret as well as I could. And to do that, I had to hide it from myself" (154; emphasis added). The fissures between self and "self" are hugely debilitating and in the attempt to feel whole again she owns the "monstrosity" of her identity. She describes her slow process of metamorphosis in her testimony, articulating the realisation that "a crack down my middle was splitting open, and I couldn't be just the good wife and mother anymore" (157). She says that she began writing under a pseudonym filled with the desire to "create a life" for herself (157). This act of self-creation, via writing, is recuperative and redemptive: "But as soon as I began, wings that had been growing for years stretched and pushed and I found myself flying. I was home again" (157). The new "home" she embraces is not the one scripted by masculine notions of nation. Her writing allows her to connect with other marginalised bodies and monstrosities, some labelled as such because they transgress the limits set by society, while for others the monstrosity attributed to them is the product of heinous acts like the repeated rape of a young girl (Dilaram) or the infliction of domestic violence (Mumtaz' mother).

Mumtaz' self-fissuring trauma becomes a positive generative force, unlike the trauma experienced by the two main male protagonists as a result of "their" woman's deviance and other life-events. In an interesting reworking of the myth of the phoenix narrated through the voice of Mumtaz early in the novel, Hamid deconstructs the image of "fire" (a figure for trauma, with all its connotations of moth-burning desire and nuclear war) in the myth of the Phoenix rising from the ashes: was it "purificatory, a redemptive, rejuvenating blaze that … allowed the creature's essence to emerge stronger than it was before in a new, young body"

or “a manifestation of entropy, slowly sapping the life-energy of the phoenix over eons”? (31) Mumtaz recalls her father asking her whether

> I thought the fire in our lives, the traumas, increased our fulfilment by setting up contrasts that illuminated more clearly our everyday joys; or [whether] I viewed them instead as tests that made us stronger by teaching us to endure; or [whether] they simply amplified what we already were, in the end making the strong stronger, the weak weaker, and the dangerous deadly? (31-2)

Mumtaz’ traumatic realisation of her “monstrosity” does not encourage her to value “everyday joys” or teach her to “endure.” Instead it “amplifie[s] what [she] already [is],” albeit what she *is,* in her perception and that of others, is very different. Her trauma results in the expression of self that is “not an act but a [new] identity,” to reiterate words quoted above. The traumas of Ozi and Daru are not redemptive, however. The traumatic death of Daru’s mother (caused by a randomly fired gun) becomes a permanent source of psychological terror for him as he repeatedly has nightmares about a bloody sky blanketed by falling bullets. Readers learn, through Mumtaz, that Ozi was molested as a child and, while living in Pakistan, he is continuously chided by a domineering mother who checks and corrects everything from his posture to his receding hairline. But these traumas do not encourage self-reflexivity on the part of either man. They reinforce *entropy*, a refusal or inability to change, “in the end making the strong stronger, the weak weaker, and the dangerous deadly” (32). Such potentially deadly entropy, Hamid seems to suggest, is also characteristic of the (masculine) nation the two men represent within the allegorical schema of the novel.

Mumtaz' corporeality, in the form of her physical attributes and sexuality, is emphasised from the start. She is brought to life by the recollections of Ozi and Daru who, for instance, fixate on the cadence of her voice: "Hoarse voice, from intimacy's border with asthma: parched beaches, dust whipped by the wind. Very sexy …" (12); "It has the soul of a whisper, meant only for the person she's speaking to, even when she isn't speaking softly" (29). Readers are given a vivid picture of her physique, first through the eyes of Dilaram who pronounces, "[a] nice face. And good hips. But your breasts aren't generous … Perhaps it's because you have broad shoulders that they seem small" (49). However, she is portrayed as more than an object of male desire or a reproductive body. For instance, later in novel Daru describes the athleticism of her body when teaching her to box: "Her movements are fluid, efficient, her attention focused on me when I'm explaining and on her own body when she's moving…. She throws her punches at a slow, measured pace…. She keeps hitting it, completely intent on the bag, and my surprise at her strength gives way to a new surprise at her endurance"(117) . She is depicted as a strong desiring woman whose sexual drive is stronger than her husband's. Unlike the traditional image of a (sexually) passive (South Asian) woman, she actively pursues and commands her sexual relationships. When discussing her affair with Daru, Mumtaz frankly speaks of her desires and fulfilment: "It was fantastic. We had a delicious courtship, slow and exquisite … Sex was a revelation: being touched by another man, declaring my independence from the united state of marriage, remembering myself by being felt for the first time" (158). (Hamid's choice of words here, "united state," is surely intentional.) In Daru's account of the first time he and Mumtaz have intercourse, he describes how Mumtaz takes the initiative:

> I want to kiss you, she tells me….

> Her fingers curl through mine and I close my fist, holding them there. Our eyes meet and I look away, but she leans forward … She kisses me….She takes a condom out of her handbag, one hand stroking my throat….She takes me and keeps me….Afterwards, when she leaves me lying there, I smell the moth dust mixed in with her sweat and my sweat on my body. (145-6)

Such representations undermine dominant patriarchal and oriental discourses which construct South Asian women, and their sexuality, in passive terms. The emphasis on Mumtaz' desire also deconstructs the national and cultural discourses which construe a woman's body primarily in maternal terms and then use this maternity to render its object asexual and devoid of desire.

1.4 Hamid's Vision and its Challenges

The repositioning of Mumtaz at the centre of *Moth Smoke's* political critique of contemporary Pakistan is not entirely unproblematic. In spite of its many emancipatory and gender progressive articulations, there are aspects of the novel's allegorical (re)visionings that demand consideration. Certainly, Mumtaz successfully leaves the reductive and essentialist construction of her subjectivity, rejecting socially-affirmed attempts to control and subjugate her and scandalously "abandon[s] [her] family to save [her]self" (242). This gender-progressive character arc is, however, couched in problematic terms. As a monster, she is pushed to the margins of the dominant society. The novel remains mute about the extent to which this attempt to "extricate herself [entails] discarding the material and social means that allow her agency" (Costin 40). Hamid's narrative offers no clear indication that Mumtaz' chosen exile has any effective purchase, or whether the marginal voice she elects

to articulate will achieve any political gain. Moreover, it is problematic that she assumes a masculine persona to voice her challenging opinions. While she forgoes her identity of a wife and mother, her attempts at appropriating power (as a writer) cannot escape a masculine visage.

In addition, the depiction of motherhood remains problematic in the novel. I suggest that Hamid's text betrays an underlying current of anxiety when it concerns itself with motherhood. Maternity and maternal figures predominantly constitute dangerous, life-threatening (as opposed to life-affirming), dis-eased and, importantly, emasculating forces. For instance, during her final trimester Mumtaz claims to have been hurt by childbirth in a way that goes beyond the physical labour of carrying and birthing a child (158).The random death of Daru's mother causes him to have recurring nightmares of the sky streaked with bullets which fill him with a sense of impending doom and crisis. The text also hints at the probability of an illicit relationship between Daru's mother and Ozi's father, Khurram, which results in resentment in Daru from a young age. Similarly, Ozi's controlling domineering mother infantilises him, turning him into a nervous "school boy" (156), which in turn causes Ozi to slowly lose respect in the eyes of Mumtaz. Even in portrayals of the animal world, negative images of maternity abound, for example in the image of a bitch lying on the side of the road whose last ounces of life are drained by the puppies feeding off her body. On one hand Hamid's novel portrays a woman's chosen rejection of a prescriptive maternal identity as having the potential to reinvigorate and change the "Phoenix tale" of nationhood. Simultaneously, however, the novel suggests that the lack of a nurturing and empathetic "feminine" force exacerbates "fratricidal" social and political destructiveness.

1.5 Conclusion

Despite critical and popular celebrations of globalism and transnationality in the last decades of the twentieth century, the appeal and sway of nationalism has risen as a dominant political force in the past two decades (consider Donald Trump's restriction on immigration, his "wall, and "Brexit"). South Asia is no exception. The rise of the right-wing BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in India, and the State's continuous confrontation with an increasingly powerful and militant right-wing Islamist group in Pakistan, attest to the persistence of nationalism as both a rhetorical and political force. Whether it is the Nation-State trying to mark its contours, ground its ideological apparatus, and construct an affective appeal for its subjects, or militant/insurgent/resistant groups resisting a hegemonic state, "contemporary meanings of 'the nation' are being [and continue to be] fought on the terrain of women's bodies and life circumstances" (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault 1). Hamid's novel was written and published before the watershed moment that arguably re-galvanised nationalism worldwide: September 11 2001. Nonetheless it remains an important investigation of the ways in which nationhood is constructed in gendered narratives.

Hamid gives voice to the almost invisible Mumtaz of history through the corporeality and sexuality of his contemporary Mumtaz. Unlike the wife who bore fourteen children to Shah Jahan and died in childbirth, statically memorialised in what is at once a mausoleum and a celebration of the emperor's wealth and power, Hamid's Mumtaz rejects domesticity—both in terms of wifehood and maternity—and so, in terms of the novel's extended allegory, refuses to be reduced to an object in the masculine narratives of the Nation-State. Taking the mantle of Zulfiqar Manto, Mumtaz appropriates the traditional source of masculine

authority, the pen along with its power to name, to inscribe truth aka history, for herself. The her-story she writes is of monsters like her who challenge the myth of homogenised nationhood though the portrayal of alternative, marginalised subjectivities. Perhaps idealistically, it is suggested that such (re)writing opens up the possibility of redefining nationhood in different, and ideally, more inclusive terms.

Despite inviting this progressive interpretation, Hamid's (perhaps over-determined) allegory reveals some significant limitations. When Mumtaz rejects her role as wife and mother, she is pushed to the margins of society. Her emancipation comes only at the cost of exile, in the process of which she becomes a monster in the terms of history's narrative. The narrative suggests no possibility that Mumtaz could be a wife *and* a professional, a mother *and* a self-expressing writer; these roles are exclusive. *Moth Smoke* thus remains haunted by the spectre of masculine anxiety: its ostensible vision of female emancipation is not only complex but ultimately compromised. Perhaps most tellingly, while Mumtaz "speaks" in the novel (in her trial testimony), readers are offered no glimpse into Mumtaz' exposé of the "real events" behind the multiple voices heard at the trial. These remain hidden, countersigned by a male pseudonym, Zulfiqar Manto, and ultimately by the authoritative voice of Mohsin Hamid.

Chapter Two: Kamila Shamsie's Alternate Cartographies of History (Memory) and Desire

> Shamsie is always a writer of political fiction (although the kind of narrative she tells and the ways of telling are unlike those of most political novelists) and of desire (King "Kamila" 149).

> I'd certainly call myself a feminist …. Pakistan contains some of the most radical feminists in the world, because reacting to misogynism as hideous as that which can be found there creates a powerful opposite trajectory. Yet there's also heterogeneity: there are secular feminists like me, and thinkers who want to produce valuable feminist reinterpretations of the Qur'an (K. Shamsie "British" 221).

These extracts form an entry point for my critical foray into Shamsie's novel *Broken Verses*. I propose that this novel offers an alternate (re)imagining of Pakistan which (re)inscribes the nation—its politics, religion, history and (gendered) subjects—in terms of a genealogy of activism, advocacy and resistance. It is a feminist (re)imagining of a key historical moment in Pakistan's history—the 1980s era of General Zia-ul-Haq. Shamsie's novel challenges, and decentres, the male gaze of the dominant official (national) and literary narratives in which General Zia and his politics are positioned as the over-arching signifier and point of focalisation for remembering and engaging with the polemics of that era. Through the character of Samina, Shamsie foregrounds the (historic) female face of the political resistance which publically disputed and fought against General Zia's misogynist policies and attempts (in particular his instrumentalisation of religion) to police and curb the civic freedom of Pakistani women. This shift in narrative focus from State-mounted and sanctioned forms of oppression and violence to defiance and diversity allows the novel to

emerge as a (feminist) rewriting of dominant national and international discourse(s) about Pakistan.

I contest that by emphasising this history of resistance (and its legacy) from within, Shamsie issues a two-pronged challenge that moves beyond an apologetic, reactionary nationalism (Pakistani and/or Muslimness) on one hand, and the politico-exoticism of neo-Orientalism on the other. Shamsie undermines popular discourses that posit Pakistan as a fundamentalist, failed State. In particular, *Broken Verses* refuses to cast an extremist and misogynist (version of) Islam as the only true (or even the dominant) signification of the everyday practised religion in Pakistan. As part of the feminist agenda of resistance, the religion that appears in the novel is (re)claimed by its female practitioners. Concurrently, it is also diversified: the narrow (clerical) interpretations of religion are challenged by practices in which faith functions as private and personal or cultural and populist.

Secondly, Shamsie's novel complicates, and interrogates, the stereotypes of Pakistani-Muslim women as silenced, (sexually) repressed, helpless victims of a patriarchal society and/or a misogynist religion, Islam. It deconstructs the neo-Orientalist rescue narratives built around the body of this supposedly powerless and oppressed Pakistan-Muslim woman. I purport that as Shamsie (re)inscribes politics, history and religion by centralising the female body, she also avoids enacting a violent erasure and/or displacement of her own by asserting the corporeality of this body in terms of desire and loss. The feminist schema of *Broken Verses* also expands upon and diversifies the notional understanding of engagement, emancipation and resistance, especially as codified in liberal discourse(s) in relation to female bodies. I propose that the novel refuses to uphold the hierarchal divide that privileges public over private, nation over home, and domesticity/motherhood over (sexual)

desire. In *Broken Verses* the personal is always political; home is intrinsically bound with nation, which in turn is tied to global geo-politics. Politically engaged, domesticated and desiring—all appear as equally valid expressions of womanhood. For women, the 'choice' of staying at home and looking after the family is posited to be as valuable a form of agency and commitment as the decision to step out in the streets and actively protest against hegemonic structures of power.

I begin my analysis by briefly situating Shamsie as a writer, particularly in the context of her matrilineal heritage. This contextualisation suggests the significant influences that helped shape Shamsie as a writer and that inform the feminist praxis of her literary oeuvre. Next, I offer an overview of the novel in terms of its structure, characterisation and thematic focus. I then move the discussion to a close-reading of the text in terms of its engagement and representation of the feminist political struggle against the tyrannical regime of General Zia. This is followed by an exploration of how her novel deconstructs neo-Imperial discourses through its engagement with religion and the female body. I highlight that the subversive agenda of Shamsie's novel, articulated most powerfully through the presence of strong and agentive female characters, rewrites the neo-Orientalist discourses of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism. I argue that Shamsie refuses to accept the dismissive, cultural stereotypes that construct the female body as a passive recipient of male desire, and that advocate for female desire to be sublimated once a woman becomes a mother. Even more importantly, her novel detaches sexuality and desire from its dominant heteronormative moorings to generate a narrative that (re)defines Pakistan (its history and present) in terms of diversity and multiplicity.

2.1 “A Life Centred Around Writing”

> [W]hile I grew up in the harsh world of a misogynist military government in 1980s Pakistan - where women's freedom was severely threatened - my familial legacy enabled me to imagine, without pressure or expectation, a life centred around writing. (K. Shamsie "Long" n.p.)

Shamsie attributes her choice to write political fiction and the shaping of her consciousness as a writer to the socio-political ethos of her age and her lineage. She claims that she “always wanted to be a writer” and sees the vocation of writing as “an inextricable part” of her identity and life (Brown n.p.). In a career spanning over 19 years, she has authored seven award-winning and critically acclaimed novels (several of which have been translated into multiple languages), and a collection of essays titled *Offence: A Muslim Case* (2009). As a reviewer and vocal cultural commentator (like Mohsin Hamid), she regularly contributes articles on political, cultural, social and literary topics. Her non-fictional pieces appear in newspapers, and journals like *The Guardian, Dawn, The New York Times*, *New Statesman, Times Literary Supplement, Guernica, The Annual of Urdu Studies*, and *Index on Censorship*. She has been a former trustee of English PEN and Free Word. Following the publication of her second novel, *Salt and Saffron* (2000), Shamsie was named one of Orange’s 21 writers for the 21st century (Mader 5). In 2013, she was chosen as part of *Granta*’s Best of Young British Novelists (Chambers *Britain* 163) and *The Daily Telegraph* listed her as “One of Britain’s 20 best novelists under 40” in 2010. Shamsie has garnered widespread recognition and praise from her fellow writers and critics for “the breadth of her imagination”, her dedication “to investigate history” in a relentless pursuit of truth, and her “commitment to using fiction as a way to tell that truth” (Freeman "Kamila" n.p.).

Born into an “elite muhajir family” (Chambers *British 207*) with ties to Delhi and, South Asia’s great cultural centre, Luknow, Shamsie is a third generation female writer. She notes that her heritage, literary and otherwise, influenced the shaping of her sensibilities as a writer and an individual. She grew up listening to the steady rhythm of her mother’s type-writer in a household where her grandfather (who read Greek till his last days) introduced her to the concept of onomatopoeia at the age of three (M. Shamsie "Sunlight" 138). According to Shamsie, writing was so normative and intrinsically bound to the everyday routine of her family life that there was a time when she, as a child, did not see it as a matter of distinction ("Long" n.p.). It is therefore not surprising that at the age of nine Shamsie declared that she wanted to be a writer and co-wrote her first novel with her best friend when she was eleven years old.

The women in her family, from her great-grandmother, her great-aunts (Tazeen, Attia Hosian and Hamida) to her mother, were strong, independent and agentive role models. The influence of these women can be seen in the feminist sprit that permeates her literary oeuvre. Shamsie writes that the women of her family were “all fiery” individuals who as “writers, politicians, [and] activists” ("Long" n.p.) challenged the traditional, domesticated and essentialist definition(s) of womanhood prescribed for them by a predominantly patriarchal South Asian society. Writing about the non-conformist, inspirational women of her family, she refers to her great grandmother, Inam Fatima (aka Inam Habibullah). She was a reformist and a politician who became a member of the provincial assembly in 1937 and, despite opposition from men, actively championed the cause of women’s participation in politics. She discarded purdah (unusual for her times), helped to found the women’s sub-committee of the All India Muslim League in 1938, and was elected its first president.

While her great grand-mother made her presence felt in the male-dominated arena of politics, other female members of Shamsie's family appropriated the power of the written word. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), a novel by her great-aunt Attia Hosian was the inspiration behind Shamsie's book *Salt and Saffron*: a loving homage from a niece to her great-aunt. The novels, though different in style, voice and subject treatment (the aftermath of 1947 Partition), nonetheless share a subversive agenda which centralises gender politics and challenges patriarchy by (amongst other things) employing an "intelligent, questioning young woman in search of self-empowerment as narrator" (M. Shamsie "Sunlight" 136).[80] Similarly, Shamsie's mother, Muneeza Shamsie, is well-known in literary and critical circles as a book reviewer, feature writer and critic. She is the editor of three ground-breaking literary anthologies on PAW and has recently published a book on the history and development of Pakistani Anglophone literature.[81] Her anthology *And the World Changed* is the only collection of its kind, featuring original Anglophone fiction by Pakistani women.[82]

Shamsie believes that it was significant for her "to grow up in a family where the written word mattered so deeply" because it allowed her, in spite of prevalent patronising patriarchal (and materialist) attitudes, to "imagine, without pressure or expectation, a life created around writing" ("Long" n.p.). Growing up in a household in which normative womanhood meant politically aware, professionally active and literate women, inculcated in

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[80] Hosain also took an unconventional path in her personal life, choosing to marry for love and settling in England. Love marriages were unusual for women of her time.

[81] Her works include *A Dragonfly in the Sun* (1997), *Leaving Home, Towards a New Millennium* (2001) along with *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women* (2005), and *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2017).

[82] Other members of Shamsie's family (both male and female) also wrote. Jahanara Habibullah, Shamsie's grandmother, was 84 when her memoir about growing up in the State of Rampur (pre-partition India) was published by Oxford University Press (Karachi). Her great-aunt Tazeen published a book on women's rights in Pakistan, and her sister is a writer of children's books. The role of privilege in creating space for these agentive and independent femininities to emerge is notable. Shamsie's family enjoyed a distinct advantage in terms of their class and its concomitant access to (almost global) cultural and monetary capital. They came from a privileged background where it was a common practice for (initially) men and women to be educated abroad.

Shamsie a strong feminist consciousness which continues to inform her fictional and non-fictional writings:

> Carrying on the tradition set by the women writers in her family many decades ago, feminism remains central to Shamsie's writing as well. Her fictional women—Aliya, Mariam, Raheen, Aasmaani, Samina … Hiroko [Isma and Aneeka]—are all involved in a struggle for freedom, be it personal or political, individual or collective. (G. K. Khan "Narrating" 38-9)

2.2 Writing Alternate Realties: Politics and Histories, (Queer) Sexualities and Religion

> We live as the consequence of the histories that happened, not the ones that might have been (K. Shamsie qtd. in Bhattacharji 394-5).

Commenting on fiction's potential to act as a "place of truth" (K. Shamsie "More"), Salman Rushdie observes:

> [D]escription itself is a political act….redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized (*Imaginary* 14).

The feminist praxis of *Broken Verse* highlights that Shamsie, like Rushdie, embraces writing as "a deliberate political act", a means of redressing and "redescribing reality" (Mader 6) through an active uncovering of repressed memories, forgotten histories and silenced voices. I submit that fiction, in Shamsie's case, is a means of confronting "dangerous

attitudes" regarding nationhood, ethnicity, gender, religion, caste and/or class (Ellappan and Lawrence 6). Shamsie's stance, however, differs from a New Atheism inspired Rushdian valorisation of art and literature (which in itself can, potentially, become hegemonic) in many ways.[83] Most importantly in this context, the fictional worlds and characters she creates "remained grounded … by an inherited, predominantly matrilineal appreciation" of how 'the written word mattered so deeply' in subcontinental colonial contexts, and continues to matter in postcolonial Pakistan's uneasy, gendered, national and neo-colonial environments" (Clements *Writing* 124).[84]

For Shamsie, the novel is an influential "place [to perform] politics … without being dogmatic" (Hanman n.p.). All of Shamsie's novels, from *In the City by the Sea* (1998) to the latest *Home Fire*, are narrative attempts to find potential answers to the simple yet momentous question of our times: *"[h]ow did it come to this"* (K. Shamsie *Burnt* 1). She consistently explores history and politics in her novels with the sensibility of a Homeric cartographer, locating the fissures and fault-lines which cause violent ruptures in national and transnational contexts. The narrative worlds of her novels are multi-layered tapestries in which the personal/individual/domestic are superimposed over the historical/political/global. These individual stories of love, loss and desire are, in turn, used to chart, explore and understand "broader, recognizable, social, political and historical contexts" (King "Dangerous" 114). As a story-teller, Shamsie is driven by the urge to reveal to her readers "the hidden landscapes along history's major pathways" (Viswanathan n.p.). The stories she tells subvert the otherwise neatly patched-up, linear and sanitised versions of official history. Within these narratives the memory of the histories and silences that

[83] Likewise, Aslam's rather romanticised worldview in which the artist takes the place of present day prophets, soothsayers and saviours. See chapter three for details.
[84] See also M. Shamsie ("Discovering").

Shamsie excavates is a powerful reminder and deterrent "combat[ing] the amnesia that feeds toxic political impulses" (Long n.p.).[85] Hers are not exclusionary histories: rather they cross the thresholds of class, religion, ethnicity, culture and language, emphasising multiplicity, hybridity and syncretism (instead of difference) as integral parts of identity and experience. Her novels demonstrate that "historical experience" can function as an "equalizing force" (Cilano *Contemporary 1*). In this way, "literary narratives" act as "an imaginative alternative to dominant forms of identification" within the "broader field of representation" (Cilano *Contemporary 1*).

The landscapes of her novel are liminal spaces—existing somewhere between memory and reality, past and present, emotion and experience—in which "both history and geography coalesce" (Jain 9) by virtue of the imprints they carry of repressed histories (both national and particular), buried actions, and forgotten individuals. As disruptive political and cultural forces impinge on a character's present, s/he traverses the past in order to find solutions or avoid loss in the present. The stories that emerge function as narrative maps which offer emotive (romantic but not sentimental) and, more importantly, *alternate* routes to the political, cultural and historical milieu that forms the backdrop to her novels.

Most of Shamsie's novels are narrated by and focalised through a female protagonist. The exceptions are *In the City by the Sea* which employs a pre-pubescent young boy Hasan, and *A*

[85] For instance, *Kartography* (2002) confronts the black-hole in national memory (history) on the topic of the ethnic and linguistic fissures that resulted in the 1971 civil war. It comments on the "genocidal repression of Bengalis in East Pakistan", highlighting the gendered nature of the conflict (Herbert 161). *A God in Every Stone* (2014) traces the forgotten history of "Red Shirts", a non-violent, anti-Imperial movement led by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan during the 1930s in Peshawar. It protests the exclusionary politics of (Pakistan's) nationalism which denies this struggle, in particular, the massacre at *Qissa Khwani Bazar* in Peshawar's (and the country's) official history because Gaffar Khan was against Partition (King "Dangerous" 115; Hanman n.p.). *Burnt Shadows* challenges the positioning of 9/11 as the "ground zero of history" (K. Shamsie "Legacy" 158) by tracing the roots of terrorism back to the American-Pakistan led coalition against Russia in Afghanistan during the 1980s. *Home Fire* complicates the simplistic understanding of home-grown terrorism by interlinking the allure of organisations like ISIS with the larger and complex issues of home, belonging and citizenship.

God in Every Stone. Even in these two novels women still occupy a significant space.[86] The women in Shamsie's novels are not stereotypical exotic, cloistered and/or voiceless victims of oppression; they are strong, increasingly complex and independent individuals. As Shamsie's novels show us a "society where arranged marriages and puritanical distaste of sexual imagery are the norm", she also populates her fictional worlds with female characters (mostly belonging to an elite cosmopolitan class) who have "sexual desires and sexual experience[s]"; they take lovers and "if married lead independent lives" (King "Kamila" 149). Shamsie's female characters are predominantly educated women, with dreams and aspirations. Although their desires and efforts might be frustrated by patriarchal forces, Shamsie does not construct these coercive and authoritarian power structures as an exclusive feature of Pakistani society. Instead, she sees patriarchy as an oppressive force, subjugating women in varying degrees and forms around the world: "[w]herever in the world you go, you're living in the world's oldest and most pervasive empire, which is the empire of patriarchy. I don't know a place I've been to where it doesn't exist" (K. Shamsie qtd. in Hanman n.p.). Shamsie writes with the awareness that the categories of *Pakistani Woman* or *Pakistani-Muslim Woman* are highly volatile, contested and unstable constructs. Additionally, the corporeality and materiality of their lives and experiences often tends to disappear as they are turned into over-determined signifiers by (competing) discourses of religion, nationalism, modernity, tradition, local and global forms of feminism(s).[87] Shamsie is careful to inscribe the female bodies in her fiction in terms of diversity of experience (of their bodies and society), belief-systems, attitudes and sexual orientation. Furthermore,

[86] See Mader's discussion of the character of the widow in Shamsie's first novel as an example of how a narrative can allow subaltern voices and stories to speak without appropriating them (3).
[87] As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this context the bodies of the Muslim-Pakistani women are read as (Butler's) political signifier, which do not "describ[e] pre-given constituencies, but are rather empty signs which come to bear phantasmatic investments" (Gedalof 104).

Shamsie's novels explore commonalties across cultures, classes, countries and ethnicities. These transnational and cross-cultural linkages offer alternate means of identification for her female characters, enabling them to forge syncretic collective identities and avoid overly-simplistic categorisations.

Broken Verses exemplifies this approach. Shamsie's fourth novel has been described as a thematically dense (S. Hasan 197), though often critically neglected, rendition of "Pakistan's short but highly charged [political] history" (Reporter n.p.). As with her other novels, *Broken Verses* is composed of interconnected plotlines—individual stories of loss and love unfolding against Pakistan's turbulent political past and present. Shamsie uses these individuals and their stories to "move through history" (K. Shamsie "British" 213) in order to show "how layers of history fall one upon the other to create a texture which surrounds and perhaps defines us despite ourselves"(Hartland n.p.). Set in 1990s Karachi, *Broken Verses* is a tale of inter-generational conflict, in which the character Aasmaani—a rather sceptical and disillusioned woman—acts as the point of focalisation and narrative voice in the novel's main plot. Aasmaani is the 31-year-old daughter of a Pakistani feminist and political activist, Samina Akram—the "Incandescent. Aflame" (298) and embodiment of grazia (33). Aasmaani is often portrayed as an unreliable narrator, by virtue of her subjective recollections of the past. The story of Samina and her beloved the Poet, aka Ashiq, forms the sub-plot of the novel. Positioning these two characters as the "moral compass" (Ranasinha "Resistance" 203) of the narrative, Shamsie incorporates the history of political struggle and resistance amassed against Gen Zia's discriminatory politics during the 1980s. The novel posits this era as one of Pakistan's most significant periods in political history, the violent repercussions of which still haunt the nation. Using the characters of Samina and the Poet as the point of

focalisation in the novel's sub-plot, *Broken Verses* narrates the story of a nation held hostage by the violent politics of General Zia as he shamelessly appropriates Islam to acquire and maintain political power. His policies, national and international, inevitably divided and morphed the socio-political fabric of the country, leaving behind a bloodied history of sectarian, ethnic, religious and sexualised violence as his legacy. The focus of Shamsie's narration is not solely on enumerating a history of the (sexualised) victimisation and/or persecutionary politics of that era. Instead, through the characters of Aasmaani's surrogate father-figure the Poet and Samina, Shamsie symbolically documents the two significant forms of Pakistani political resistance to General Zia's politics—the pen (poetry) and corporeal agitation and activism respectively.

The anti-authoritarian activities of the Poet and Samina subject them (especially the Poet) to various forms of intimidation and harassment: Samina is beaten in rallies; the Poet is repeatedly imprisoned, forced into exile to save his life and is eventually tortured to death in (what is suspected to be) an extra-judicial murder. Samina goes missing two years after the brutal murder of the Poet—the man she loved deeply and unconventionally. The death of the Poet had pushed Samina towards depression and suicide. Aasmaani is shown to be in denial regarding the nature of her mother's death and, haunted by her disappearance, continues to look for answers. Soon after Aasmaani accepts a job as a researcher at STD, a TV studio, she starts receiving cryptic letters, written in a code which her mother and the Poet developed to communicate with each other. The letters lead Aasmaani to believe that the Poet is alive and in fact has been secretly imprisoned and tortured by nameless political forces in some twisted political conspiracy. In response, Aasmaani begins a fervent search,

hoping for clues about the disappearance of the Poet, believing that a validation of his life would cause her mother to resurface.

The Poet's letters constitute a mystery or a secret located at the heart of the novel that drives the plot. Like her first three novels, in *Broken Verses*, this secret or "memor[y] of the past, that refuse[s] to be buried, memor[y] that ha[s] a living presence and a foot in the future" (Jain 11) must be unearthed and born witness to in order to resolve present problems and complete the protagonists' journeys of *becoming* or self-discovery. The secrets which are built into the fabric of Shamsie's narratives are not "scandals involving specific people but the black hole of silence and forgetfulness into which public memory disappears" (Bhattacharji 394).

In *Broken Verses*, Aasmaani's quest to uncover the reality (and the meanings) of the Poet's letters acts as a plot-device to examine the politics of General Zia's period and the feminist movement against his dictatorship. Aasmaani's engagement with the achievement of her mother as a political activist allows critical examination of the legacy of the (secular) feminist movement in Pakistan, in particular the merit of fighting against despotism and tyranny given Pakistan's continuous battle to uphold democracy and establish the will of the State and rule of law. When analysed in this context, Aasmaani's search for truth can be read as "a quest for alternate stories to officially sanctioned, sanitized history[ies]" (Bhattacharji 394). Moreover, Shamsie's use of the 1980s as a historical backdrop allows her to construct a (political) critique which works nationally and globally. General Zia's militarisation of Islam in the form of (an anti-Soviet, pro-US) *Jihad*, is presented as the route that led to the creation and proliferation of extremist groups like Al-Qaeda, culminating in

the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror.[88] As the novel traverses the pages of history, it delivers scathing criticism of the culpability of both Pakistan and the US in creating the current culture of suicide bombings. It is important to note that although Shamsie uses characters as vehicles to build broader political and historical commentaries, she does not reduce them to allegorical vehicles: "[t]he characters come first for me" she notes, "I want to explore how history impacts on their lives, rather than using them as a vehicle to talk about history" (K. Shamsie "British" 213).

The letters Aasmaani receives are found to be a hoax created by Ed (Mir Adnan Akbar Khan), the son of Shahnaz Saeed—a legendary actor and close friend of Samina. Ed is Aasmaani's boss at STD and later in the novel becomes her love interest. He, like Aasmaani, is haunted by abandonment issues in relation to his mother. The characters are brought together by a similarity of experience in relation to their mothers: both have been left disillusioned and traumatised by the perceived and real absences and unconventionality (read sexuality) of their larger-than-life mothers. Ed hopes that the letters will force Aasmaani to face the reality of her mother's death and that they can both create a redemptive space (Mader 5) in which their mutual love and a new-found understanding of the past can heal their fractured relationship and identities as children and individuals.

One of K. Shamsie's characters succinctly sums up the primary agenda of the political-historical storyline of *Broken Verses*: it is a text that "expand[s] people's notion of what it means to be Pakistani" (297). The text does this by reminding the nation (and its audience)

[88] Importantly, Shamsie does not view 9/11 as *the* defining moment which redefined politics for Pakistan and the world: for her, it was America's invasion of Afghanistan. She claims, "9/11 wasn't the turning point; it was the war on terror. It's important to make that distinction. 9/11 happened and it was horrible … However, the fallout wasn't inevitable, and the turning point was America's invasion of Afghanistan … That's when the war on terror came to Pakistan. In 2002, Pakistan's religious parties became serious players in the government for the first time, and at that moment I thought the world had changed…. the word 'Muslim' has become more contentious, but it's a fallacy to think that before 9/11 it wasn't" ("British" 224).

"of all the components of its character" (335). It calls readers to bear witness to the silences and injustices committed in the name of religion/ethnicity/community/nation and to ensure that tyranny is made to "defend itself in language" (336). Similarly, readers witness the danger(s) inherent in any socio-political and/or legislative project that seeks to circumscribe womanhood by using the categories of religion and nationhood, especially when both are defined by a male gaze.

A key defining structural feature of Shamsie's writing, evident in *Broken Verses*, is the use of twins or mirroring devices. These twins—characters, plotlines, motifs, images—tend to involve parallelism and are often juxtaposed against each other, allowing her to elucidate an idea/character in its heterogeneity or multiplicity.[89] For instance, Shamsie explores the world of Pakistan's national politics by contrasting two eras: the 1980s—a decade of despotic censoring and punitive military rule challenged by an equally vigorous, female-led political activism—and the 1990s, a period of unstable democracies, eroded political legacies and disillusioned successors (Toor *State 159*). Similarly, the opposition to General Zia's incendiary, right-wing politics is presented in the form of a binary: a literary challenge proffered by Pakistan's left-wing intelligentsia (represented by the character of the Poet) and a physical resistance of protests and rallies led from the front by women. The significance of engaging in political activism (though words and actions) as a form of nation building is contrasted against the equally important duty of performing domestic/familial labour on the home front. Likewise, a celebration of communal Islam is contrasted in the novel with a rigid and conservative religiosity. The (male) authority of bearded Maulanas (or clerics) to interpret and represent Islam is challenged by Muslim women or feminists (from

[89] As I will discuss, this structure can, however, by virtue of its inherent binarism, lead to essentialism.

Pakistan and other parts of the Muslim world). Religious conservatism is put into dialogue with the avid secularism of characters like Samina and the Poet.

Pakistani womanhood or femininities, in *Broken Verses,* are portrayed by characters who complicate and/or defy essentialist, simplistic and reductive (neo-Orientalist and neo-Imperial) assumptions of womanhood in contemporary Pakistan. These women complicate the prevalent construction of Pakistani-Muslim women as the "homogeneous 'powerless' group" of Western feminist traditions: they are represented as more than "implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems" (Mohanty "Under" 57). Their portrayal is not exotically exploited in service of "any simple, mobilizable epistemology" (Clements *Writing 124*) for defining Pakistani, third world, postcolonial, and/or women of colour. There are unconventional women like Samina and Shahnaz who challenge traditionally prescribed normative positions of domesticity and a selfless, asexualised motherhood. There are also characters who subscribe more neatly to the relatively traditional model of Pakistani womanhood as family-oriented, heterosexual, loving, and dutiful mothers, daughters and wives, but who are also progressive and independent. Represented through the characters of Beema and Rabia in the novel, these women can be read as Shamsie's perspective on the contemporary Pakistani urban woman's successful negotiation and integration of modernity and traditionalism. The presence of characters like Samina and Shahnaz could be viewed as a "redemptive", "formal-political move" on the part of the author, indicative of a "nostalgic position" generated by the "burden of representation and her awareness of an international audience" (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 254). However, the presence of figures like Beema, Rabia and Aasmaani serves to broaden the field of representation beyond the notion of writing as a representative voice. Moreover, the depiction of these liberal, independent and

progressive women is contrasted in the novel with the lived realities of other Pakistani women who, “living in classical patriarchal society” (S. Ahmad "Multiple" 3), are often victimised by the unholy trinity of religion, patriarchy and economics. The women we meet in Shamsie’s novel are “subordinate, powerful, marginal, central, or otherwise, vis-à-vis particular social and power networks” (Mohanty "Under" 59).

Overall, the polemics of Shamsie’s novel challenge, deconstruct and reconfigure the simplistic and monolithic meanings ascribed to the word *Pakistani*—an identity which in official histories and international discourses is predominantly constructed in exclusionary masculine, heteronormative and religious terms. In the following sections, I analyse Shamsie’s text in terms of its engagement with the 1980s politics of General Zia. This is succeeded by a discussion of Shamsie’s dialogue with the discourses of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism, focusing especially on her construction of womanhood in relation to domesticity/motherhood and the nature of desire.

2.3 The Significance of “Bearing Witness”: Reading the Gendered Politics of Resistance in *Broken Verses*

> We are all General Zia's generation … I was four when he came to power and 14 when he died. He was my childhood, he was the Pakistan I grew up in. So I think for all of us there is a real interest in looking at how we got here. How did the nation get to this point? And we see the large figure of Zia and want to go back and look at those years. (K. Shamsie "Dark" n.p.)

I begin by reiterating that *Broken Verses’* feminist agenda extends to an engagement with the history, achievements and potential future of the feminist movement in Pakistan. In doing so, it re-centres Pakistan’s official national his-tory, headlined by military dictators,

violence and/or references to religious fundamentalism, as *her-story* marked by a strong feminist polemics of political and religious resistance. In this respect the novel uses the 1980s as its reference point and the characters of Samina and the Poet as its focalisers to inscribe a history of political resistance against authoritarian regimes.

The 1980s marks a watershed era in the history of Pakistan as a Nation-State. The ethno-linguistic conflicts, sectarian violence, and political upheavals which plagued Pakistan during the 1970s set the stage for a hostile military take-over by General Zia in 1979. He remained in power until his violent death in a plane crash in August 1988. His almost decade long authoritarian regime "left Pakistani society and the state transformed beyond recognition" (Toor "Political" 131). In order to gain legitimacy, he embarked on a project of Islamisation, the "ideological underpinnings" of which continue to haunt the "sociopolitical trajectories of Pakistan" (Silva "Shameless" 30) at inter/national levels. He institutionalised changes in the country's legal, socio-cultural and political structures which his political and military successors found impossible to undo. The institutionalisation of a narrowly interpreted Islam (a Sunni-Wahabi version) resulted in an increase in violence, especially by non-state forces against political rivals, women and minorities, breeding a culture of vigilantism in the name of implementing religion. For women, in particular, this meant that the authority to regulate and police their lives was no longer restricted to the men of their families (bothers, fathers, sons etc.)—any male member of society (professional, educational, or from their neighbourhood) could now protect and/or enforce morality.[90] Shamsie gestures towards the conditions which led to General Zia's involvement in Pakistan's politics and his wilful appropriation of religion:

[90] See Toor (*State;* "Political"; "How"); and Jamal ("Gender"; "Global").

> … the anti-Bhutto movement pulled religion out from behind its veil of privacy and into the realm of politics as both secular-minded and hard-line religious politicians banded together to campaign against the government. Bhutto tried appeasing the hardliners by introducing Islamic laws, *but the General in the wings took over and decided to show everyone how Islamization was really done*. (91; emphasis added)

This reframing of history is significant for two reasons: it negates the arguments that Pakistan's tenacious relationship with politicised religion started with Zia. It deconstructs the commonly-cited binary between an orthodox-minded General Zia and his predecessors like the secular-socialist Bhutto.[91] Scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot argue that since General Ayub Khan, state machinery has been actively involved in the religious arena. Ayub tried to *statize* (Jaffrelot 14)[92] religion by streamlining and nationalising traditional religious organisations and processes. Bhutto used "Islam is our faith. Democracy is our policy. Socialism is our economy" as a political slogan, employing religion as an ethno-religious marker to mobilise the nation against India. By prefacing General Zia's politicisation of Islam with a reference to Bhutto's compromised politics, Shamsie attributes the rise of the religious right in Pakistan to the general unscrupulous and at times Machiavellian manipulation of Islam by various political and religious organisations:[93]

> … throughout Pakistan's tumultuous political history, political legitimacy has been gained through concessions made by those in power to right wing religious extremists. Confronted with weakening institutions, a constitutional vacuum, the threat of multi-

[91] Shamsie's text here directly engages with Rushdie's novel *Shame* which is premised on this divide (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 134).
[92] J. Malik refers to this process as the attempted "colonialization of Islam" by the State.
[93] Shamsie claims that she wanted to signal the inter/national geopolitics which gave birth to Zia: "in 11 years, Zia-ul-Haq warped the fabric of the nation, but he didn't come out of a vacuum" ("British" 216).

