TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY ANTIGONES: THE POSTCOLONIAL WOMAN SHAPED BY 9/11 IN KAMILA SHAMSIE’S *HOME FIRE*

LISA LAU AND ANA CRISTINA MENDES

**Introduction**

Set in the early 2