> ethnicism, and a resurgence in regional identities, successive regimes increasingly sought refuge in Islamic symbolism. (Mohamed 206)

Given the historical construction of the female body as a symbol of the nation/community/family and a marker of cultural authenticity, unsurprisingly women bore the brunt of Islamisation. Capitalising on the support of an economically mobile but ideologically conservative middle class' rise to economic and political power (A. Jamal "Gender" 297 ff.),[94] Zia's Islamisation focused on the "moral regulation" (Toor "Moral"; "Political") of female citizens by, firstly, promulgating the discourse of *chadar aur chardewari*.[95] This discourse aimed to remove and/or limit women's free/unsupervised access to public/civic activity by construing womanhood in terms of domesticity. This gendered construction of the female body also meant the privatisation of female sexuality (and topics related to it such as marital rape, sexual health, abortion) and heterosexual marriage became the only appropriate and sanctioned avenue for the expression and exercise of female desire/sexuality. *Broken Verses* foregrounds how General Zia used women as a bargaining chip with the religious right (and/or other conservative forces) to leverage more power for himself by offering them increased control over women's civil and sexual autonomy:

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[94] *Jammat-e-Islami* was the main right-wing religious organisation which supported Zia's polices. Founded by Maulana Maududi before partition, it was marked by religious conservatism, and thrived on political opportunism. Unlike other religious organisations, *Jammat* had always been organised, deriving its power mainly from the urban centres of Karachi and Lahore. Also see Maqsood; Shaheed and Mumtaz ("Islamisation"; *Women*).

[95] *Chadar aur chardewari*, literally meaning the veil and the four walls (of house), is a popular slogan from the 1980s. It encapsulates the metaphoric construction of the Pakistani-Muslim woman as conjured during General Zia's regime. As envisioned by the masculine gaze, this Pakistani woman was to be a modestly dressed, veiled creature, whose life revolved around home and the hearth (four walls). She was an obedient daughter, a dutiful wife and self-sacrificing mother. Interestingly, Pakistani women writers inverted the construction of home as a safe haven for women (as implied by this slogan) and used it in narratives which exposed domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape and other crimes committed against women within the sanctified four walls of the home and the nation-State. One of the most memorable rewritings of this slogan is Fahmida Riaz's poem titled *Chadur aur Diwari* (Veil and the Walls).

> In June that year, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq dismissed the civilian government he had handpicked … [He] announced that henceforth sharia would be the supreme law of the land. This move towards theocracy sent violent tremors down the spine of the women's movement, which knew that Zia's Islam concerned itself primarily with striking down the rights of women and befriending fundamentalists. (138)

For Pakistani women, the most damaging and devastating blow to their rights and freedom were the judicial reforms called *Nizam-e-Islam* (Islamic System) which General Zia introduced as part of his agenda to implement *Shariah* (Islamic Law).[96] In 1979, this *Nizam* or system introduced new punishments in the Pakistani penal code called the Hudood Ordinance for three types of major crimes: theft, z*ina* (extramarital intercourse) and intoxication (from alcohol or drugs). This was followed by changes in the Law of Evidence in 1983 along with suggestions for modification in the Laws of Qisas (retribution/retaliation) and Diayat (blood money), both of which deal with the crime of murder (Weiss "Implication"; Carroll). The *Zina* Ordinance justifiably became the most notorious, critiqued and contested legislation among these laws. Defining z*ina* as "sexual intercourse without being validly married" (S. Khan *Gender* 1) the *Zina* Ordinance treated all forms of sexual activity outside marriage—that is, adultery, fornication, rape (within or outside marriage) and prostitution—as crimes against the State.

This law was critiqued because it failed to provide adequate distinction between consensual and non-consensual sex, resulting in a legal grey area. The law dictated that in order for charges of rape to be upheld, either the rapist must confess the crime or the victim must produce testimony of rape from four pious men. If a rape victim failed to

[96] *Nizam-i-Mustaf*a literally means "System of the Prophet" and *Nizam-i-Islam* means Islamic system. Both refer to the utopian premises of making Pakistan the true Islamic State by restoring society to the golden age of early Islam when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) formed the first Islamic State in Madina.

provide this legal evidence proving coercion, the allegation of rape was considered as an admission of guilt, that is, of indulging in sex outside marriage by the accuser.[97] The *Zina* Ordinance was discriminatory in multiple ways: firstly, it placed the onus of proof on the rape victim, while also diverting attention away from the accuser. As Afiya Shehrbano Zia argues, "[t]he foremost consideration in [*Zina*] cases will be proving or disproving consent, rather than forceful coercion or violation. This has the effect of shifting the focus of all subsequent prosecution from the aggressor to the victim" (*Sex* 17). Similarly, though men could potentially be victims of rape, this law proved to be especially damaging for women as the conditions of conviction (provision of male witnesses and/or confession) made it virtually impossible for women to prove rape. The failure to prove the crime resulted in the double victimisation of the rape victim: without proof of coercion, rape became an admission of having sex outside marriage and was thus punishable, "[t]he 2003 National Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan report stated that 88 percent of female prisoners are serving time for violating the *Zina* Ordinance" (Mohamed 206). The "repercussions of the Ordinance" also proved to be "class-based" as most of the women convicted of these charges were poor, or had no resources to defend themselves. Furthermore, it has been documented that women, whether charged or convicted of *zina*, became susceptible to custodial rape along with other form(s) of torture (S. Khan *Gender*). General Zia claimed that "moral decay was responsible for Pakistan's economic and political problems" (Sharlach 101) which could only be resolved by the "'pure and chaste' Pakistani citizen" produced through the implementation of *Shariah*. The *Zina* Ordinance was flaunted as one such attempt at creating good Muslims. Within this context, the bodies of Muslim Pakistani women conveniently became "the easiest and most visible means for proving …

[97] For detailed discussion see S. Khan (*Transnational;* "Zina"; *Gender;* "Locating"); Weiss ("Implication"; "Women"; *Interpreting*); S. Mohamed; Quraishi; Sharlach; Kennedy; Shaheed (*Gender;* "Contested"; "Cultural"; "Other"); and Imran.

Muslim credentials without … affecting the daily lives of most men" (Shaheed and Mumtaz "Islamisation" 76). With its legal authority to determine what was good (permissible) and bad (immoral), the *Zina* Ordinance turned the (masculine) State into a moral guardian, institutionalising its power and control over the sexual and "erotic autonomy" (Alexander 64) of its female subjects, while effectively "criminalizing their sexuality" (Toor "Political" 131). Furthermore, as the new Ordinance allowed anyone to accuse a woman of adultery, fornication or exhibiting immoral behavior in general, it extended the right of surveillance and control (moral guardianship) to non-familial members. Thus, it was wielded as a tool to exact revenge, discredit claims, discipline willful daughters/wives and, in general, to punish women for their non-compliance.[98]

Inspired by true events and based on real-life iconic people from Pakistan's history, the novel positions the Poet and Samina as the "touchstones of democracy, accountability and justice in the novel" (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 203). I consider Samina as an entry-point for mapping out the roots/routes of the feminist political engagement that forms a vital part of the novel. Samina is central to the narrative structure of the novel in multiple ways. First, her character is used to chart the history of the feminist political movement in Pakistan, demonstrating that "women's activism has always been an integral part of the Pakistani political fabric" (Charania "Feminism" 318). The text highlights indigenous forms of feminist resistance, while also evaluating the potential success, failures and future of the Pakistani feminist movement. Second, staging this activism against the military dictatorship of Zia places the rise of the religious-right in Pakistan in a wider inter/national geopolitical frame. It also challenges the discourse of Muslim exceptionalism by particularising Zia's

[98] See S. Khan (*Transnational; Gender;* "Zina"; "Locating") for discussion of the various instances in which the Hudood or *Zina* Ordinance was intrumentalised by men to oppress and victimise women.

politicisation of Islam. Third, Samina's involvement in the feminist movement deconstructs the homogeneity of the victimisation of Pakistani women by showing that the roots of their oppression lie in a complex web of economics, patriarchal opportunism, feudalism and corrupt military/political regimes. And last, Samina's character challenges the woman-as-nation trope which, through its eulogising and myth-making, divests the female body of the particularities of its corporeal and subjective experiences.

Shamsie's references to the Hudood Ordinance illustrate the unholy alliance between the military, the religious-right and politics and how this interrelationship impinges on the mobility, civic rights, and visibility of Pakistan women. The majority of this historical context is incorporated into the novel via an article which STD, the TV channel where Aasmaani works, wants to publish on its website as part of celebrations for the Poet's 70th birthday. The CEO of the channel asks Aasmaani to check if it represents a factual account of his life. This article can be considered the official, public record of the Poet's life and activism. The reading of this article is continuously punctured, augmented and elaborated on by Aasmaani's own recollection of the Poet and her mother's life. The result is a parallel national her-story of Pakistan which documents the politics of General Zia's oppressive regime and the strong resistance mounted against it (especially by Pakistani women). Readers are told that when the Hudood Ordinance was introduced in 1979, the Poet was "very critical" about it (91). In comparison, when the details of the Ordinance were made public in the newspaper "*something broke free*" in Samina as she read out "loud every detail" (92; emphasis added). Realising the depth of misogyny embedded (especially) in the *Zina* Ordinance made even a strong-willed woman like Samina fearful for the future of

Pakistani women as she looked to Aasmaani and exclaimed, “For the first time, I wish I’d given birth to a son” (92).

Samina’s reaction mirrors the way in which Pakistani women reacted to the passing of the laws at a national level. Instead of producing compliant female subjects or removing them from the public realm, the announcement ironically galvanised a strong women’s movement which placed the issue of women’s rights at the center of national consciousness. The passing of these laws had significant impact for the elite and professional upper middle-class of Pakistan who, until Zia, had enjoyed an insulated and privileged lifestyle. General Zia’s Islamisation, at the expense of secular civic rights, threatened to impinge on the mobility and visibility of Pakistan’s privileged class [99] As Shamsie suggests in the quotation at the opening of this section, the “coming of age” of this class “under the oppressive dictatorship of Zia was a dramatic, wrenching change” (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 133). It, in particular, proved to be a “fertile ground” (133) for the Pakistani Anglophone writers (largely belonging to this class). These writers returned to this time as the historical moment that changed the socio-political trajectory of Pakistan forever.[100] It is therefore no coincidence that one of the strongest voices of resistance to rise against General Zia was that of the Women’s Action Forum (WAF) the “first secular and highly vocal women’s organization” (Charania "Feminism" 318) founded by upper-middle class and professional Pakistanis.[101] Samina documents the resistance mounted by these women: “[i]n the wake of the Hudood Ordinance the women’s movement in Pakistan began

[99] De-secularisation and, ironically, anti-Westernisation were a key part of General Zia’s Islamisation project. For instance, the sale and consumption of liquor by Muslims became highly punishable offence. He shut-down night-clubs and instituted *shalwar-qamiz* as national dress. People were encouraged to actively adopt (and display) religious life-styles and customs.
[100] Zia’s regime often features in the works of Pakistani Anglophone writers. See Aslam’s *Season of Rainbirds*; Shamsie’s *In the City by the Sea;* U. A. Khan’s *The Geometry of God* (2008); and Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. Outside Pakistan, Rushdie’s *Shame* (1983) remains a seminal text on the politics of the age.
[101] Along with WAF, the All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) also challenged the discriminatory policies of General Zia’s regime.

to assert itself, though it wouldn't be until 1981 that it went into high gear with the formation of the Women's Action Forum" (93). WAF's message resonated with Pakistani women and the organisation quickly rose to prominence. Their success is documented in the novel, "[i]t was 1983 and by then the Women's Action Forum … was taking on the military government with an astonishing show of bravery" (94).

The event which primarily galvanised WAF was the rape case of Safia Bibi which is also mentioned in *Broken Verses*. In 1983 Bibi, an 18 year old blind girl, was convicted of *zina* and sentenced to "three years' rigorous imprisonment, fifteen lashes and a fine of 1,000 rupees" (S. Khan *Gender* 4).[102] Her case enraged the country, resulting in widespread national and international protests and eventually the conviction was overturned and Safia Bibi was freed. Her acquittal was a major victory for the Pakistani women's movement (K. Shamsie *Broken* 95). Other major victories for the Pakistani women's movement which are addressed in the novel include emendation to the Law of Evidence and the failure of the Ansari Commission's recommendation to become law (95). Ruvani Ranasinha observes that WAF's agenda of resistance primarily centered on the utilisation of various literary and cultural platforms, like theatrical performances, to raise awareness and mobilise women. APWA instead challenged the State's will through direct action, that is, by organising rallies and protests. According to Ranasinha, Samina represents a fusion of both forms of resistance and activism (*Contemporary* 137).

These historical events are reproduced in the novel in detail. Even before the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance, Samina is involved in "going from city to city, and

[102] She was, in fact, raped multiple times by her landlord and his son, as a result of which she became pregnant. Instead of remaining silent, she decided to launch a case against her assailants, but they were acquitted, as she was unable to provide sufficient evidence to prove coercion. Ironically, her pregnancy was considered by the court as evidence that she had extramarital intercourse, leading to her conviction.

often to smaller towns … and talking to different groups and individuals about the need to politicize women, to bring them together, to do something" (93). When General Zia's regime announces the implementation of a new Law of Evidence she joins a large number of women activists, in the streets of Karachi, to protest (94). According to Anita Weiss, in 1983, when the Law of Evidence was being drafted for implementation, "demonstrations protesting the ordinance broke out in Lahore and Karachi, jointly led by women of varying political and social backgrounds" ("Implication" 102). In February 1983, women, who usually found themselves on opposite sides of the table during political and national debates, marched to Lahore High Court in unification to voice their dissident against the discriminatory new law. In a rare occasion, female members of religious political organisations rallied alongside secular-minded members of WAF. Shamsie's novel gestures towards this significant historical moment using the ruse of an article published by an Egyptian newspaper about Samina's activism. Aasmaani becomes a refractive lens to introduce readers to the details of this protest-rally.

The semiotic content of the article—two photographs showing Samina being attacked by the police—acts as the affective centre in Shamsie's description, reflecting how women continued to rebel and resist, undeterred by both General Zia's ban on political protests and the State's violent crackdown on those who took part in these rallies.[103] The first photograph captures her holding a pole with a torn banner as a female police officer grips it to take it away from her. She is doubled over as a "second policewoman holds a lathi [baton] horizontally. The photographer has caught the moment when the policewoman's

[103] While this discussion might read like a conflation of the factual and fictional, according to Shamsie her inspiration for the character of Samina came from the photographs she saw of Pakistani women subjected to State violence during these protests. In "The Missing Picture", she writer "[m]emory plays tricks, of course, but I could swear that it was in the moment of looking at those images that the character of the activist mother in my novel *Broken Verses* started to form" ("Missing" 11). Samina's fictional photographs are an extremely close recreation of the factual.

arm recoils after striking my mother [Samina] across her midriff with the lathi, and my mother is just beginning to double over, mouth open, eyes closed, face strangely serene" (256). The second picture shows her fallen to the ground after being beaten, surrounded by fellow protesters too afraid to pick her up. She is pinned down "to the ground as though she was an animal" (256) by a long stick wielded by a policeman but her defiance is captured through her symbolic posturing: "she will not be defeated. Although she's on the ground, her head is raised, looking straight at the policemen, and one hand is gripping the long stick, making clear her intention to use it to lever herself onto her feet. In the background, other men walk past, not even looking at her" (256). The original photographs were taken by Azhar Jaffery (a photographer accompanying WAF) who captured this proof of State brutality as female protesters were assaulted by the police. Although strict State censorship made it impossible for these pictures to appear in national news media (and incidentally international media also appeared disinterested), they—along with other photographs—were placed on the walls of the city of Lahore where this protest took place. During an era when democratic political leadership had been dispersed and "floggings and hangings took place in public to show citizens the price of trying to undermine the law … the photographs had an electrifying effect, and WAF very quickly found itself propelled to the position of being the most visible opposition to Zia's regime" (K. Shamsie "Missing" 11). These two photographs—directly incorporated in the novel from the annals of Pakistan's unofficial history, "those periods of history that don't enter official narratives or are pushed to the margins" (K. Shamsie "Missing" 11)—symbolise a (re)inscription of the story of 1980s Pakistan as *her-story*. The women's movement continued to critique and challenge the State, as signified through the description of these pictures, which are emblematic of the resilient and democratic spirit of the Pakistani nation. Aasmaani recalls "there was such a

headiness at the centre of all the anti-government activity" that despite "all the mayhem wreaked upon the nation", it still seemed to be "happy times" (95).

The sub-plot of the novel, thus, interrogates General Zia's sacrificing of women's mobility, civic rights and visibility at the altar of *chadar aur chardewari* in order to win support. This "brutalization of the [female] Pakistani self" reflects the imposition of the "will of the male state" as Islam is arbitrated by self-proclaiming men of Allah to "legitimize, rationalize and legalize" their misogynist "fear and distaste of women" (Inayatullah 127) through state laws, such as the Hudood Ordinance or the Law of Evidence. In this context, Shamsie's integration of these photographs and her references to women protesting in the streets is symbolic. These photographs are historical proof (within the novel and in reality) that undermines any oversimplified and homogenised image of Pakistani women as mere hapless victims of a pervasive religious patriarchy or a masculine Nation-State. They also represent the (re)mapping and (re)marking of public spaces by women as sites of contestation and assertion of their rights as civic national subjects. The images negate assumptions (and the allegations of the religious right) that feminist engagement with law, culture or religion in Pakistan is something alien, foreign or borrowed from the West. These representations of women's assertive political engagement reject the attempts to privatise, and thus render invisible and silent, issues of women's rights—especially when they collide with the interest(s) of the Nation-State. They reflect the oft-forgotten fact that "Pakistani feminists pioneered against reactionary nationalist and Islamist adversary forces. The activists proved that they were citizens conscious of their responsibilities and worthy of defending the liberties of the nation, and that they were capable of arousing grassroots mobilization" (Charania "Feminism" 326).

Importantly, Samina herself comes from a privileged class which could potentially limit the range, scope and thereby effectiveness of her (and by implication the novel's) feminist agenda. However, by choosing to move Samina's field of engagement from the spheres of law and/or social discussions to (hardened and more rigorous) street-based activism, Shamsie counters Samina's potentially limiting class-privilege. It, then, becomes a plausible narrative device to introduce and incorporate the stories of the victimisation of other women, especially those belonging to the under-privileged class. It also allows *Broken Verses* to function as a narrative in which the character of Samina cannot be accused of appropriating the tragedies and victimhood of other women as a sounding board to assert and advance her ideas.

Samina's characterisation is crucial as it reflects the three key phases of the feminist political movement and thought in Pakistan. Her story can be read as a coming of age story for the Pakistani women's movement. The first phase begins in 1968, soon after her return from the UK after completing her education. While helping out at her uncle's under-staffed law office, she is accidentally pushed into the realm of political activism by a case her uncle is involved in. Samina's uncle was hired by an uneducated helping-hand who accused her employer of inhumane treatment and withholding her pay. The unnamed woman, "an illiterate villager", was socio-economically disadvantaged, whilst "her employer was a wealthy crony of many of the most powerful people in the country" (86), making it unlikely for her to get justice. Before the matter could go into court, the woman's employer discredited her by maligning her character and questioning her state of mind. He brought in "'credible witnesses' who were willing to attest to the moral depravity and pathological insanity of the woman" (86). Doubly persecuted and with no hope of justice, she murdered

her employer and committed suicide. An international film crew working on a documentary about Pakistan heard of this incident and wanted to include it in their narrative. Samina's uncle sent her to talk to them and thus began her journey of political activism as "Pakistan's Gypsy Feminist":

> The Canadian film team must have scarcely been able to believe their luck that day—everything about her cried out, 'I'm ready for my close-up!' She was wearing a plain white kurta, a thick karra on her wrist—silver inlaid with lapis lazuli—and had her hair tied back with a scarf. She could speak with passion and intelligence and flashing grey-green eyes. (87)

Madeline Clements suggests that through this carefully framed interaction between Samina and the Canadian film crew, Shamsie critiques "the role that the Western media play in creating celebrities out of photogenic activists and resistant artists of 'exotic' origin" ("Orienting" 208).

The staging of Samina's rise to national and international prominence is a ploy used to expose how nation-states or communities seek to deploy the bodies of women as blank surfaces to create and inscribe stories or narratives of their choice. Readers are told that it was not until Samina came to the attention of the Poet that she started to gain recognition for her political views at a national level beyond the limited circle of the English-speaking elite class. The Poet fell in love with her and as the "Beloved" she became the inspiration behind his nationalist, revolutionary poetry. In his poetry, he changed the year of her birth so that she was the same age as Pakistan and thus began creating poems with "the intimate resonance of a man speaking to his lover and the grand sweep of a poet declaiming about the nation" (87-8). Her altered birth date reflects the metaphoric deployment of the female

body in nationalist narratives. Feminist scholars argue that the production of nation through various cultural forms like songs, poetry and films often carries erotic undertones. As a metonym for the country/nation/land, the female body becomes an "erotic *Vatan*" or homeland which as a "beloved and/or a mother" is to be loved, possessed and protected (Najmabadi).[104] This metaphoric use poses a double disadvantage in that it construes the nation/country as an object of male desire and also circumscribes its identification within masculine terms. This metaphoric construction effaces the needs and particularities of the corporeal existence of female subjects. The Poet's unabashed declaration of love for her/Pakistan results in her being asked to "speak at girls' colleges, to join panels on Women's Upliftment, to cut ribbons, to pose for pictures" (88). In this first phase, Samina's identity and the terms of her feminist engagement are dictated by what or how the Poet envisages her. A feminist consciousness is thus determined by and subsumed within a national discourse articulated and envisioned by a masculine imagination. The relatively elitist and non-consequential forms of Samina's feminism at this stage, cutting ribbons or speaking at localised gatherings, incur the derogatory and dismissive title "coffee-party feminism" (89). Once again, this is a carefully placed reference to the feminist polemics within Pakistan. The majority of the women who founded WAF came from privileged backgrounds and were to be associated with various NGOS. Their feminist agendas were attacked for being foreign, while their engagement platforms—developmental projects for uplifting women—were seen primarily as a ruse for capturing foreign funding. Without having made any noticeable attempts at (what Spivak calls) unlearning their own privilege

[104] Also see the claim made in *Nationalism and Sexualities* that "[w]henever the power of the nation is invoked ... we are more likely than not to find it couched as a love of country: an eroticized nationalism" (Parker et al. 5).

(Landry and MacLean 3),[105] the majority of the elite-class running these NGOS are involved in developmental projects which make superficial, cosmetic changes without making any material or substantial difference in the lives of women at grass-roots level.

The beginning of civil unrest in the 1970s forces Samina to realise the limitations of her involvement with women's emancipatory projects, accompanied by a simultaneous need to construct an identity not defined and determined by the Poet's gaze: "she walked out of the Poet's life in search of an identity that wasn't caught up in his shadow" (88). The year 1972 marks the beginning of the second phase of her identity as a feminist. This part of her activism comprises primarily of fighting against wrongful political incarceration (such as that of the Poet) and socio-political injustices through the justice system. The research she conducts on the Pakistani judicial system while working for her uncle allows Samina to help other women searching for justice by "pointing them in the direction of sympathetic lawyers and journalists or explaining their legal rights to them" (90).

The arrival of General Zia into politics marks Samina's entry into the third and final phase of activism. Until General Zia, the constitution of Pakistan had, to varying degrees, offered state protection to all its citizens. The political system had been working on a precarious synthesis of the secular and the religious. While religion remained an integral part of the social fabric, the constitution was structured around secular principles that offered to

[105] For Landry and MacLean the idea of unlearning privilege (Spivak *Critique*) means recognising that "[o]ur privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions" (5). Dutta adds that, according to Spivak, "the possibility of engaging in emancipatory politics begins with unlearning one's privilege … Unlearning one's privilege means critiquing and challenging the history that has closed the opportunities for alternative knowledge, other options, and other possibilities" (191).

protect and uphold human rights.[106] However, when General Zia came to power and introduced a parallel system of *Shariah* courts and discriminatory changes in legislation, it soon became apparent that challenging the will of the state only through the legal system would not suffice. Therefore, from 1979 onwards, Samina becomes actively involved in street protests, concentrating on raising awareness (especially in the rural areas) for a country-wide grass-roots mobilisation. This phase, characterised by public debate, has been presented as the preferred form of (feminist) activism, involving mobilisation of people from varying backgrounds in urban and rural centres, to mount resistance through civic and legislative means. Rejecting violence—whether perpetuated by oppressive forces or those resisting them—Shamsie, through Samina, suggests that tyranny must be made accountable in language: "weaken it with public opinion, with supreme court judgements, with debates and subversive curriculum. Take hold of the media, take hold of the printing press and the newspapers… Don't do anything less than all you are capable of" (336).

This feminist agentive performance in the public arena is preceded and prefaced by another significant aspect of Samina's political activism or what may be referred to as the politics of resistance. As I have stated, General Zia and his cohorts used the cover of *Nizam-i-Mustafa* or *Nizam-i-Islam* to justify the formulation and implementation of their largely patriarchal and misogynist emendations to Pakistan's legal system. As these laws and related policies exploited the name of Islam, it became very risky to publicly critique or challenge them, as such action could potentially incur charges of being a (Western) agent, an atheist or a non-believer. When various Pakistani women's groups like the WAF and PWLA (Pakistani Women Lawyers Association) began challenging General Zia's

[106] A more nuanced discussion of this issue is not possible here. For further discussion see A. Jamal ("Gender"; "Rights"); Jaffrelot; Shaheed ("Cultural"; *Gender*); Toor (*State;* "How"); S. Khan (*Gender;* "Zina"; "Locating"); Rouse (*Shifting;* "Gendered"); and Weiss (*Interpreting;* "Implication").

discriminatory legalisation, they initially positioned their arguments within the framework of liberal, secular human rights discourse. Their objections were labelled unIslamic, Western and foreign to Pakistani (Eastern) culture, and they were swiftly discredited and dismissed. Realising that grass-roots mobilisation would not be possible without challenging the religious-right on their grounds, they became engaged in "looking for empowerment of their gender within a 'rethought' Islam" by "reinterpreting and re-examining a masculinist reading of the Quran Shariah" (Zia "Reinvention" 31). Members of WAF became involved in working on a feminist exegesis of the Quran, a (re)reading of Islamic history and jurisprudence so that they could write back to the religious-right using their own rhetoric.

In the novel this agentive engagement of Pakistani women with Islam—its histories and traditions—is highlighted through the character of Samina who "saw that her own belief in secular jurisprudence was not sufficient to take on a government intent on claiming its laws were God-ordained, so she went to Egypt to work with women's groups there and discover the feminist traditions within Islam" (93-4). The State, by laying claim to religion and the associated discourse of cultural puritanism, had hoped to mobilise conservative elements of society by creating a "hierarchy of citizenship" (Yasmeen 184). This hierarchy was meant to allow the masculine State and its male actors, through the "moral regulation" of its "willful daughters" (A. Jamal "Gender"), greater power over their bodies (read sexualities), thereby creating disciplined and docile (Foucault *Discipline*) female subjects. Instead, this attempt was met with a strident challenge by "feminist activists who fashioned astute repudiations from within the confines of the very Islam that the state was employing to efface them" (Ranasinha *Contemporary 130*).[107] Samina's decision to engage with religious traditions and interpretations reflects that though, traditionally, "Islamic jurisprudence has primarily

[107] See Toor ("Moral"; *State*), especially chapters four and five in the latter.

remained a patriarchal discourse" it may be appropriated "to demand a new articulation of the rights of women" (Mansoor 53).

The novel also gestures towards other, more subtle, forms of women fighting oppression: instances of what Deniz Kandiyoti refers to as "passive" resistance signifying "strategies and coping mechanisms" ("Bargaining" 285) grounded in the (socio-cultural, religious, political, economic) particularities of their own patriarchal situations, enabling women to "bargai[n] with patriarchy" ("Bargaining"). I propose that these examples of negotiation and resistance encode the feminist engagement in indigenous terms. Aasmaani recalls that her earliest memories were of "courtrooms, prisons, lawyer's offices" as she accompanied her mother who strategically used her daughter's presence to elicit sympathetic responses from otherwise stringent and unrelenting authorities:

> I was just a few months old when the Poet was imprisoned in 1972, and my mother knew the ability of a smiling infant to cut through bureaucracy. I could instantly reduce both uniformed and inky-figured men into cooing creatures and though they tried to snap back into the positions of authority, the damage had been done as soon as they started addressing me in baby-talk. (90)

Karachi, as the novel's spatial setting, reflects an overarching feminist political agenda to (re)inscribe the country's realities in terms of resistance, instead of oppression and violence.[108] Karachi functions as a useful backdrop in her novels because its diversity can be read as emblematic of Pakistani diversity. For Shamsie, Karachi is the only truly cosmopolitan city in Pakistan owing to its richness and heterogeneity in terms of language, ethnicity, class, sect and religion. In spite of being a city deeply troubled by its divisive

[108] The city of Karachi is a significant recurring presence in her novels, a writer's "personal tic" (K. Shamsie "Shamsie Reflects" n.p.).

politics, corruption and a continuous cycle of crippling violence, Shamsie is fascinated by the city's survivalist spirit and the will to live. In this context too, it can be read as a symbol of the nation's endurance and resilience in the face of (repeated) crisis. Most importantly, perhaps, Shamsie finds Karachi interesting because of its (comparative) gender progressiveness:[109]

> You'll often hear Karachiwallas[110] say there's nowhere else in Pakistan they can happily live. I've heard it said more frequently by its women than its men. Karachi is hardly free of patriarchy, but its women are more visible, and more often to be seen in positions of authority, than elsewhere in the country. In February, when the city's most powerful, and controversial, political party, the MQM, called for a women's rally, the numbers that gathered were so vast … that the BBC declared it the largest congregation of women ever organized in the world….it was heartening to imagine we were witnessing a new kind of campaigning—one that placed gender in the political arena and gave teeth to the phrase "women's vote". ("Shamsie Reflects" n.p.)

Spatiality, therefore, can be read as a significant aspect of Shamsie's narrative design in *Broken Verses*. Depicted as the spatial location of women's activism against General Zia's misogynistic Islamisation of the country, Shamsie's Karachi emerges as what Homi Bhabha refers to as "a performative site of political agency" (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 236). That is, a space where Pakistani women assert themselves as gendered political subjects, staking their claim in the nation's future while negotiating their rights and positions as citizens. The

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[109] It must be noted that Shamsie's Karachi-based stories mainly deal with a select group of Karachiites—the educated, liberal, and affluent elite class of "gated communities, private members' club and exclusive beaches" (Chambers qtd. in K. Shamsie "British" 213). An exception occurs in her latest novel *Home Fire*, which depicts the Sohrab Goth of Afghan refugees and a muhajir-dominated, middle class yet diversifying Nazimabad. This lack of class diversity suggests a potential lack in the scope of Shamsie's feminist agenda, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

[110] The residents of Karachi.

references to slogan-bearing women organising rallies, protests and sit-ins in the novel (see for instance 93-95 and 255) serve to challenge the construction of Pakistani urban public space as purely "the site of masculinist … publics" (Varma 2) and instead (re)gender it as a potential "space for feminist solidarity" (Ranasinha *Contemporary 250*).

2.4 Reinscribing Religious Realities

> Shamsie alludes to an Islamic history and cultures richer and more interesting than the present fundamentalism; she mentions poets, feminists, international relations, political ideals, customs, and connections … Unlike the puritanical Islam of recent news, her portrayal of Muslim society is more varied. (King "Kamila" 149)

In recent years, sexuality and gender have become increasingly visible as tools to construct and demark boundaries between Us and Them. Scholars have argued that in the wake of the War on Terror, West has relied upon liberation and/or resuce narratives, inscribed onto the bodies of Muslim women, to justify its political agenda. In reaction and response to the West's neo-Imperialism, especially its aggressive geographical and economic overreach, puritan right-wing forces within Muslim countries, including Pakistan, have grown in strength.[111] Indigenous anti-Western voices, risen in the wake of events like the US-led intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan's northern areas, as well as the racist and/or xenophobic attitudes faced by Muslims living in the West since 9/11, have resulted in the production of an Islamist-led "national identity politics".[112] This

[111] Hamid gestures towards this development in his novel *Moth Smoke,* through the character of Mujahid Alam.
[112] I use the word nation in the sense of a Muslim *ummah*, that is, a Muslim brotherhood that cuts across geographical boundaries.

heteronationalism,[113] like other forms of fascism, has engendered a "terrible cultural conservatism" with dreadful consequences for women (Spivak *Other* 248-9).[114] Within Paksitan, such indigenous right-wing movements have been investing in a revitalisation of the rhetoric of religious traditonalism in which Pakistani women's bodies have been mobilised and instrumentalised as symbols (veiled, domesticated, sexually restrained), representing the spirituality and thereby cultural superiority of (earlier authentic) Muslim societies. Using women as markers of national identity and difference, these puritan discourses "authorize equally limiting narratives of Islamic womanhood" which "compromise their human rights and liberty" (Zine "Between" 1). The heteronationalist project legitimise their agenda of re(establishing) and (re)inscribing patriarchal authority by "a factitious 'tradition' of male dominance over 'their' women as a prideful response to the erosion of national sovereignty by neocolonial imperial Western forces" (Afzal-Khan "Politics" 153).[115]

Broken Verses, like *Burnt Shadows* and *Home Fire*, is "inscribed with globally anticipated tropes of a stereotypical 'fundamental' Islam and Islamic Identity" (Clements *Writing* 135). It also reflects the changing socio-political reality within Pakistani society in terms of the country's relationship with religion, its representative forms and voices. Various characters repeatedly (and reductively) refer to religious groups and their political representatives using the synecdoche "the beards", or other stereotypical short-hands such as "fundos" and

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[113] Expanding on the notion of heteropatriarchy, Gosine argues that modern States are also characterised by heteronationalism, that is, they exist as a combination of patriarchy, heterosexuality, racism and ethnocentricism, "nations must always be heterosexualized to ensure the reproduction of citizens, just as they must also be racialized and gendered to ensure the construction of national boundaries and bodies" (Gosine qtd. in Ilkkaracan 382).

[114] Here I am repurposing arguments that Spivak originally made in relation to anticolonial national struggles.

[115] Similarly, Toor contends that globalisation and its accompanying structural modifications and reorganisation has resulted in dangerously accentuating the process of socio-economic changes in developing or third world countries like Pakistan. Historically, such accelerated changes provoked strong "anxieties in the societies and communities experiencing this change; anxieties which feminist scholars have shown to result in greater regulation of women" ("How" 14). For a South Asian example, see Chowdhury, especially chapter five.

"mullahs" (59-60; 72-73; 185). The beard is the male equivalent of the stereotypical veil, as exemplified by the image of the Islamic Rage Boy (Morey and Yaqin 22 ff.). It appears in the novel as an identity marker used as an all-inclusive term to refer to the religious right and their politics. The increasing presence of religious groups within Pakistani politics is hinted at early in the novel when readers are told that in spite of failing to "muster any compelling street-power" during their political campaigns, "the newly united religious bloc emerged as the third-largest party" winning 45 seats (60). Taking advantage of inter/national geo-politics, "the beards" have risen to power and are talking "democracy better than anyone else" (185). These geo-politics include the US military intervention in the region, yet another military dictatorship of General Musharaf, failure of the local political parties to sustain democracy and/or resistance militarism, and the decline of organised activism from the left. In the novel, Shehnaz Saeed notes the duplicitous appropriation of women's issues by religious parties to gain public sympathy and votes. Sarcastically she tells Aasmaani that "[t]he assemblies haven't even convened yet and already the mullahs in the Frontier are saying 'of course women can work, but accordingly to the guidelines of Islam.' What guidelines? There are no such guidelines!" (59). She jokes that their appropriation of religion gives her additional incentive to resume her acting career: "I don't want to be one of those women the beards approve of, the ones who sit at home and cook dinner" (59).

Shehnaz's comments encapsulate the changing reality of the right-wing religious-political parties, such as Jammat-e-Islami, in Pakistan. Contrary to popular belief, these right-wing, traditionalist religious groups do not operate as a static organisation. They often arise to provide an anchor in the face of the erosion of traditional socio-cultural reality, due to the incursion of technology and aggressive capitalism. Scholars, such as Amina Jamal

("Gendered"; *Jamaat;* "Feminist"), Humeira Iqtidar (*Secularizing ;* "Changing"), Sadaf Ahmad ("Identity") and Fawzia Afzal-Khan ("Betwixt") note that religious parties, especially those with political vested interests, have continued to evolve and reorganise themselves. A salient feature of this reorganisation, in Pakistan and other Muslim societies, has been the religious right's co-option of progressive rhetoric to legitimise their cause and win support. These organisations employ a rhetoric which apparently makes concessions in favour of women's participation in politics, their access to higher education and employment. The catch, of course, as indicated by Shehnaz, is that women are *allowed* to do so as long as they follow the prescribed religious (patriarchal) norms: they can participate in politics and sit in parliaments as long as they follow party policies and the leadership of their male leaders. They can go to colleges and universities but preferably study in segregated ones.[116] Similarly, "they can leave their homes for employment providing they do not challenge male supremacy in the home, or even at work" (Shaheed and Mumtaz "Islamisation" 75).[117] Moreover, the stereotype of irrational, "faceless, menacing but ultimately mockable Islamist bogeymen" (Clements *Writing* 135), the angry Mullahs, who use religion as an instrument for instigating holy wars and promulgating a misogynist patriarchy, is curiously introduced at the start of the novel. After moving back to Karachi, Aasmaani settles in a room which used to be a nursery, despite its obvious short-comings. Rabia, her sister, warns Aasmaani that she (with her liberal and secular-minded cosmopolitan constitution) would not cope well in a "master bedroom" that was continuously under aural siege (read fiery religious sermons

[116] An example is the International Islamic University, Islamabad, founded in 1980, which has separate male and female campuses.

[117] For elaboration concerning the birth and promulgation of right-wing religious organisations in Muslim societies as linked to changing material and socio-cultural realities, see Mernissi (*Beyond*; *The Veil*); and Badran ("Understanding"; *Feminism*). For elucidation of the evolution of religious political parties (especially Jammat-e-Islami) in Pakistan, with a focus on their gendered politics, and their co-option of progressive, secular strategies and rhetoric see also A. S. Zia ("Women's"; Zia "Politics"; "Reinvention"; "Secular"); and Shaheed & Mumtaz ("Islamisation"; "Contested").

about sin, punishment and damnation) due to being situated "directly across from a mosque" (2).

Furthermore, the novel connects the relative increase in the visibility of right-wing religious parties within Pakistan's political and socio-cultural framework to post-9/11 neo-Imperialist Western (especially US) policies. It also reinforces the association of religious political parties with a Taliban-esque mind-set and modus-operandi, that is, as an anti-liberal, anti-cultural and misogynist (homogeneous) group. It lends credence to the liberation narratives by positioning women as the primary victims of the rise of Pakistan's religious right. In a seemingly innocuous exchange between Aasmaani's colleagues at STD in reaction to America's possible attack on Iraq, they say:

> 'You want to piss off the Americans, there's only one thing to do. Vote in the fundos….'
>
> 'You just shut up and go sit in your corner. You vote in the fundos, they'll do nothing about the petrol pumps, and just ban all your precious music videos and put us women in burkhas.'…
>
> 'Seriously! But listen, yaar, you think the mullahs are going to join this government?'
>
> 'God forbid. If they do, who knows what kill joy laws they'll try and pass….' (72-3)

This exchange is significant for two reasons: firstly, it reflects the assumption that religion, here Islam, is antithetical to culture (or secular form of enjoyment).[118] More significantly, it highlights that the visibility and mobility of women's bodies are the first victims when 'Men of Religion' decide to implement and uphold the word of God as supreme law. This typecasting of religious elements within Pakistan in the familiar and terrorising tropes of the

[118] This carries echo of Huntington's *Clash of Civilisation*.

War on Terror rhetoric could be viewed as corroborating the (West's) construction of Pakistan as "a safe haven for Taliban and Al Qaeda jihadists" (Moreau "World" n.p.).[119]

A selective reading of the novel in terms of such portrayals might read this as a proof of strategic exoticism. However, consideration of the text as a whole highlights a far more complex, ultimately deconstructive, representation(s) of faith, piety and the intersection of gender and religion in Pakistan. I propose that Shamsie distinguishes herself from writers like Azar Nafisi, Ayan Hirsi Ali, Kureishi or Aslam in two significant ways: she shows that these beards/mullahs/fundos are not *the only* or *the dominant* face of piety, faith or religion for the people of Pakistan. Similarly, when she does refer to fundamentalist elements and their favoured flavour of misogynist religiosity, the sole focus is not on this constitutive element of "the Pakistani horror brand" (Hamid "How" n.p.). Instead, Shamsie consciously highlights the resistance and agentive performance(s) of her characters, especially women inside and outside their homes, in their private and public lives. Clements refers to this dualism as a "dis/sociative" (*Writing 136*) quality of Shamsie's writing: there is a deliberate conjuring of Pakistan—its supposed Islamic culture and identity—accomplished through tropes/motifs/myths (stereotypical or otherwise) ascribed to it in post-9/11 rhetoric. Simultaneously, she tends to distance or disassociate from these essentialist and limiting contexts, often adopting radically "alternative interpretative slants, which render redundant the binary epistemologies of contemporary and historic Islamic customs and practices widely available in the West" (Clements "Orienting" 215).

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[119] On 22 October 2007, *Newsweek's* cover featured symbolic images of the Islamic rage boy (in this instance exemplified by the students of Lal Masjid, the Red Mosque, in Islamabad carrying out a protest), with the caption "The Most Dangerous Nation in the World Isn't Iraq. It's Pakistan". The issue contains an article by Ron Moreau titled "Pakistan: The Most Dangerous?" which attempts to prove Pakistan as a greater threat than President Bush's infamous "Axis of Evil" (Merskin 165), that is, Iran, Iraq and North Korea ("Pakistan?" n.p.). Three years later in 2010, *Newsweek* published another article by Moreau captioned "Pakistan Is the World's Most Dangerous Country", without the question mark, to explain why and how "potentially dangerous Pakistan is to itself, the region, and the world" ("World").

In the beginning of the novel, reference to fiery sermons from the mosque is contrasted with a painting representing a verse from *Surah al-Rahman*[120] in the offices of STD, the television studio where Aasmaani attends a job interview. Aasmaani recalls that this verse, framed as a rhetorical question, appears as a refrain in the *Surah* and has been the "beloved of calligraphers for *its variedness and its balance*" (5; emphasis added)). This painting is a narrative device that triggers a memory of a conversation between Aasmaani, her mother and the Poet. Samina instructs Aasmaani to learn Arabic so that she can produce translations of the scripture which challenge and/or deconstruct the patriarchal exegesis of the Quran. The Poet singles out *Surah al-Rahman* for Aasmaani to translate especially for him, playfully challenging her to produce a more eloquent translation of the *Surah* than his own. This short exchange characteristically exhibits the dis/sociative quality of Shamsie's writing. It alludes to the references of the virginal *houris* in the *Surah*—an image which has been notoriously associated with suicide bombers—along with an apocalyptic vision of the sky splitting apart, turning red like a rose or stained leather on the Day of Judgement. These stock references to Islamic mythos are encapsulated within an interesting framework. Samina's instructions to (re)translate the Quran (and by extension religious epistemological tradition) challenge the Quran's (and Islam's) construction as an inaccessible, fundamentally patriarchal text. The challenge is to an ostensibly closed system of *Surahs* impervious to (re)interpretation, wielded by menacing mullahs to deprive Pakistani-Muslim women of agency and rights. Samina's suggestion to her daughter positions the Quran as a *text* which, in its exegesis, is open to feminist intervention and thereby can no longer be univocally used to oppress and/or disempower women. Simultaneously, by highlighting the interest of calligraphers and the Poet in the stylistic features, imagery and structuring of the *Surah*,

[120] Surah means a chapter, Al-Rahman, meaning "The All-Merciful" is one of the adjectives describing the qualities of Allah.

Shamsie removes it from its purely religious context and instead posits it as an artistic artefact—a musical composition with rhythm and cadences, an aesthetically pleasant visual and literary piece with evocative imagery. In post-9/11 contexts "[w]here scriptural Islam and the language of Arabic have generally been presented as instruments of patriarchal oppression, and their affiliates as antipathetic to art, *Broken Verses'* discussion of Aasmaani's potential creation of a poetic, English-language translation of the Qur'an pre-empts and interrupts both these readings" (Clements *Writing* 138).

The construction of religion/Islam as, largely, the purview of men, and the source of patriarchal power in Pakistan (in the Muslim context) is further challenged and deconstructed through the character of Samina. As previously mentioned, in order to "battle the religious hard-liners on their own turf" (94), Samina draws strength from other Muslim feminists involved in similar struggles in other countries like Egypt—seeking empowerment through and within a re-appropriated model of Islam (Zia "Reinvention" 31). Samina is said to have played a pivotal role in establishing a transnational Islamic feminist network by "linking Muslim feminists from around the world" (255). Through Aasmaani's recollections, readers are presented with another instance of the reclamation of religion by Pakistani women. Aasmaani recalls her mother's famous public debate with Maulana Moin Haq on women's issues such as purdah, and the manipulation of religious edicts by Muslim clerics or Maulanas for political purposes. This live-television debate can be seen as symptomatic of women's refusal to concede authority to men in religious matters. Samina on one hand draws attention to how, through selective interpretation and translations, men have used religious precepts (such as notions of piety and modesty) to police and control women. Concurrently, Samina is a mouth-piece to verbalise the hypocritical and insidious

role played by the right-wing religious political groups in politicising the notion of *ummah*—in particular the instrumentalisation of this construct to support the US during the Cold War era. She also highlights the potential deadly consequences of creating a future in which *jihad* can be weaponised to serve (individual) political gains:

> The subject is your obligations to the ummah. You take a territorial issue in Afghanistan and you make it into a matter of religious duty—you and your unlikely bedfellows in the West—and you spout phrases like "the unity of the ummah" as you hand those boys … the most sophisticated weapons and the best combat training in the world and tell them to get the infidel Soviets off Muslim soil. Soil has no religion, Maulana … What happens after Afghanistan, have you considered that? Where do they go next, those global guerrillas […]? (285-6)

Samina therefore acts as a narratorial device to direct reader attention to the presence of vibrant dissident feminist voices in Muslim cultures/traditions (inside and outside Pakistan) which have continued to challenge and question masculinist interpretation(s) and the misogynist instrumentalisation of the Quran and *Shariah*. Equally critical of Islamic fundamentalism and Western universalism, the character of Samina symbolises the voices of Muslim feminists who actively cultivate alternate and indigenous epistemological frameworks to engage with notions of women's (human) rights, liberalism and civic polity (Zia "Secular").

The Islamophobia generated in the course of the War on Terror led to the creation of a global polity in which "the politics of self-identification"(Hamid "Islam" n.p.) is increasingly subservient to an individual's faith or religion at birth. This leads to a reductive and essentialist politics of identification which, by turning an individual into a religious symbol,

maximises the significance of this group/communal identity over the potential autonomy and diversity of that person's lived experiences. [121] As Marnia Lazreg argues, "[t]he fetishism of the concept, Islam, in particular, obscures the living reality of the women and men subsumed under it" (95). In contrast to some of the works by her contemporaries like Rushdie or Aslam,[122] Shamsie's narrative lends credence to the politics of self-identification, while highlighting that the reality of Islam as a "lived religion", for Pakistani men and women, is inherently different, varied and more complex than can be explained by any simplistic referencing of the "literalist interpretations of scripture"(Hamid "Islam" n.p.).

The novel subverts the religious reality of Pakistani society—commonly codified in terms of a gendered, fundamentalist patriarchy—by highlighting the notion of faith in its diversity. *Broken Verses* challenges an Islamic religiosity as the primary mode of identification for Pakistanis by the inclusion of avowedly secular characters like the Poet and Samina in the novel. These characters, by choosing to self-identify as secular, refuse to let their identities and lives be defined and interpreted by the parameters of the religion of their birth. For instance, the Poet is "dismissive of organized religion" (223) and does not partake in socio-religious traditions and customs like Ramazan and/or Eid. Similarly, when General Zia, in alliance with the religious right, imposes policies that demand and encourage a public display of the signs of piety[123] to prove one's Muslimness, the Poet passionately critiques

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[121] The same is true for other forms of group affiliations like race, ethnicity, gender, nationhood, and/or sexuality.
[122] See for instance the review of *Joseph Anton* by P. Mishra ("Joseph Anton by Salman Rushdie–Review") or the representation of communal Islam in Aslam's *Maps*.
[123] Apart from legislative changes, General Zia also instigated certain reforms and policies in the name of establishing *Shariah* and patriotism. Men and women on national television were told to wear Pakistan's national dress, that is, *shalwar qamiz*. Similarly, women were asked to have their heads covered at all times whenever they appeared on national television, whether in dramas, ads or news. The legislative changes regarding the crimes of theft, intoxication and fornication/adultery introduced in February 1979, in the form of the Hudood Laws, allowed the State (for the first time) unfettered access to and power over the individual citizen. This atmosphere of strict (moral) policing and vigilance moved "issues of personal piety from the realm of the private to that of the public" (Toor "Political" 139). This resulted in "Islamization from below" (Toor "How" 17) with people adopting signifiers such as the beard and veil as proof of being a good Muslim.

this public commodification of what should have remained a personal choice to express his/her faith: “They’re out there, those men of war and politics, shouting about their God, insisting everyone own up to their relationships with Him, declare your devotion down on your knees, in Arabic, for all to see” (213). Like the Poet, Samina does not observe traditional Muslim traditions such as Ramazan or the Eid. Aasmaani recalls that her mother refused to celebrate Eid because “it seemed false to celebrate … when she hadn’t fasted” (223) and she never saw both of them on the festive occasion. This secular outlook also leads the Poet and Samina to challenge and defy the hetero-patriarchal and religious institution of marriage. They are deeply in love, yet they do not marry, partly because marriage is positioned as a socio-religious institution. While the Poet “didn’t believe in marriage”, Samina refuses to be bound into “co-habitation” by a “formal contract which … demanded a declaration of religious beliefs” (89). Other secular characters include Aasmaani, Ed and Mirza.

Shamsie’s novel highlights that faith/religion in Pakistan cannot be represented by an either/or binary—its reality is neither the literalist, fundamentalist Taliban-esque Islam nor a form of secularism that demands a complete renunciation of religion. Thus, unsurprisingly, *Broken Verses* celebrates a cultural and communal Islam that can be an enabling and positive source (of comfort, identification and affiliations) for its practitioners. In this sense, Shamsie’s novel is unlike Aslam’s *Maps,* in which no positive spaces are found for practicing faith-based subjectivities—whether male or female. Religion in *Broken Verses* is presented neither as innately oppressive for women, nor as a source which is always generating (and sustaining) violent fundamentalism at a communal level. The text presents religion as a potential source of comfort and communal celebrations, most notably through its second

generation characters like Rabia and Aasmaani. When Aasmaani first visits the STD offices, she feels out of place and old—"seen but unnoticed … in a shalwar-kameez with a dupatta tossed over one shoulder"—among its relatively younger and hip crowd of "twentysomethings in jeans and short kurtas" (4). Clements argues that seeing the calligraphic rendition of *Surah al-Rehman's* ayah offers her "a temporary anchor to something older and—by implication—wiser and more substantial than her latest flippant and studiously 'apolitical media incarnation', or the studio's aspirant bright young things" ("Orienting" 140).

The novel shows that it is not only the clerics or the state that are involved in the instrumentalisation of religion: the narrative illustrates the manipulation of religion at a micro-level, that is, by individuals for various personal gains. For instance, Aasmaani tells us that during the month of Ramazan "holier-than-thous" (individuals) were "in their element" (131). Filled with a sense of self-righteousness, without any real knowledge of the religion, and hypocritically ignoring their own vices, people would start acting as morality police. They would try to impose their own perceptions of Muslimness or religiosity upon others, often by morbidly shaming non-fasting people in the name of spiritualism. Aasmaani recalls a woman in her neighbourhood who was in the habit of acting as a religious-moral authority. Every Ramazan she would make a list of non-fasting people and then proceeded to "call someone on the list and recite Qur'ānic verses down the phone" (131). Aasmaani tellingly reveals that this same woman had no qualms about ignoring religion and morality when she cheated her widowed sister-in-law out of the latter's due share in the family inheritance.

Simultaneously, this hypocritical and conservative attitude is contrasted by people collectively celebrating their faith and/or partaking in the ritualistic practice of having *sehri*: "This was one of the chief joys of Ramzan—this evidence of everyone engaged in eating before daybreak, the transformation of that solitary hour into something communal" (133). For Aasmaani, Ramazan and Eid mean a celebration of the familial: the arrival of Ramzan is marked by the "sisterly ritual" (133) of having French toast and tea with Rabia. Similarly, with the Poet and Samina's disinterest in religious rituals, Eid becomes an occasion for Aasmaani to fully embrace her undivided self by simply being "Beema and Dad's daughter, Rabia's sister" (223). The celebration of Eid "with fervor, festivity" is a source of stability, strength and comfort for Aasmaani: "[y]ear after year, Eid in Dad and Beema's house followed a pattern as unvarying and comforting as the progression of the moon from sliver to sphere" (223). Religion for characters like Aasmaani, Rabia and/or Beema is not a cause of angst or oppression; instead it is a reason for celebration and a way of belonging to a community. As Ranasinha claims, "[r]eflecting on the gendered parameters of the relationship between piety and secularism, the narrative presents Aasmaani's younger generation as a new social formation. Their ease with Islamic culture is not some reactionary throwback to prescribed gender roles" (*Contemporary* 142).

Moreover, as previously mentioned, *Broken Verses* diversifies the religious realties of Pakistani society by deconstructing the authority of men to act as the sole authority on Islam. An active involvement in the exegesis of the Quran and (re)interpretation of the religious epistemologies and histories is presented as a valid mode of engagement (as opposed to being sacrilegious) for the Pakistani female adherents and practitioners of Islam. In Shamsie's novel the religious conservatism of ominous-sounding mullahs and people

manipulating religion for personal gains is placed in dialogue with the avid secularism of characters like Samina and the Poet. The moderation and piety of Aasmaani's practicing Muslim grandfather, though mentioned tangentially, reflects another model of religiosity in Pakistani culture. Similarly, an orthodox form of faith based on literal interpretations of religious sources/texts is compared to a more inclusive, "ascetic … pantheistic … [and] syncretic" (Clements "Orienting" 49) version of Islam in the form of Sufism.[124] The former version of religious orthodoxy is positioned and discussed, particularly in terms of its detrimental effects on women in terms of their civic rights, sexual violence, and economics. Shamsie calls herself a secular feminist (K. Shamsie "British" 221) and, in line with this positioning, *Broken Verses* (like her other novels) provides variants of what it means to be a Muslim, contextualising its practices within the confines of geography and culture.

Shamsie's characters in *Broken Verses* recognise that in the contemporary world "God has become the most dangerous subject of all" (216) and are, thereby, forced to accept "the value of certain silences" (216). However, the novel advocates that resistance—large or small— continuously needs to be mounted against the tendency to pigeonhole people into dogmatic and restrictive categories on the basis of their faith. Aasmaani admonishes Mirza (successor to the Poet's legacy) for abandoning his love affair with God: for no longer writing about God in the tenor which reflects Poet's earlier proclamation about faith: "[i]t's an obscenity to make love so public" (213).[125] She criticises Mirza for prostituting his literary abilities to serve non-democratic forces, and in doing so forsaking the (Poet's) legacy of

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[124] *Maps* constructs a similar binary, the problematic nature of which I discuss in Chapter three. Shamsie avoids this pitfall by diversifying the meanings of faith: individual piety, Sufism, cultural Islam, and organised religion. More importantly, Shamsie's novel avoids rejecting Islam as an organised religion, instead highlighting it as a potentially positive source to engender collective identity and a sense of belonging.

[125] I read this statement by the Poet as an element of the Sufi poetics of the novel, rather than an instance of Western secularisation. In the esoteric tradition of Sufism the spiritual connection between man and God is often conceived and narrated as a love affair between man and a woman (Malamud; Anjum "Soul"; "Bridal").

offering people alternate voice(s) and means to relate to Him or the Creator. For her, Mirza's refusal to be political in his creative endeavours—that is, challenge those who try to homogenise difference by privileging a monolithic form of faith—means that he has effectively left religion/God "in the hands of the extremists" (216).[126] A similar sentiment is echoed by Rabia, Aasmaani's sister, when the latter jokingly remarks that she is "'considering a boycott of Ramzan' … '[t]o protest the rising power of the Machiavellian Mullah Alliance'" (133). Rabia reminds her that abandoning religion—whether as faith or ritual—is equivalent to giving credence to the claims of the very forces that Aasmaani wants to protest: "[i]f you boycott religion because of them you only strengthen their claim to being guardians and interpreters of that religion" (133).

When read together, these examples highlight a social reality in which religion is a "site of discursive conflict between the state and its female subjects, who used every avenue available to deconstruct the politically charged, patriarchal nationalist 'reality'" (Ranasinha *Contemporary 130*). The opposition to religious conservatism and the far-right is not the sole prerogative of secular-minded characters. When Aasmaani's fraternal grandfather, "the most gentle and pious of men" read the details of the laws being passed "in the name of Islam", he "wept himself to death" (91). In the form of such dissenting voices, Shamsie captures a national history that is often neglected not only in the Western world, but also in Pakistan. The politics of resistance in the novel highlight that the worst parts of Pakistan can be labelled "horrendous, but it's important to also note many Pakistanis have been fighting against extremisms for a long time, largely unrecognized by the rest of the world" (K. Shamsie "British" 220-1). This representational matrix deconstructs multiple hierarchies and

[126] The same sentiment is echoed in Burke's famous aphorism: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" (qtd. in Bandura 113).

the dualism regarding religion in Pakistan, for instance, most notably, it collapses the Manichean divide between secularism and religion. Samina, privately secular, is willing to engage with religion in her fight against a patriarchal State that abuses religion for political purposes. Similarly, the Poet is one of the strongest and most outspoken secular characters. However, he and his acolytes are also "deeply immersed in the mystical Sufi traditions of Islam" (Ranasinha *Contemporary* 142). Mirza came to his attention after he wrote *Iblis Aur* Adam, a Sufism-inspired poetic re-telling of the story of Adam's expulsion from Heaven which revises the notions of hell, heaven, sin, punishment and redemption. In his version of the narrative, Adam and Lucifer, are not arch-nemeses, but rather *raqeebs* (rivals in love), fighting for the love of their beloved—God. For the Poet, this tale is a syncretic signifier of love, one of the most basic human conditions which unites us across time and geographies. He reminds Samina that it is "the first and the final love story….It is the story in which we all live….Moses and Changez Khan and Marilyn Monroe and you and me … we are all just players in that great story. Iblis and Allah. Love makes us devils, love sends us to hell, love saves us" (122). Thus, the novel deconstructs the notion that people with strong secular inclinations cannot have faith or those who question religious fundamentalism and conservatism cannot practice religion. This depicted version of Islam/faith (in Pakistani society) is complex, diverse and inclusive.

Ranasinha contends that by "critiquing the performativity of faith in public and the pushing of 'internal, intimate belief' into 'something increasingly represented outwardly', *Broken Verses* privileges an avowedly secularist stance" (*Contemporary 141*). This secular stance conforms to an epistemic framework in which "[r]eligion or its absence is largely a private matter. The political society is seen as that of believers (of all stripes) and non-

believers alike" (Charles Taylor *Secular* 1).[127] It can be understood as "a political doctrine of state neutrality toward religion" (Mahmood "Can" 293) which is premised on separation of the religious from the social. This form of secularism also advocates for the accommodation of "a plurality of religious and non-religious ways of life" so that individuals belonging to diverse belief systems may exercise their faith with complete freedom and equality (Jaffrelot 4). Whilst this secularism may be viewed as privileging a Western perspective in Shamsie's novel, consideration of other characters and their relationships with religion or faith suggests otherwise. Shamsie notes that "[t]he Islam I grew up among didn't make distinctions between the sacred and secular.…Pakistani Islam is quite haphazard and capacious" (K. Shamsie "British" 225). She acknowledges that Islam remains an integral part of the experiential lives and performative selves of many Pakistanis at communal and individual levels and for these people the word secular can often mean an absence or negation of religion ("British" 225-6).

I contend that by choosing to use characters with an avowedly secular disposition to challenge the religious right or fundamentalist voices, Shamsie expands on the traditional (Western) understanding of secularism, highlighting that there is "secularization without secularism in Pakistan" (Jaffrelot 2). Expanding on Taylor's theory of secularism, Iqtidar differentiates between secularism as an ideology and process in the context of Pakistan. Ideologically, secularism refers to policies and practices of the State: "[t]he secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a

[127] Taylor contests that this secularisation does not necessitate a complete privatisation or exclusion of religion. He claims secularism or a secular polity is characterised by three key features: (a) "religious liberty", that is, the freedom to believe (or not); (b) "equality between people of different faiths or basic beliefs"; and (c) "all spiritual families must be heard" ("Meaning" 23). The secular agenda of Shamsie's echoes Taylor's understanding of secularism. Religion is not absent from the public sphere, but is instead a civic polity in which the State, economic and cultural process, and the legal system allow equal protection and access to all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs (or their lack of).

particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion" (4). Read in these terms, secularism in Pakistan appears to have failed as the State has continued to intervene in the religious arena to use certain constitutional principles to discriminate against minorities.[128] However, secularism as a social process, or secularisation, continues to exist in Pakistan, as exhibited through the diversity and plurality of religious practices and beliefs.[129] Arguably, the juxtaposition of secular voices in the novel with communal celebration of religion, along with references to private piety and Sufism, deconstruct the image of Pakistan as "this world where the 'Clash of Civilizations' is becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy" (K. Shamsie *Offence* 15). Foregrounding the multiplicity and heterogeneity of characters' lives, in terms of their faith, politics and subjectivities, reflects that "there is not one Pakistan, there are many" (Inayatullah 131).

2.5 Rewriting Womanhood and Desire

> Pakistan is just like India, except when it's just like Afghanistan….It will become clear whether the Pakistan of our work is Indo-Pak or Af-Pak depending on whether the cover has paisley designs or bombs/minarets/menacing men in shalwar kameezes … If women are on the cover, then the two possible Pakistans are expressed through choice of clothing: is it bridal wear or burkhas? On the subject of women, they never have agency. Unless they break all the rules, in which case they're going to end up dead. I don't think there's anything to be said about them, is there? (Hanif "How" n.p.)

Hanif's satirical remarks are a sombre reminder of the prevalent yet stereotypical (and problematic) "violent imagining"(G. K. Khan "Narrating" 30) of Pakistan (as a Muslim Other),

[128] For instance, non-Muslims cannot be the Head of State.

[129] Scholars like Nandy, Kaviraj and Jaffrelot argue that South Asian societies present a unique form of secularism, which has not been taken into account by theorists like Charles Taylor. See Nandy, Kaviraj ("Critical"; *Reflections*), Jaffrelot and Asad (*Formations; Genealogies;* "Religion").

hinting at the use of “re-vitalized orientalist tropes” (Zine "Between" 1) and Islamophobic[130] imagery to inscribe Pakistan. Hanif also highlights the significant correlation between (Pakistani) women’s material bodies and their symbolic mobilisation and evocation as gendered, politicised commodities to authenticate and validate selective narratives about Pakistan as a nation.[131] He claims that the bodies of Pakistani women—the proverbial “usual suspects” evocatively invoked in service of the symbolic inscription of an *authentic* Third-world, Pakistani, Muslim woman—are sought-after symbolic commodities exploited by (international) publishers and experts marketing Pakistani (and or South Asian/Muslim) Anglophone literature. Pakistani women, along with their sartorial choices, indicate the kind of Pakistan readers are likely to encounter in the book: the presence of the image of a henna-adorned woman, bejewelled and/or decked in bright-bold colours and suitably ethnic clothes (or alternatively kohl-rimmed eyes longingly peering through a veil) typifies a foray into an exotic (and fetishised) land of mangoes, spices, mystics, scrumptious food, languid siestas, and *zenanas* filled with sensuous desiring bodies.[132] In contrast, the presence of a burkha-clad woman foregrounds an encounter with a “hard-country” (Lieven), filled with fire-breathing mullahs, menacing army Generals, religious fanatics ready to blow themselves up for houris,[133] and misogynist male Neanderthals. Ranked as “the third most dangerous country for women” (Reuters n.p.), Pakistan often prefigures as a place of forced marriages and honour-killings; inhabited by a hapless, featureless, oppressed and disenfranchised horde called Pakistani women, who are—most significantly—in desperate need of (Western)

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[130] I borrow the term from Zine who defines Islamophobia as “a fear of Islam or its adherents, that is translated into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression” ("Between" 9).
[131] Clearly, the mobilisation of women as symbolic capital in service of nation or for the creation of particular epistemological and ideological discourses is not limited to Pakistan.
[132] The images of women—whether in line with the exotica-erotica sales-pitch, or veiled (Muslim) figures signifying victimisation—is also found in many fictional, non-fictional and other media narratives related to Arab/Muslim countries and the region of South Asia. See Jiwani; Rastegar; Afzal-Khan ("Politics"); Durham ("Displaced"; "Constructing") and Kark.
[133] In popular Muslim mythology, *houris* are young, beautiful maidens who await martyrs in Paradise.

saviours. Both types of Pakistan are often brought to life symbolically via the female stereotypes described here, and have found widespread currency. However, in the contemporary geo-political context of the War on Terror, the latter image—enunciated using the praxis of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism—has emerged as the oft-quoted, heavily circulated, staple representation of the *real* Pakistan in neo-Imperialist and neo-Orientalist discourses.[134]

I contend that Shamsie's feminist and political agenda in *Broken Verses* can be read as an implicit engagement with the notion of neo-Orientalism, along with the associated epistemological categories which it mobilises—in particular the "flexible positional superiority" (Said *Orientalism 7*) of the West embedded within it.[135] Shamsie's novel is a gendered political intervention that challenges and complicates overtly simplistic, two-dimensional and essentialist constructions and perceptions of Pakistan and Pakistani (read Muslim) womanhood.[136] Enunciated in terms of challenging the representational politics of religion, politics (internal and global) and gender in the neo-Imperialist and neo-Orientalist discourses, the (feminist) agenda of Shamsie's novel reflects Bleiker's claim that "'the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of

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[134] Although the concepts of neo-Imperialism and neo-Orientalism are inter-connected and the latter is often used as a rationale for the former, given the context and focus of my research, neo-Orientalism is more appropriate.

[135] In order to contextualise and historicise my discussion of the construction of the female body in neo-Orientalist epistemologies, I draw on the critical insights offered by Cooke ("Saving"; "Muslimwoman"; "Islamic"); Mahmood ("Feminism"; "Agency"; *Politics;* "Feminist"); Nader; Kandiyoti ("Old"; "Bargaining"; "Reflections"); Alrasheed; Altwaiji; Bahramitash; Charania ("Spectacular"; "Feminism"); Charlesworth and Chinkin; Morey and Yaqin; Satterthwaite and Huckerby; Zine (*Introduction;* "Creating"; "Between"); Dag; Afzal-Khan ("Politics"; "Betwixt"); Morey, Yaqin and Forte (*Contesting*).

[136] Pakistan's image as a supporter- sponsor of Islamist terrorist groups gained currency after Osama bin Laden was killed by American forces in Abbottabad, a city close to the nation's capital Islamabad. The ignorance claimed by Pakistan's military and national intelligence services regarding Osama's presence was viewed with suspicion globally. Riedel claims: "All of the nightmares of the twenty-first century come together in Pakistan: nuclear proliferation, drug smuggling, military dictatorship, and above all, international terrorism. Pakistan almost uniquely is both a major victim of terrorism and a major sponsor of terrorism. It has been the scene of horrific acts of terrorist violence … and it has been one of the most prolific State sponsors of terror aimed at advancing its national security interests (31).

politics" (510).[137] Through its engagement with the women's movement of the 1980s, the novel investigates and contests the neo-liberal feminist praxis which, through its investment in the ideas of feminist and/or Muslim exceptionalism, (re)performs a "paternalistic" feminist agenda.[138] By Orientalising the problems and suffering of Pakistani (read Muslim) women, this form of feminism ultimately fuels and supports the subjugation and militarisation of its (Muslim) Other by the neo-Imperialist forces in the global War on Terror. More importantly, through the character of Samina, Shamsie presents a form of feminism which disavows religion, nationalism and Western liberalism as the only possible avenues to meaningfully engage with Pakistani womanhood.

Following 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, Orientalist tropes have been revitalised in what has been labelled by theorists and critics as "neo-Orientalism". In his seminal text *Orientalism,* Edward Said argues that the Western Imperial project was supported by an Orientalist discourse which justified colonisation by interpellating the Orient[139] as an Other requiring rescue. The Orient, constructed in essentialist and reductive terms (Kerboua), symbolised an "anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity" (McClintock *Imperial* 40). A cornerstone of the colonial epistemological traditions and rhetoric that justified Imperial occupation was the (gendered) rescue narrative trope (Afzal-Khan "Politics"; R. Kapur; Jiwani; Cooke "Saving"; Bahramitash; Fluri; Huckerby and Satterthwaite; Rastegar; Chinkin, Wright and Charlesworth; Hunt and Rygiel). This motif was used to christen Imperial

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[137] Bleiker argues for an aesthetic approach to understand or decode political representations, claiming that "there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith" (510). Representation(s) in the political arena are also shaped by the ideologies of those who construct them and consume them. See also B. Mann and M. Khalid.
[138] I borrow this term from Spivak's ("Subaltern Original"; "Three") and Mohanty's critique of the representation and discussion of the category of Third world woman in Western literature and criticism ("Cartographies"; "Under"). See also Young's chapter on Spivak.
[139] Following Said and Kerboua, the Orient here refers to the geographical belt that extends from North Africa to South East Asia, and which is dominated by Muslim countries and/or culture.

expansion as a humanitarian endeavor to rescue brown women from the oppression of brown men.

Post- 9/11, this Orientalist binary of West and East has been (re)cast in simplistic, "theocratic Manichean" terms (Zine "Between" 3).[140] This recasting has been influenced by claims such as those of Huntington, who discusses the inevitable clash between the West and Islam due to the fundamentally antagonist nature of the two civilisations (culturally and religiously),[141] or by Bernard Lewis's "(in)famous exhortation that Islam is a failed civilization" (M. Kumar 237).[142] Referring to the rhetoric of the War on Terror coming from the White House, Judith Butler claims that "it is the same binarism that returns us to an anachronistic division between 'East' and 'West' and which, in its sloshy metonymy, returns us to the invidious distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as 'Islam' itself)" (*Precarious* 2).

An integral part of this neo-Orientalist and neo-Imperialist discourse has been its gendered Islamophobia,[143] characterised by a deep fixation with the body of the (veiled) Muslim woman. Within these discourses, the female Muslim body appears a "malleable construct" (Zine "Between" 9), continuously being (re)inscribed, appropriated and (re)defined to serve specific ideological, political and/or cultural agendas. In the post 9/11-

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[140] Studies of post-9/11 rhetoric show that both Islamist fundamentalists and the US government, especially the Bush administration's "American messianic nationalism" (Lattin n.p.), have drawn on religious imagery, syntax and tropes to support their agendas. See Nayak, R. Kapur, Kellner, R. M. Smith, Bahramitash and Ivie .

[141] Huntington asserts that "the fault lines between civilizations will become the battle lines of the future" (22). Notably, in 1993 the West/Muslim clash was initially framed as a question mark, or possibility; but when the article developed into a book in 1996, the hypothesis had become undeniable, based on *historical truths* about the incompatibility of Islam and the West. This Manichean binary of the West vs the Rest became the explanation for everything that was going wrong in the West from economics, terrorism, hate crimes to insurgencies.

[142] See also Lewis ("Roots", Islam, *Crisis*, "Revolt").

[143] This anti-Islamic rhetoric is founded on a distinctively masculine praxis and language of militarisation and dominance. It is characterised by the use of sexualised humiliation—involving verbal, physical or allegorical feminisation of the Muslim (male) other—as a tool to assert dominance. The misogyny, sodomy and homophobia embedded in the treatment of prisoners at Abu Garib and Guantanamo (Gardham and Cruickshank; Hersh; Winterbottom et al.; Begg) highlight the sexualised nature of this abuse (Bhattacharyya; Zine "Between"; Tétreault; B. Mann). Though this anti-Islamism is gendered in terms of the construction of both Muslim masculinities and femininities, I will concentrate more on the inscription of the Muslim female body due to its direct relevance to Shamsie's feminist agenda in *Broken Verses*.

world, the bodies of Muslim women have emerged as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (Focault qtd. in Ilkkaracan 380) where "competing discourses of embodiment and agency intersect" (Durham "Constructing" 144) and where contemporary global power struggles between *us* and *them* play out.[144] This neo-Orientalist discourse plays upon the reified images of Muslim woman as fragile, silenced, agency-less, and politically immature individuals to construct rescue narratives which justify war on terror as a war for (Muslim) women's rights.[145] These liberation narratives which "exoticize difference in the name of empathy and solidarity" (M. Kumar 237) by casting Muslim women as homogenised "victims of their anachronistic faith, lacking agency and voice" (Zine "Between" 4) have been successfully mobilised in international security discourses to demarcate and/or define the enemy or the terrorist (the fundamentalist Muslim male subject) and to "legitimize coercive state responses" (Huckerby and Satterthwaite 2) against the threatening Other. Moreover, once these disempowered Muslim women have been liberated from "fanatical Muslim Men" (Zine "Between" 9), their unveiled bodies—performing "corporeal modernity" in accordance with (Western) "prescribed and (pre)scripted" ideals of human rights, sexual freedom and liberalism—[146] prove their self-empowerment and progress (Fluri 251).

Unsurprisingly, liberation/rescue narratives thrive on the concomitant rhetoric of feminist and Islamic exceptionalism(s). The discourse of Islamic exceptionalism presents issues such as the (lack of) education, religious fundamentalism and separatism, violation of women's rights, repression of sexuality and misogyny, as exclusive and endemic to the Muslim world

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[144] That is, a liberal, modernised, progressive, secular, democratic, free, emancipated West at conflict with a fundamentalist, conservative, traditionalist, regressive, religiously extremist, repressive, static and authoritarian Muslim world.

[145] For discussion of the politicisation of human (women) rights post-9/11, see Satterthwaite and Huckerby.

[146] See Laura Bush's discussion of what counts as freedom for Afghan women: "The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control….Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, *women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment*" (qtd. in R. Kapur 211; emphasis added).

and/or to Islam.[147] It presents sex as "the particular and defining hang-up of Islam" (Bhattacharyya 9) which consequently constructs (Muslim) societies that are "being fundamentally (*and uniquely*) centered around men's sexual control of women's bodies" (Rastegar 118). This discourse constructs a picture of a Muslim society where Islam is evil, while whitewashing and over-simplifying the role of factors such as cultural traditions, capitalism, globalisation (especially the unilateral flow of capital from the first to the third world), realpolitik, authoritarian governments, poverty, and/or corrupt regimes that contribute to oppressive and bleak circumstances for women.

Interestingly, when Shamsie refers to different sources of oppression in *Broken Verses*, these are *not* positioned as endemic to Islam or religion *per se*. The manipulation of religion, tribal/feudal custom or economic circumstances are shown to cause women's oppression and victimisation in Pakistan. The first case Shamsie includes in the novel is that of the illiterate maid who murders her abusive employer. Here, a superior socio-economic position is shown to offer protection to the abuser. The second case is that of the Poet himself. His mother was exploited and raped by her landlord, which led to her pregnancy and social ostracism. In another case, involving honour killing, a tragedy takes place because of animosity between two families.

In contrast to Islamic exceptionalism, the praxis of feminist exceptionalism encodes and frames narrative(s)/instance(s) of female resistance and struggle emanating from the Muslim world as singular, individual response(s) by strong, yet rare (Muslim) women. These women face deadly corporeal consequences for their transgressive actions (a tendency Hanif

[147] The *insider's perspective* in many works suggests this Islamic exceptionalism. A. H. Ali's work, for example, suggests that "[t]he Koran is not a great book; it is reactionary and full of misogyny" (160). Similarly, Nafisi proclaims that "[l]iving in the Islamic Republic [of Iran] is like having sex with a man you loathe, you make your mind blank—you pretend to be somewhere else, you tend to forget your body, you hate your body. That's what we do over here. We are constantly pretending to be somewhere else—we either plan it or dream it" (329).

mockingly refers to in the excerpt quoted at the start of this discussion). This liberation discourse of feminist exceptionalism (and the epistemological categories it evokes)—couched in the neo-liberal feminist terminology of “can-do Girls”—is characterised by the repetitive “trope of the individual heroine fighting bravely against a uniformly and always-already patriarchal, oppressive culture coded this way because of its adherence to Islam” (Afzal-Khan "Politics" 153). The choice to emphasise the individual nature of resistance, problematically casts the agentive (Muslim) female subject as “one single person: one body, one voice” (Lunden n.p.) who, in an “absolutely unprecedented” (Chesler "Mukhtar" 83) manner, somehow finds the courage to stand up against oppressive (read fundamentalist, Islamic patriarchal) forces and to fight for her (human) rights.[148] Often implicit in these stories of liberation and self-empowerment—championing (selected) dissenting female figure(s) as heroines par excellence—is a strong visual rhetoric of human rights through which the suffering of this Other (Muslim/brown) woman is turned into a spectacle for (Western) consumption. The spectacular rhetoric of human rights (Hesford 8 ff.) in which these narratives of liberation and exceptionalism are worded, allow for these stories to be hijacked and appropriated to affirm the superiority of the Western self (feminist and otherwise). According to Afzal-Khan, this rhetoric:

> […] enacts, through the image of the ‘suffering other’, not so much a politics of the other’s accessing her ‘voice’ but the presence and self-recognition of the Western feminist who has rushed to that other’s rescue, whether through aid agencies, or through performances in the other’s name, or through ‘activist’ writing and publishing. ("Politics" 159)

[148] This “individual heroine syndrome” (Afzal-Khan "Politics") is evident in the West’s preoccupation with stories and voices such as those of Mukhtaran Mai, Malala Yousafzai, Irshad Manji, Azar Nafisi and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

This rhetoric also creates an asymmetrical viewing and representation platform which divides the world, that is, the West and its Other(s) into oversimplified "spectator and sufferer zones" respectively, foreclosing the possibility of any productive analysis into how the two might intersect (Hesford 9). The bodies of these rescued and liberated women become performative synecdoche, highlighting everything that is wrong with their respective culture (in this case Islam). The concomitant discourses of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism also allow for the West to mask its neo-Orientalist and neo-Imperialist agenda of regimenting and controlling the Muslim woman's body through the rhetoric of (universal) human rights and the notions of progress, development and empowerment. Analysing the representation and mobilisation of the cases of Pakistani (Muslim) women like Mukhatran Mai in international press, Charania cogently argues that the nature of the interest of a "white audience" in her story symbolizes:

> […] an insidious investment on the part of human rights regimes. As an apparatus of neoliberal, neocolonial and the war on terror's machinery, human rights in its (over)use of such visual tropes and imagery to paint a picture of brown oppression, demonstrates a simultaneous allegiance to "whiten" the brownness of these women's lives while using that same brownness to mobilize a narrative of the *other*. ("Spectacular" 67)

I propose that *Broken Verses* writes back to these discourses of Islamic and feminist exceptionalism. The characters of strong and vocal women like Samina, Shehnaz, Aasmaani, and Beema challenge and deconstruct the discourses in which the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women are interpellated under the banner of "identical cross-cultural universal subordination" (Young 204). The references to the 1980s' vibrant movement of feminist resistance and dissidence, discussed in detail in the previous section, likewise negate the

notion of individual heroine syndrome as a valid frame of reference for talking about Pakistani-Muslim women. Instead, *Broken Verses* proposes that "[w]omen's activism has always been an integral part" of Pakistan, both socially and politically (Charania "Feminism" 318).

Shamsie's feminist agenda in the novel warns against a reductive reading of Pakistani women in terms of lack—that is, lacking agency, identity, individuality and voice. By doing so it challenges a Western or Eurocentric liberal model of feminism, one rooted in "identity based politics of visibility" (Afzal-Khan "Politics" 152). Shamsie does highlight the oppression and subjugation faced by women in Pakistani society but refuses to locate its root-cause exclusively in religious terms. The women in *Broken Verses*—whether agentive or victims—cannot be simply categorised as "an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions" (Mohanty "Under" 55). The characters of Samina, Aasmaani and the Poet gesture towards (and incorporate) various instances of female victimisation (and resistance) in the novel's plot. This heteroglossic text (without appropriating subaltern voices) locates the notions of agency and disempowerment, freedom and oppression along the nexus of economics (local and global), culture and geography (urban, rural, tribal). The threading of these multiple voice/stories, in turn, builds a complex picture of Pakistani womanhood which challenges and deconstructs the notion that Pakistani women are mere victims of an ever-present, ominous, uniform patriarchal structure. Samina and her 'coming of age' story as a feminist - activist represents the various stages of the feminist movement within Pakistan. Grounding and connecting the roots/route(s) of feminist awakening(s) with local (communal) culture and other Muslim countries like Egypt, presents readers with an instance of feminist

agentive performance which is indigenous, bottom-up, progressive, and communal—as opposed to foreign (Western), imposed from above, and individualistic. Shamsie further challenges the rhetoric of feminist and Muslim exceptionalism through her representation of womanhood, especially in terms of desire.

In terms of assigning and locating agentive performances, Shamsie undermines the binary of the private and the public which positions the latter as the sphere of activism, power and (historical) significance. The familial and domestic are closely intertwined with the national and historical. Unsurprisingly, the public-political role and literary achievements of the Poet, as the symbolic father-figure of the nation, are positioned to be as significant as the conventional fatherhood of Aasmaani's dad—sketched in terms of paying bills and fixing things: "[f]athers were efficient in matters of finance, and rewiring. They didn't lack emotion, they simply didn't express it except in tiny bursts. And they were always there. That was their most abiding quality" (250). Towards the end of the novel, as Aasmaani starts to come to terms with the suicide of her mother and begins mending her relationship with her father, she becomes a mouth-piece to assert the significance of stable homes and paternal figures: "[l]et's talk about the heroism of staying at home with your children, and the heroism of leaving them in order to fight….Let's talk about the simple pleasures of finding order in the working of an electric fuse" (257-8). These excerpts are also significant because they construct radical models of (Pakistani) masculinity which value domesticity and vulnerability. Juxtaposition of the very public and unconventional (secularised) masculine self of the Poet, with the rather traditional and homely figures of Aasmaani's father and her (devout and loving) fraternal grandfather, as well as the heterosexual figures of Ed and Beema's husband Shakeel with the queer selves of Mirza and Shehnaz's husband,

suggests models of Pakistani masculinities that challenge the construction of Pakistani society as a heteropatriarchal[149] space inhabited solely by violent, hyper-masculine and heteronormative masculinities.[150]

Shamsie continues this pattern with the female characters and feminist agenda in her novel. Beema and Samina are sketched as the opposite ends of Pakistani womanhood: Beema is a loving mother, devoted wife and dutiful daughter. She goes to Islamabad to look after her dying mother. There she "spent hours at a stretch sitting by her mother's bedside, holding her hand … she'd smooth down the goosebumps that appeared on her mother's skin, though the old lady was well past being aware of such things" (324). She has also been a loving mother for her step-daughter, Aasmaani, admitting that she worries about her continuously, "I fuss. I know. I can't help it. It's what mothers do" (22). Moreover, when Samina falls into depression after the political assassination of the Poet, Beema brings her home and looks after her until Samina commits suicide. Furthermore, she maintains a house reverberating with the sounds of domesticity. Aasmaani reminisces that "… in Dad and Beema's house there was always some sound—Beema on the telephone, the cook yelling at the gardener, the neighbour's dog barking" (23). Religious traditions like the Eid are familial ritualistic festivities which are annually celebrated with family members (close and distant) with full gusto and spirit. Interestingly, Beema is also interested in grapevines and the mundane, "'Such excitement,' Beema declared … 'About Shehnaz Saeed's return. I was talking to the customs guy about it and next thing I knew I was in the centre of a throng,

[149] Borrowing L. Hart's notion of heteropatriarchy (7), J. M. Alexander argues that colonisation as well as decolonisation (the formation of new States) is characterised by the twin processes of patriarchy and heterosexuality, maintained and regulated through socio-cultural traditions and State laws (65). This patriarchal heterosexualisation of the civic polity plays an instrumental role in policing and, when required, denying, for instance, in the case of homosexuality "the erotic autonomy of its subjects" (Ilkkaracan 382).

[150] See the hyper-masculine persona grafted on to General Zia in Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes.*

buzzing away about the Great Comeback'" (21). She appears to incarnate traditional South Asian womanhood, defined primarily in terms of her domesticity.

Beema stands in stark contrast to the unconventional womanhood of Samina—living independently in a self-owned house, and in an open relationship with the Poet. Samina represents the modern woman who refuses to sacrifice her sexuality at the altar of motherhood. She has given up a traditional domestic life to pursue her passion to fight against patriarchal tyranny as a feminist and political activist. Although these two women are situated poles apart, they are not cast as adversaries, but rather as two sides of the same coin, forming a symbolic sisterhood in which each is a source of strength for the other. Together, they represent Shamsie's incarnation of ideal feminist selves—women standing together as equals and supporting each other in their fights, whether at home or in the public arena. This message is highlighted when Beema tells Samina:

> Put us together, Samina, and the two of us form the one Superwoman that every individual woman needs to be if she's to go through this absurd world with even the barest sense of responsibility. *We* take on governments, buy the groceries, wrest religion out of the hands of patriarchs, raise *our* daughters into women, and accompany *our* men to places they'll never survive alone because they're still little boys in the bodies of competent adults. (184; emphasis added)

Beema's use of collective pronouns to (re)define agency and empowerment suggests that these characters see themselves as complementary. They are not opponents, nor do they judge one another using the patriarchal lens of good (the domesticated mother, wife and daughter) or bad (independent-minded, desiring body) women. It is this bond of sisterhood that allows Samina to trust Beema with her daughter, giving her the freedom to go out in

the streets and take on patriarchal State machinery bent on disenfranchising women through its discourse of *chadar aur chardewari*. Similarly, it is through this sense of compassion and respect, as well as recognition of the other woman's struggle and contribution, that Beema is able to bring Samina to her home and look after her following her mental breakdown. Significantly, Beema does this despite the discomfort of her husband who puts up with her choice with "gritted teeth" and is not "too happy about how close Beema and … [Samina] were. It would have suited him better … if they got on civilly enough not to make life uncomfortable for ... [Aasmani] and no more" (184).

The friendship between Samina and actress Shehnaz Saeed is another example of an empathetic relationship between women in the novel. While the relationship between Beema and Samina is platonic, Samina and Shehnaz's friendship has homoerotic undertones as Shehnaz is in love with Samina. This pairing is significant. Shehnaz, like her husband and Mirza, represents desire in its homoerotic dimension. She (like her husband) is positioned as a closeted character in the novel who struggles with the nature of her desire and sexuality. Following convention, Shahnaz initially marries a man but this relationship eventually ends in divorce, leaving her with a son to support. Post-divorce, it takes her several years to "face the truth" about herself and the focus of her desire induces feelings of shame, self-consciousness and inadequacy as a woman. She considers her desire "unnatural" (294) and when her son, Ed, discovers that his mother is a lesbian, he shames her by saying "You're not a real woman" (296). These remarks symbolically represent Shahnaz's alienated sense of self. She has internalised the idea that heterosexuality is "normal" and anything else is an abomination and/or perversion. It is predominantly Samina who helps Shehnaz to relinquish the sense of shame and stigmatisation surrounding her sexuality and desire. In a

conversation with Samina, Shehnaz delivers a "tortured monologue" on "desire and identity" (296) and the question of repressing one's sexuality to conform. She is positioned as a subaltern, experiencing an identity crisis, psychological anxiety and shame induced by the nature, as well as the existence, of her desire—both of which she perceives to be transgressions of what is considered sexually and socially appropriate. In response, Samina uses a mango analogy to confirm the pre-eminence of Shehnaz's right of self-identification as a woman as well as a civic subject: "I've never liked mangoes. People say it means I'm not a true Pakistani, but I've never liked mangoes. Nothing to be done about it, and frankly I don't see why I should bother to try. The way I see it I'm just expanding people's notions of what it means to be a Pakistani" (296-7). Through her explicit, non-judgemental acceptance of Shahnaz's womanhood in terms of eroticism and corporeality, Samina legitimises Shehnaz's "right to pursue homosexual preference within a larger sphere of sexual choices" (B. Bose 251).[151] Samina's acceptance and empathy challenges the essentialist, heteropatriarchal construction of both womanhood and the nature of sexual desire. I propose that in doing so she participates in creating a safe space for Shahnaz where she can begin to re-conceive her desire and self in non-pathological terms:

> That's what Samina taught me—that it wasn't anyone's business and no one had a right to question me about it and demand answers. She … finally made me dispense with all feelings of shame. My husband was largely responsible, too, but it was Samina who took that final filament of shame off my skin and just blew it away. (296)

The homosexuality of these characters (Shehnaz, Mirza, and Shehnaz's husband), I argue, is not an instance of "liberated sexual identities made possible" by exposure to Western

[151] These comments relate to the homoeroticism in Mehta's film, *Fire*, and are equally relevant to *Broken Verses*.

liberalism as Gairola Rahul suggests (317), whether as a legacy of British colonialism or a fruit of globalisation. Shamsie refuses to position the politics of desire (in terms of what is acceptable or transgressive; normal or perverse, both homoerotically and heterosexually) within a framework of modernity versus traditionalism or religious conservatism versus Western liberalism. Her non-judgemental, equal treatment of homo/heterosexuality appears to conform to Eve Sedgwick's theorisation of all forms of sexuality as non-authoritative performances of human desire:

> [T]he specificity, materiality, and variety of sexual practices, along with their diverse meanings for individual lives, can be done better justice in a context where the impoverished abstractions that claim to define sexuality can be treated as not authoritative. The dividing up of sexual acts—indeed all persons—under the "opposite" categories of "homo" and "hetero" is not a natural given but a historical process, still incomplete today and ultimately impossible but categorized by potent contradictions and explosive effects. (xvi)

Shamsie is not the first or only female writer to explore homosexual desire in a South Asian/Pakistani context. In order to highlight the significance of Shamsie's feminist agenda in *Broken Verses*, it is useful to place her novel in dialogue with two other South Asian landmark works on the subject of female homosexuality, Ismat Chughtai's infamous short story "Lihaaf" ("The Quilt") and Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*. I consider these works seminal because of their disruptive and provocative effects. The content of both—the existence and performance of lesbian desire—has been variedly described as inflammatory, subversive and incendiary.[152] Chughtai, a pre-partition Urdu writer, made headlines (and incurred

[152] For discussion of the two works, see B. Bose; Ross; Rahul; Rajakumar; I. Mitra; M. Kumar; D. Kumar and Naz.

litigation) with her hugely controversial (at the time) short story, first published in 1941/42.[153] The story hints at the existence of same-sex relationships in the lives of both its protagonists, a husband (the Nawab) and wife (Bibi Jan). The Nawab ignores his wife but is shown to have an interesting predilection for "youthful", " fair and slim-waisted'" boys (Mitra 316), whereas the unhappy wife, caught in an unfulfilling marriage, is hinted to have been brought back to life by the skilful hands of her maid, Rabbu. *Fire*, a film by Indian-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta, explores the lesbian relationship between two sisters-in-law in a middle-class Hindu family. Radha and Sita are both frustrated in their respective marriages due to the disinterest and neglect of their husbands. Radha's husband Ashok is a celibate ascetic while Jatin's marriage to Sita is a sham as he maintains a relationship with a Hong Kong Chinese woman, Alice. Frustrated and disillusioned, the two women grow close, their emotional bonding eventually leading to physical intimacy. *Fire*, like "Lihaaf", prompted significant social criticism and protest, including life-threats, the smashing of movie-sets and refusal of access to certain sacred sites (the city of Varanasi) for filming. It is debatable whether these works are the only, or even the most subversive literary/media portrayals of female homoeroticism. However, undoubtedly, these works generated immense controversy in their era because they challenged normative heterosexuality by the "raising of discomfort levels about our so-called regular, happy home and family lives" (B. Bose 250). In this respect, these works can be interpreted as the site of feminist resistance.

Arguably, however, the subversive feminist agendas of these works remains, comparatively, problematic and limited. Both works locate the origin of the women's homoerotic desire in frustrated and unfulfilled heterosexual matrimonial relationships. This creates the uneasy impression that if the characters of Bibi Jan, Radha and Sita were not

[153] L. A. Flemming cites the publication date as 1941 ("Out" 204), while I. Mitra claims it as1942 (314).

neglected by their respective husbands, they would not have turned to other women for the alleviation of their sexual frustration. As B. Bose suggests, "[i]t almost seems as if they would not have necessarily desired each other in a normal heterosexual world; they merely have such a desiring thrust upon them by aberrant male (hetero)sexualities" (256). While homoeroticism is implied in the narrative and is never explicitly realised or named in "Lihaaf", in the case of *Fire,* the dynamics of the homoerotic desire between the two women continue to be expressed and performed in the terms of heterosexual metaphors and fantasy. In the case of Shamsie's *Broken Verses*, even though two of its characters (Shehnaz and her husband) choose to publically remain closeted throughout the narrative, subversively the three characters' (male and female) homosexuality is a natural form and expression of their desire: it is not born out of (or verbalised in) frustrated heteronormativity. It is an agentive performance of desire rooted in their corporeality. Moreover, these characters are not entirely closeted in the traditional sense of the terminology, as their homosexuality is known and accepted (to varying degrees) by different people. For instance, Mirza's homosexuality is at least known and accepted by the Poet, Samina (also possibly by the close circle of their acolytes and friends) and Aasmaani. Furthermore, by drawing a connection between sexuality and Pakistani identity in the mango analogy, Shamsie symbolically highlights the inexorable relationship between heteronormativity and constructions of states/nations, with the procreative, middle-class family as its traditional unit of structure and function. Concurrently, Samina's emphasis on diversification, along with the presence of male and female homoerotic desire in the novel, recreates a Pakistan characterised by excess—in terms of history, subjectivities, bodies, beliefs—that cannot be contained by neatly organised binary and essentialist categories of heteronormative nationhood. Shamsie's "gendered and sexual politics of excess" (Minai 1

ff.) challenges the narrow construction of Pakistani identity, thereby creating an alternate national space which allows for "the possibility of affective attachment to the nation … in queer terms" (Cilano *Contemporary 106*).

In spite of Ed's close attachment to his mother Shehnaz, his immersion in New York's cosmopolitan world and his liberal-minded indulgence in heterosexual relationships, he cannot reconcile himself with Shehnaz's sexuality. He refuses to see her as anything but a mother and consequently censors her for asserting her agency as a homosexual, erotic subject. Ed is not the only child in the narrative who, despite a liberal and progressive outlook, is conflicted by the tendency to regard motherhood and sexual desire in exclusionary, antithetical terms. Aasmaani sees her mother's choice to be a feminist and political activist as testament to her agency and courage, refusing to "invent excuses or justifications" (254) for critiquing her actions. Samina refuses to allow her identity and corporeality to be circumscribed by the essentialist and reductive notion that "femininity is maternity", asserting to her daughter, "Sweetheart, I can't stop being a woman just because I'm your mother" (203). She refuses to accept the binarism which exalts domesticity (via maternity) as a preferred sphere for women in comparison to agentive performance in the public sphere: "I would not allow them to tell me that there was a choice to be made between motherhood and standing up for justice" (90). Aasmaani also refuses to accept the patriarchal normative principle that "a woman's actions were only of value if they could be linked to maternal instincts" (254). However, like Ed, Aasmaani is also haunted by her mother's decision to abandon her and go into exile with the Poet, thereby positioning herself as a woman first and mother later: "[i]t's not natural. Mothers aren't supposed to choose anyone else over their children. You unnatural woman" (254). She sees her mother's

depression and consequent suicide as the ultimate act of abandonment, signifying that Samina chose “romantic love” over motherhood (90). Similar sentiments are shared by Aasmaani’s father, who sees maternity as the ultimate expression and fulfilment of female subjectivity. For him, it is not only normal for female desire to elide into maternal desire, in fact, this elision is a naturalised or common sense construct which positions maternal desire as superior to feminine desire. As Geetha Ramanathan argues, “the elision between maternity and femininity is total; the mother's sexuality is denied and then the woman becomes acceptable as mother. Maternity becomes the pre-condition of the foreclosure of the female's sexuality and autonomy” (18). Aasmaani highlights that the equation of femininity with maternity is so deeply entrenched within patriarchal socio-cultural structures that even the most liberal-minded men fail to see past the naturalised construct that “[m]otherhood [is] an all-or-nothing business” (101). In the words of Aasmaani:

> Unconventional mothers and their children—that was a subject that made Dad choke on his attempt to be honest without sounding chauvinistic….But if a woman was a mother, Dad was simply unable to view her life in any way except as it might relate to the well-being of her child. (67)

Ed refuses to see his mother as a desiring corporal being. He is especially repulsed by the homoerotic nature of her desire, and he cannot even bring himself to name it. Talking to Aasmani he refers to his mother’s lovers as “others”, claiming that he “resented her for having them” (232). The use of the words *others* and *them* constructs these women as nameless, faceless and genderless apparitions. These othered women constitute a dichotomous contrast to the normative female *self* signified by (a) heterosexual womanhood and (b) more importantly, the asexual mother. Ed blames his mother for

lacking the ability/capacity to truly love him, preferring instead to love "them" (232)—which by association implies that she prioritised her body's need for pleasure and sexual intimacy. As Amaya Fernández Menicucci and Santiago Fernández-Ardanaz state, "Unable to cope with the fact that his rivals are not men, and, what is more, feeling his masculinity and sexuality irremediably rejected, Ed reshapes reality to make it match his own perception of it, to 'fit his story'" (145). In comparison to Ed and/or her father, Aasmaani is more ambivalent in her assessments about the elision between maternity and femininity or homoeroticism. When Shehnaz apprehensively confesses her love for Samina in front of Aasmaani, she simply replies, "my mother didn't raise any bigoted children" (294). Similarly, when Ed complains in front of Aasmaani about his mother's active sexual life, Aasmaani, echoing her own mother's language, tells him that Shehnaz "didn't stop being a woman because she became a mother" (233). Privately though, she admits to herself that, at some level perhaps, this is also what she wanted from her mother, that Samina should exist only as her mother "to the exclusion of all else" (233). This insistence of both children (albeit in differing degrees) on a desexualised motherhood is symptomatic of an approach to maternity which, even in this post-modern age, insists on constructing the institution and the subjective experience of motherhood, predominantly, from a child's perspective.

The positioning of Shehnaz and Samina as *unconventional* mothers/women foregrounds the female body as a political construct. In terms of the female body's sexuality, desire and ability to procreate, *Broken Verses* portrays women as erotic and/or desiring subjects, signalling their bodies as the location of desire and pleasure, both homo- and heterosexual. Even in the case of the heterosexual relationship between the Poet and Samina, the female body is never positioned as an inert and passive object for the fulfilment of the phallus. In

this way the desiring female body emerges as a site of resistance and subversion through (a) the validation of female desire itself; (b) the assertion of the right to choose; (c) and the legitimisation of the female libido and its active pursuit of physical pleasure. Lucy Sargisson argues:

> If, as has been suggested by Freud, the libido governs our relations to the other, then a libido governed by femininity shifts the focus from masculinity and can potentially move away from a conception of the world ordered along an axis of what can best be described as binarity, opposition and phallocentricism. It is with this in view that libidinal femininity is treated ... as a utopian concept; it provokes a paradigm shift in consciousness. (112)

Broken Verses represents this libidinal femininity. The centralisation of the female libido—representing both the power and potentiality of female desire in heterosexual and homoerotic dimensions—is not meant to signify "an escape from the phallic, but … a definite departure from an obsession with the phallic" (B. Bose 258). This paradigm shift speaks of the feminist utopian longing to see the female body construed as the "speaking/talking" subject—rather than as an object of desire—(B. Bose 253), in keeping with Helen Cixous's *écriture feminine* and Luce Irigaray's radical metaphor of the two lips.

In my discussion of *Broken Verses*, I have explored the international and indigenous ideological (feminist, political and religious) praxis with which Shamsie implicitly and explicitly engages in her novel *Broken Verses*. The presence of agentive, vocal women like Aasmaani, Samina, Beema, Rabia and Shehnaz and the references to subaltern women like the Poet's mother, the maid whose case Samina's uncle takes, and Safia Bibi, portray the spectrum of Pakistani womanhood. Their varied positons and subjectivities in turn offer a strong challenge to the discourse of feminist exceptionalism while deconstructing the

liberation narrative of brown Muslim women in need of rescue. Shamsie also complicates the praxis of Islamic exceptionalism by highlighting that a complex interplay of indigenous socio-economic factors and global capitalist forces create structures of dominance and oppression which are more responsible for women's oppression than religion. The diversity or plurality of belief systems and practices—in terms of religion, politics, history and sexualities—which Shamsie's characters present in the novel, deconstruct the image of Pakistan as a hot-bed of fundamentalism for its international audience. Indigenous readers are reminded, simultaneously, of the need to embrace the multiplicity that has historically characterised Muslim culture in South Asia. A thesis on the malleability of identity and character, Shamsie's novel is about reconfiguring, through multiplicity, what it means to be Pakistani, for local and international readers. Shamsie writes from what Cooke refers to as a space of "multiple critique", a third space born out of multiple consciousness and double critique (Cooke *Women* 109). From this space, "post-colonial subjects articulate an oppositional discourse that simultaneously targets local and global antagonists" (Cooke *Women* 109). Writing from this space of multiplicity allows her to move beyond the binaries which "lock critical engagements into polemical dialectics" (Zine "Between" 14) and the simplistic over-used terms of national, global, religion, secularism, heteronormativity, and homosexuality.

2.6 Problematising Shamsie's Politics of Resistance

Shamsie's narrative successfully challenges a reductive image of Pakistan in terms of religion, politics and in particular the role and position of its female subjects. However, despite its strong feminist undertones, the novel's subversive agenda remains troubling because it constructs resistance in problematic gendered binaries. Talking to Aasmaani,

Shehnaz refers to the Poet and Samina as legends: "They were mythic … *The Poet* and *the Activist*. They walked into a room and crowds parted for them. The sea itself would have parted for them if they'd so demanded. That's how we felt, all of us who were their audience" (295; emphasis added). I contend that this symbolic construction associates the Poet with the power of the word and Samina with corporeality through her activism, thus recreating and reinforcing the phallocentric division between man and woman in terms of mind and body. And although Samina features significantly alongside the Poet, the manner in which their activities and impact are encoded in the novel affirms the Poet's superiority. The Poet's mythic status is continuously reinforced and upheld in the novel: except on rare occasions, he is referred to by his symbolic title the Poet, instead of his name Ashiq. In contrast, Samina predominantly remains Samina throughout the narrative—a human and an individual. Her title of 'The Activist', which Shehnaz refers to in the quote above, is infrequently used as an adjective. Furthermore, the manner in which the narrative encodes the achievements of both characters also (re)asserts and (re)establishes a hierarchy between them. And as within this hierarchy, the Poet appears to be given a superior position, thus, this representation becomes gendered too.

In chapter XII, Aasmaani goes looking for information that can shed light on the circumstances of the Poet's death. She meets a character called the Archivist, who for more than three decades has been clipping articles from Pakistan's English and Urdu newspapers and storing them in an elaborate system. In the novel he is referred to as "a Karachi institution" (162) and his significance is highlighted by pointing out that for years he has been delivered a copy of every Karachi newspaper free of charge by 'The All-Pakistan Newspaper Association'. In other words, he is positioned in the text as a kind of national

historian. The file which this Archivist or historian keeps on the Poet curiously opens with an article titled “Weep, Pakistan”. This title, alongside the language of the article, positions the death of the Poet as a national tragedy. Likewise, the birth of the Poet is shown to be cause for national celebration. As I have mentioned, STD planned to mark the birth of the Poet by releasing a documentary about him, for which Aasmaani is asked to confirm facts. Similarly, readers are told that the Poet moved the nation with his poetry and he was instrumental in bringing down the military regime of Ayub Khan. In fact, it is implied that the State got rid of him because it feared that his much awaited new collection of political poems would have a similar effect and result in an uprising: “ No one had forgotten the impact his Hikmet translations … had on the popular—and successful—uprising against Ayub Khan in 1969. So the government had him killed—and tortured, to teach other revolutionary poets a lesson” (173). Additionally, it is suggested that the government agents “burnt his poems” (173) fearing that “[h]is death would make his poems so much more powerful than his life ever could” (174). His death, a violent political assassination, remains shrouded in mystery and conspiracy that continues to haunt the consciousness of the nation. In short, in life and death the mythical status of the Poet’s character is maintained. He dies for the country, for telling uncompromising truth, for speaking out against an authoritarian regime—this framing adds a tragic resonance to his character which is not made available for Samina in the text.

In contrast, Samina becomes a footnote in history—remembered and eulogised only by those who were close to her. The Poet’s death and the conspiracy surrounding it become a part of the nation’s history, archived properly through the Archivist. Samina instead dies of individual grief and commits suicide. Samina’s death is remembered through letters of

sympathy (not via articles published in national newspapers) sent to her family by individuals who had known her or worked with her. The record-keeper of these mementos is Samina's step-daughter Rabia and their archive is a box. Similarly, Samina's achievement is celebrated by stating that she made a difference in the lives of people and the women's movement. The women's movement, itself, is credited with small victories, unlike the Poet's voice which toppled governments.

This alignment of the two characters also becomes disturbing in an historical context. Like Hamid's choice to use a male pseudonym for Mumtaz' anti-authoritarian voice, the persona of Samina does not move beyond reductive binarism. This becomes even more curious in the context of Pakistan's literary history. Women like Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed are a well-known and publically recognised part of Pakistan's tradition of feminist resistance. These women are considered to be some of the most subversive female voices in Pakistani literature who have challenged and fought for women's rights though literature as well as political activism.[154] It seems surprising that, in the presence of such an iconic role-models, Shamsie casts Samina as merely a political activist. It can be argued that Samina's suicide is a part of Shamsie's deconstructive strategy that challenges the traditional deployment of the female body as a symbol of the Nation-State in masculine nationalist discourses. Samina's depression is brought on by the Poet's violent death, especially from having to witness his mutilated, tortured body and the painful spectacle of the burning of his poems as a helpless bystander. This grief and depression—or mental illness—is a powerful corporeal assertion of the materiality of her existence as a woman and individual. Like Mumtaz' monstrous motherhood, Samina's illness is a reminder of the leaky bodies which cannot be contained within normative boundaries and discourses. Her illness is also a

[154] See R. Ahmad; N. Silva ("Shameless").

symbolic reminder of the precarity of human self—especially of (as I mentioned earlier) "how layers of history fall one upon the other to create a texture which surrounds and perhaps defines us despite ourselves" (Hartland n.p.).

However, I propose that its binary structure ultimately compromises the strong feminist praxis of Shamsie's novel. The most important blow is delivered by the novel's message itself: "move the battles towards abstract space. Force tyranny to defend itself in language" (336). This conclusion, offered by the novel (curiously through Samina), privileges language—the written word and history—as the ultimate site for resistance. As the written word is associated with the Poet in the narrative structure, therefore, it is his mode of resistance which is privileged with permanence. While Samina and her corporeal activism, in comparison, becomes temporary and transient. The Poet, his voice and character, is historicised and nationalised in the novel, while Samina, her loss and death, are problematically individualised and privatised.

Chapter Three: "Blood becoming Ink":[155] Nadeem Aslam's Incriminating Lyrical Murals of Violence, Brutality, Love and Loss

> How could anyone discriminate against 3 billion human beings simply because of their gender! If that makes me a feminist then I am. … The women—more than the men— attempted to remake the world, and failed. But in their attempt they became part of the universal story of hope. (Aslam "Writing" n.p.)

Aslam's second novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (*Maps*) is an unforgiving and impassioned examination of the communal politics of a Pakistani migrant community in Britain during the 1990s. This critique is articulated through sustained engagement with (the gendering and treatment of) the body of the migrant (predominantly) Pakistani-Muslim woman. *Maps*' multi-layered critical structure simultaneously takes up the issues of economic marginalisation, religious nationalism (and its concomitant traditionalism), racial discrimination and gender. However, I contend that, in comparison to the novel's centralisation of the interplay between religion and gendered violence, Aslam's engagement with race and class remains tangential.

Maps can be read as an endeavour to 'name' the various subtle and more overt forms of violence and brutality which the bodies of migrant Pakistani (Muslim) women often endure daily. The polemics of *Maps* reflect that the ideological investment in the female body as a marker of familial/communal honour generates a culture obsessed with closely monitoring, controlling and policing this body, especially in term of its sexuality. The institution of marriage, steeped in traditionalism, is depicted as one such mechanism, instrumentalised to

[155] Aslam ("Interview" n.p.).

ensure this body's *proper performance*—both privately and publically. Attempts at female defiance or deviance result in severe compensatory retribution practices: from forced marriages, domestic abuse, marital rape(s), manipulation of reproductive rights and female infanticide, to the notorious honour-killings.

Importantly, Aslam does not fall into the trap of presenting the figure of the migrant Muslim woman as only a voiceless object, continuously and pervasively defined by her victimhood. Simultaneously, he denies the Pakistani migrant woman (especially that belonging to the first generation) any "sustained, powerful myth of a primal innocence" (A. Ahmad *Theory* 118). He complicates the representational matrix by showing that women themselves are willing and unwilling actors in creating and sustaining oppressive structures which engender violence.

Maps charts the roots/routes of the violent (individual/familial/communal) treatment of Pakistani-Muslim female bodies. Aslam vacillates between accusing Islam for engendering these atrocities and suggesting that a crisis in traditional masculinity is the real culprit. Sufism, and its centralised message of love, is presented as a counter to a misogynist, conservative and violence-engendering (Islamic) religiosity. Characters such as Heer and Sassi, from South Asian romantic folktales, are presented as (glorified) symbols of agentive subjectivity, even though their rebellion ends tragically. However, I argue that Aslam's pro-feminist agenda ultimately fails. Firstly, because the "history of female agency and resistance articulated … [through Sufi folklore] lacks a trajectory into the present" (R. Ahmed *Writing* 165). Similarly, the contradictory ideological factors that anchor the narrative (and enact their ideological violence on women's bodies) turn the novel's polyphonic structure into a "cacophony of voices [which] is not truly dialogic" (Yaqin

"Muslims" 113). More significantly, investing male figures in the novel with the power and position of the saviour ultimately undermines the effect of Aslam's critique.

I begin this analysis by briefly contextualising Aslam as a writer. His views about the political potency of literature and the role of the writer play a significant role in his approach to, and treatment of, the subject-matter. I then move to a detailed discussion of structure, plot and characterisation of the novel. My analysis of the representation of the female body in *Maps* begins by arguing that the spatial setting of the novel, in itself, emerges as a female body. Discussion of the corporeal female body begins by looking at how the body of the migrant woman is interpellated in dominant socio-cultural structures to produce normative womanhood. I undertake in-depth analysis of the representation of the domesticated female body in the novel—particularly focusing on the social surveillance and conditioning mechanism(s) which are used to produce honour-embodying and compliant female bodies. I also explore, in detail, how Aslam's Sufist poetics undermine the novel's feminist agenda. I then focus on Aslam's delineation of the various forms of violence which are inflicted on female bodies that resist, rebel and/or transgress.

My analysis reads the atrocities depicted in the narrative as an ecology and economy of violence. I propose that the violence in the novel functions as an ecology because its various forms and permutations (along with those who perform it) may be treated as inter-linked phenomenon, connected across borders and informed by the spatiality and temporality of its setting. Moreover, the majority of the violent acts represented in the novel are not incidental: they are, in fact, systematically employed to access, assert and reclaim power, and more importantly, to achieve compliance. I conclude by critically reflecting on some of the troubling aspects of Aslam's narrative.

3.1. The Literary Vigils of Nadeem Aslam

> From my viewpoint, all writing is political—even non-political writing is political. Coming from Pakistan, and belonging to the Islamic world, I can't not be aware of how politics affects our daily lives, how it is not just dry legislations and laws and statements. It's visceral. (Aslam "Wasted Q&A" n.p.)

Aslam, like Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid, sees writing as a political and public act, through which he endeavours to bear witness to the atrocities of the world. However unlike his contemporaries, for Aslam fiction is not merely a place to capture alternate stories and truths. For Aslam, writing fiction is an act of retribution, of redressing the balance by holding the powerful accountable, and bringing culprits to justice. Aslam claims that news is the most "emotional program" on television for him (Yaqin "Nadeem" 41): "[i]f something terrible is happening in the world, I wished to know about it so that I can become angry, become upset or become galvanized by that news to try to put an end to it" (Aslam "Conversation" 357). "Galvanized" by acts of injustices against humanity, he believes that it is his responsibility as a writer to critically write about this world: "My writing must say something of the world, must say to the unjust people who get away, *maybe in life but not in my head; in my head I will put you on trial and we will judge you and sentence you*. ("Margins" n.p.). He sees himself as someone who keeps vigil through his books, bearing witness by writing "down the words, the deed and the date"("Conversation" 360), warning the wrongdoers "not [to] feel safe" for the writer remembers (Clements *Writing* 123).[156] Statements like these indicate a self-aggrandising role attributed to the writer. In Aslam's valorisation of writing (or art) as a medium for conveying and containing the truth about

[156] This metaphor of the writer keeping watch comes from a poem by Czesław Miłosz, a Polish Nobel prize winner poet. Aslam has the concluding lines from Milosz's poem painted on the walls in front of his writing desk as a constant reminder of his role as a writer. See Aslam (360) and Clements ("Orienting" 194).

life, the writer emerges as a modern-day prophet-saviour—an idea that is evident in *Maps*. His writings are problematically invested in "a liberal secularist endorsement of culture and creativity" (R. Ahmed *Writing* 159), often cast as religion's antithesis—a position which, despite Aslam's attempts at complication, is true in *Maps*.

Aslam's "impressive" (Upstone 102) debut novel, *Season of Rainbirds*, was followed by *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004). *Maps*, like its predecessor, won awards and international recognition (both home and abroad).[157] Aslam followed *Maps* with two novels about the militarisation of Afghanistan, *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). Both treat America's involvement in the region (from Afghanistan's and Pakistan's perspectives respectively) in the name of the War on Terror. Aslam's latest novel is *The Golden Legend* (2017), a scathing review of minority issues in Pakistan, especially in the context of the country's blasphemy laws. The key concern which Aslam repeatedly addresses in his novels is the intersecting worlds of politics, religion, gender and, to some extent, history.

Pakistani-British author Nadeem Aslam is the product of two seemingly opposite worlds. It is the interplay of these contrasting/contradicting ideologies, world-views, locations, and languages which informs, illuminates and structures his literary oeuvre. During his formative years, Aslam personally observed the interplay between a communist, secular worldview juxtaposed against a highly conservative and relatively intolerant religiosity. Aslam's father was a committed communist, poet and film producer who, along with his family, fled Pakistan to avoid political persecution. He has been influential in sculpting Aslam's relationship and attitude towards creativity: "[my father] advised me at the outset, all those years ago, to always write about love" (Aslam "Writing" 2). From him, Aslam claims, he also

[157] *Maps* was awarded the Patras Bokhari Award in Pakistan (Weingarten 2). Among others, it was longlisted for the Man Booker prize.

“learned about political commitment and the life of the mind” ("Life" n.p.). In contrast, his mother came from a religious-minded family whose members (especially her brother) had increasingly become practitioners of a conservative [Wahabi-inspired] “strict unsmiling sect of Islam” (Aslam "God" 66). Years later, while writing an article for *Granta* on faith and his distrust of organised religion, Aslam traced back the seeds of his aversion to religion to the myopic, violent and conservative beliefs of people like his maternal uncle whose “version of Islam was the same kind practised by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan” (Aslam "God" 66). These two influences and perspectives continue to inform and animate his writings.

Firmly believing that “the job of a writer is to be a voice that is not the majority voice” Aslam declares that he enjoys being on the margins ("Like" n.p.). In *Maps* he takes up the story of one such marginalised figure—the migrant Pakistan-Muslim woman, highlighting her plight.

3.2 (Re)reading the Small Scale 9/11s of *Maps*

> [Visiting Ground Zero]I asked myself whether in my personal life and as a writer I had been rigorous enough to condemn the small scale September 11s that go on every day… (Aslam "Life" n.p.)

In essence, *Maps* is a murder-mystery: the catalyst event at the heart of the novel is the disappearance of an unmarried Pakistani couple, Jugnu and Chanda. They have vanished under suspicious circumstances and are presumed dead, killed in the name of honour. Chanda’s brothers are suspected of murdering the couple. The story suggests that Chanda’s illicit affair with Jugnu, and in particular her unabashed flaunting of her will and desire by moving in with him, was seen (by them and the community at large) as an egregious insult

to, and assault on religious, communal and familial values. The shame incurred by her family warrants redress— that is, restoration of familial honour by expunging and corporeally exterminating the shameful bodies via an honour killing. Thus, in the simplest terms *Maps* is a story about an honour killing, and the search for and incarceration of the murderers.

Maps is set in an "unnamed" yet "not nameless" (Pataki "Dasht" 81) fictional town called Dasht-e-Tanhaii, translated variously in the novel as Desert of Solitude or Desert of Loneliness.[158] The majority of residents in this ghetto-like town are Pakistanis, with a small number of Indians and Bangladeshis. Aslam chooses to keep the location of this Dasht-e-Tanhaii vague—except for disclosing that it is part of Northern England. Instead, the effect that the diasporic location of this town evokes in its residents becomes its signifier. The town's evocative name seems at odds with the beauty of a luscious, bountiful and somewhat idyllic world of nature (characteristic of a typical English countryside) that swaddles it. The use of a pastoral landscape is structurally integral to the plot.[159] The beauty of the natural world provides sharp contrast to the monstrosity and unnaturalness of the familial and communal acts of violence perpetuated in Dasht-e-Tanhaii in the name of tradition, culture and religion. More importantly, the sensuousness with which Aslam creates this natural world underscores a significant, though problematic, connection between desire, sexuality and (male) creativity in the novel.

The narrative in *Maps* can be broken into three different but inter-related storylines, with Shamas' character common to each. The plot is not action-based; rather, events are vehicles

[158] The name of the town, *Dasht-e-Tanha,* is taken from the opening line of a popular Urdu ghazal titled "*Yaad*" (Memory) by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. It is a nostalgic celebration of the memories of a lost love and how those memories provide solace to the narrator in a state of *hijar* (separation or exile).

[159] The town has been "imaginatively re-mapped"(Nash 36) and renamed by its inhabitants in an effort to create replicas of the South Asia homes they had left behind. This spatial strategy (Gregory 168-73) of "reverse[d] appropriation of social space" (Weingarten 5)—a powerful inversion of cartography during colonisation—helps Aslam to effectively defamiliarise the landscape, especially for (English/Western) readers. This invokes in the reader the sense of bewilderment and dislocation experienced by the members of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. See Pataki ("Dasht"; "Wilderness"; "Space") and Weingarten.

for the study of characters and their ideological positions. The first story is about the Jugnu-Chanda love affair and the couple's tragic deaths. While their absent-presence haunts the narrative from the start, readers are given the details of their murder only towards the end of the novel. As a result, the focus is displaced from the crime itself to the conditions that incite it. The second story-line concerns the dynamics of the Aks family: Shamas, Kaukab and their children and the emotional, mental and psychological turmoil they experience. With Kuakab and Shamas mostly occupying opposing positions, this family becomes a microcosm for the polemics of the novel to be enacted. The third strand in the novel tells the story of Suraya, the circumstances of her divorce (portrayed as another form of gender abuse) and her subsequent affair with Shamas.

The novel's diasporic location and its (thematic) centralisation of violence (like honour killing) could potentially position the narrative as yet another neo-Orientalist reference to popular discourses which see violence, misogyny, religious fundamentalism and bigotry as key traits of ethno-religious Muslim migrant communities. However, Aslam complicates such a simplistic reading through certain structural and narratorial choices. In *Maps*, the honour killing, along with its investigation by the British police, takes place off the pages. Instead of focusing on the crime *per se*, Aslam uses it as a ploy to stage and trace an explosive nexus of gender, faith, class and race. The narrative itself gestures towards this instrumental use and positioning of the crime within the plot. Shamas tellingly muses that the two lovers "have become a bloody Rorschach blot: different people see different things in what has happened" (137). This can be seen as a metafictional acknowledgement of how, in public imagination and popular discourses, honour-related crimes become politicised and instrumentalised to serve certain agendas.

In *Maps* Aslam concentrates on foregrounding the various "quotidian forms of terror" (Moore 3) that the people in Dasht-e-Tanhaii (and in Pakistan) endure.[160] He showcases that these acts of terror are committed by ordinary people in the name of religion and culture/tradition.[161] Confronted by racism, isolation, economic and linguistic disadvantage, the survival mechanism for the inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii is a blind adherence to religion and, what Vijay Mishra refers to as, "racist fictions of [imagined cultural] purity" ("Diasporic" 423). The jingoistic mentality of this "displaced", "ethnic enclave" (V. Mishra *Literature* 14) demands complete compliance and silence, along with a rejection of its Other (especially the hyper-sexualised White body) from its occupants. Its intense "narcissistic masochism" (Said "Mind" 54) and cultural exceptionalism creates a stifling environment which sanctions and justifies sexual repression and inhumane acts of cruelty against the (sexual, ethnic, religious) other. Aslam's narrative is especially attentive to and critical of the manner in which this brutality is manifested on women's bodies. The stories of Kaukab, Chanda, Suyara and the unnamed Muslim girl portray a disturbing picture in which religion emerges as the most obvious culprit for their misery. Certainly, Aslam's treatment of various crimes against women is not as simplistic or crude as the sensationalism which often accompanies the figure of the coloured, migrant Muslim (South Asian) woman in popular Western media. Yet, paradoxically, the way in which he structures his critique—oppression of female bodies aligned with religion—undermines its effectiveness by reaffirming the stereotypes and essentialist rhetoric he apparently seeks to dismantle.

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[160] Aslam notes that he was more interested in exploring the lives and tribulations of the inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii as human beings, rather than using race as a lens to define and identity their life experiences ("Writing" n.p.).
[161] For Clements the targets of this inward censorship and violence in *Maps* are particularly those individuals "whose ordinary, lived experiences of Islam are not recognised as legitimate by their Islamist censors" (*Writing* 98).

One of the factors which weakens Aslam's critical praxis, I suggest, resides in the narrative's failure to adequately contextualise Islam and its associated (social) practices, which we see in *Maps*, as particularised religious and cultural permutations born out of the regional/ethnic/class origins and affiliations of Dasht-e-Tanhaii's fictional inhabitants. Researchers like Tahir Abbas note that a vast majority of British Muslim migrants come from remote villages or under-developed urban towns of countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iraq ("Honour" 17). For many of these migrants, the experiences of alienation, otherness and socio-economic disenfranchisement "re-emphasised traditional cultural norms—in particular hegemonic masculinity" ("Honour" 21). Aslam fails to adequately explore the role of these intersectionalities in engendering violence.[162] I acknowledge that religious conservatism and cultural traditionalism exists in the British migrant Muslim/Pakistani communities: I agree with Amina Yaqin's claim that "[t]here is certainly nothing to be gained by whitewashing or ignoring the appalling practices in which women especially are victimized, brutalized and murdered" ("Muslims" 103). I also acknowledge Aslam's prerogative and freedom as a fictional writer.[163] However, in relation to honour killings and other forms of apparently religiously-condoned violence, the choice to ignore the current (Western) Islamophobic climate and the "prurience [of] the media and the ways in which [such violence] can be constructed to corroborate neo-Orientalist stereotypes about Muslim communities" (R. Ahmed *Writing* 157) could appear naïve and irresponsible on part of Aslam.

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[162] For details on the composition pattern of Pakistani diaspora and how their area of origin and *biradari* is responsible for creating specific ethnic/communal strongholds and socio-cultural patterns in Britain, see P. Akhtar; Shaw (*Continuity;* "Kinship"; "Arranged"); T. Abbas (*Muslim;* "Honour"); W. Ahmad and Z. Sardar; and Charsley (*Transnational;* "Vulnerable "; "Unhappy").

[163] Responding to K. Shamsie's question about the motivation behind producing an unforgiving, violence-filled book like *Maps* about Muslim-Pakistani migrants, Aslam states that he refuses to write apologetically (shoulder the brown man's burden) and censor his critique because of his origin: "I live in the west. I have a knowledge of how it works, its injustices and subtle repressions, but I also know this other world, and I have to bring news of that, too" ("Writer" n.p.).

Aslam shifts between an omniscient narratorial voice and one that is limited to the perspective of various individual characters: sometimes through the direct reportage of their thoughts and feelings and at other times via the use of free indirect discourse. In this way he traces a period of 12 months, from the investigation of the crime through to the sentencing of the culprits, refracting events through a series of different characters' viewpoints—Shamas, Kauakb, Mah Jabin, Charag and Suraya. The shifting and often contradictory perspectives of these characters provide what Jutta Weingarten describes as "an open perspective structure" (4). The cacophony of voices builds a multi-focal and multi-vocal narrative that resists singular, overtly simplistic interpretations.

Madeline Clements suggests that *Maps* "demonstrates, on a detailed, domestic, diasporic level, the dangers of displaced and disenfranchised migrant Muslim characters cleaving 'fundamentally' to an extreme (Western) atheistic or (Wahabi) Islamic ideology and an imagined homeland" ("Orienting" 158). The narrative pits first generation migrants against their (relatively) assimilated children; traditional Islam against Sufism; the mullah (practicing Muslims in the case of *Maps*) against the artist/writer; traditionalism against modernity; secularism against tyrannical religiosity; oppressive and oppressed "emphasized femininities"[164] against resistant desiring female bodies; and (predominantly faith-related) deviant and misogynist masculinities against sensitive, "benign" and "feminized" masculinities.[165] Throughout, the narrow-minded adherents (men and women) of a literalist and masculine form of religion (mostly adhered to by first generation migrants) are singled out as sources of misogynist violence. In contrast, liberal and secular-minded characters—who happen to be men, as I argue—are problematically aligned with sensuality, creativity

[164] See Connell.
[165] See M. Mirza.

and humanity. The humanity, desires and happiness of individuals are often thwarted, threatened and ultimately denied by a rigid, stifling and over-bearing community which ascribes to cultural and religious orthodoxy. The individual's "life wish" (Aslam *Maps* 281)—often symbolised in the form of sexual desire—places that individual in opposition to the carefully guarded and maintained boundaries of their respective communities.

The contradictory tensions in the novel also relate to what Yaqin describes as, on the one hand, an attempt to provide "a forensic pseudo-documentary analysis of a sociological phenomenon [honour killing]," and on the other, "the story of two lovers killed for their transgression [in ways that are] complicated by the traditional factors of ghettoization and lack of material resources and cultural capital" ("Muslims" 101). Moreover, there are portions of the novel, especially towards the end, that are narrated in the seemingly authoritative voice of a judgemental third person omniscient narrator. This cuts against the ostensible polyphony of the novel in damaging ways. When this narrative voice is adopted, the tone is that of a pseudo-ethnographer. Various acts and instances of violence most often are *reported* in this way: clinical, distanced and matter-of-fact. The almost journalistic manner of documenting violence and repression is used not only with reference to Dasht-e-Tanhaii, but also for Pakistan and even the larger Muslim world/community. Incidentally, this harsh, critical and mostly unforgiving realism is set against elements of magical realism. The latter is often used while depicting the world of nature—as well as other things which the narrative associates with it, like human love and desire. Referring to the novel's problematic tone, Rehana Ahmed observes that *Maps* "immerses itself in a glut of patriarchal crimes and forms of abuse … often captured in bald statements which scream from the page, bringing to mind the Islamophobic headlines which periodically adorn the

pages of the *Daily Mail* or the *Sun*" (*Writing* 154). While a detailed discussion of this aspect of narration, and its political implications, falls outside the purview of this discussion, given the delicate and politicised nature of the novel's subject-matter, these authorial choices in terms of tone and structure are curious and warrants further investigation: as for an uninformed and/or a non-Muslim reader, Aslam's ostensibly factual insertions, coupled with the narrative's failure to distinguish between actual Muslim religious dictates and their misuse/manipulation could potentially (re)affirm neo-Orientalist and/or Islamophobic assumptions.

The narrative is also haunted by another contradiction. For much of the novel, particularly in the first three sections and in the portrayal of Kaubab, religion and culture are blamed for the misery and oppression experienced by the inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. However, in its concluding chapters, the novel reads more like a Hardy-esque tragedy, with an existentially constructed desert of loneliness inhabited by human beings searching for solace and salvation through love.

The overarching effect of these contradictions is to problematise Aslam's claim that he is not a contributor to the perpetuation of neo-Orientalist criticisms of Islam. He asserts that his goal in the novel is to give voice and representation to the people forgotten in the grand narratives of history, victims of the "the small scale September 11s" (Aslam "Life" n.p.) that take place in every-day lives. Commenting on his engagement with religion in his works, Aslam claims that his criticism of Islam is not vindictive (Aslam "Life" n.p.).[166] He argues that critiquing the abuse of power, inequalities and discrimination within a

[166] Aslam refers to comments made by Martin Amis in his interview with Dougary where he states, "'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.' What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation – further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan" ("Voice" 7). Such comments were seen as a reflection of Islamophobia. See Eagleton; R. Bennett; and Shamsie ("Martin"). Amis also had supporters: see Morey (253).

community/nation/country to which one has an affinity is not a sign of betrayal or bias, “to refer to autumn as autumn is not an act of treachery towards the garden” (Aslam "Mystery" n.p.). However, as I will discuss, the novel’s structure arguably calls into question his own personal motivations and the validity of his assertions. Certainly some of the practices (apparently) validated by Islam and condemned in the novel deserve exposure and condemnation. Nonetheless, the partial and selective portrayal of aspects of the religion dilute and diminish the effects of this critique.

3.3 The Female Body in *Maps*: Reading the Symbolic and the Corporeal

In what follows, I argue that the female body in *Maps* is portrayed as both corporeal/physical and metaphorical/spatialised. Aslam uses both corporeal and metaphorical (female) spaces to comment on the gendered nature of the experience of migration. Éva Pataki argues that “[s]pace has become one of the most frequently used themes and critical tropes in recent criticism of ethnic and minority literatures” ("Dasht" 81) and, in particular, that “there is a mutually independent and transformative relationship between space and identity” (81). I draw on the work of theorists like Michel de Certeau, who understand space as a “practiced place”, that is, a place “composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function” (de Certeau 117).[167] In this epistemological revision, space is no longer “fixed, unchanging”, but is an inscribed body that is “inextricably linked to

[167] Pataki similarly states that space becomes as a practiced place by the various practices, movements, and operations, which situate it and make it function” ("Dasht" 90).

social practice and cultural signification" (Stock and Vöhringer 14). This accords with theorisation of the (female) body by feminist scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz who, navigating between phenomenological /psychoanalytical and socially determinist approaches, also view the body as an inscribed surface. Likewise, (female) subjectivity is constituted both "inside out" and "outside in", shaped by both subjective interiority and lived corporeality and by external factors such as class, culture and race.

I argue that space can similarly be read as a body that is brought into being not only by its physicality but also by the socio-cultural practices performed within it. In *Maps*, Dasht-e-Tanhaii is constructed as a feminised space. Charag, for example, compares the town to a "labour room," dominated by the experiences and sounds of women "screaming, cooing, reassuring, out of control, in charge, shouting in pain, in pleasure, laughing, sobbing" (Aslam *Maps* 132). Kaukab similarly thinks of it as characterised by the sounds and emotions of women: she imagines that it "hoards its secrets, unwilling to let on the pain in *its breast*. Shame, guilt, honour and fear are like padlocks hanging from mouths" (45; emphasis added). Nilufer E. Bharucha suggests that female spaces, like the womb, are "biologically recessed" (93). Dasht-e-Tanhaii also emerges as a large enclosed, privatised, domesticised and recessed space (surrounded by the main body of a white metropolis).[168] It is dominated by the often unnamed women who inhabit the fictional town, preparing food, arranging marriages and gossiping. Moreover, the town is portrayed in affective terms. While its inhabitants are divided along the lines of nationality, ethnicity, religion and class, there is one thing they all agree on, the name of the town itself: "Only one name has been accepted by every group, remaining unchanged. … Dasht-e-Tanhaii" (29).

[168] It is also not unlike the traditional descriptions of *zenana*—a spatial equivalent of the body of a veiled woman. See Bharucha and Jhala.

The home of Shamas and Kaukab is compared to a scarred surface by their daughter, Mah-Jabin, who thinks "[t]his house is almost not a building but an emotion; every last surface here bears the scars of war [between Kaukab and her children]" (Aslam *Maps* 120). There are constant references to the dominant emotions of loss, fear, guilt and shame that this space invokes in the older, first generation members and the stifling lack of freedom experienced by the younger generation with respect to relationships and life choices. Claire Chambers (among others) has observed that this urban space is continually described by Aslam in rural, even "pastoral", terms (*Making* 84). Natural imagery abounds, as Pataki has noted: "[it is] a natural environment which Aslam fills with trees and other plants, footpaths and lawns, lights and shades, colors and fragrances, described in a poetic language full of metaphors and metonymies"(82). In this way, the town is imagistically linked with nature and the natural, which is traditionally associated with the feminine.

Ironically, however, this feminised space is neither welcoming nor nurturing. It is a "self-protective ghetto" (Misri 154), isolated and insulated from the outside threat of metropolitan Britain. Despite the attempt to exclude contagion from without, the stifling claustrophobia of the town causes illness and disease. The attempt to preserve the purity and integrity of cultural identity ultimately proves to be a kind of self-inflicted illness, literal and metaphorical. Kaukab thinks it is a place where "[n]o one breathes" (*Maps* 45), "*nobody* deserves this run-down neighbourhood of one suicide attempt a year, 29 people registered insane" (46). Shamas is required to translate a local health authority pamphlet that warns against the "resurfacing" of tuberculosis in "the poorer neighbourhoods (those pockets of the Third World within the First)" in the world's great metropolitan cities (161-2). The

situation, he thinks, is compounded by the poor living conditions in places like Dasht-e-Tanhaii where people “lived in over-crowded lodgings, one inhaling the germs coughed by the other” (162). Muslim cultural and religious traditions are described as filth “dragged like shit on the shoes” (129). As discussed in relation to *Moth Smoke*, the nation is often portrayed as an essential and unchanging female body and in *Maps* a similar (gendered) depiction of the town is offered: it is ahistorical, outside of history, almost dead. Only those who leave the town are able to enter history and flux, and so achieve a degree of success.

3.3.1 The Representation of the Corporeal Female Body

In an interview with Yaqin, Aslam notes that his purpose in writing *Maps* was to explore the theme of honour killing ("Nadeem" 41). Elsewhere he adds that “he was trying to understand what maleness is” ("Life" n.p.). The two concerns are related, given that honour killings are conducted as a communal and familial attempt to reclaim *izzat* (roughly translatable as male honour). In her discussion of *Maps*, Clements argues that Aslam does not draw a direct connection between Muslim fundamentalist characters and crimes like honour killing ("Orienting"; *Writing*), but I disagree. In the novel he draws explicit links between those who practice an austere, fire-breathing, version of Islam and their misogynist treatment of women. Only three months after the publication of the novel, the London suicide bombings of 7 July 2005 occurred and Aslam states, "[t]hose boys who blew themselves up, boys like that were beating their sisters" ("Life" n.p.). K. Shamsie comments on Aslam’s long-standing interest in the way religious fundamentalism is born and bred: she says that when her mother Muneeza read the novel, “she regarded it as a description of the world out of which the next suicide bombers were going to come” ("British" 225). She continues, “Nadeem is a writer who has been engaging with these issues for a long time”

(225). While some novelists, like Martin Amis, felt that following 9/11 his current work in progress was “reduced, overnight, to a … pitiable babble” (Pankaj Mishra "End" n.p.), Aslam's reaction to the terror attacks was one of recognition: "I thought, that's *Maps for Lost Lovers* – that's the book I'm writing” (Aslam "Life" n.p.).

Throughout the novel, an austere, orthodox version of Islam is linked with violence, particularly against women. With the story of Chanda and Jugnu at its core, the narrative reads like a feminist critique which maps the routes that lead from religious austerity (augmented by obscurantism, fanaticism, and bigotry) to often times vicious and retaliatory corporeal violation of the female body (as well as other ethically or religiously deviant/transgressive bodies). This is perhaps most unequivocally stated in a letter Mah-Jabin’s husband sends to his wife. She has left him and returned to Pakistan because of his abusive behaviour. Ironically, he asserts that the letter is a “*story of love*” (306) but the “love” he professes for his wife is couched in threatening and violent terms that link his sense of emasculation with the victimisation of Muslims world-wide, past and present. He sees Mah-Jabin’s decision to leave him as a slight against Allah and insinuates that she will suffer eternal damnation unless she repents. The ways in which he expresses this are chilling, and bracketed asides in his letter draw her (and our) attention to his abusive actions: “*(Remember the tip of my cigarette on your skin, Mah-Jabin? Keep that fire in mind. The fires of Hell are a thousand times hotter*)” (306). Describing the punishment that will be meted out in the afterlife to those who have humiliated Muslims he writes, “*They’ll have spikes in their flesh. (Remember the sewing needles in your thighs, Mah-Jabin?)*” (307). His “love,” couched in the punitive terms of religious rhetoric, is envisaged in terms of a gendered hierarchy: “*The world is lit only with the light of our love for Him, we the men who*

were submissive to Allah, and the women who were submissive to their men" (308). He urges his wife to consider which "*list [of believers and unbelievers] your name is going into, Mah-Jabin, and be afraid. What kind of End awaits you after this short life of fifty or sixty years?*" (308). This letter is perhaps the most striking example of how religion is instrumentalised to police women and to legitimise and assert male control and authority over them. Although not always as explicitly stated, this is evident throughout the novel, in multiple ways.

Aslam is here critiquing the ways in which religion is used to create the idea of a God-ordained gendered hierarchy which rationalises male control over women. Although not directly mentioned in the novel, two common South Asian cultural and religious assertions are gestured towards here. The first is the cultural notion of *majazi khuda* which equates the husband to God on Earth. The second is Verse 34 in Surah *an-Nisa* (4:34) which references the notion of men being appointed the *qawwam* (plural *qawwamun*) over women—that is, men (father, brother, son or husband) are responsible for women as their maintainers, guardians and protectors.[169] While this involves aspects of care, it has also been translated to mean that men have been given divine authority over women, including the right to beat disobedient wives in order to discipline them.[170] This has been used to justify women's abuse, their (emotional/intellectual/physical) inferiority and their restriction to the domestic realm. Instances of this can be found in *Maps*, such as when a group of women complain to the cleric at the mosque in Dasht-e-Tanhaii that their children have

[169]For details regarding the controversial use and translation of the term *qawwam* and the verse itself, see Wadud; and Devos.

[170] This ayah is widely debated by Muslim feminists who claim that what should be an edict regarding the care and protection of women has been misinterpreted as a justification for absolute authority of men over women.

been the victims of a paedophilic cleric: they are ignored and his activities are downplayed, despite his history of child sexual assault. We learn that in response,

> [s]ome of the men had just laughed at the women and told them to go away and get the dinner ready for their husbands; others were even more contemptuous and told them to stop cackling like hens in the place of worship, adding that a woman should be a creature of the home and the night, and had no place outside in the word of men. (235)

The cleric says to the police, "[t]he females say they complained—but then they get excited over everything and are not very intelligent, they don't know what they are saying" (235). The language here is emblematic of the reductive positioning of women in popular imagination: dehumanised, sexualised, domesticated, overtly emotional and lacking intelligence, justifying their treatment as the inferior gender.

Aslam exposes that the positioning of female bodies as objects belonging to men—their "property", as Suraya's husband states (166)—is used to condone abuse: from controlling their reproductive rights, manipulation of divorce law, marital rape to honour killings. Suraya's husband asserts this directly when he threatens her with a knife, saying, "the role of a woman is to give life, the role of a man is to take it" (159). The ramifications of such attitudes are exemplified in many of the descriptions men give of women in *Maps*. Women are routinely dismissed as temptresses, and their very corporeality is used to suggest that they belong in the realm of the material, not the spiritual. A cleric at the mosque, advises a group of boys to renounce the pleasures of the flesh by staying away from "the faeces-filled sacks" that are earthly women and to instead "wait for the houris of Paradise" (126).

Maps, problematically, associates the reductive cultural positioning of women to Islamic injunctions and Quranic dictates. Chanda's brother describes women as "nectar-coated poison, puffs of coloured dust, dancing butterflies" (285), which should be read in conjunction with Jugnu's assertion, earlier in the novel, that there are no butterflies in the Quran (291). Logically, then, this implies that there are no women in the Quran and confirms the perception that perhaps "Islam underwrites the masculine as primary, while the feminine is almost an afterthought" (Nash 38).[171] Suraya questions some of the "Islamic Law" (such as *halala*)[172] that disadvantages women, positioning them as inferior. Her husband divorces her in a drunken stupor and then, once sober, regrets his acts and begs her to take him back. According to the novel the only way this can be achieved is if Suraya remarries and then divorces her new husband, freeing her to marry her former husband again. She thinks (but then banishes these thoughts), that "*Allah is not being equally compassionate towards the poor woman [herself] who is having to go through another marriage through no fault of her own … It's as though Allah forgot there were women in the world when he made some of his laws, thinking only of men*" (150: italics original). Bitterly, she questions the Islamic rule that enables only men to declare divorce, by uttering the word *talaaq* three times: "It was as simple as that" (159). It is the ultimate abuse of authority that a man, in anger or a state of intoxication, can make this declaration, leaving women to deal with its ramifications. Chanda's death is portrayed as the end result of yet another problem with Islamic divorce laws. She is unable to obtain a divorce from her third husband who has disappeared, leaving her in a state of limbo, unable to move on with her

[171] Nash refers to the portrayal of Islam in *Brick Lane*, another novel that portrays an isolated Muslim community (in East London) in which women are subject to male abuse.
[172] According to this injunction, if a man divorces his wife formally, he cannot remarry her unless the woman marries and divorces (or is widowed by) another man.

life. Unable to remarry, she is forced into an illegitimate relationship with Jugnu that results in their honour killing.

Notably the depiction of Islamic divorce laws and *halala* in the novel is a misrepresentation in several ways, which invites questions about the potential (political) agenda of the narrative. The issue of the dissolution of marriage through divorce is clearly addressed in the Quran in Surahs 2, 4 and 65. While Islam explicitly recognises the need and the right to divorce, it urges its followers (men and women) not to be frivolous in its exercise and calls for close monitoring and regulation of the process. To deter people from misusing or exploiting it, divorce has been declared as one of the most displeasing acts to Allah, as noted in *Sunan* Abu Dawud,[173] "Of all things permitted, divorce is the most repugnant to God" (Ali and Leaman 27). For the majority of the Islamic jurists, divorce is divided into three main categories: *talaq* or male-initiated dissolution, *khula* or female-initiated divorce and "judicial divorce, also usually female-initiated" (28). *Talaq* is a unilateral declaration of the dissolution of marriage pronounced by the husband by uttering the word '*talaq*' (or I divorce thee) a maximum of three times, after which the divorce becomes final and absolute. In the case of *Khula*, the woman applies for a divorce from her husband. Initially jurists decreed that *khula* could only be granted with the consent of the husband, minimising the effectiveness of this option to the detriment of women.[174]

Moreover, if a man divorces his wife while in a state of intoxication, the divorce is invalid. In fact, the hasty assertion of the right of divorce is something frowned upon in Islamic culture. Instead, it is advisable to exercise divorce in a series of stages, which includes trial

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[173] *Sunan* Abu Dawud is a compilation of the hadith, that is, the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). It is part of the six most authentic sources of hadith called *Al-Sihah al-Sittah* (The Authentic Six) which are commonly referenced to elaborate and supplement the teachings of the Quran.

[174] This opinion has been revised following judicial reforms in Pakistan and Egypt during the twentieth- century (Ali and Leaman 27 ff.) .

separation and the possibility of reunification. The suggested stages are intended to deter men from casually or hastily exercising their rights to declare divorce. Furthermore, if a husband disappears, his wife needs to wait for a period of time after which the marriage is automatically nullified.[175] There is also a provision in Pakistani law, for the government to grant a dissolution of marriage to a woman whose husband has disappeared (*khula*). However, in *Maps* Aslam implies that orthodox Muslims (like Kaukab) do not recognise a woman's right to *khula* as Islamic. This suggests that even if Chanda had applied for the legal nullification of her marriage it might not have been acceptable to Kaukab. This is crucial because the whole premise underlying the honour killing is based on the inability of Chanda to be legally or religiously separated from her husband. Finally, while *halala* is a provision open to a couple under Islamic law, it cannot be contrived, and yet this is how Aslam portrays the action of Suraya. One cannot solicit a second marriage solely with the intention to divorce one's second husband in order to facilitate remarrying the first. It is clear, then, that a great deal of the plot—invested with the idea of religion as a persecutory force against women—is reliant on an arguably damaging misrepresentation of Islamic law.

3.3.2 Commodifying Sexuality: Hymens, Chastity and the Surveillance of Female Bodies in *Maps*

Said argues that "exile is a jealous state". He explains that,

> With very little to possess, you hold on to what you have with aggressive defensiveness. What you achieve in exile is precisely what you have no wish to share … an exaggerated sense of group solidarity as well as a passionate hostility towards outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you. (*Reflections* 178)

[175] There is disagreement among various sects as to the length of time—anything from four to eleven years.

"[A]ggressive defensiveness" and "hostility towards outsiders" certainly characterises the diasporic community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The "solidarity" of the group is fundamentally premised on a conservative attitude towards women's bodies and how they are policed. Since the 1990s, considerable attention has been paid to socio-economically disadvantaged British-Muslim (predominantly South Asian) immigrant communities living in areas like Bradford, Kirkless, Leeds, Dewsbury, and Huddersfeild.[176] Researchers argue that the close-knit, often secluded and secluding communities have developed internal mechanisms to police their borders from the intrusion (pollution) of (largely white) others (F. Ahmad 44). Such communities employ religion and culture as key instruments of control, repression and, in extreme cases, permanent purging through death. These diasporic communities often contain men—especially youth— who are plagued by poverty, with limited or no education and lacking the linguistic/life skills to navigate the world beyond. These men have been reported to form gangs/clandestine groups to run surveillance projects and, when required, 'reclaim' women (and even young men) who run away or are thought to have strayed. Posing as defenders and preservers of communal and/or familial *izzat* (honour), they see it as their duty to bring back women who leave homes to escape abuse or forced marriages. Interestingly, these surveillance projects are often supported by a network of information-feeding local taxi drivers. One such group of Bradford taxi drivers, for instance, claimed to be "doing God's work, [by] acting as moral vigilantes" (Alibhai-Brown n.p.).[177] In *Maps*, the men who attack Shamas claim to be part of "a small discreet operation" that finds and brings home wayward wives and children: "We have ways of infiltrating women's refuges, where the girls go to hide … [and] we can find which city the runaway boys are living in … no place is far enough" (249). They tell Shamas, "The children and runaway wives

[176] See Afshar ("Gender"; "Muslim"); T. Abbas (*Muslim*); Ahmad and Sardar; Warsi; Fazakarley; P. Akhtar; and Bowen.
[177] Migrant South Asian women in Bradford call such groups the "mobile phone mob", see Macey (50).

have to be brought back. They *must* be brought back. Girls can become prostitutes if they are left on their own and the boys drug addicts" (250).

Various researchers, however, indicate that this ostensibly community-focused crusade is in fact driven by patriarchal opportunism (Toor "How" 169). These self-professed moral crusaders demand a "small fee" for their reclamation services and resort to physical violence when necessary (as Shamas himself experiences):

> We do what the parents say. One mother and father wanted us to bring back the girl – who had run away a week before her arranged marriage to a decent-enough cousin from Pakistan—and they said we could use as much force as we liked … If we had to we should hit the body—which would be covered up with the wedding gown—or we could hit the head—where the veil and the hair would hide the bruises. (251)

It is not simply money that motivates their actions. Scholars have discussed how belonging to such a vigilante group might offer otherwise rudderless (young) men opportunity to lay claim to a(n albeit notorious) societal role and social status.

The hypocrisy of such men,[178] masquerading beneath a veneer of upheld propriety, is visible in *Maps*. A prostitute, frequented by Dasht-e-Tanhaii's male members, is allowed to live in the community because she is "white" (16). Readers are told that had she been a South-Asian, she would have been murdered for disgracing the community. Similarly Chanda's father critiques Jugnu and Shamas ("infected" by the blood of their Hindu father) for their transgressive behaviour, but only because it involves Muslim/Pakistani women, "'Are all the sons of that family like that—defying conventions, doing what they please?'...

[178] Alibhai-Brown provides the example of a taxi driver who acted as a moral vigilante while running an all-white women/girls prostitution ring (n.p.). See also Macey.

'They can do what they like with white women—we all know the morals they have—but at least leave our own women alone'" (176-7).

The community in Dasht-e-Tanhaii is like the Pakistani Islamist state in Rushdie's *Shame*: one which, in Deepti Misri's words, is "invested in the proper performance of female modesty—in order to legitimize its claim of cultural difference and moral superiority—and the family unit, through which this national morality is both derived and sustained" (131-2). This sense of (and concern for) moral superiority manifests in obsessive concerns with the female body, notably with respect to pre-marital virginity and marital fidelity, and the careful policing of what women wear and how they behave. This obsession is indicative of what Sherry B. Ortner calls the "virginity complex", in which "the purity of women is seen as adaptive for the social coherence, economic viability, or cultural reputation of the group, regardless of whether the group is a caste, lineage, or family" (22). Jane Schneider suggests that preservation of a woman's pre-marital virginity and marital loyalty is a marker of (male) honour which:

> helps shore up the identity of a group (a family or a lineage) and commit to it the loyalties of otherwise doubtful members. [It] defines the group's social boundaries … [It] is also important as a substitute for physical violence in the defense of economic interests....Honor regulates affairs among men. (18)[179]

Lawrence Watson states that in (rural-based) communities (like the one depicted in *Maps*) "the sadistic control of female purity is simply a form of *realpolitik*" (151). This virginity complex stems from the idea of women's bodies as property or a "form of currency" as famously argued by Levi-Strauss (479). Comparing the kinship system to linguistics, Levi-

[179] See also Mernissi ("Virginity").

Strauss concludes, “the emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged” (496). In these circumstances, suggests Ortner, the “economic value of women becomes a focus … [and] virginity is a symbol of exclusiveness and inaccessibility, nonavailability to the general masses, something, in short, that is elite. A virgin is an elite female among females, withheld, untouched, exclusive” (Ortner 31-2). Similarly, Recep Doğan argues that the predilection of certain communities in Britain to commit honour killing is intricately linked to their practice of endogamy (as well as arranged marriages). Historically practiced in many countries worldwide, endogamy is a “form of marriage … [that] requires each male to get married and to seek a bride within his own community. Therefore, maintaining female relatives suitable for the marriage is an important task for the family” (Doğan "Honour" 407). Quoting Amir Hossein Kordvani, he suggests that a woman’s suitability for marriage depends on whether “she has been ‘used’ by another man before coming into the hands of the husband, as the only legitimate ‘owner’ of a woman’s sexuality. A non-virgin bride is regarded as ‘second-hand’ and some men avoid accepting them as their wife” (407).

The intense surveillance seen in *Maps* is a product of and (re)produces precisely this kind of investment in the female body. Close monitoring and social conditioning of young women are frequently employed mechanisms to ensure that these female bodies retain their exchange values. Quite early in the novel we learn that young Kaukab, the daughter of a cleric, grew up in a strictly segregated environment observing both psychical and spatial forms of purdah:

> Kaukab hadn’t seen a man up close without there being the gauze of her *burqa* between him and her since the age of twelve—she had been made to wear it because it was well

> known that certain men marked out beautiful girl-children and then waited for years for them to grow up. Her vigilant mother lifted the stamp of every letter that came into the house to make sure no clandestine message was being passed. (65-6)

Any deviation from the prescribed gendered norms, whether in appearance or behaviour, distresses mothers like Kaukab. What appears to be at stake is the fear of their offspring's assimilation into Western culture, particularly their daughters. Their hyper-vigilance extends to all aspects of their daughter's lives, from what they wear, to how they behave, and the life choices they make. Ruvani Ranashina points out that women in Aslam's novel are represented "as the most doctrinaire preservers of the religious morality and Islamic notions of gendered propriety that dominate this community" ("Racialized" 305). Unsurprisingly, we see Kaukab treating her daughter as her mother treated her. Kaukab imposes strict limits on her daughter's sartorial choices. Mah-Jabin recalls she was not allowed to wear "'Western' clothes to school unless they mirrored *shalwar-kameez* in cut and style" (92-3). She was forbidden to wear skirts because "they were an easy-access garment" (93).[180] Even a sari is considered "skimpy" (93) by her mother and she is made to return a sweater "that had a broad paler stripe running from armpit to armpit, calling attention to the chest" (93). Traditionally, Muslim men, with women as their intermediaries, have exhibited what Marie Macey calls "great concern" over appropriate female dress and behaviour "because these are taken to signify not only women's honour, but that of their families and of the wider community" (51). Macey argues that this emphasis on appropriate clothing "symbolize[s] the deeper fear of corruption by the West and the threat to traditional values and morals" (51).

[180] Haleh Afshar notes that for the majority of Muslim women in West Yorkshire, the exposure of legs (by wearing shorts or skirts, for instance) constitutes being naked ("Muslim" 134). During the family dinner, Kuakub stops a skirt-wearing Stella from going outside the house as she would be considered naked by the neighbourhood women (317).

Just as Kaukab has internalised the gendered expectations of her mother, so too does Mah-Jabin, initially. Whether it involves clothing, hairstyle (311) or the voicing of an independent opinion, Mah-Jabin learns to stifle her individuality, and present herself as only "a daughter, *her* [Kaukab's] daughter" (93). This reflects what Aisha Gill terms the "socialisation of young women" in honour-based societies in which the "deeply internalised" notions of "family honour and cultural norms" (especially in relation to gender) mean that "women often find it difficult to break away from these values" ("Crimes" 246). The situation between Kaukab and Mah-Jabin is generalised beyond their individual relationship: "There is so much outside the house that may not be brought into the house, and *the mother* is quick to construe any voicing of opinion or expression of independent thought by *the girl* as a direct challenge to her authority" (93; emphasis added). Thus, Mah-Jabin's decision to leave Dasht-e-Tanhaii for studying abroad is seen by her mother as a sign of a (moral and sexual) corruption induced by the West:

> If education was what you wanted you would have gone to a university within commuting distance and lived at home like decent girls all over these streets. Freedom is what you wanted, not education; the freedom to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smeared life. (111)[181]

Even after Mah-Jabin leaves Dasht-e-Tanhaii, her mother imagines her "sitting over there in America … wearing immodest Western clothes, no doubt" (237). Even a woman dancing

[181] The sexuality of boys is also closely policed, particularly with reference to possible sexual relations with (white) "outsiders". Mah-Jabin recalls the frequent secret searches of her elder brother's room (Charag) which she was made to perform for her mother, looking for "condoms, and addresses, photographs or phone numbers of white girls" (118). Similarly, a whole chapter is devoted to Charag's recollection of discussions about the polluting nature of sex that shadowed his adolescence and youth. Boys were told by a cleric "to handle their members with tissue paper when they urinated, that it was a disgusting appendance" (126). This comes immediately after the cleric discusses the disgusting nature of the female body and insists on the sublimation of sexual desire. He reminds the boys that "intercourse was so dirty that the boys had to be made pure afterwards by bathing" (126). For men the "commodity value" of their sexuality is tied to their education/ability to earn (118 ff.)

slowly at Nusrat's concert is interpreted by local women as displaying a lack of womanly restraint. What they object to, in particular, are the "open movements of pleasure" (191) which foreground the sensuousness of her body and put it on public display.

Furthermore, the language used by Kaukab to describe Mah-Jabin reflects her understanding of female bodies as a form of currency or as objects of exchange. She thinks it would be difficult to arrange a marriage for her daughter because "she is no longer a virgin, is used goods" (110); in short she has lost her *value*. Similarly, divorce for a woman—signifying her loss of social worth—could lead to a complete erasure of body, self and identity as is the case with Chanda. When she returns from Pakistan "trailing the stink of failed marriages", the sign on the family shop, which was named after her, is painted over. In an equivalent act of erasure, her brothers and father ask her "to consider wearing the all-enveloping *burka*" so people "would [not] know it was her as she went by" (342). A third level of erasure occurs linguistically: Shamas thinks that "Chanda's father could not bring himself to mention his daughter's name because of the shame he felt" (139). Divorced, she becomes a social pariah: emptied of value, reduced to the stigma of "the twice-divorced girl" (342). She is not unaware of this and writes in her diary "*I feel I am being erased*" (342).

The community appears to take literally the Urdu meaning of the word for "woman", *aurat*, which means hidden. All things to do with female corporeality are to remain "hidden" whether this is for reasons of modesty or shame. This includes menstruation, pregnancy, hormonal problems (as discussed above), sex and even medical conditions such as a prolapsed uterus suffered by Kaukab (273). In a striking example—which illuminates the precarious and fragile nature of sexual-behavioural propriety that haunts women in Dasht-

e-Tanhaii—"the Indian and Pakistani mothers of growing daughters" (160) tell a shopkeeper not to import an Indian woman's magazine. Ironically what they find scandalous and objectionable is the publication of a query sent to the magazine's "medical-advice" page by a woman who "had recently given birth to her first baby" (161). She reports that her husband had taken to "entering her where she was tighter", complaining that "her vagina was too loose now" (161). She sought advice on how to tighten her vagina. And if that was impossible then to know what could be done so (anal) sex did not "hurt [her] as much" (161). While the letter does not explicitly use the word "anal sex" it is nonetheless deemed to be "vulgar and pornographic" (160). These incidents reflect an intense privatisation of female bodies, especially their sexuality, to the extent that any public discourse (or display) surrounding these bodies, even if it discusses their problems or medical issues, is deemed inappropriate.

While the South Asian "virginity complex" is a well-documented societal fact (Abraham 596), its depiction in the novel is often exaggerated. Suraya is "thankful to Allah" (153) that she is not the mother of a daughter, because this would have limited the physical affection she could show to the child. She recalls her mother "sharply telling her father not to play too enthusiastically with his little daughter lest he cause 'irreparable physical damage to her private areas'" (153). The paranoid imagination of the women of Dasht-e-Tanhaii construes the body search of a Pakistani girl at an American airport into "fondl[ing]" and inappropriate "touching" during which "anything could have happened" to this "*unmarried* girl" (107). This irrationality and obsessiveness is mocked by Mah-Jabin who sneeringly thinks that "Yes: the girl could've damaged her hymen in the scuffle" (109).

Maps also details some of the physical and emotional effects of this fetishisation of virginity on the young, surveilled female bodies. Mah-Jabin recollects that her mother "warn[ed] the twelve-year old virgin against using these kinds of napkins that have to be inserted into the body [tampons] lest she be 'ruined for life'" (109). A similar paranoia prevents young neighbourhood girls, like her, from being allowed to "see a gynaecologist for hormonal problems at twelve, not even a female one" resulting in a neighbourhood "full of teenaged girls who are doughy and have chins coarse as a cactus, bristly like their brothers" (107).

One consequence of gendered socialisation is that women internalise structures of oppression to the extent that many "feel that they are to blame for the emotional and physical abuse they suffer and so become complicit in their own subjugation" (Gill "Crimes" 246). Gill writes here of honour-based societies, but this observation can be extended to patriarchal social structures generally. If the immediate sphere and force of socialisation is the family, it is supported and extended by an all-pervasive set of religious and cultural ideological apparatus. In *Maps*, while women are portrayed as agents who seek to render (female) bodies "docile"—in Foucault's term (*Discipline* 135 ff.)—via a variety of processes, this is done with an appeal to the ostensible mandate of religious rhetoric. The complex emotional effects of this are suggested in a scene in which Ujala indicates his disapproval for Kaukab's favourite reading matter, *Veil*, a monthly "Muslim woman's magazine" published in Pakistan. While Mah-Jabin thinks that the magazine—filled with "orthodox rants, and strictures, apocalyptic visions and prophecies" (301)—is a harmless source of distraction for her mother, Ujala rejects this saying "I have never seen more misery and guilt on her face than when she has finished reading something printed in there. It's turned her into a selfish

monster" (301-2). He sees this as just one example of the ways in which Kaukab, and other women like her, blindly follow religion to the detriment of the well-being of those closest to them, and to their own. He says, bitterly, "*She* is the reason why father won't openly condemn the idiocies of Islam. He thought it would hurt her. She and her like don't do any harm? She has harmed every one of us. She won't allow reason to enter this house" (302). Later, he contrasts his *reading* of the Quran with her mechanical recitation of the Arabic scripture, "I've read the Koran, in English, unlike you who just chant it in Arabic without knowing what the words mean, hour after hour, day in day out, like chewing gum for the brain" (322).

Notably, this description of mechanical recitation resonates with Alslam's iterative portrayal of community members who unquestioningly accept the dictates of religious authority (primarily articulated by men). To borrow from Marx, religion appears to be an opiate, numbing any tendency to question the atrocities perpetuated in its name. As Ujala contemptuously says to Kaukab, "If you lot [women/mothers like her] had tails they would wag every time you approached a man with a beard [a sign of piety]" (304).[182] The negative effects of this blind adherence are seen when "unruly" children—those who display independence, challenge boundaries or disregard their parents—are not treated by counsellors or psychologists but are instead referred to clerics for "healing" (like Ujala or the Muslim girl). Diagnosed as "possessed" by djinns, the remedy conveniently involves paying for an exorcism performed by clerics (clearly a conflict of interest). The most extreme

[182] Elsewhere, Aslam equates the forms of religious affiliations and practices of people like Kaukab to escapism. This uncritical relationship of Muslims with Islam led to dangerous consequences. However, his solution problematically juxtaposes religiosity against a secular, creativity: "[W]e make decisions that are wrong and then we have to live with the consequences of those mistakes. But turning to religion means we don't have to think anymore, we don't have to make decisions anymore … Some people might say it's serenity, but to me it's an escape! … if a youngster is disillusioned he should not have the opportunity to fall into the hands of the extremist mullah—let him channel his disappointment and make great works of art. More libraries and art schools and film institutes—less mosques" ("Writing" n.p.).

example of this in the novel involves a cleric torturing a young woman in the basement of her house while her parents, on the floor above, recite verses from the Quran:

> She was killed during the exorcism arranged by the parents with her husband's approval. The holy man assured the family that if reasonable force was used the girl would not be affected, only the djinn, and that there was no other way to drive out the malevolent spirit than by beating the body it had entered. (185)

Maps, through this and other incidents, iterates a correlation between religiosity and the oppression and violation of (female) bodies. It delivers a scathing critique of the unquestioning reverence accorded to these holy men and their instrumentalisation of religion to justify and support an oppressive, patriarchal culture.

One of the key uses to which religion is put in the novel is to control women. It is (the ruse of) religious-traditionalism which mothers use to justify their surveillance of their daughters and inculcate in them a sense of unquestioning resignation to their fate, submission to patriarchal authority. This is epitomised in Suraya's silencing of her own challenge to the religious dictate which has led to her predicament. She fatalistically says, "but Allah's law was Allah's law and nothing could be done" (159). Her resignation is the product of her conditioning at a female-only Muslim institute. "Disgusted" by her daughter's infatuation with a Sikh boy at her co-educational school, Suraya's mother enrolled her at a female-only Muslim institution, so that her daughter could learn "traditional [feminine] values like modesty and submission" (203). While Suraya initially resents being sent to a segregated school, she is ultimately "glad that her mother had … sent her to a place where they taught her to fear and love Allah, made her think of the afterlife—saved her soul" (203). This type of indoctrination is just one more example of the ways in which the bodies

of the women are institutionalised and stamped with the qualities of submission and self-denial that are considered to be prerequisites for a good Muslim wife. Like other socio-cultural aspects of the community, such as tradition and religion, education becomes another means of producing docile female subjects. Kaukab recalls that as a child, a cleric attempted to discipline her by telling her that there were more women in Hell than men, according to the Prophet (peace be upon him). She ran home in tears and was comforted by her mother who told her that the holy man had taken the Prophet's (peace be upon him) words out of context (200). This is a small event, but points to other incidents in the novel where religious dictates are (deliberately) misinterpreted by men in ways that reinforce their authority over women. As discussed, the reductive construction of the materiality of women's bodies is shown to be a key feature of the religious rhetoric spewed out by the so-called Muslim male believers and practitioners: be it men like Mah-Jabin's husband, Shamas' elder brother, or the clerics dismissing the accusations of a concerned mother in order to shield a paedophilic holy man.

The "training" meted out to daughters in these multiple ways is always in service to what Haleh Afshar calls "preparation for becoming a future wife, for acquiring a name not yet known, a home not yet found, a man not yet met and perhaps a mother-in-law as well. The values prescribed at home are merely a path towards this unknown future" ("Muslim" 127). Suraya gives voice to precisely this and expresses the fear of being unmoored, divested of identity without the compass of wifehood/motherhood to guide her into the future for which she has been prepared. Following her divorce, and separated from her son, she feels her identity as a *woman* has been lost. The notion of womanhood as defined by being a wife

and mother is so naturalised that she unconsciously thinks that all her life's experiences were meant to culminate in the fulfilment of these roles:

> She can smell the wild flowers that grow nearby ... [which] she as a small young girl would stick onto her finger-nails … to briefly give herself grown up fingers. Earrings, necklaces, ribbons, perfume, lipstick. The young girls were learning to be women, to be false, teaching themselves to become the figures in men's dreams and fantasies. Now she realizes how lost she is at times because a dreamer isn't there. (202)

Suraya's thoughts are symptomatic of the prevalent perceptions of the women in Dasht-e-Tanhaii in which womanhood is equated with domesticity. This is unsurprising because in insulated, honour-based societies such as the one depicted in *Maps*, "ascribed positions have a much more prestigious meaning than achieved positions have. […] Positions given by birth or ascription as being a daughter, son, wife, husband, mother or father always prevail and maintain their priority" (Doğan "Honour" 404). An investment in ascribed identities or positions implies that the individual's self and will remains secondary to the collective desires, opinions or rules of the community. Adhering to these norms and expectations is a necessity born out of the community's need to maintain its identity and survive in hostile circumstances. Not only are sanctions or punishments used to maintain cultural norms and ensure conformity with prescribed familial and gendered roles, but other forms of more subtle discipline are used too, such as criticism or ostracism. Aslam shows that a community ascribes positions as the primary means of social organisation. This places pressure on men creating oppressed masculinities; and for women reinforces a gendered and hierarchal social framework in which individual female desires and subjectivities are circumscribed or overwritten by marriage, wifehood and motherhood.

3.3.3 Patriarchal Bargain or Disguised Slavery: Marriage in *Maps*

Given that in Islam sexual relationships can only be consummated in marriage, the significance of the marital unit is central. It is frequently argued that in culturally-specific diasporic communities, marginalised within the host country, the collective's "identity" as a separate and superior entity is dependent on the careful observation and performance of the cultural norms and values imported from "home". Family, along with its gendered underpinnings, as the fundamental organising unit of society, takes on even greater significance in this context. As a result, the reinscription of traditional roles is deemed to be crucial to the survival of the community. This impacts both men and women—unequally. Men have more leeway to transgress and move across boundaries (public/private, communal identity/individual self), while doing so for women often bears serious consequences, even death. Viewed as guardians of tradition and cultural integrity, women's individuality is secondary and sacrificial to their roles as wives and mothers. Misri argues that the Pakistani Islamist state in Rushdie's *Shame* is "invested in the proper performance of female modesty in order to legitimize its claim of cultural difference and moral superiority—and the family unit, through which this national morality is both derived and sustained" (Misri 131-2). I argue that the same applies to the community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii.

The successful maintenance of the family unit, which in turn supports the community's "national morality", depends on careful observation of the roles of both men and women in the institution of marriage. Marriage, as portrayed in *Map*s, is heavily invested in a particular performance of femininity (and masculinity) and, resultantly, emerges as one of the primary sources of female oppression. Margaret Abraham suggests that in South Asian cultures femininity has, traditionally, been constructed primarily "in terms of

submissiveness, inferiority, self-sacrifice, nurturing, good moral values, docile demeanor, social dependency and chastity" (596). This traditionalist notion of womanhood is reflected in Kaukab who believes that all women should be like those she knew in Pakistan, "who were drenched in patience, and were grateful that they had found a man no matter what his behaviour" (128). She has instilled in Mah-Jabin the notion that "a woman's life is hard because you have to run the house during the day and listen to your husband's demands in bed at night" (113). While reflecting on the drudgery of domestic labour, Kaukab observes that men are able to retire at 65, but there is "[n]o retirement age for us housewives, though" (43). Interestingly, while this labour is constant it is also unrecognized. Growing up Mah-Jabin sees her mother and other women in the neighbourhood endlessly sewing: Kaukab "had once claimed that in her life she had stitched five hundred kilometres of seams" (299)—an accomplishment hardly registered anywhere. When Kaukab's grandson asks, "[w]hy is Grandma Kaukab always cooking?", she is "moved that the boy had noticed her, had paid enough attention to her to have identified a trait of sorts" (314). The naturalisation of womanhood as understood as wife and mother, means that their contribution on the domestic front remains unnoticed: by others and by women, themselves. Moreover, the institution of marriage constructs domesticity for women as a constant process of evaluation in which their worth is always at stake. Kaukab says,

> [B]eing a housewife *is* difficult. I sometimes say to myself that if I had studied medicine I would have had to take the exam just once and be respectfully called a doctor for the rest of my life, but in domestic life you have to take and pass exams *every* day, and even then appreciation isn't guaranteed. (314)

For the majority of women in the community, a “good” woman’s exchange value is determined by her domestication and piety and by her proclivity to such behaviour. Unsurprisingly, this traditionalist model of femininity is inculcated in their daughters and this, in turn, reconfirms the demands made by men in a classic model of supply and demand. These women have come to realise that the qualities Muslim men most value in a wife are compliance and submission.

This male preference for compliant female bodies, as shown in the novel, has been discussed more generally by scholars commenting on (Pakistani) Muslim migrant communities. Alison Shaw’s research on transnational, consanguineous marriages among British Pakistanis highlights that young adults often prefer to marry someone from Pakistan by choice, rather than force. This partiality stems from various social and cultural reasons. For instance, there is general consensus that “a partner from Pakistan will not be contaminated by western mores … [m]arriage to such a partner will help prevent the loss of Islamic or traditional behaviour in the next generation” (Shaw "Arranged" 216). Unsurprisingly, British-Pakistani men express a “stated preference for Pakistani wives over local cousins, on the grounds that British-raised women are likely to be too assertive and independent” (216). Interestingly, however, even British-Pakistani young women are partial to husbands imported from Pakistan. One of Shaw’s female “informants” told her that a Pakistani man “knows how to talk respectfully to the elders, he knows his culture, he is more religious …. Men from here, they are too forward, too confident in talking to women” ("Arranged" 217). These responses, from both men and women, reflect that fear of (moral and physical) corruption, and the desire to preserve one’s socio-religious identity, customs and cultural values (in hostile or othering environments) reinforces an investment in and a

performance of traditional masculinities and femininities. Kaukab, Suraya and other women in *Maps* continue to ascribe to traditional notions of womanhood (in varying degrees) because traditional gender roles and frameworks offer security, by virtue of their familiarity, structure, and sense of protection and belonging in an unfamiliar, hostile and changing external world.

Shaw further notes that even while "[y]oung [Pakistani second-generation immigrant] men have more freedom to socialize before marriage", the general preference is for spouses imported from Pakistan ("Kinship" 330). Even in Pakistani migrant families which are relatively wealthy, well-settled and to some degree integrated into British society, many young women "are burdened with guilt and shame for failing to fulfil their filial duties. In particular their selected routes towards romance, cohabitation and marriage meet with severe reprimands and often lead to painful ostracization" (Afshar "Muslim" 130). Interestingly, even for boys who are allowed to engage in "numerous flirtatious relationships", there is an assumption "that in due course the woman they choose to marry will be suitable, submissive and obedient" (130). This emphasises the correlation between marriage and the desired maintenance of cultural purity. It also clearly suggests the significant hypocrisy of men who seek to draw a clear line between public and private gendered spaces.

This pattern of endogenous spousal selection is evident in *Maps*, as is the hypocritical sexual double standard practiced by men. Suraya thinks, "while men are happy to consort with women who are forthcoming and assertive, they will judge that trait objectionable in a potential wife" (156). According to Afshar, young men in communities like the fictional Dasht-e-Tanhaii "often expect their sisters, future wives and daughters to behave in a

distinctly different way; to dress in the way that their mothers and grandmothers had done, to remain separate from the host society and to retain the identity that is so dear to the heart of the immigrant society ("Muslim" 134). This is evident in Kaukab's reflection that "it wasn't uncommon for Muslim men to marry white girls and then divorce them quickly upon learning how difficult and shameless they were, and then having an arranged marriage to a decorous and compliant Muslim girl" (57). This is why she compares having a good daughter to winning the lottery (98). An assertive or opinionated daughter/wife is believed to be the result of infection from "outside", what Shaw refers to as "contamination", thereby becoming a potential burden and a source of shame. Once married, a good woman is expected to perform the duties of managing domestic affairs, bearing children (especially male), acting and behaving with due reverence towards her husband, his parents and/or extended senior/elderly kin:

> Married women … are not to bring conflict, but peace. They are to be help-mates and obedient partners. They are required … not only to embrace the new ascribed role of wifehood, but also to excel at it. Within a year or two they are expected to give birth, preferably to a son, and to transmit the positive family 'values' intact to the next generation. (Afshar "Muslim" 133)

Marriage, as practiced traditionally in South Asian societies, can be equated with the process of migration itself for women, in which they (symbolically positioned as a material/physical property) are exchanged between two families. Once married, a South Asian woman symbolically becomes a permanent exilic presence for her natal family. In *Maps*, the common advice given to daughters by "every decent mother" is "the house you are going to—the house of your husband and in-laws—is Heaven but you are not to desert it

even if it becomes Hell, that as far as the parents are concerned a daughter dies on the day of her wedding" (252). Women, in marriage, are thereby expected to adjust and mould themselves according to the wishes of their husband and in-laws—even if it means either a complete renunciation of self and desire, or their sublimation.

Another way in which the novel reinforces the notion of marriage as a condition of oppression—for men and women—is in the depiction of arranged marriages. In the novel, this complex phenomenon is portrayed without nuance, and such marriages are effectively shown to offer little more than a prison sentence for both parties. Mah-Jabin scathingly refers to them as "organized crime[s]" (106). In *Maps* these "crimes" are persistently perpetuated by a network of neighbourhood women even when these marriages end in separations, domestic violence and, in the worst cases, violent death.

Notably, the novel does not distinguish between arranged marriages and *forced* arranged marriages, a crucial differentiation discussed by numerous scholars. Shaw, for example, distinguishes between "two types of South Asian arranged marriages" ("Kinship" 323) and identifies a third type, the relatively rare phenomenon of "'love marriages". The first is what she refers to as "conventionally arranged marriages, in which the major decisions are made by the couple's guardian. The bride and groom may be consulted, but have no significant influence over the decisions" (323). These marriages may take the form of "shot-gun marriages, where parents, alarmed that a son or daughter is slipping into a potentially shameful liaison, take immediate action" (323). She suggests that such marriages are "usually with cousins because these can be arranged quickly, and because responsibility for the control of female sexuality, the corner-stone of family honour (*izzat*), extends from a girl's father and brothers to her other close male kin" (323-4). The second type is what she

calls “arranged love marriages” (a term in common circulation in such cultures). These “appear to be conventionally arranged, but … the bride, the groom, or the couple together have influenced the decisions in important ways, or have engineered the situation almost entirely themselves” (324). Unlike these relationships, the marriages that are depicted in *Maps* are almost entirely orchestrated by the parents (especially mothers), against the wishes of their children. They are, thus, *forced* marriages and almost always end disastrously.

The most obvious examples, and with some of the worst consequences, are the arranged marriages Chanda is forced to endure. As discussed earlier, married thrice but divorced twice, Chanda’s alleged failure to divorce her third husband causes her to enter into an adulterous affair with Jugnu that culminates in their murders. A second similar case is that of the unnamed “Muslim girl” who, because she is in love with a “Hindu boy,” is forcibly married off to a cousin. Her refusal to perform her wifely duties results in an appallingly violent death in a so-called exorcism. This cleansing is performed, at the request of her parents and husband, to remove her contaminating autonomous will (to them an “evil spirit”). The (partly) arranged marriage of Mah-Jabin to her cousin in Pakistan, following her heartbreak in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, is another instance of a relationship characterised by violence and abuse that results in her return to England as a divorcee. Although there is only one instance of domestic violence in Kaukab and Shamas’ marriage, it is haunted by the violence of emotional and psychological loneliness. In arranging their marriage, their parents gave no consideration to their significant differences—ideological and temperamental: he, a liberal, secular communist; she, the daughter of a cleric, almost obsessive in her traditional religiosity. Ujala verbalises this clash, saying to his parents

"[t]here couldn't have been a more *dangerous* union than you two" (324: my emphasis). The resulting damage is not limited to the couple but also impacts their children, and their children's relationships. The utter despair that results from such mistaken, forced unions is clearly suggested in the recollection, by Chanda's sister-in-law, of her parent's marriage. This is captured starkly in an evocative passage:

> Her father had planted them [grape vines] but her mother always complained of the leaves that dropped on her clean floor. When he fell ill she saw her chance and cut them down. She was halfway through when suddenly the courtyard was filled with about a dozen sunbirds, screeching and circling the fallen arbour. They had fed on the grapes and had probably made nests somewhere under the large leaves….In his room her father screamed and waved his hands in the air like birds above his bed but her mother kept axing and sawing. (221)

The imbalanced distribution of power between men and women in such marriages is ironically emphasised through the character of Kaukab.[183] Mah-Jabin is repeatedly told by her mother that a wife must initially be patient and stoic in marriage because "the first two decades of marriage belong to the husband, the rest to the wife" (1). Though Kaukab fails to see the multiple levels of irony embedded in the situation, she nevertheless believes that a transition from the status of wifehood to motherhood (eventually) empowers a woman, endowing her with agency. A woman's adult children become a source of protection and strength for her against the (potential) hegemonic rule of the father. Mah-Jabin sarcastically points out the irony of Kaukab's conviction by stating, "'[h]ow fucking wise you are, Mother,

[183] Notably, Kaukab is not a silent, suffering south Asian/Muslim wife, completely lacking agency. Her apparent subalternity is contrasted by episodes where she asserts her will. For instance, when Shamas beats her, she stops talking to him and separates her bed which eventually causes him to leave the house and reside elsewhere. He does not return till his mother passes away.

such wisdom! Victory awaits all the beleaguered Pakistani women but what a price, Mother, two decades of your life wasted'" (114). Mah-Jabin's anger-fuelled remarks can be dismissed by virtue of their sanctimonious or morally superior tone, however, the narrative appears to lend them credence. Mah-Jabin, Charag and Ujala's tenuous relationship with their mother—in particular their choice to physically and emotionally distance themselves from her—suggests that Kaukab became even more of a subaltern as a mother than she was as a wife.

The narrative repeatedly highlights the suffering caused by the community's insistence on following (normative) traditions, beliefs and systems, even though they no longer work. In spite of suffering themselves, women like Kaukab continue to work within existing, oppressive structures of power. Additionally, they expect compliance from others, and are invested in passing these traditions and ideologies on to their own children. Voiced through Maj-Jabin, the repeated loss and tragedy experienced by various characters seems to suggest that violence will continue to breed violence unless a change is made: "Why do … people keep doing the same things over and over again, expecting a different result?" (113)

In *Maps*, the institution of (arranged) marriage becomes doubly devastating for women because of its hierarchal nature which allows men (and the in-laws in general) unfettered access to the female body—in terms of labour, sexual fulfilment and reproductive rights. For the residents of Dasht-e-Tanhaii—unhealthily obsessed with sexuality, purity and contamination by the other—marriage is an additional instrument to police and control desire. Researchers have identified that arranged marriages are favoured by communities such as the one in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, because they offer a convenient means of disciplining actual or potential bodily transgressions. Pnina Werbner reports that some parents "see

marriage as a solution to the 'problem' of sons and daughters who they feel are out of control; some may have boyfriends or girlfriends, some may be taking drugs or involved in petty crime" ("Honor" 30). I contend that in *Maps* these transgressive bodies are *desiring* bodies. The novel sets up a binary between desiring individuals and a repressive, disciplinary religious community. Associated with the former is independence, freedom and, interestingly, creativity. This is closely linked with corporeality and finds expression in the performance of desire and sexuality. The latter conforms to all the prescriptive attitudes and behaviours discussed above and actively seeks to suppress and deny these embodied impulses. Hence, throughout the novel, the community's distrust and fear of individuality, particularly as it finds expression in sexuality, is focused on the surveillance and finally punishment of transgressive bodies.

3.4 Complicating the Figure of the Migrant Woman

Aslam's novel draws attention to the multiple forms of violence and oppression inflicted on the bodies of women in Dasht-e-Tanhaii: subjugation and suffering which might appear to be all pervasive. He nevertheless complicates the familiar trope of the victimised migrant Muslim woman. In some respects *Maps* challenges the reductive Western positioning of "Muslim men as tyrannical, Muslim women as down-trodden or exploited, and the wider world of Islam as culpable" (Chambers et al. 67). Repeatedly, he calls into question the dominant media stereotype of Muslims, especially women, as suffering from "sexual misery" (67 ff.). The women in the novel are not simply, or always, portrayed as passive, voiceless and lacking desire. The most obvious representation of female sexual agency is enacted by Chanda, however, even Kaukab, who is shown to have become emotionally

withdrawn and frigid in later life, is revealed via flashbacks to have been a passionate and sensual woman. We learn that she fell in love with and corresponded with Shamas before she discovered, on her wedding day, that he was the man her parents had chosen as her husband. As the daughter of a *maulvi* (Muslim cleric), subjected to the surveillance of her mother, this was a significantly transgressive act. Not knowing to whom she had been betrothed, she embroidered poems received from Shamas "into curlicued and tendrilled vines and then embroidered them onto her wedding-day clothes" (68). Importantly, although she condemns Chanda for living with Jugnu, she never condemns her love for him. Unlike Chanda's brothers and the community who censor Chanda for simply desiring, Kaukab recognises the validity of "love being a phenomena as old and scared as Adam and Eve" (64) and acknowledges women's agentive capacity to experience it: "[w]omen joked among themselves: 'Why do you think a bride cries on her wedding day? It's for the love that this marriage is putting an end to for all eternity. *Men may think a woman has no past*—'you were born and then I married you'—*but men are fools"* (64; emphasis added).

Here Kaukab asserts ownership not only of love but of her past, and in this way makes claims for a desiring female subjectivity that is not simply defined by marriage. The idea of women, and their bodies, as the passive recipients of male desire is undermined at several points in the novel. Both Mah-Jabin and Suraya are shown to have quite explicit and eroticised notions of ideal manhood (117, 216). Suraya has a henna pattern tattooed on her back for her wedding night which "excited [her husband] beyond measure" (201) and Mah-Jabin has no qualms about pleasuring herself (post-coitus) when her husband fails to satisfy her. Suraya and her village friends take great delight in "making lewd remarks about husbands ('how often, and how fast, and, praise be to Allah, how slow?') and fiancés and

about other men of the area too" (216). The pleasures they are shown to enjoy are not only sexual but sensual too: Chanda recalls her mother scenting her freshly-washed hair over a "brazier of smouldering incense" (360); Shamas recalls how, early in their married life, Kaukab used to wake him up with beads of water falling from her wet hair, her "body scented with the dawn bathe, eyes glittering with mischievousness" (56).[184]

Saba Mahmood argues that "agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (*Politics* 15). This succinct formulation captures a central idea explored by many women-focused critics concerned with the ways that gender is represented in non-Western countries. Lati Volpp, for example, suggests that the "insistent focus on immigrant and Third World women as victims also leads many to deny the existence of *agency within patriarchy*" (1211). The limiting notion that Muslim immigrant women exist under the absolute and homogenising control of a patriarchal culture is problematic as it positions them as wholly passive victims and Aslam's novel risks precisely such a positioning. This negates the notion that there may be many subtle negotiations in which female agency gains some expression under the terms of what Deniz Kandiyoti refers to as the "patriarchal bargain" ("Bargaining" 275). Understandings of women as *either* agents *or* victims "preclude the possibility of a female subjectivity that is shifting, contradictory and inconsistent, and do not capture the dynamic and complex relation of women to social and familial expectations" (Mani 162). The women in Dasht-e-

[184] I acknowledge that these references can, potentially, also be read as examples of the "politico-erotic" (Brennan). The episode in which Suraya converses with other village women, especially, seems to lend credence to this charge—an Oriental-styled inside look into the rural, world of *zenana*. Referring to the imagery and diction of the novel, Neel Mukherjee finds Aslam guilty of formulaic writing, or what Huggan terms politico-exoticism (12). N. Mukherjee writes, "[a]n aesthetic, even as perverse as this, is ideology, too, and the relentlessness of all this florid excess shows up the dishonest core of the book: it is heaving and straining for ethnic exoticism. It's the perfect book for the insidious, patronising neo-colonial lobby who are still looking for the mysterious magic of the Subcontinent, of the smell of spice bazaars and the colours of gorgeous handwoven textiles in their retarded idea of the Subcontinental novel." (n.p.) I argue that the overall structure of the novel is an ironic and deconstructive portrayal of the eroticised gaze. The tranquillity, lusciousness, and sensuality of the heterocosm is typically haunted by a latent threat of violence in scenes dealing with even the most mundane activities.

Tanhaii are certainly portrayed as the agents of patriarchy but also, within this role, are able to exercise some resistance and challenge, even if relatively minor. Aslam's use of free indirect discourse gives readers insight into the thoughts of some women in the community (Kaukab, Suraya and Chanda's mother) in response to masculine authority and labelling. While this voicing does not extend to the key victims of honour-based violence in the novel (Chanda and the Muslim girl), it nonetheless offers readers a glimpse of the internal debates of some women. These debates reveal the ambivalent relationships of these women to the masculine interpretations of religion and culture. Although they appear to *mimic* the dominant ideology of the community at the visible, spoken level, our access to their inner thoughts reveals that their subjugation is not complete. Even in his grief for Chanda, her father's main concern is for "the living"—her brothers (181). Her mother, however, refuses to dispense with her memories of her daughter and condemn her to the status of a sinner. This stands in opposition to the dictates of an honour-based culture which demands that a victim's family sever of all ties with the one condemned. In one of several surreal passages, Chanda's mother sees a tree "with only one long branch in flower" and recalls being told that a similar tree grew on the grave of a pious man. She imagines that such a tree might be found on her daughter's grave, thus revealing that, unlike the majority of the community, she does not see Chanda as corrupt or immoral (171). Chanda's apparently menopausal mother also dreams of her daughter and wakes up "to find herself flowing again from down there, the place that, in her case, had proved to be the portals both of life and of death: Chanda came out of there, as did her killers" (276). Strikingly, in this image of the corporeal connection between mother and daughter it is her sons that she condemns. Just as she names her sons to be guilty, she also accuses Jugnu of "corrupting" Chanda (171). Kaukab, too, refuses to simply blame and label Chanda. In a forceful confrontation with Chanda's

run-away husband she accuses him of being the culprit, claiming "*You* have forced her into that sinful situation" (345).

The most prominent female character in the novel is Kaukab who simultaneously invites readers' revulsion and sympathy. In the words of K. Shamsie, "she could, in the hands of a lesser novelist, have become a monster. But in Aslam's hands she is transformed into a women entirely human, entirely heart-breaking" ("All" n.p.). Although Kaukab lacks linguistic and cultural capital, she unflinching insists on asserting what she believes is right (or wrong). She is the most opinionated vocaliser of an austere and punitive version of Islam in the novel. Simultaneously, she is portrayed as deeply lonely, despised by her children and even alienated from the wider community. For people around her, Kaukab's rigorous faith has imbued her with unwavering strength. But many narratorial asides, focalised through her perspective, reveal her sense of displacement and lack of belonging. Readers are shown that she is not immune from doubt and desperation: "she remind[s] herself that she is not lost, that He [Allah] is with her in this strange place. And yet she doesn't know what to do about the fact that she feels utterly empty, almost all the time, as though she has outlived herself, as if she has stayed on the train one stop past her destination" (270).

Kaukab is also shown to frequently speak out against the ways in which other characters, and her family, marginalise her subjectivity, grounded in a conservative religiosity. She resists the attempts of others to patronise or pity her. When Shamas accuses her of having a tantrum during an argument, for example, she says, "I want you to listen to me. […] I am not throwing a tantrum: I am angry. Take me seriously" (40). Elsewhere, during a family dinner in which Ujala questions and condemns her religious beliefs, she says, "What I don't understand is why when you all spend your time talking about women's rights, don't you

ever think about *me*. What about *my* rights, *my* feelings? Am *I* not a woman, am I a eunuch?" (322). In declarations such as these, Kaukab demands to be heard and seeks validation of her (religious) identity. However, as often as she makes such claims she is ignored, her *voice* reduced to *noise*. In this sense she is, problematically, a subaltern and for all her speech, is unable to *speak*. It is not just the characters within the novel who exhibit this dismissive lack of recognition; the overall narrative structure also, at times, marginalises her. Shamas' failures as a husband and father are exposed in the novel, however his motivations are also explained to the reader. The narrative does not extend this courtesy to Kaukab though. Shamas' affair with Suraya, for example, is rationalised as the consequence of his emotional, communicative and physical distance from his wife. When he hits Kaukab, this abhorrent action is ostensibly justified as a reaction to her refusal to breastfeed their new-born son, Ujala, in daylight hours during Ramadan (139-42). In the family dinner scene towards the end, both Shamas and Kaukab are confronted by their children following the verdict on Jugnu's and Chanda's murders. While Shamas' idealistic communism is challenged by Ujala, he is defended by Mah-Jabin and Charag who regard his "contribut[ion]" to the community, however limited, as "noble" even if it comes at the cost of his family (324). In contrast, the only vindication they offer for "derange[d] … ignorant and uneducated" (323) Kaukab's failures as a mother is her victim-status as a woman, both in Pakistan and Britain. Despite her indirect apology to her family—"I can't seem to move without bruising anyone, but I don't mean to cause any pain"—she continues to act as she always has, refusing, or unable, to relinquish the traditions and behavioural patterns that are the cause of their pain (366). To the very end, when she disappears from the narrative, she shows no capacity to reconceive her version of Islam, or experience it in any other mode beyond blind acceptance. Clearly Kaukab's very selfhood is premised on her religiosity and

for her to question this would mean a relinquishment of self. It is precisely this that the novel appears to demand of her. Just as his children partially vindicate Shamas' weakness and failures, so too does the novel as a whole. Not only are explanations offered for his short-comings, but also his role as a rational, compassionate (and creative) saviour is upheld to the end. He dies trying to dispose of the coins with which Kaukab tries to commit suicide (327-31; 363-67). Kaukab is provided with no such redemptive narrative arc, remaining to the end "ignorant and devout: a deadly combination" (Yaqin "Muslims" 109).

3.5. The Sufi (Aslam) Sings of Desiring Bodies

Maps embodies a repeated (gendered) dichotomy: the creative, natural world is in opposition to and stifled by a religiosity obsessed with purity and the need to expunge contamination. In this way the novel appears to endorse a problematic assumption that mainstream Islam is devoid of and rejects that which is sensual and sexual.[185] This stereotypical notion was forcefully articulated by another British-Muslim novelist, Hanif Kureishi, at the Jaipur Literary Festival in 2015. During a discussion panel, Kureishi reiterated the Manichean binary between religion and culture, Islam and desire/sensuality. Defending the sexual elements in his works, he argued that including such explicit content was an intentional and necessary act of defiance against Islamist insistence on purity and renunciation of pleasure:[186]

> It's important to write about sex because we are desiring creatures. Particularly in the Muslim world, it's [sex] distorted and forbidden […] One of the things radical Islam thinks about is pleasure, all the time, in the negative … Islam is a death cult of extreme

[185] Conversely, this is the same Islam which is the cause of oppression and violence against women.
[186] The sexual content in his recent works has qualified him as a candidate for *Literary Review's* "Bad Sex in Fiction Award".

> fascism—we also have to have a resistance from the side of pleasure. … In the present context the love of sensuality, love of desire, our sexual love of one another seems to have become a political act. Remember that, every time you are f*****, you are defying political Islam. (Kureishi qtd. in Nelson n.p.)

There is a confusing elision here of the "Muslim world" and "radical" or "political" Islam which fails to acknowledge the different kinds of Islamic faith practiced globally. Resultantly, the entire "Muslim world" is, arguably unfairly, dismissed as a "fascist" "death cult". The over-simplified parallels Kureishi draws are symptomatic of (some) Western generalisations about Islam that have gained currency especially post-9/11. His conflation of sensuality and sexuality is also noteworthy. There is nothing in Islam that prohibits people from enjoying beauty or pleasure in general. Aslam, in *Maps*, offers a similarly condemnatory and simplified version of pleasure-denying, traditionalist (wife-beating, murderous) Muslim culture against which he sets Sufism as "the opposition party of Islam" (191). Discussing elements of Sufi thought in Aslam's novels, including *Maps*, Sadia Abbas argues:

> Aslam's novels combine a use of theological thinking with intense poeticism and a profound preoccupation with the body. What facilitates this fusion is a sustained use of Sufi aesthetics, which, though it is not adequately addressed by the word theological, nonetheless invites it. (186)[187]

Most interesting, for my purposes, is S. Abbas' comment about Aslam's "preoccupation with the body". Aslam opposes the community's attempts to control corporeality, grounded in uncompromising religious laws, with an individualistic ethos that perceives bodies as animated by desire/love. This latter is intimately connected in the novel with Sufi aesthetics

[187] While other critics refer to the Sufi elements in Aslam's novels—e.g. Bhanot; R. Ahmed (*Writing*); Nash; and Clements (*Writing;* "Orienting")—S. Abbas' chapter is the most sustained and complex analysis.

(primarily articulated through male figures), which in turn promotes Sufi thought and devotional practices as key modes of *resistance*. While S. Abbas' argument has merit, both her analysis of Sufi aesthetics and that promoted in the novel itself, require careful (re)consideration.

I agree with S. Abbas' suggestion that in *Maps* "consciously Sufi forms and themes" are figured as "countercultur[al] practices" (194). She refers in particular to the incorporation of Sufi song. In a significant scene which threads together Sufism, poetry and desire, Aslam stages such ideas in a concert attended by the Dasht-e-Tanhaii community. Here Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, a singer who is figured as the consummate artist, brings alive the legends of Heer and Sassi by performing the lyrics of the famous Sufi poet Bulleh Shah. The scene is portrayed in terms that are both mystical and sensual, as N.F.A. Khan sings in a hypnotic and prophetic voice of a human soul yearning for (divine) love. Interestingly Nusrat sings of the transgressive love of Heer and Sassi in a community which has recently been complicit in the honour killing of Chanda and Jugnu, and the brutal murder of the Muslim girl. The tales of Heer and Sassi function symbolically in the novel in two distinct ways. The first articulates the Sufi philosophy of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, of self-annihilation in the search for the beloved which, in turn, signifies the yearning of the human soul for the Divine.[188] This loss of self is suggested when Nusrat sings, in the voice of Heer, "*Don't anyone call me Heer … call me Ranjha, for I have spoken his name so many times during this separation that I am become him*" (191). The second level of symbolism involves the centrality of women whose agential capacity is articulated in acts of defiance, mounted though errant love. These acts are positioned by Aslam as universal symbols of hope and, as such function politically. Both the

[188] Anjum explains that, *Wahdat al-Wujūd* or the "Unity of being' "is another extension of the notion of the love for God. According to many Sufis the highest stage is reached when a Sufi realises union with God, and the dichotomy between I and Thou, or the Creator and the Creation ceases to exist" ("Bridal" 5).

women and the poets who portray them, despite being marginalised and stigmatised, continue to mount an "opposition" to conservative forces, as the narrator states:

> … always always it was the vulnerability of women that was used by the poet-saints to portray the intolerance and oppression of their times: in their verses the women rebel and try bravely to face all opposition. They—more than the men—attempt to make a new world. And, in every poem and every story, they fail. But by striving they become *part of the universal story of human hope*—Sassi succumbed to the pitiless desert but died with her face pressed to the last sign of her love [his footprint]. (191-2; emphasis added)

S. Abbas argues that Aslam "weaves a novel out of and around" (197) such mythical South Asian stories about doomed, transgressive lovers. He stages them as offering a mode of resistance against violent religious orthodoxy and misogyny that comes from *within* South Asian Muslim culture. Thus, it is implied, there is no need for Muslims to look to the (colonial) West for guidance or assistance—"Empire does not have to gallop to the rescue" (198):

> Aslam replaces the chivalric idiom of the humanitarian romance of imperial rescue—where white men save brown women from brown men, to recur to Spivak's usually decontextualized line – with an actual tradition of romance, which is used here to provide a critique of misogyny. In other words Aslam does not match the imperial line with what Spivak calls the "nativist patriarchal" counter and "parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The woman actually wanted to die.'" Instead he turns to a tradition that foregrounds the pain, loss and violence of misogyny. (197)

By recentering the possibility of (female) resistance (coupled with desire and love) *within* a local aesthetic tradition he offers a two-pronged counter-cultural assertion. This negates the Islamic neo-orthodoxy that characterises the inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, for whom religious traditionalism symbolises both “a return to an authentic past and [a] passage out of neocolonial structures of domination” (Mufti 59). On the other hand, the resort to indigenous South Asian mythology rejects neo-Imperial rescue narratives, which are so common in contemporary anti-Muslim discourse.

Violence perpetuated in the name of religion and tradition is consistently countered by the possibility of love: “love never steps out of the picture [in Aslam’s novel]” writes K. Shamsie ("All" n.p.). Aslam seems to promote love and desire as a (politicised) kind of “new religion”, the prophets of which are artists. The link between love and art—as political acts, echoing the sentiments of Kureishi—is foregrounded before the book begins, in the dedication:

for My Father,

who advised me at the outset, all those years ago,

to always write about love

and for

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

1911 - 1984

and

Abdur Rahman Chughtai

1897 - 1975

two masters who taught me, each in his own way,

about what else is worth loving[189]

The ideas that animate this dedication find expression in *Maps* through the multiple "lost lovers" haunting the novel, the deaths of whom are a consequence of conservative Islam's denial of the body and refusal to honour and legitimise human desire. They are also articulated through the "lost lovers" of history as captured in South Asian folklore. The novel's characters, and the legendary figures evoked, begin as living, desiring bodies but their "*life* wish" (eros) is eventually extinguished by conservative societal forces (thanos), reducing them to ghosts. Mythical couples like Heer and Ranjha, Sassi and Punnu are metamorphosed into the novel's present in the figures of Chanda and Jugnu, the unnamed Muslim girl and the Hindu boy, and Shamas and Suraya. Controversially, though, in the latter couple, it is Shamas who draws this parallel (for Suraya, it is a means to an end).

Through complex melding, a "map" of lovers emerges: mythological figures merge with real ones; various couples dissolve into others; and Islamic and Hindu mythology, prefiguring the fates of the lovers, mingles syncretically, echoing the Sufi notion of the human soul in search of love/union with the Divine. The community believes that the initial pair that haunts the novel, Chanda and Jugnu, walk hand in hand in the forest by the lakeside. A woman tells Kaukab that "[t]he children are going around saying that in the lakeside woods a pair of sad ghosts wanders, luminous, … a man and woman, his hands and her stomach glowing more than the rest of their bodies"(187). This "luminosity" initially relates to Jugnu, whose hand glowed in the dark after a chemical spillage. This realist explanation, however, transforms at various stages into something more surreal or

[189] Faiz Ahmed Faiz was a Pakistani poet; Abdur Rahman Chughtai was a Pakistani painter. Each is known for his leftist, anti-establishment works.

supernatural. After he and Chanda become lovers this luminosity is imagistically transferred to Chanda's body and becomes a symbol of their union, suggesting that when murdered, she was pregnant. Shamas later thinks, "[h]er ghost's belly is said to be brighter than the rest of her, an indication that it contains a luminous child, the child that died with her" (230). Shamas also uses such imagery to describe himself and Suraya. While recovering from a beating, he deliriously imagines, "[t]he two ghosts that are said to be roaming the woods near the lake—surely they are he and Suraya, their baby glowing inside her womb, his hands burning, giving out light" (268-69). Thinking of Suraya and himself as lost lovers he dreams that "he'll find her the way Shiva had found Parvati when she had walked away from him after a quarrel; he'll follow her footprints on the ground, a row of paisleys, like the ones on her jacket" (269). In this scene, a Hindu myth about lovers (Parvarti and Shiva), initially introduced by Shamas (164-65), evokes the South Asian/Muslim story of Sassi and Punnu via the common image of footprints. The third set of lovers with whom this imagery is connected is the pair who remains unnamed and only identified by their faiths: the Muslim girl and the Hindu boy. Following the girl's murder, Shamas finds the boy wandering in the woods by the lake—just like Sassi wandered in the desert looking for Punnu. The "unhinged" boy imagines himself as a ghost, transposing himself and his beloved on the figures of Chanda and Jugnu: "It's me and her: her stomach glows because that's where on her dead body my letter was placed, the letter I wrote to her on the day of the funeral. And my hands glow because of the orchids I am carrying for her" (365).

Maps centralises the importance of physical love and advocates the immediacy of desire. When Shamas' relationship with Kaukab becomes physically and emotionally frigid—while Kaukab is comforted by the possibility of heavenly "consummation"—Shamas yearns for

bodily comfort. As an atheist he has no faith in an afterlife, thinking "the universe is without saviours: the earth is a great shroud whose dead will not be resurrected" (20), and so he seeks earthly solace for his loneliness. In the figure of Shamas—and Jugnu—Aslam conflates the human need for intimacy that is consummated in physical connection, with nature. According to S. Abbas, Shamas' atheism and related insistence on the primacy of nature—an attitude shared by Jugnu—is "part of [Aslam's] insistence that the body is all that humans have … [which] is meant to counteract the denial of the body with which the novel is so concerned" (193). She continues: "If everything ends with the grave, there is no reward to be gained by deferring the body's pleasure, and the idea of resurrection is a cheat, not a promise" (193).[190] Shamas also believes that the sexual desires and the need for intimacy are instinctive and natural, and that cultural and religious policing and suppression is abnormal, even monstrous. When he and a friend, Poorab-ji a "good, kind" but religious man, see some young Europeans passing by after a night on the town, "distaste" and "revulsion" show on Poorab-ji's face. He thinks he had "just seen sordid promiscuity on display, debauchery, lewdness" while for Shamas, "there was hardly anything more beautiful than those young people, fumbling their way through life, full of new doubts and certainties, finding comfort in their own and others' bodies" (144). Thus the novel shows that it is not only strictly religious and traditional characters like Kaukab who reject worldly pleasures; even a mild, kind character like Poorab-ji cannot refrain from exercising censure.[191]

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[190] I concur with S. Abbas' argument that Aslam's celebration of, and insistence on, worldly, physical love turns the metaphorical into the literal and reduces Sufi aesthetics to "a necessary Sufism" (199).

[191] Poorab-ji is a Hindu priest in charge of the Ram and Sita temple. Elsewhere in the novel a Christian vicar at the Church of St. Eustace, calls for the social boycott of two people who left their respective spouses to live together (247). Thus, the novel suggests that all religions are similarly repressive and censoring of *natural* expressions of desire.

Interestingly, this "religion of love" is also articulated in a manner that sits awkwardly with the indigenous Sufi aesthetics that Aslam appears to promote. For instance, the notion of love promoted in *Maps* is decidedly corporeal—for both men and women. The metaphorical idea of love, articulated by Sufis in the aforementioned South Asian myths, is "conflated in the novel with a western liberal idea of individual freedom" (Bhanot 210). In comparison with the "worldliness of love" (S. Abbas 194) advocated in *Maps*, the form of love iterated in myths like Sassi/Punnu and Heer/Ranjha, while ostensibly transgressive, nonetheless remains unconsummated. The lovers never experience worldly union and what the myths celebrate is not their coming together but their willingness to forsake all in the name of love. In this sense, the myths become metaphors for human souls yearning for Divine love. As I have argued, the novel *appears* to situate its politics of resistance, voiced through the transgressive female characters in Sufi poetics, within a South Asian/Muslim cultural heritage. I concede that unlike some other contemporary British-Muslim writers (fictional and otherwise), the notion of desire/love in Aslam's novel—and thereby resistance posited through it—is not wholly or simply associated and/or entangled with a white body. Aslam's politics of this resistance is primarily articulated in a distinct South Asian tenor—through its positioning of coloured bodies (especially female ones) as actors/agents (Shamas, Suraya, the Muslim girl, the Hindu boy). However, this is undermined at a number of points.

In this respect I disagree with S. Abbas' claim that Aslam simply "replaces the chivalric idiom of the humanitarian romance of imperial rescue" with a local "tradition of romance" (197). At times, it appears that white bodies continue to be associated with the ideals of freedom, individuality and liberalism which characterise the "*life* wish" that the novel

celebrates. This is evident in the scenes already mentioned: when Shamas sees "young white men and women … smelling of alcohol, hair and clothing awry, on their way back to their homes from some late night party (144), or when Mah-Jabin imagines "freedom" (117-18) as a feature of the white world. It is also apparent in Charag's relationship with (white) Stella to whom he loses his virginity. Crippled by a culturally-induced (sexualised) self-loathing and unable to initiate the sexual encounter he so desires, Stella "take[s] matters into her own hand" (127). When they become lovers, it seems that he is cleansed by her touch. It is Stella who gives him the permission to be himself, to abandon his chemistry studies, and the burden of familial expectations they represent, with a single utterance, "Simple" (128). It is she who 'frees' him to express his individuality and desire.

Even more importantly, the allegedly subversive agenda of the novel remains fundamentally gendered. *Maps* consistently draws parallel between creativity (music, poetry, painting or writing), beauty and desire (love/sex), presenting all three as life-affirming forces which, in the case of its connoisseurs, practitioners and seekers, "defamiliarise[s] their tradition-bound oppressive everyday life" (M. H. Khan 219). The narrative foregrounds the role of the writer/poet/artist by positioning this figure as a kind of saviour or emancipatory voice that speaks for those who live on the margin and is able to "tell [us] what to think about" (Yaqin "Nadeem" 40).[192]

Significantly, all of the artists in *Maps* are men, and it is they who channel Aslam's humanistic agenda: it is they who "sing" for the martyred who pursued desire, and preserve the histories of those, living on the margins, who are at risk of erasure. They also articulate "what's truly worth living for and dying for"; seeking to dissolve boundaries and borders,

[192]This also aligns with Aslam's more general comments about the political and social role of artists/writers as activists. See Aslam ("Like"; "Where"; "Life"; "Writing"; "Question"; "Conversation"; "British"); Clements (*British;* "Orienting"); Yaqin ("Nadeem"; "Muslims").

they are the synthesising prophets of timeless, natural, universal truth. Theirs are the voices of reason, railing against, as Charag says, "violence done … in the name of a religious and social system" (320). These artists rebut the claims of religious adherents like Kaukab that Islam has given "dignity to millions" (321). Instead they rebuke its followers, exposing their faith as blind adherence and unreflective superstition that sanctions violence. For these liberal saviours, Islam is nothing more than "barbaric," characterised by "[a]mputations, stoning to death, flogging…" (322). The vulnerable for whom they speak are invariably women, stigmatised and punished for asserting their corporeality and desire.

There are many artist figures in *Maps*. One, previously mentioned, is N. F. A. Khan; others include Wamaq Saleem, Shamas and Charag. Khan is an artist who crosses borders, representing the dissolution of various boundaries such as those between East/West, religion/profanity, popular/classical. His synthesising capacity as an artist is evident after his death as he is mourned by Shamas, Suraya and Kaukab, each for a different reason. "Who will sing about the poor?" asks Shamas; Suraya remembers him as a voice for women, and Kaukab as one who sang in praise of Allah and Muhammed (238). During one of their illicit meetings, Shamas and Suraya discuss their shared veneration for the poet Wamaq Saleem. Suraya remembers being taken to a reading by the poet by her father and Shamas tells her that he organised the reading. Saleem is a fictional character based on Aslam's imagining of what his father would have been like and what he would have achieved had he not fled to England.[193] I am less interested here in Aslam's tribute to his father than in the manner in which the figure of Saleem is positioned in *Maps*. Shamas tells Suraya that Saleem's work

[193] Aslam states, "all my life, I felt that there was a kind of wound in my father. He felt that his real life didn't happen. He wrote poetry under the pseudonym Wamaq Saleem [while still in Pakistan]. And in all four of my books, Pakistan's great poet is called Wamaq Saleem. … So I have done for him in the universe of my novels what he couldn't do in real life because of me" (Yaqin "Nadeem" 41). Similarly, Maya Jaggi observes that the character Wamaq Saleem, "the great Pakistani poet", is a son's loving fulfilment of his father's frustrated ambition" (Aslam "Life" n.p.).

"sold by the hundred-thousand in Pakistan and India" and that Saleem "*did for Pakistan what Homer did for the Mediterranean and what the Bible did for Jerusalem*" (155; emphasis added). This grandiose comparison is further extended when Suraya tells how the women of Dasht-e-Tanhaii brought the visiting poet "flowers, containers of perfume, and jars of honey, because *just like the Prophet*, peace be upon him, it was his favourite food" (155). She adds that "men presented him with bottles of whiskey and gin" (155). Here Saleem is raised to the height of Homer, Christ and the Prophet and yet the mention of alcohol secularises this veneration. Conflation of the classical poet with religious leaders suggests an unmooring of the figure of the "Prophet" from its religious context and its reimagining in secular terms. This worldly figure "sings" not only against injustice, but also voices a universal message of what constitutes love, freedom and beauty. This is crystallised in the myth of "*Hiraman the rose-ringed parakeet and princess Padmavati*" (167). Shamas sees the figure of the parakeet in this myth as a metaphor: "Hiraman the parakeet represents an artist, they tell us what we should aim for, they who reveal the idea to us, telling us what's truly worth living for and dying for, in life" (168).[194]

The association between the artist and *his* role as saviour is most evident towards the end of the novel. In the penultimate chapter (the final short chapter is more like an epilogue), shortly before his death, Shamas thinks he sees Suraya standing in an upstairs window. Knowing that she is pregnant he imagines a "curve to her belly" and thinks, "[My] child is already saving her, already lessening the amount of pain in this Dasht-e-Tanhaii called the planet Earth" (367). This is deeply ironic on many levels. Suraya's reason for her

[194] Furthermore, the over-all aesthetics of the novel, problematically, conflate the world of nature, beauty, art, pleasure, love and (sexual) desire. This is embedded in the novel's polemics, structure, symbolism and imagery. R. Ahmed refers to this representational matrix as a "fetishisation of creativity" (*Writing* 161) which—though complicated by Aslam—nevertheless carries echoes of New Atheism: a valorisation of culture and the creative offered against, and as substitute for, traditional belief systems or religion (which is almost always atavistic and repressive). See R. Ahmed (*Writing*); Bhanot.

relationship with Shamas is not because she wants to become pregnant, nor is it because she loves or desires him. She is deeply pragmatic and seeks to marry again, so that she can divorce again and return to her first husband and—most importantly—her son. The complex multi-focalisation in the novel offers readers access to both characters' internal thoughts via free indirect discourse. As a result we know that while Shamas believes their relationship is mutually fulfilling and that meeting Suraya was like "mee[ting] oneself" (155), she does not. Suraya feels ashamed and dirty about their affair, but thinks "There *is* no other way" (200). After intercourse she "weeps quietly, desperately cleaning herself […,] scrubbing herself" (198-99) in the dark water of the lake. Recalling "the details of her debauchery" she begs Allah for forgiveness (198). Not long after, Suraya discovers she is pregnant. However, we do not learn what she feels about the pregnancy and, from this point on in the novel, we are not given further access to her thoughts—in effect, she is now silenced. Thus, Shamas' claims to have "saved" her at the end of the novel are doubly appropriative: it is even unclear whether it is her he has seen in the window or whether she is crying as he imagines. There is nothing to suggest that she is happy about the pregnancy and will simply exchange the new baby for her lost son. We learn via a third party that (due to her pregnancy) Suraya then marries another man in Dasht-e-Tenhaii, one who "is obsessed with the idea of having a son but so far none of his wives have given him a boy" (365). Chillingly, the reader learns that this is the same man who allowed his wife—the unnamed Muslim girl—to be murdered during exorcism. Shamas thus typifies a metaphoric elevation of the figure of the artist as saviour, which is at the heart of the novel's polemics. Although we are invited to consider his assumption about Suraya to be mistaken, because she has been silenced in the narrative itself, we have no concrete way of challenging the way he has absorbed Suraya into *his* story of salvation.

In this way the novel promotes a vision in which the saviours are all "educated men" as "the agents of progressive, rational and secular transformation" (Misri 162). However, as Misri notes, this ironically reinforces a portrayal of women (and those who are uneducated/working class) "as being largely devoid of progressive potential or social engagement" (163). Misri continues, "for every male iconoclast in the Aks family—Jugnu, Shamas, Charag and Ujala—there is virtually no parallel among the women, neither in the family nor in the neighbourhood" (163). It is first generation women, like Kaukab, who are invariably the mouthpieces for/of restrictive religious rhetoric in the novel. And even when these women do literally speak—as Kaukab does quite voluminously throughout—they are unheard or misunderstood.[195] It is not just the men who do not "listen"—the reader is also encouraged to dismiss her words, and her voice, due to the excessive, irrational, obtuse and superstitious nature of her discourse. In a similar way, in the Chanda-Jugnu relationship it is Jugnu who is largely *heard* in the novel as a voice of science and reason and as a more fully rounded character. In contrast, we only hear snippets from Chanda who exists as "a barely heard spectral presence" (Misri 163). Misri argues that Chanda is both dismissed by her family and over-written in the novel itself: "the novel itself replicates the literal and figurative erasure of Chanda by her own family. […] Consequently, the death of the secular, erudite iconoclastic Jugnu is privileged with a tragic resonance in the novel that Chanda's death is not" (163).

This is ironic because the novel appears to champion the cause of women by highlighting the violence they are subjected to in the name of honour; however, this championing is subtly undermined. As noted, *Maps* was originally conceived as a novel about honour killing,

[195] Amer sees Kaukab as "a twofold subaltern: on the one hand, she is unable to speak English; on the other hand, she is unable to make herself understood and heard even in her native language" (257). Throughout the novel her speech is referred to as being like that of a drunk, or Tarzan: she "make[s] noise silently!" (300).

but it seems to be heavily invested in foregrounding the revolutionary potential of male artists. Instead of exploring the possibility of female agency, women are reduced to (victimised) bodies that act as a kind of vehicle to advance (masculine) liberal progressiveness. Men like Shamas and Jugnu are positioned as champions of the cause of female emancipation from religious conservatism and its violent consequences. And yet the women themselves largely lack transformative agency and, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's sense, do not *speak* but rather are *represented*. Just like the Sufi poets and male saviours, Aslam's narrative appropriates the voices of women, ultimately speaking *for* them.

3.6. Configuring the Ecology and Economy of (Honour-based) Violence in *Maps*

While honour killing remains at the heart of the narrative, the novel is replete with various other forms of literal and metaphorical violence which the narrative seems to suggest is institutionalised and pervasive. The novel constructs an ecology and economy of violence which is multi-layered and functions in complex ways. As suggested by the name of the community itself, Dasht-e-Tanhaii (Desert of Loneliness), the process of migration in itself entails violence—the violence of dislocation, loneliness and isolation. This psychological violence is compounded and magnified by the overt racism migrants often face in the new country. The erosion of culture, especially traditional masculinities and femininities, is experienced as a threat by the first generation. A mother visiting Chanda's convenience store seeks to discipline her daughter, saying if she doesn't behave she will be "given away to a white person" who would "make her eat pork and drink alcohol and not *wash* her bottom after going to the toilet" (220). Interestingly the seriousness of the threat, here directed at bodily contagion and pollution, is then associated with the inversion of

established gender roles: “If you don’t behave, I’ll not only give *you* away to the whites, I’ll give away your brother too. They would make sure he doesn’t learn to drive when he grows up and has to sit in the passenger seat while *you* drive. Do you *want* a eunuch like that for a brother?” (221). As this suggests, the pollution of the individual body is linked with the contagion of the communal body more generally, resulting in rigid enforcement of socio-religious traditions and a strict policing of individuals, especially women.

While the novel’s ecology and economy of violence takes many forms, in the discussion that follows my primary concern is the representation of violence engendered by the communal ethos of honour and shame. Most obviously, this is evident in the killing of Chanda and Jugnu. However, I contend that the novel is more interested in unveiling various manifestations of honour-based violence and mapping out its roots/routes. This can be expressed not only in physical and verbal forms but in the fear of these. As Macey suggests, “it is not only actual violence but *fear* of violence which constrains and controls women’s behavior” in migrant communities (50).

Interestingly, Aslam’s novel offers a complicated understanding of honour killing, which challenges the dominant and simplistic (Western) perception of this crime. In *Maps*, the central honour-killing in the novel is revealed to be motivated less by the notion of honour *per se* than what Ranashina refers to as “the senseless action of bruised hypercritical masculine egos” ("Racialized" 304). Initially, readers are encouraged to understand that the murders of Chanda and Jugnu were motivated by the desire of her brothers to avenge their family honour (20). The representation of the community’s understanding of honour killing as proper, legitimate and correct (347-8)—as a kind of a righteous kill which (allegedly) is sanctioned and sanctified by religion and tradition—justifies the popular (mainly Western)

assumptions which construe honour killings as product of a tribal culture and sexually repressive, conservative (Muslim) religiosity (Doğan "Is"; "Honour"; Abu-Lughod "Seductions"). The bravado with which Chanda's brothers lay claim to the crime/murder in Pakistan (and not in England) reflects the stereotypical construction(s) of Muslim countries/communities (ethnic communal enclaves like Dasht-e-Tanhaii) as the "privileged zone[s] of shame" (and related honour) where "the idea breathes its favourite air" (Misri 118).

Contexts, like these, along with the manner in which this crime has been employed in popular imagination and discourses have turned it into a loaded term, synonymous with Muslim cultures and their "almost pathological investment in honour" (Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin 14). Given the politicisation of honour killing, especially its location at the intersection of issues of race, ethnicity, religion and gender, it is necessary to define it (and tease out its epistemological complexities) more precisely before considering its representation in *Maps*. An engagement with some of the issues involving the honour-shame complex, and its concomitant violence, is also necessary at this stage as Aslam's novel gestures towards them, implicitly and/or explicitly.

3.6.1 Honour-based Crimes and their Geopolitical Instrumentalisation in the UK

The 1990s saw the emergence of a concentrated focus on women's rights at the international level in the form of a burgeoning transnational feminist movement. This worlding of women's rights—embedded within a framework of international human rights—also, according to feminist anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, "set the stage for a particular stigmatization of the Muslim world based on naming and publicizing the 'honor crime'" ("Seductions" 17). In the early 2000s, a large number of reports/ fact sheets from

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were published, alongside literary texts—creative non-fiction and fiction alike[196]—and an increasing body of academic literature with a feminist approach to issues relating to honour crimes. Internationally, this resulted in heightened visibility of crimes committed in the name of honour and compounded Western negativity towards Islam stemming from Khomeini's fatwah against Salman Rushdie in 1989 and the Gulf War in 1990. Public protests by Muslim migrants in response to the aforementioned events placed a dissenting British (South Asian) Muslim presence "firmly on the political, cultural and social landscape" (T. Abbas "Honour" 22). The effects were considerable as, "[y]oung Western European Muslims [increasingly found] themselves in the precarious position of having to define their loyalties, with radical political Islamism on the one hand and developments to national multicultural citizenship on the other (T. Abbas "Honour" 22). According to Werbner, even before 9/11, (South Asian) Muslim communities were portrayed as "problems" in the public imagination ("Veiled" 44).

Things changed post-9/11. Questions related to free speech or difference of opinion became symptomatic of a deeper malaise—a religious minority's refusal to integrate.[197] The events of 9/11 and 7/7 created a climate in which Islamophobia "gathered pace as a lived experience [for Muslims] … [and] also in the way it is utilised as an analytical concept in various research and policy development arenas, instrumentalised both negatively and positively depending on the predilection of the definers" (T. Abbas "Honour" 26). Violence against women began to be framed in different ways. Honour killings, and other honour-related crimes, were increasingly used by "politicians and the press … as ammunition in a more general assault" on British multicultural and Muslim migrant communities (Ahmed,

[196] Examples include Khouri's *Honor Lost* (2001), Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), Souad's *Burned Alive* (2004) and M. Mai's *In the Name of Honour* (2007).

[197] A number of high-profile, sensationalised and often televised accounts of honour killings circulated around this time and fed these perceptions. These included the murders of Heshu Yones, Rukhsana Naz, Sajhda Bibi and Banaz Mahmod.

Morey and Yaqin 14). Mostly “presented in a one-dimensional sensational style with an emphasis on gory descriptions of violence” (102), the depiction of honour killings in the British media served to widen the Manichean divide between a liberal, humanist, secular and, thereby, superior metropolis and its intolerant, backward ethno-religious minorities, ensnared in enclaves characterised by “anachronistic, ossified traditions [rooted in] a denial of the equality between men and women” (Werbner "Honor" 37). Increasingly, honour killing was understood as a phenomenon that is “more about culture than gender” (Siddiqui 277). In this way, suggests Hannana Siddiqui, the issue was firmly placed within the framework of debates about race, religion and ethnicity: “This approach constructs particularly racial groups [such as Muslims] as ‘high risk’ and therefore in need of special measures and control” (277). Theorists such as Mary Douglas (*Risk and Blame*, 1992) and Ulrich Beck (*Risk Society*, 1992) argue that we live in a “risk society” within which certain risks are highlighted for public attention and consumption, at specific times, in order to suit various political agendas. They call for consideration of who and what are identified as risks, by whom and why. We might also ask, who is framed as the victims of these risks, and why? In the discourse of Islamophobia, the most obvious victim is the secular, democratic West—characterised by (sexual) freedom—which is threatened by an irrational, backward, barbaric and conservative religiosity. Part of this discourse portrays a second victim—the “ethnic woman” subjected to multiple forms of violence: forced marriages, genital mutilation, child-marriages, infanticide, domestic abuse and, at the extreme, honour killing. The increased (politicised) visibility of the migrant woman necessitates that we ask, “What is behind this growing concern for the hitherto invisible and marginalized ‘ethnic woman’?” (H. S. Mirza 127). And as Spivak proposes in response to her own 1988 question, “can the subaltern

speak"?, we must ask the question so that we can begin to "plot a history" ("Subaltern Original" 297).

It has been argued that the bodies of ethic/brown women—as signification of a "cultural pathology" (Shain 2)—are frequently appropriated in liberal emancipatory discourses that are often sensationalist and engage in cultural stereotyping (H. S. Mirza; Thapar-Björkert; Majid and Hanif). Drawing on a report published by CIMEL/Interights[198] after a roundtable on "Strategies to Address Crimes of Honour", Meetoo and Mirza warn against a reductive articulation and framing of honour-based violence primarily in terms of "the individual family and their barbarity and senselessness" (54). This can, as Siddiqui cautions elsewhere, potentially result in the "exoticisation of the issue and racism in dealing with victims and minority communities" (277). More importantly, the paternalistic tone implicit in these emancipatory and/or condemning discourses can further victimise these women by reducing their lives, voices and circumstances to a "pornography of violence" (Meetoo and Mirza 194). The report concludes by foregrounding the link between a symbolic battered ethnic (brown) female body and the demonisation of a Muslim other: "The combination of sex and violence involved in honour crimes lends itself readily to lurid images and … cultural stereotyping" (CIMEL/Interights qtd. in H. S. Mirza 127). The symbolic investment in such bodies risks erasing and silencing the corporeality and experiences of the very subjects which liberal, humanist and even feminist discourses/forces claim to represent.[199] This is not to deny the importance of foregrounding the violence and oppression that are part of the daily lives of some migrant/Muslim women, however it is also crucial that honour-based

[198] CIMEL stands for Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Laws, a research centre hosted by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights (Interights) is an international human rights organisation based in London.

[199] The co-option of feminist voices to serve the socio-political and economic concerns of a white, masculine, State apparatus is not new, as discussed in the previous chapter.

violence is not *only* essentialised in the service of Islamophobia. In the words of Meetoo and Mirza:

> While honour killings are real in *effect*, in that women are brutally murdered, they are also constructed as ethnicised phenomena within the racialised multicultural discourse, and are as such also an *affect* of this discourse. In this regard the media reports have real consequences. They contribute to putting women at risk through sensationalising these crimes in their style and content of reporting, which results in voyeuristic spectacle (cries of 'how dreadful!') followed by multicultural paralysis and inaction ('nothing to do with us! It is part of their culture'). (55-6)

3.6.2 Labelling Honour-based Crimes

As suggested in the previous section, honour killing, through its evocative (and sensational) conjuring of the word 'honour', tends to truncate the polemics of this crime and its contexts (along with associated cultural and religious practices) into fixed, simplistic, essentialised, and ahistorical schema. In their traditional contexts both honour and shame are gendered constructs (Churchill; Abu-Lughod "Seductions"; *Veiled;* Nurka; Akpinar; Moran and Johnson). Theoretically speaking, the concepts of honour and shame are equally applicable to both men and women. In reality, due to strong socio-cultural underpinnings, they are instead discursively produced and inscribed on male and female bodies in contrasting ways. The differential manner in which honour and shame are produced and embodied results in the gendering of these categories. Thus, within a traditional socio-cultural context the honour-shame complex is understood and experienced in symbolic terms in which "*honor is ultimately seen as being men's responsibility, while shame is viewed as being women's*

'burden'. Honor is thus actively achieved, while shame is often passively defended, leading to an entirely different set of expectations for men and women" (Shahani 276).

The words *honour* and *shame* are also understood differently across different languages: these differences are indicative of the complex socio-cultural symbolism embedded in their understanding. Unlike their translated counterparts of honour and shame in the English language, a variety of terms (with subtle connotative and denotative differences) are used in various languages—like Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Notably, in Pakistan (in the Urdu language) there are at least two words that can be translated as denoting "honour" and these have distinct, if related meanings. The first is *izzat*, a more general term relating to respect and social reputation. The other is *ghairat* which contains more masculine and violent connotations. A *ghairatmand* is someone possessing a sense of (masculine) pride, decorum, honour, respect, especially in social aspects. In contrast, the word *beghairat* , often used as a term of abuse, is roughly translated as a spineless, immoral, "dishonourable, or socially impotent" person (Shahani 277). Honour killings are usually indicated by reference to the former term, as *ghairat kay naam pay qatal* (murders committed in the name of *ghairat*) most often referring to action taken by a man to avenge masculine honour sullied by a woman's (sexually) transgressive behaviour or simple disobedience. Justification for such actions "is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honour' vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential" (Welchman and Hossain 4).

Many scholars, notably feminist ones, have challenged the idea that honour-based violence, in particular honour killing, is an ahistorical phenomenon to be understood and

categorised as a socio-religious or familial crime, rather than a sexual offence or a violation of human rights (Gill "Patriarchal" 1). In her seminal work, “Seductions of the ‘Honor Crime’”, Lila Abu-Lughod draws attention to the construction of honour-related crimes—in academia as well as popular literature/media—as “a distinctive and specific cultural complex” associated with Muslim societies (22). She continues to argue that these representational matrixes, tend to “solidify honor crimes as timeless cultural practices associated with particular kinds of communities defined by their alterity” while simultaneously “affixing values of individualism, freedom, humanity, tolerance, and liberalism neatly to the West and to Western states that host dark immigrants” ("Seductions" 37). Drawing on Abu-Lughod’s analysis, Yaqin gestures towards a similar propensity in the popular reporting and study of honour crimes. She contends that (in the West) “human rights activism, the judicial and legal system, media representation, fiction and fantasy and anthropological study” (Yaqin "Muslims" 104), in an almost conspiratorial manner, seem to have joined forces to fix honour crimes onto particular communities as proof of their inferiority and backwardness. Reported in a dangerous concoction which combines a “scientific mode of factual reporting” with “imaginative storytelling”, honour crimes are construed as particularised and enduring cultural practices of (largely Muslim) societies that are “at odds with western society” and the (superior) liberal, humanist values it represents (104).[200]

The positioning of honour-based violence as evidence of a tribal and backward religiosity which, in turn, is unilaterally condemned, has been variously contested. For instance, Aisha Gill argues that honour (and crimes committed in its name) is a socio-anthropological

[200] See also Sen; Churchill; Idriss; Idriss and Abbas; Smartt; Chesler("Worldwide"); Jamal ("Piety"); Cooney; Doğan ("Women"; "Is"); and Julios.

construct which is “historically persistent and highly topical” ("Patriarchal" 1). She further contends that when examined in its historical contexts and cultural variances, honour emerges as a “symbolic and hence rhetorical construction, subject to contested meanings” ("Crimes" 244). These meanings vary not only across timelines but are also subjected to transfigurations and changes depending on ethnicities, class, caste, and sect (Gill "Crimes"; Doğan "Honour"; Shahani; Gill, Strange and Roberts; Idriss and Abbas). Gill and other scholars challenge the positioning of honour killings (and other honour-based crimes) as primarily a religious phenomenon, endemic to certain (migrant) communities (like Pakistanis, Turkish, Kurdish, Bangladeshis). They argue that honour-based crimes should be seen and treated as extreme examples of gendered violence—femicide—which transcends cultural boundaries, “though [paradoxically] laws governing specific cultures are often invoked to support” such atrocities (Gill "Crimes" 248-9).[201]

The “honour/shame complex” (Akpinar 431) appears to have two key distinctive but interrelated semiotic markers: it is a “social evaluation” (Shahani 274) and is also intrinsically bound with sexuality, especially that of women. As a social evaluation, the notions of honour and shame are defined and viewed “through the prism of kin and community. A primary consideration in the community is … ‘what people will say?’” (Shahani 275-6). Evaluations of honour (*izzat*), then, come from the outside; honour is not something that resides within a given person but rather is *earned*: it is the cumulative effect of how people view your behaviour and character. How you are perceived is more important that what you actually are or do, and in this regard women—and their bodies—become the carriers of male/family honour.

[201] See Coomaraswamy (xii) and Bettiga-Boukerbout for discussion of honour crimes in various cultural contexts.

In this respect, the honour/shame complex is deeply intertwined with notions of sexuality, and this can come to dominate the meaning of the term, often by use of the word *ghairat*. The honour/shame complex paradoxically places women's bodies in a double bind. At one level they are reproducers, conduits for the family blood-line, "carriers of group identity" (Akpinar 430), preservers and transmitters of culture and guardians of morality. Simultaneously, precisely because their bodies are invested with so much symbolic value, they have the potential to bring shame to the family/community by failing to comply with ascribed (masculine) standards of gendered behaviour and bodily comport. As discussed before, in a patrilineal, honour-based society a woman's most important attribute is her ability to reproduce and, by extension, her sexuality. The symbolic investment in female sexuality inadvertently creates a gendered hierarchy "underwritten by sexual violence" (Shahani 277). I concur with Shahani's assertion that in honour-based societies:

> [women's] bodies are invariably imagined as resources of men's honor and volatile repositories of shame, making them subject to social control and sacrificial extermination. Women's bodies have thus been repeatedly seized, invested with, and converted into, valuable possessions and dangerous beings—into a promise of paradise, conveying, at the same time, a sense of deepest menace. (274)

There is an important distinction between honour-based violence against women and what might be called 'crimes of passion'. In the case of the latter (which can range from domestic violence to murder) the perpetrator is usually an intimate partner enraged, as the phrase suggests, by a spontaneous fit of *passion* (another category might involve sociopathic individuals). In the former, the violence, while often committed by an individual can, equally, be committed by a group. In this respect it crosses the public-private divide. It is not the preserve of an intimate partner but invariably involves familial members who may be

more or less connected to the victim by blood or marriage—a father, brother, cousin, uncle or brother-in-law (Gill "Crimes" 248; Cooney). Disturbingly, female family members, even mothers, are often involved in such crimes but usually as secondary actors and supporters. The justification for the violence is always the violation of (male) "honour," familial or individual. This appeal to honour is dangerous because it extends the right to retribution beyond the family itself, allowing wider members of the community to police, surveil and punish transgressive female bodies.[202]

Scholars note that those who commit crimes of honour against women usually use a "cultural" defence of provocation to reduce their culpability (Akpinar; Siddiqui; Abu-Odeh; Leader-Elliott; Carline). This has the effect of shifting the blame away from the perpetrator and onto the victimised female body, while (re)affirming the symbolism of "women 'embody[ing]' the honour of males" (Welchman and Hossain 6). It has been suggested that, given the cultural tolerance for honour-based violence against women, in some cases perpetrators use it to hide their more prosaic reasons for committing violence. These can include wishing to discard a wife in order to marry another woman, rejection by a woman and her family or, most often, economic reasons relating to property and inheritance. Perpetrators are likely to receive a lesser sentence under law, even in Britain, for committing "honour-based" violence against women rather than violence originating from other motives/drives.[203] A further complication is the fact that crimes of violence against women are not always motivated by the defilement of honour per se, but are intended to act as a deterrent and corrective force for reinforcing and maintaining social order (Kandiyoti "Bargaining") and (re) establishing male authority more generally.

[202] See Welchman and Hossain (5).
[203] In the honour killing of H. Yones, her father Abdulla Yones pled provocation, mounting a defence based on cultural traditions and, as a result, his sentence was reduced by seven years, from first-degree murder to manslaughter in a British court. See R. Ahmed (*Writing* 167-8).

As I will discuss, Aslam's novel appears to draw attention to these competing constructions of honour-based violence: one which portrays it as endemic to Islam/Muslim communities, and the other which understands it as an expression of patriarchal oppression.

3.6.3 Cartographies of Honour-based Violence in *Maps*

The centrality of love and desire in *Maps* is in tension with the intensity of Aslam's portrayal of violence. The violence is of a particular kind; it is gendered and its victims are almost always women. He regards it as his role to expose what he claims is the unnoticed or ignored violence experienced by Muslim women, the everyday "September 11s" (Aslam "Question" n.p.). Commenting on the novel Aslam insists that all the incidents of violence it contains are drawn from real life: "my sea is imaginary but the fish are real" ("Like" n.p.). *Maps* adds Aslam's voice to "those that were already being raised" ("Writing" 1) in Pakistan and the Muslim world. His concern with what might be called 'feminist' ideas is something he stresses in many interviews, alongside his belief that "any form of art" has the "potential for truth-telling" ("Writing" 1). He says that he is "proud" of the fact that when he sent off his first novel to the publishers, because of its deep concern with Pakistani women, they assumed it was written by a woman (Yaqin "Nadeem" 42). The same thematic focus is clearly evident in *Maps*. This stands in contrast to much diasporic Muslim men's writing which, as has often been noted, tends to be concerned with relationships between fathers and sons.[204]

The worst form of gendered violence enacted against and on the female body is, of course, that of honour killing. In addition to various 'asides' in which such murders are mentioned, there are four instances in the novel in which women are killed in the name of

[204] See Nash and Clements (*Writing*).

honour. The ways in which Aslam engages with the issue of honour killing are at times contradictory. He appears to be cognisant of the sensationalist portrayal of honour killing in Western media, as mentioned earlier, which positions it as a Muslim religious/ethnic/cultural crime. He complicates such simplistic portrayals by representing the honour killings in the novel as fundamentally driven by thwarted and bruised male egos, rather than by religion/culture. In other words, the murders appear to be cast as femicides, "the misogynous killing of women by men as 'a form of sexual violence'" (Radford and Russell 3).[205] In doing so, Aslam undermines the "cultural" interpretation of such killings as essentialist and ahistorical. In his depiction of honour-based violence, Aslam appears to anticipate the tropes and images evoked in popular imagination, along with the (racial, neo-Orientalist) stereotyping and type-casting engendered. However, simultaneously, the excessive (even obsessive) emphasis on the negative aspects of religiosity in the novel appears to invite readers to understand such violence as endemic to a backward, misogynist Muslim culture. R. Ahmed argues:

> [T]he novel appears to simultaneously show an awareness of the culturalist discourses that surround such crimes *and* foreclose any legitimate critique of such discourses by attributing the only objection to the murderers themselves, whose misogyny … serve[s] almost to parody their position. (*Writing* 169)

Given these conflicting approaches, any deconstruction of the sense of self-righteous superiority implicit in Western discourses, offered in *Maps*, is weakened.

The honour-based violence in the novel takes many forms: verbal, psychological and, of course, literal/physical, each manifested in multiple ways. As noted earlier in this chapter a

[205] See Widyono; Welchman and Hossain.

distinctive feature of the honour/shame complex involves reputation. “What will people say?” is a constant refrain in the novel, along with “what will people think?” In the honour-obsessed community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, “Hell is other people” (*Maps* 32), a phrase that echoes Sartre. The neighbourhood is described as “a place of Byzantine intrigue and emotional espionage, where when two people stop to talk on the street their tongues are like the two halves of a scissor coming together, cutting reputations and good names to shreds” (176). The importance of reputation is emphasised part way through the novel when Shamas thinks, “[w]hat the ideas of honour and shame and good reputation mean to the people of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh can be summed up by a Pakistani saying: he whom a taunt or jeer doesn’t kill is probably immune to even swords” (193). The clear link between verbal and physical harm is manifest here, foregrounding that words can have corporeal consequences. In disastrous ways, in the novel, taunts and jeers against characters’ reputations beget acts of violence. In an extreme example, it is the constant jibes of condemnation that cause Chanda’s brothers to kill her and Jugnu. The punishment meted out for transgressive behaviour in an honour-based crime does not end with corporeal erasure such as that of a killing, but extends beyond this. It requires a complete erasure: in language as well as in memory. Shamas imagines the verbal violence unleashed against Chanda and her mother: the first by refusal to name her, the second by vitriolic abuse. He thinks,“[i]t is likely that Chanda’s father could not bring himself to mention his daughter’s name because of the shame he felt, not wishing to see the girl coupled with Jugnu in his own speech, *not having the strength to see them together even in language*” (*Maps* 139; emphasis added). He also imagines this man silencing his wife, who he fears will expose events to the police, in a tirade of misogynistic obscenities typical of domestic verbal abuse: “*Keep your mouth shut! This woman is a complete* haramzadi! *The* kanjri *woman*

didn't say anything when it was time for her to speak and raise her badmash kutia *daughter properly and now she cannot hold her tongue!*" (139).[206] After Chanda is murdered by her brothers, her father appears to disown her "to save face in judgemental or belligerent company" (176). He simply says, "Yes, yes, what had to be done was done. Now leave me in peace" (176). This implies that the pressure to conform to communal values is greater even that his love for his daughter or fear of legal consequences. He performs a role required of him by the community, one that condones the actions of his sons, out of fear that he may be excommunicated. As Doğan notes, in honour-based societies, when a woman's sexual reputation is tarnished, "[k]illing, though itself criminal, is the *correct* response" ("Honour" 410; emphasis added). Like Chanda's father, women in the wider family agree with the punishment that has been meted out to Chanda, fearing that her besmirched reputation will have consequences for them and their daughters: "no one would want to marry [a girl] whose aunt had set up home with someone out of wedlock" (349).

Another significant example in the novel that evidences the links between verbal (rumour, gossip) and literal violence is Suraya's divorce and the events surrounding it. This highlights that "[w]hat mattered was not what you yourself knew to have actually happened, but what other people thought had happened" (158). The narrator offers this comment after details of an incident in which Suraya attempts to intervene on behalf of a fourteen year-old girl belonging to the enemies of her husband's family. The girl, who has been repeatedly raped by her uncle, has fallen pregnant and refuses to name her rapist. Suraya fears that the girl will be murdered by her family who accuse her of "having relations with someone and thereby bringing dishonour on the bloodline," and "disgracing the

[206] The Urdu terms used are particularly offensive and sexualised, and translation does not indicate the degree of this offensiveness: *haramzadi* (bastard); *kanjri* (low-life/prostitute); *badmash* (characterless/corrupt); *kutia* (bitch).

family" (157). Suraya visits the girl's family intending to tell them who is responsible for the pregnancy but is herself turned into a victim, realising too late that by entering "the enemy courtyard" she has put "her own survival … at stake" (158). Although the men of that family don't actually rape her, Suraya is told that:

> […] they were going to let everyone know that they *had* raped her because it would cast a mark on their honour and their name and their manhood if people thought they had had a woman from the other side of the battle-line in their midst and hadn't taken full and appropriate advantage of the opportunity. (158)

The next sentence stresses the dire consequences of damage to one's reputation: "As it turned out it was as bad as if they had raped her" (158). Although Suraya's husband and her in-laws believe in her innocence, the swirling rumours increase her husband's volatile and abusive behaviour towards her: "he just couldn't get the barbed comments of people out of his head" (158). It is this that ultimately leads him to divorce her. The diction used is significant: words like "enemy," "feuding" and "battle-line" symbolically stress the way in which women's bodies have historically been constructed as symbols of communal/tribal/national honour, over and on which men wage their wars.[207]

This incident also reinforces another form of violence, encoded in speech, to which women in the novel are subjected. Male blame makes them the double victims of verbal violence: regardless of their innocence, they are framed as transgressors, seductresses and

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[207] I have discussed this in relation to *Moth Smoke*: the woman-as-nation/earth symbolism opens up the actual/corporeal bodies of women to violence during times of conflict. In South Asian history, one of the worst forms of this sexualised violence was evidenced during the 1947 Partition. *Cracking India* (1998) draws attention to the ritualistic and sexualised nature of the violence unleashed on and against women's bodies—rape, forceful conversion/abductions, the cutting off of women's breasts, and ripping open of wombs were meant to signify an assault on the ability of nation/community to reproduce itself. For detailed discussions of the (national and communal) politics which engendered this violence see Butalia ("Women's"; "Reflections"; *Other*); Daiya; Menon and Bhasin ("Recovery"; "Body"; *Borders;* "Abducted"); and M. Hasan.

the destroyers of families. This is the fate of both the raped fourteen year-old and Suraya. Similarly, at multiple points in the novel the community is shown to blame Chanda for bringing disgrace to her family: "that girl Chanda managed to destroy her entire family" says one woman from the community (*Maps* 261). As a result of her actions her father is forced to resign from his role as headman at the mosque because of his "'immoral', 'deviant', and 'despicable' daughter, who was nothing less than a wanton whore in most people's eyes—as she was in Allah's" (15). She is blamed for the repercussions the males around her suffer. In the words of the community's matchmaker, "[w]hat a shameless girl she was … so brazen. She not only had poor Jugnu killed by moving in with him, she also ruined the lives of her own poor brothers who had to kill them" (42). The appalling final words of Barra to his dying sister confirm the brothers' sense of the righteousness of their actions. They also reveal how the brothers conceive of themselves, and other men in her life, as victims while simultaneously further criminalising the real victim, Chanda:

> If you can hear me, beg Allah's forgiveness for your sin before dying. And beg pardon from us and your parents for all that you put us through. And don't forget your husbands, ask forgiveness for the times you may have overlooked their concerns and comfort. (355-6)

As discussed earlier, Aslam's novel positions the repression of desire as a kind of (sexual) symbolic violence against women and men alike. The high value placed on women's virginity and chastity, suggests Abraham, creates a culture in which "specific qualities such as censored sexual repression [are regarded] as essential for women" (597). This censorship, and the violence it entails, is more fateful for women in comparison to men. Men have options for exercising their sexuality before or outside of marriage without incurring

punishment as in the case of Charag, Chotta or Shamas. We learn that Shamas' sexual awakening took place in Lahore's famous red light district and later, frustrated by Kaukab's coldness, he contemplates visiting a prostitute again. However, in the case of women in the novel any sexual transgression is violently punished. Even within marriage, men's and women's sexuality is treated differently: "the traditional normative order socializes men to believe in their sexual prowess and women to believe in the fulfillment of their husband's sexual desires without addressing their own sexual needs" (Abraham 598). In consequence, husbands are allowed unfettered access to their wives' bodies and, given that they own them, the notion of marital rape is almost oxymoronic.[208] This is gestured towards in the novel when the husband of the non-compliant Muslim girl is told to rape her by his mother-in-law. The primacy of male desire, and desirability of female sexual repression, is also evident in the relationship of Mah-Jabin and her husband. Mah-Jabin's husband cares only about his own sexual satisfaction, labelling her an "'English whore" (97) for pursing sexual gratification through masturbation.

Aslam highlights that in a society obsessed with women's bodies as a potential source of shame, they can be subject to erasure by infanticide even before they are born, or immediately after birth. He states, "[i]t is my understanding that Pakistan is among those countries where the ratio of men and women is inconsistent with the rest of the world. In the rest of the world there are more women than men. In Pakistan … [m]illions of women are not there" ("Where" n.p.). The subject of female infanticide is raised obliquely at several

[208] Abraham refers to Rinita Mazumdar to note, "[t]hese [traditional] values make violations, particularly rape within marriage, 'ethically permissible'" (592). Such attitudes are not uncommon in South Asian culture, and are justified by selective references to the Quran and Hadith. References such the Quranic metaphor that women are *fields* to be *ploughed* by their husbands are used to support such behaviour. These men conveniently ignore other Quranic injunctions regarding mutual care and respect between spouses. Aslam could arguably be accused of similar forgetting: the majority of his female characters lack sexual agency and those few who do express their desires are portrayed as outcasts of the *normative* social order.

points in *Maps* but is the main focus of Aslam's novella, *Leila in the Wilderness* (2010). In *Maps*, the narrator refers to fertility clinics in Pakistan which advertise the ability to "*tell you the sex of the foetus while you wait*" with the implication that "*if it's female you may have it aborted quickly*" (88). The selective preference for sons is made clear in the Muslim girl's husband who continues to marry when his existing wives are unable to produce him a son. It is also a complicating factor in Chanda's murder by her brothers. Barra's actions, it is implied, are at least in part the result of his bitter anger and disappointment when he learns that the foetus his wife aborted, in the belief that it was a girl, was actually a boy (349).

Chanda's and Jugnu's honour killing is not depicted as an isolated incident in the novel although it frames and shadows the whole. Honour-based violence, as an institutionalised practice in South Asian communities at home and abroad, pervades the novel. For example, we learn of "[a] Pakistani man [who] mounted the footpath and ran over his sister-in-law—repeatedly, in broad daylight—because he suspected she was cheating on his brother" (*Maps* 136).[209] The "honour" killings that are mentioned in the novel are not always in response to female sexual transgression. In another brief aside, there is mention of a man who puts "a bullet into [his wife's] head" when she tried to leave their violent marriage (250). The transnational nature of honour-based violence is emphasised when Shamas is described as reading a news report about *"[a] seventeen-year-old Palestinian girl [who] was beaten to death in Gaza Strip by her father for having lost her virginity*" (281).

Community members in the novel are shown to not only condone the killing of Chanda and Jugnu, but to have anticipated it. One man says to his wife, "When I saw Jugnu I knew he was as good as dead. I knew Chanda's brothers were waiting for them … Had my sister

[209] This reference appears to be based on the killing of Tasleen Begum that occurred in Britain but Aslam has transported it back to Pakistan, perhaps to suggest that "the Land of the Pure" is, ironically, the origin of such brutal acts.

set up home with someone that shamelessly, I would have dissolved them both in acid" (*Maps* 340). Kaukab is not ready to believe that Chanda's brothers killed her, because they do not openly boast about it in the community: "I know Chanda's brothers are innocent … because those who commit crimes of honour give themselves up proudly, their duty done. They never deny or sulk" (42). The narrator asserts that those who hear them boast about the act, when in Pakistan, agree that the deaths were a matter of honour and killers, like the brothers, "usually killed openly and were proud of their deed. Some even presented themselves to the police afterwards … The law of Pakistan was almost always lenient with them and they were out of jail much sooner than those who had committed other kinds of murder" (347-8).

The framing of the murders in the novel appears to align with the ways in which Western media and public imagination portrays "honour killing" as misogynist religio-cultural phenomena, specific to sexually-repressed, uncultured Muslim communities. However, Aslam reveals that the real motives for the killings were not (simply) honour-based. In this way he suggests how cultural pathologising of such crimes might ironically be utilised to conceal what is, in fact, masculine domestic abuse. This is particularly evident in the judge's responses when the brothers are finally brought to trial. The judge, we learn, "batter[ed] down all talk of 'code of honour and shame'" referring to the brothers as "cowards" and "wicked" instead (*Maps* 348). Further details of the verdict are recalled by Shamas:

> [H]e heard the judge say that the killers had found a cure to their problem through an immoral, indefensible act; a cure, a remedy—and their religion and background took care

> of the bitter aftertaste. Their religion and background assured them that, yes, they were murderers but that they had murdered only *sinners*. (278)[210]

Although the judge regards the murders as "immoral" and "indefensible" he nonetheless frames the brothers' acts in terms of "their religion and background". In other words, the killings are discussed in culturally specific terms: they remain moored to their ethnic and religious roots. This has several significant consequences. As discussed earlier, such religious particularlising opens the possibility of mounting a mitigating cultural defence for murder on the grounds of provocation. There is international evidence that such a defence is often used when honour crimes are brought to trial, which has been noted to generate (familial/communal) support by providing an acceptable (understandable) rationale for the need of violence. Moreover, scholars have also argued that it could also lead to reduced sentences and/or a general lenient behaviour towards the treatment of the perpetrators within the society as well as the legal system.[211]

Furthermore, as the nature and extent of Chotta's and Bara's incarceration is never fully revealed, readers remain uncertain whether the brothers successfully managed to mount a provocation defence. As the punishment meted out for a crime is often a measure of its severity, this authorial omission further marginalises the victims. Aslam's choice not to

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[210] These remarks resemble Judge Denison QC's sentencing of Abdella Yone for the murder of his daughter in 2004: "The killing and the manner of it was an appalling act. This is in any view a tragic story arising out of irreconcilable cultural difficulties between traditional Kurdish values and the values of Western society. It's plain that you strongly and genuinely disapproved of the lifestyle in this country of your daughter but it must not be an excuse to kill". See Smartt.

[211] In 1999, Pakistani woman Saima Sarwar was killed by a gunman outside her lawyer's chambers with the help of her mother, father and uncle. Her crime was to seek divorce from an abusive (alleged drug addict) husband. The perpetuators were said to have obtained formal approval from community leaders. A few Pakistani senators openly condoned the honour killing claiming it was a cultural-tradition and hence justified. See Amir H. Jafri for details. (Aslam has also referenced this case in his interview on the subject). In 2004 an Iranian Muslim student Arash Ghorbani-Zarin was murdered by the brothers and father of his Bangladeshi girlfriend, Manna Begum. The father was sentenced to life-in-prison, while the two brothers (18 and 14-years old) were given 16 and 14 years imprisonment respectively. Ursula Smartt notes, "[i]t appears that the sons' mitigation defence had been successful in this respect … sav[ing] them from a life sentence for murder."(6)

reveal the exact sentence retains the focus on the crime and the reasons for it, rather than offering closure that acknowledges and vindicates the murdered. This echoes the narratorial choices made by Aslam in the novel. Via free-indirect discourse readers gain insight into the responses to the murder of many community members but are given very little access to the thoughts and feelings of the victims before they died. There is a gendered aspect to what little we do hear of Chanda's and Jugnu's speech. Jugnu's words are occasionally reported via the recollections of Shamas but there are only a handful of instances in which Chanda's words are recalled or recorded. The same applies to the Muslim girl who is not only unnamed but without voice in the novel. The narration of the novel thus underscores Aslam's focus on the community rather than its victims.

When Chanda's brothers are led away from the dock following their trial they show no remorse for their actions and instead assert they are the victims of racial profiling. They resort to "litanies including words like 'racism' and 'prejudice,'" claiming that the judge's remarks had "insulted [their] culture and or religion" and that the proceedings were those of a "kangaroo court" (348). R. Ahmed suggests that the brothers' objections read as if "scripted, the recitation of a formula that has lost its meaning through repetition and one that is, moreover, identified with religious doctrine" (*Writing* 169). Aslam appears to emphasise that both the British and the diasporic migrant community resort to such "scripted" performances. The former is captured in the words of a "distinguished Pakistani commentator" (read liberal) on British radio following the trial: "Some immigrants think that just because they belong to a minority they are nice people, that they should be forgiven everything just because they are oppressed" (348). The latter is summed up by the community matchmaker's claim that "the white police are interested in us Pakistanis only

when there is a chance to prove that we are savages who slaughter our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters" (41). The strategising of honour-based crimes to service specific agendas and ideologies by both the West and the migrant communities has been noted in scholarship on the subject. Gill, for instance, notes that the honour killing of Heshu Yones, for the majority of British media, became a symbol of a "'*culture clash crisis'* amongst youth" that were construed to be at risk from a "ghastly way of life" perpetuated within the British Muslim migrant community ("Patriarchal" 4, 3). A report on the murder in *The Mirror*, a British newspaper, epitomises the explicitly religious framing of this cultural 'crisis'. By referring to Heshu's father as "Father Fanatic" it also invites clear parallels between his actions and those of Muslim extremists. This is further stressed when the writer states, "The fanaticism sometimes seen in those of other faiths belongs to another age. It is right that we should be tolerant. But nothing could be less tolerant than killing your own daughter because she is going out with a Christian" (qtd. in Gill "Patriarchal" 4). The writer implies that Heshu's boyfriend was Western by alluding to his religion, however he was in fact a Kurdish Christian, hence a member of her cultural community, if not her religious one. In addition to honour killing, forced marriage, genital mutilation and other such "Muslim" practices have been used as ammunition in political debates about multicultural concerns and immigration policies.[212]

Aslam draws attention to the ways in which honour-based violence is manipulated for various personal ends by characters in the novel, including those within the community itself. The most obvious example is one I have previously discussed, that of brothers claiming "racism" in response to the judge's verdict. Another is the fabricated story about a "counterfeit" Jugnu and Chanda seeking asylum in Britain. A young man and woman from

[212] See Yaqin ("Muslims"); and Siddiqui.

Pakistan, previously unknown to each other, are presented in this story as lovers on the run from the girl's family who were "hunting them in order to kill them" (273). This is problematic because while the matters at stake are real, as long as they continue to be articulated in terms of cultural/ethnic difference, the victims of honour-based violence will remain over-written. As R. Ahmed argues, the novel appears to anticipate "objections to negative representations of the community" in which singular crimes are generalised to stereotype the whole community. However she suggests that, ironically, the narrative in fact dismisses such objections "by underlining the potential complicity of such an attitude with criminal behaviour which targets women and children. … Any criticism of the stereotyping of Islam or Muslims [thus] becomes a sanctioning of crime" (*Writing* 170).

In *Maps* the scene of Chanda's and Jugnu's killing is delayed until near the end, after we have read hundreds of pages that emphasise the narrowly conservative and punitive religiosity of the community. When Aslam finally does provide details of the event and the motivations of the two brothers, we learn that the murders were the result of a series of unfortunate events and, in the words of Ranashina, the "senseless action of bruised, hypocritical masculine ego" ("Racialized" 304). The brothers already feel emasculated in their role as brothers-in-law to Chanda's latest husband. Aslam draws attention to the Urdu word *sala* which means "brother-in-law" but in some contexts is also used as a term of abuse:

> [T]o call someone *sala* was to say, 'I fuck your sister and you can't do anything about it!', 'You can't stop me from trying my manhood on one of your women!' What could be more humiliating to men who had been brought up to defend their women's honour

> above all else? A man's brother-in-law was a swear-word made flesh, and, frustratingly, [they] had to accept it. (346-7)

Chanda's decision to move in with Jugnu is a double assault on the brothers: her inability to remain married symbolised their failure (in the eyes of other men) as patriarchs who had been unable to secure a suitable match for their sister (342). But more importantly, Chanda's decision to openly co-habit with Jugnu, despite her family's wishes and threats, was an assertion of will that humiliated and feminised them in the public eye: "we are men but she reduced us to eunuch bystanders by not paying attention to our wishes" (342).

Compounding this existing sense of their humiliation, the brothers are portrayed in the novel as having criminal tendencies, having once been part of a group that smuggled heroin into Britain from Pakistan. Barra is portrayed as having a very short temper and Chotta as an alcoholic. Furthermore, they are shown to feel anger and jealousy, unrelated to their sister, due to events that occurred in the hours before the murders. This leads them to vent their emotions on the bodies of the two lovers. Barra had just learned of his wife's mistaken abortion of a much-desired boy child, thinking it was yet another girl, and had had to be prevented from "punching the doctor" (349). Chotta epitomises what Priyamvada Gopal calls a hypocritical patriarchy "that indulges in its own sexual proclivities but denounces the objects of their attention as 'sluts'" (*Indian* 190). He has been a regular customer of the white prostitute in Dash-e-Tanhaii. This leads to his extra-marital affair with Kiran when one night, in a drunken stupor, he knocks on Kiran's door, mistaking her for the prostitute. Although he himself indulges in intercourse outside marriage, he nonetheless censures Chanda for exercising her own desires. On the night of the murders, after "drinking alone" at a pub, he finds Kiran in bed with another man (351). Feeling jilted and slighted, he goes

home and digs up a pistol, acquired during the drug smuggling stint, and walks back towards Kiran's house.

The narrator's description of what ensues is significant for Chota's generalising transfer from his lover's betrayal to the moral corruption of all women: "He was on his way back to Kirin's house, saying 'bitch' and 'whore' to himself repeatedly, when he changed direction and found himself going towards where Chanda and Jugnu lived; what he had been saying had changed to 'bitches' and 'whores' some time ago" (351). Aslam takes care to meticulously chart the accidental nature of both Jugnu's and Chanda's deaths in the pages that follow, stressing the fragile emotional state of both brothers and Chotta's drunkenness. This emphasises the stark difference between these deaths and traditional honour killings which are almost always premeditated. Chotta's words to Chanda make clear that his concerns are more with himself than with her honour. He is frustrated with his circumstances and jealous of his sister's happiness, saying to her, "[y]ou think the world is heart shaped? … Some people aren't as lucky as you, and have problems" (354). Chotta and Barra are thus portrayed not as "the henchmen of evil religious culture; rather their crime can be traced in part to their own subordination and emasculation which has led to their violent rage" (R. Ahmed *Writing* 168).[213]

Despite complicating the deaths in ways that suggest that they are not motivated by the bothers' desire to avenge familial honour, and thus portraying their violence as the result of an overvaluation of masculinity that excludes and undervalues femininity, Aslam persistently offers a damning portrait of Pakistan. Misri argues that in *Shame* Rushdie

[213] The backstory of Shamas' widowed grandmother historicises the use of violence as a compensatory act for men (51). Later, Aslam quotes British Home Office statistics to highlight that violence against women cuts across national and cultural borders (138). Read together, these references can be seen as an attempt to complicate any straightforward connection between religion and misogyny.

"reproduces the hierarchical opposition between 'East' and 'West along the lines of shame"—associating shame with the East (Misri 22)—and Aslam appears to do the same for Pakistan. In *Maps*, the "land of the pure" is figured not only as the source of austere and punitive religiosity, but is also, ironically, a place teeming with corruption and vice. These portrayals are supported by apparent statistical evidence voiced with ethnographic authority by the narrator, for instance, "according to the statistics, in one Pakistani province alone, a woman is murdered every thirty-eight hours solely because her virtue is in doubt" (136). Pakistan is a "poor", "harsh and disastrously unjust land" (9) where wives are consistently beaten and murdered (with little or no impunity) (226).[214] Such portrayals seem to undermine Aslam's claim that "[i]n real life, and in my writing, I can't pretend that all Pakistanis are angels any more than I can pretend that all Pakistanis are deceitful" ("Where" n.p.). In *Maps* almost *all* Pakistanis seem to be deceitful with the exception of the secular, creative *saviours* like Shamas and Jugnu.

3.7 Conclusion by Way of a Critique

I mentioned earlier in the chapter that Aslam's stated purpose in writing *Maps* was to explore the theme of honour-killing and how this phenomenon is ostensibly tied to and invested in a particular performance of maleness. He also claims that his intent was to foreground these atrocities—the everyday 9/11s— as acts of violence which frequently brutalise bodies of 'bad' Muslim women (sometimes men are victims too), accused of

[214] Pakistan, as well as other Islamic countries, largely remains a source of dis-ease, corruption and (gendered) violence in the novel. Kaukab's question "what's wrong with Pakistan?" (112) is answered with sporadically placed incidents which portray it as a place where greedy relatives kill and swindle people of their life-savings—for example, the owner of *Safeena* (152). It produces oppressed and oppressive "fools" like Kaukab (112). Other Muslim countries, like Turkey (264), Saudi Arabia (281) and Tunisia (44), are home to similar acts of brutality in *Maps*.

bringing shame and dishonour to their families and communities. Due to a culture of silence, rooted in religio-social traditions which condone such acts, these allegedly transgressive bodies fail to become part of his-story: condemned, they exist outside the margins of (national) imagination and discourse. Unlike some of his predecessors and/or contemporary novelists writing about the British Muslim/South Asian experience,[215] Aslam's primary concern in *Maps* is to dissect the origins of gendered violence with a communal focus, rather than in an exploration of either race or class. His novel, written from the perspective of a man with feminist sympathies, weaves a complex criss-crossed tapestry of religion, gender, race and class. Nevertheless, his choice to explore the theme of honour-related violence (underscored by an emphasis on sexuality) by spatially situating the novel in a migrant UK community, results in perilous confrontations between religion, gender and multiculturalism. Aslam has been praised for "ventur[ing] into this politically sensitive terrain with apparent fearlessness," and for refusing to "shoulder the 'brown man's burden'"(R. Ahmed *Writing* 157). Simultaneously, he is credited with creating a narrative that includes multiple points-of-focalisation/voices, well-rounded characters and complex, intertwined ideological threads. In these ways he avoids a reductive and damning picture of the migrant Muslim community.

However, despite his complicated storyline, the uneven treatment of the theme that ostensibly motivates the novel, and the forces which Aslam chooses to contrast, are problematic. Aslam's inward critique, unapologetic and even radical in approach and tone, manages to highlight the oppression experienced by the marginalised sections of the migrant/Pakistani community (women) on a daily basis due to the instrumentalisation of religion. He nevertheless creates a narrative which, in comparison to its blatant religious

[215] See Rushdie; Kureishi; Malkani; and S. Manzoor.

rhetoric, downplays the role of class/economics and racial prejudice. The violence, as experienced by female bodies, is portrayed to be pervasive and institutionalised. Women are positioned as both its victims as well as its executioners and consumers. Despite its feminist agenda, the narrative ultimately appropriates the bodies, voices and/or stories of the very women whose cause Aslam claims to be championing, and the overall emancipatory agenda, by positioning (creative) men as saviours.

Aslam is unable, I argue, to avoid stereotyping; the cumulative effects of his portrayals stage yet another Manichean rivalry between Western values and questionable, indeed inferior, Muslim ones—which, in the case of the latter, engender oppressed and violated female bodies. As *Maps* repeatedly draws a correlation between female victimisation—enacted through marriage, divorce, and the honour/shame complex—and religion, Aslam's engagement with religion warrants attention. Throughout the novel there is an uneven portrayal of traditional religion and especially religious-based subjectivities, such as that of Kaukab. The practitioners of such faith are characterised in the novel as irrational and unquestioningly reverent. The result is a portrayal of Islam that is persecutory and discriminatory, enacting its own form of racism and othering. As I've suggested, conservative Islam and the religious-traditional trappings of the institution of marriage, divorce laws, and the honour/shame complex are responsible for repressing, pathologising, and even punishing (an otherwise natural) sexual desire and those who dare exercise it.

Numerous accusations are levelled against orthodox Islam, echoing ones articulated in popular Western discourses. While Aslam is surely critiquing the community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii and its "uneducated [inhabitants'] partial and skewed understanding of their religion, or of their confusion of tradition and religion" (Yassin-Kassab n.p.), he risks

suggesting, to readers unfamiliar with the religion, that this reductive and intolerant version of Islam is the only one. The lack of variance in his portrayal of the Muslim migrant experience, particularly for women, is a point that "will be lost on non-Muslim readers" (Yassin-Kassab n.p.) and may even reinforce their prejudices. What is even more problematic is that some of the persecutory gendered practices associated with Islam are in fact misrepresented, as I have argued. Aslam fails to highlight that most of the tragedies in the novel arise from the mis/ab-use of religious dictates on the part of a specific socio-economic community. There are no alternative practising Muslims in the book—no successfully integrated professionals, no happily married couples, no achieving women, for example. R. Ahmed describes this as an "ideological novelistic silence" that offers no place to "a British Muslim collectivism that is not antithetical to individual rights and gender equality and that exists beyond stereotyping discourse" (*Writing* 174). What we see instead is Islam as an influence on this migrant community that cannot bring anything of value. Jugnu, for example, dismisses Islam's message and origins, stating that he cannot believe "what an illiterate merchant-turned-opportunist-preacher—for he was no systematic theologian—in seventh-century Arabian desert had to say about the origin of life" (38). Rational, secular characters, like Jugnu and Charag, are unable to conceive of any redeeming factors or benefits in Muslim identity. Ironically, their own inability to conceive of Islam as anything other than an irrational, unsystematic collection of dogmatic principles reveals their own rejection of plurality and diversity. This inversely seems to promote "a secular transcendentalism" thereby enacting its own kind of "aesthetic-political dogmatism" (R. Ahmed *Writing* 159).

In recent decades, again post-9/11, Sufism has come to be positioned as the (only) "good" kind of Islam, articulated in a (simplistic) opposition between "Islamicism (equated with 'extremism') or non-political, individual pietism" of the Sufistic kind (Mondal 40).[216] As I have argued, this oppositional pairing is problematic when translated in gendered terms. This binaristic position has been adopted by many "secular" novelists of Muslim origin, or "secular elites" (35) in Geoffrey Nash's term. They "frequently" use it, he argues, to attack "revivalist Islam" and/or "the Islamic beliefs, practices and cultures of the lands to which they notionally belong" (Nash 36). Aslam exemplifies such "secular elites," endorsing an apparently Sufist celebration of human love and desire over austere religiosity. He establishes sexual union and physical desire as ends in themselves rather than the means they are, in Sufism, to achieve transcendence through union with the Creator—producing a simplified and skewed representation of Sufism. Moreover, while this palatable variety of faith legitimises female desire through legends and myths, it fails to produce any female subjects capable of agentive performance in the present day. Aslam's Sufism, ultimately, fails women by investing male bodies (and their creativity) with the power of salvation. In Aslam's version of Sufism the *saviours*—those who seem to be able to perceive, critique and sing/speak for the oppressed, in particular women—are *always* (artistic) men. These men, with whom the narrator appears to identify, are portrayed as liberal, compassionate, sensitive and artistic and are encapsulated in the figures of Shamas, Jugnu, and N. F. A. Khan. Just as the Sufi poets sing of and *for* women like Heer and Sassi, so does Aslam for women like Suraya, the Muslim girl or Chandra. As noted, these women do not "speak" in

[216] According to R. Ahmed, "It is no coincidence that the only acceptable form of Islam [in the West] is a politically quietest individualized understanding of faith and culture" (*Writing* 129). S. Abbas also notes this politicisation of Sufism: "In the post-September 11, 2001, environment, U.S. think tanks, in a bid to encourage 'moderate ' Islam as an antidote to the forms of [more threatening] Islam … have been advocates of Sufism" (185). Author of *The Islamist*, Ed Husain, writing about the moderate form of Islam, similarly States that the "majority of the world's Muslims still adhere … [to an Islam which is] deeply personal, highly spiritual, and Sufi-influenced" (237).

the novel but are spoken for by Aslam. In this way it appears that he has appropriated their stories of victimhood in the service of a secular, liberal emancipatory agenda.

Conclusion: The Many Faces of Pakistani Womanhood: Visible and the Not-so-Visible Bodies

> In my Karachi, girls were even discouraged from walking in public, let alone bicycling. When we walked, as an aunt once observed, we kept our heads down, arms across our breasts, as if ashamed. We felt suffocated by the nervousness about our appearing in public, but also by the cruel irony that some of the nervousness was justified. Night cops ran a lucrative business pulling over cars with boys and girls alone. Failure to produce a marriage license meant, at best, having to bribe your way to salvation. *This is what the Holy War for Freedom had brought us*. (U. A. Khan "Pakistan" n.p.: emphasis added)

> It is we sinful women
> who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns
> who don't sell our lives
> who don't bow our heads
> who don't fold our hands together.…
> It is we sinful women
> who come out raising the banner of truth
> up against barricades of lies on the highways
> who find stories of persecution piled on each threshold
> who find that tongues which could speak have been severed.
> (Naheed 31)

I offer these extracts from Uzma Aslam Khan and Kishwar Naheed to be read in conjunction with the statements by Kamila Shamsie and Sara Suleri with which I began this research project: Suleri's provocative, yet ironic, remark "there are no women in the third world [Pakistan]" and Shamsie's claim that Pakistani women "in temperament" are "more powerful than" Pakistani men. U.A. Khan's reference to the everyday socio-cultural reality of post-1990s Pakistan marks the point of entry for my discussion on the representation of Pakistani-Muslim women. The defiant and recalcitrant spirit of Naheed's poem marks my point of departure. Taken together these extracts constitute the frames of reference most

often used in representation(s) of the Pakistani female body in popular inter/national discourses. My discussion and analysis of the selected texts by Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam highlights that, overall, these novels complicate and challenge (if not always deconstruct) popular discourses which define the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women in terms of lack: that is, as an ahistorical, timeless, static, monolithic, sexually repressed, voiceless singularity which can be usefully instrumentalised to mark "the boundaries of us versus them, here versus there, West versus Islam, civilized versus barbaric, and secularism versus religion" (Moallem 109). Instead, these narratives represent the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women as historically and culturally-specific materialisations of womanhood, born out of a complex interplay between the discourses of religion, politics, race, class, desire and sexuality.

A key concern with which Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam seem to engage in their novels can be posed as a question: when conceptualising the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women, how useful are the paradigms of religious and political nationalism (Muslim and Pakistani) on the one hand, or a Westernised emancipatory feminism, on the other? And further, how valid and effective are these labels and frameworks in attempts to articulate the diversity and multiplicity of Pakistani-Muslim women's experiences, locations, identities, and beliefs? A similar question drives my reading of the novels: are these writers able to represent these bodies without reducing their agency to a series of binary choices: subordination versus resistance; victimisation versus emancipation; sexual repression/passivity versus enacted desire; a privatised, domesticated self, versus a free, liberal civic subject? I have argued that Hamid's and Shamsie's novels, in particular, highlight the inadequacy—and even redundancy—of such binarisms. These texts draw attention to the dangers implicit in such a simplistic oppositional approach by foregrounding the deterministic and essentialising

effects it can have. In contrast, I have suggested that while Aslam's novel also portrays the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women as over-determined (thereby written-over and silenced) by the intersecting discourses of religion, politics (local and geo-political), race and class, the novel ultimately fails to escape the polarisation it apparently sets out to question and disassemble.

As I have shown, all three authors have pointed out that growing up under the military dictatorship of General Zia was significantly influential. Coming of age in a country like Pakistan, a theatre in which some of the key geo-political conflicts and rivalries of the twentieth century have occurred, meant becoming acutely aware of what Hayden V. White refers to as "the historical process itself" (79). These writers have claimed that it is not possible to grow up in Pakistan and remain unaware of how history and politics can define and mould individuals. They cannot afford to not produce politically-committed fiction. That is why the personal always remains bound up with the political and the historical in their writing. Living through General Zia's dictatorship, with his manipulative tactics and severe censorship of free speech, offered valuable lessons in the doctored and compromised nature of his-tory and the hegemony of a singular truth. Importantly, each of these writers learned first-hand of the contestatory role that artists, writers and literati can play in anti-dictatorial movements. For them, fiction is a medium that can challenge fixed truths, recuperate lost voices, uncover silences, and offer alternate (often non-normative) modes of identification and belonging. The stories told by these Anglophone writers are reminders of the alternate histories, silenced voices and heterogeneous traditions which are at times sacrificed in the creation of clinically clean and unified national his-tories. Their narratives are creative endeavours that reimagine the failures and disasters of the Nation-State; they

seek to redefine the terms in which we engage and associate with the people/world around us and, more importantly, construct the identity of the self and others. They offer diverse and heterogeneous ways of imagining Pakistan and Islamic identity, especially that of women.

Despite its dubious moorings, radical nationalism (political and religious) is experiencing a resurgence worldwide. I have argued that Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam use their fiction to confront the many permutations of nationalist sentiments in inter/national contexts. They offer robust indigenous critiques of various conflicts and problems (the South Asian nuclear arms-race, corruption, false sense of entitlement, despondency, religious conservatism, honour killings, and misogynist socio-cultural traditions). Certainly, they deny the (nationalist) myth of a pure utopian past or that of the primal innocence of the native self. At the same time, however, they refuse to fully subscribe to the self-congratulatory tone of neo-Orientalist rhetoric that invariably positions the Western world as *the* source of liberalism, freedom, modernity, progress and agency. These writers refuse to portray bombs, menacing mullahs, religious fundamentalism, violence, and oppressed women as the only, if not primary, frame of reference for Pakistan. They are also unwilling to absolve other geo-political forces of their culpability in generating some of the conflicts and tensions that beset Pakistan—whether the insidious creep of a globalised capitalist system, the politics of the Cold War or the War on Terror.

The engagement of these writers with politics and history also informs their approach to the representation of the Pakistani-Muslim female body in their novels. I have suggested that the female body that appears in these fictional works is, to borrow from Susan Bordo, a "politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices

of containment and control" (*Unbearable* 21). These texts, in various ways, foreground how female bodies function as inscriptive surfaces, continuously being written upon and appropriated by various forces to produce specific (subject) formulations, meanings and subject-positions, which are then strategically deployed as sign-posts, metaphors and tropes to assert and support political claims, ideas and structures. Within these ideologically-informed inscriptive projects, the female body is located at the nexus of local and global politics, history and religion. These novels by Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam affirm Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observation, quoted earlier, that when the female body is instrumentalised as a trope or a metaphor, the material woman (and her issues) is condemned to a violent shuttling between antagonist forces, each clamouring to stake a claim for its ownership. Referring to the over-written, symbolic bodies of the Muslim and/or third-world woman, U.A. Khan astutely points out that:

> For women from lands colonized by successive Empires—first the British, now the American—the struggle for self-ownership, self-representation, and intellectual recognition is as pertinent as ever…. [T]he moral justification of slavery and imperialism was "civilizing" the native; nowadays the justification is "liberating" the native….Local religious zealots control her in the name of Islam; the West controls her in the name of freedom….She does not belong to herself but to others, white, brown, and black. ("Pakistan" n.p.)

Shamsie, Hamid and Aslam address and write back to both indigenous and global actors. On the one hand, they engage with neo-Orientalist discourses of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism. Concurrently, their novels question the privatisation and domestication of Pakistani-Muslim female bodies in local discourses that shore up socio-cultural traditions in

relation to religion, honour-shame, and motherhood. They deconstruct the eulogising of these bodies as symbols of the family, community or nation and the concomitant policing of women's mobility, civic rights and sexuality, which also exposes them to retributive and/or disciplinary violence.

Via close analysis of the selected novels, I have argued that Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam refuse to inscribe the bodies of Pakistani-Muslim women in terms of a monolithic, faceless and voiceless singularity—always already interpellated as oppressed and helpless objects in a pervasive patriarchy and/or misogynist religion and culture. Suffering, silence, *burqas*, hymens, henna and paisley are not *the only* or the dominant reference points that circumscribe Pakistani-Muslim women's everyday experiences (especially for Hamid and Shamsie). This is not to say that the women in these novels do not suffer. Many do. In *Broken Verses* Ed reminds Aasmaani that there are "parts of the country that exist outside the reach of the law" where exploitative people who possess "power, land, opportunity" are restricted only by the "limit of their own imagination" (127-8). Similarly, in *Moth Smoke* Hamid does not shy away from portraying the corruption and nepotism that prevailed at the time the novel was set. Aslam's *Maps*, as discussed, is a study in the violence engendered by traditionalism and an atavistic socio-religious culture steeped in notions of honour and shame. Shamsie and Hamid are careful not to represent the figure of Pakistani-Muslim women only in oppressive terms: they instead frame these bodies in the context of their negotiations with hegemonic structures, whether political, cultural, economic or religious. The women in their novels use the corporeality and materiality of their experiences and desires to create spaces (private and public) in which to exercise (qualified) agency. In this

way they question and challenge, if not always subvert, the prescribed, normative and often potentially oppressive roles allocated to them.

The female bodies in the novels under discussion occupy a range of positions, more or less agential. Mumtaz, Samina and Suraya are examples of defiance, and Kaukab is resistant and unyielding. They all claim some power, even if the agency they practice might not always be emancipatory or completely successful in alleviating their circumstances. Some, like Mah-Jabin, Suraya, and Mumtaz' mother, are the victims of domestic abuse. Some, like Dilaram, the young girl in Suraya's village and the unnamed Muslim girl, are raped and violated. And still there are those who lose their lives in horrendous acts of physical violence like honour killings. The life-force of some female bodies, like the unnamed Muslim girl/Kiran and many others in *Maps*, is constantly threatened by traditionalism and atavistic culturalism. Women, like Kiran, fall victims to miscegenation; they, like the widowed grandmother of Shamas, suffer from economic exploitation and are even targeted by State-sponsored seizure and denial of rights (in *Broken Verses*). While at times women, like Kuakab and the majority of the mothers in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, act as agents of patriarchy; others, like Samina and Bina, are also sources of strength and relief, creating liberating spaces and giving voices to the marginalised and oppressed. There are those, like Bina and Kaukab, who celebrate motherhood but others, like Samina and Mumtaz, refuse to be constrained and defined by this institution and experience. There are women, like Mumtaz, Samina, Chanda and the unnamed Muslim girl who embrace the corporeality of their bodies in terms of its desires and sexuality, even when it is non-normative, and refuse to sacrifice their sexual agency at the altar of motherhood. In some cases, when outright defiance is not an option, they negotiate and strike bargains to enable the expression of their desire

(Shehnaz). They also possess the strength to walk away from unhealthy and oppressive relationships and/or people.

As these multiple positionalities suggest, the women in the novels I have discussed are not essentialised or homogenised. Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam emphasise the temporal and spatial specificities of their female characters; they are historicised and contextualised within the milieu of their fictional worlds. The figure of the Pakistani-Muslim woman is not merely inscribed in terms of its interiority: she is also sometimes positioned (as evidenced in Hamid's and Shamsie's protagonists) as a politically engaged and aware subject. Her subjectivity is grounded in and shaped by the material realities that surround her—political, religious, economic and, in the case of Aslam, diasporic and racial. I argue that these multifarious constructions are enabled and supported by the creation and treatment of home in these novels. Home, as portrayed in all three texts, is not a private space, located outside history and its consequences. Rather, it is what Susan Strehle describes as "a space where power relations vital to the nation and culture are negotiated. Home reflects and resembles the nation: not a retreat from the public and political, home expresses the same ideological pressures that contend within the nation" (1). In other words, in these novels the realms of the private and the public, home and the world, the personal and the political are porous. Furthermore, home is connected to the wider society or the Nation-State, and, in turn, becomes the route to engage with global discourses. Notions of family, domesticity, romance, motherhood and desire are, thus, utilised to engage in conversations about citizenship, democracy, political responsibility, faith, class and his-tory (as a metanarrative).

One of the most significant features of Hamid's and Shamsie's writing is that in order to enact resistance, emancipation, or agency, female protagonists do not need to leave home

or their community or retreat from a world which is unjust and oppressive. In *Moth Smoke*, Mumtaz walks away from Ozi and Daru and her son, each of whom attempts to appropriate her body for their own narratives. Even when she abandons her conjugal relationship and house, she does not leave Lahore. This choice is in keeping with her earlier decision to leave New York and return *home* to Pakistan. In part, the impetus for these decisions is the desire to reclaim ownership of her body, but they are also symbolic of a civic subject staking a claim to the ownership of the country's future. By opting to be a journalist, located in Lahore (instead of New York), Mumtaz is reclaiming public/civic space and the authority to author the story of *her* nation. Similarly, Samina and other women activists in *Broken Verses* do not resign themselves to the whims and dictates of a misogynist, masculine State. They continue to fight General Zia's attempts to regulate and police their lives in the name of religion with incredible bravery and strength. The novel ends with previously despondent and politically-apathetic Aasmaani's commitment to keep recuperating silenced voices and to continue to challenge the hegemony of single stories and single truths. The decisions and actions of the female characters in *Moth Smoke* and *Broken Verses* reflect an agenda which also befittingly describes the polemics of the representation of female bodies in Hamid's and Shamsie's texts—that is, in both, there are Pakistani-Muslim women reclaiming the public sphere as an arena for a feminist (re)engagement with the nation's religion, politics and history.

The gendered politics of Aslam's novel, in comparison, is rather more complicated and even problematic. I have argued that his narrative fails to create any positive or empowering spaces for religious characters. There is no character in Maps signifying a Sufism-based religious subjectivity. Nusrat sings the songs but he is neither a Sufi nor an

example of a religious character. The same stands true for Shamas. Sufist philosophy is incorporated in the novel thematically, structurally and metaphorically but no character (male or female) exemplifies what it means to be a modern-day Sufi living in diaspora. Aslam's novel also seems to suggest that there is no hope of salvation for those who choose to continue to live in Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The only way to break free of the stifling grip of the community and its punitive religious practices and traditionalism appears to be to leave. Those who remain continue to be victimised by isolation, suffering and ultimately death. I have suggested that Aslam attempts to deconstruct the tragedy and fatalism which initially seems specific and particular to Dasht-e-Tanhaii, through a Sufist or existentialist poetics. However, despite what appears to be an attempt to complicate the interplay between religion and violence (particularly against women) the novel fails to provide any alternative to the version of punitive Islam and traditionalism it portrays, except for a rejection of the community and its religiosity in a turn to a Western secular-liberal notion of individual freedom, a freedom rooted in a celebration and vindication of human love and desire. I have further argued that in comparison to Hamid's and Shamsie's novels, *Maps* does not award female characters any noteworthy generative or transformative powers. Kaukab, perhaps the strongest female character in the novel, remains a problematic model in terms of an agentive subject. Her agency is embodied in her strength to hold onto her religious beliefs uncritically, despite severe opposition from her family and a hostile foreign culture. Though humanised, her character remains unredeemed. Kaukab signifies a failed experiment in migrant identity-construction, one grounded in a religious-based subjectivity. Aslam's novel foregrounds the futility of using religious nationalism to inscribe subjectivities and affiliations, suggesting that such an engagement only results in a violent annihilation of

female bodies and their agentive capacity, generating a failed model of womanhood that falls short on both counts—maternity and wifehood.

Motherhood and the Maternal Body

My analysis of the novels by Hamid, Shamsie and Aslam yields an unexpected result—a potential fertile area for future research. Despite offering complex and diverse portraits of Pakistani-Muslim female bodies, each of the texts is haunted by an anxiety generated by the maternal body. This is most forcefully apparent in Hamid's and Aslam's texts. All three novels draw a distinction between motherhood as an institution and as an experience—both of which are rendered in disquieting images. In *Moth Smoke* the pregnant or maternal body is imaged as dis-eased, life-threatening and pestilent. The maternal experience, variously interconnected through images like "being eaten alive by larvae" (Hamid *Moth* 151), moulds spreading like cancer (211), or "flesh oozing out" (211) pervades both the human and the animal world in the novel. For the female body (Mumtaz), maternity evokes psychic terror and for the male characters it engenders a crisis of self. Similarly, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, mothers (unlike fathers) are predominantly cast in a negative light. They are described by their own children as "dangerous lunatics" (118) and selfish monster(s) (302). While less overt, traces of a similar anxiety are also evident in *Broken Verses*. It finds expression in Aasmaani's and Ed's fear of abandonment due to the unconventional motherhood of Samina and Shehnaz. Shamsie's novel also references the image of a monstrous feminine, this time as an epithet to describe the unconventional intersection of motherhood and desire. However, unlike the novels by Hamid and Aslam, in which motherhood largely fails to project any positive, nurturing or generative resonance,

Shamsie's novel also portrays motherhood as a positive experience and institution through the character of Bina. Moreover, Shamsie negates and deconstructs the child's perspective which regards a mother's desiring body (hetero as well as homosexual) as unnatural or deviant. The maternal body in the texts seem to accord with Sigmund Freud's notion of *unheimlich* or the uncanny that "derives its terror not from something externally alien or unknown but—on the contrary—from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it" (Morris 307). The maternal body becomes the source of psychic terror evoked by the uncanny—that is, a disorienting experience which becomes terrifying because it has the ability to make the world that we live in appear suddenly "strange, alienating or threatening" (Collins and Jervis 1). Elisabeth Bronfen, in her feminist reimagining of Freud's *unheimlich*, connects the uncanny with a masculine sense of anxiety about bodily integrity. She writes that the uncanny:

> […] in some sense always involves the question of visibility/invisibility, presence to/absence from sight, and the fear of losing one's sight serves as a substitute … for castration anxiety, the uncanny always entails anxieties about fragmentation, about the disruption or destruction of any narcissistically informed sense of personal stability, bodily integrity, immortal individuality. (113)

The sometimes uncanny representation of motherhood, and the unease with which it is portrayed in these novels, to varying degrees, warrants further investigation. An analysis of these (and other Anglophone) texts in this light could be a potentially significant area of engagement given that in South Asian societies motherhood, in popular discourse and imagination, is constructed as a fulfilling, nurturing and auspicious experience.

A Picture Worth a Thousand Words?

Figure 1: From Left to Right: images of Nilofer Bakhtiar, Pakistani Federal Minister for Tourism, paragliding in France; female students of Jamia Hafsa protesting against the Pakistani Government; a shot of the protagonist, Miss Jiya aka the Burka Avenger from the animated series *Burka Avenger* (2013).

In an article titled "Misguided Women", Shamsie writes that when Pakistani women enter the public sphere as independent defiant or rebellious agents, it is usually their "femaleness" that attracts more attention in popular imagination and discourse, rather than their actions (35). She astutely observes that the kind of women (and their stories) that often appear in headlines or on the front page of newspapers tend to fall into one of two *types*: they are either Nilofer Bakhtiars (the norm-defying, modern, enlightened, confident can-do women of a contemporary, globalised and progressive Pakistan), or they are the lady-ninja, "burka-avenger" students of Jamai Hafsa (veil-wearing, baton-wielding, moral crusaders). The images above clearly capture these different *types*. The first is of Nilofer Bakhtiar, a Pakistani Federal Minister for Tourism during Pervaiz Mushraf's government. In 2007, the clerics at Islamabad's Red Mosque issued a *fatwa* against her after photographs depicting her hugging her paragliding instructor in France became public. Her behaviour was deemed unIslamic and "obscene" (Anonymous n.p.; David n.p.; Jan n.p.). Bakhtiar, despite support from her government, resigned. It was not her participation in an adrenaline-

pumping sport to raise funds that generated headlines but the body hugging, brightly-coloured tracksuit and the hug given to a man other than a family member. In the case of the “burqa brigades” (K. Shamsie "Misguided" 34), the second image portrays the burqa-clad students of an-all female school of the mosque, Jamai Hafsa, who acted as (at times violent) moral vigilantes at about the same time. The “burqa brigades”, as Shamsie refers to them (34), occupied a children’s library to protest against the demolition of 80 illegally built mosques and participated in raids in the areas adjacent to the mosque, claiming to shut-down unIslamic businesses. They also kidnapped the owner (and two other women) of a local shop who, according to them, was running a brothel, and demanded that the women publically admit their guilt and renounce their immoral actions. It is their veils, symbolising a regressive and conservative religiosity, which takes hold of the national imagination. The term “lady-ninja” is a disparaging misnomer commonly used in Pakistan to refer to women clad head-to-toe in black burqas. *Burka Avenger* (2013), a multi-award-winning popular animated series created by Haroon Rashid, parodies such women. It stars Miss Jiya—the eponymous Burka Avenger—as “a quirky burka-clad superhero who fights for the education of young girls using books and pens for weapons” (Brar 5). The burqa-clad students of Jamia Hafsa and Miss Jia symbolise, to varying degrees, the reversal of the neo-Orientalist image of the silent, oppressed Muslim woman: the former, a militant, agentive version of Muslim woman as (re)appropriated by Islamist nationalist discourse, the latter as a contemporary, nationalist (re)imagination of an emancipated Muslim womanhood.

Shamsie adds that “[i]t’s easy to think of the paragliding minister and the burqa-clad militants as opposite poles of Pakistani womanhood. Newspapers have taken to juxtaposing ‘oppositional’ photographs in support of this thesis” ("Misguided" 35). However, according

to Shamsie, the real opposition is between the two extremes of women who appear on the front page of newspapers and those who do not appear anywhere at all, except perhaps “in a small column tucked away” inside ("Misguided" 35): women negotiating competing demands of family and efforts to make a living on an everyday basis; women fighting against sexual harassment and gender equality on the streets, educational institutions and in workplaces; women being appointed as CEOS, lawyers, professors and judges; women cheated out of inheritance(s); women taking stands against discrimination; women standing in long lines to vote even in the remotest areas of Pakistan; women stoned alive/raped/domestically abused; or making history by becoming firefighters/pilots/taxi and truck-drivers; women toiling in agriculture fields in rural areas. These women and their stories are largely absent from the narratives of Pakistani Anglophone writers. Even in the fictional works of someone like Shamsie, who wearily writes about the stereotypical, polarised imagistic depiction of Pakistani womanhood, these women are absent. In Shamsie’s, Aslam’s and Hamid’s novels, for example, it is the ordinary Bina(s) of Pakistan who are pushed to the margins in favour of either more subversive models of womanhood such as those represented by Samina and Mumtaz, or voiceless victims like Chanda.

The spectrum of female representation in Hamid’s and Shamsie’s novels, though non-essentialist, remains limited as their novels’ portrayals deal with a narrow section of Pakistan’s population and culture. The characters in Hamid’s and Shamsie’s novels (in the selected texts and generally) belong to an elite, cosmopolitan class with barely any attempt to portray other classes/sections of the population in depth. Although Aslam’s characters are not economically privileged, the novel’s diasporic setting limits its scope as to claims to national representation. The positioning of the bodies of privileged women as

representative avatars and voices for Pakistani womanhood, in general, could potentially enact violence by erasing the stories and voices of other underprivileged/under-represented Pakistani women. Moreover, some of the problems experienced by women in the novels could be read as *First World* problems (as opposed to the more pressing *Third World* issues of poverty, injustice, violence, lack of education, as experienced by the vast majority of Pakistani women).[217] This is true of female characters who suffer in varying ways: failure to find fulfilment in motherhood; abandonment of a child; choosing one's passion over motherhood; failure to move forward because of the angst of a mother's absence. Although Shamsie and Hamid do not subscribe to exoticism or neo-Orientalist narratives of Muslim and feminist exceptionalism, centralising such issues in their texts makes them susceptible to charges of looking inwards with foreign eyes. In the palatable versions of agentive womanhood in their novels, progressive, postcolonial subjectivity is characterised by economic privilege, education, secularism, individualism and Western notions of modernity. Religiosity, tradition and the pervasive effects of poverty are frequently ignored. The subversion coded in the bodies of Mumtaz and Samina signify a model of agency which ultimately can only be achieved from the margins of society. Moreover, some of the feminist concerns articulated in Hamid's and Shamsie's novels regarding the hindrance of motherhood to women's achievement of independence and freedom, seem to align more with earlier twentieth century Western feminist thought than with the position and construction of womanhood in Pakistan and South Asia more generally. Lisa Lau, among others, notes that women as mothers or matriarchs in South Asian cultures tend to enjoy a certain level of power and privilege, so that "[e]ven in happy and stable marriages, it would not be unusual to find a woman more attached to her children than to her husband"

[217] Admittedly, the economic struggle and hardship experienced by Daru might resonate more powerfully with a larger readership within Pakistan.

("Equating" 370 ff.). This is not, of course, to suggest that motherhood is always an unproblematic or rewarding experience for all women. However, the imposition and importation of Western feminist frameworks may not adequately engage with local women's experiences or concerns. Shafaat Yar Khan rather scathingly suggests that in the fictional works of South Asian writers located abroad (like Kureishi and Rushdie and, to some extent, Sidhwa and Suleri), "the idea of the Mother which is so important to the Third World is subverted in favour of ideals not really pertinent to its cultures and thus a kind of hegemonic inscription is inserted in the fictive narratives which tilt the balance in favour of the West" (121). He argues, in other words, that for some South Asian women, motherhood can signify an agentive corporeal and social experience.

When referring to the relatively narrow spectrum of female representation, I do not claim that Pakistani Anglophone writers should *only* write about Pakistan or its wider population. This would be a neo-Orientalising and reductive claim in itself. However, it could be fairly asserted that Pakistani Anglophone writing is addressed to a global readership (and a globalised elite, English-reading audience within Pakistan). In its attempts to address this readership, such writing may end up in ignoring or even silencing the voices, issues, concerns and aspirations of a *local* population that is non-cosmopolitan, non-transnational and regional. In these texts, caught between national/local and transnational/geopolitical discourses, the indigenous women of Pakistan—vastly in the majority—may be ignored. The specificities of their multiple positionalities in terms of class, religion and tradition are not often addressed and *Pakistani women* may thus be reduced to the status of subalterns, silenced or *spoken for* by elite and cosmopolitan authors.

The notion of agency attributed to the female subjectivities in the texts I have considered seems to be, overwhelmingly, refracted through a neo-liberal lens which equates modernity/progress with individualism and secularism. It conversely fails to posit religion as offering any potential for agency. Religion plays almost no part in the plot trajectory of *Moth Smoke*. In *Broken Verses* Samina is involved in generating a feminist interpretation of Islam and its traditions, and for Aasmaani Islam is an occasional source of comfort but religion, generally, fails to animate or interest them. While Islam might ground Kaukab in *Maps*, her version of Islam—and Islam more generally—is roundly critiqued in the novel. All three novels fail to depict a single female character whose Islamic faith might offer a source of empowered and agentive subjectivity. For a middle-class Pakistani-Muslim woman like me, who does not see religion as predominantly antithetical to notions such as agency and emancipation, this remains disturbing and rather reductive.[218] From such a perspective, the writers of *Moth Smoke, Broken Verses* and *Maps* could be accused of engaging in exclusionary politics, by ignoring (or demonising, in the case of the latter) the class-inscribed female bodies who positively embrace religion as *the* constitutive element of their identity.

The discussions advanced in this thesis are not intended to undermine the significance of the novels considered or their important contribution to the growing genre of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. I believe the questions and concerns I raise open onto conversations which need to take place about the status and role of this body of literature within the nation and beyond its borders. If these often politically-centred narratives[219] are the only ones that *represent* Pakistan, Islam and their women to the reading world, a great disservice is done to real, embodied Pakistani women and their stories. These women—often middle-

[218] I acknowledge the bias of my own position and that I also write from a relative position of privilege.
[219] Here I am referring to PAW in general, in particular the fiction produced since 2000.

to low income, religiously inclined, traditional and non-cosmopolitan—can and do speak (even if their speech is not always heard) through their day-to-day negotiations with the dominant discourses of patriarchy, religion, nation, class. But the writings of Pakistani Anglophone writers (male and female), raise the question as to whether these writers are really listening when those women speak. Where are the narratives in which the Saminas and Surayyas, having experienced trauma and loss, are not simply silenced? Where are the Pakistani women for whom autonomy and fulfilment is not predicated upon a concomitant rejection or negation of family and/or motherhood? Where are the women for whom the exercise and assertion of desire does not involve abandoning a child? In short, in the fictions produced by Pakistani Anglophone writers *where are the Binas of Pakistan*?

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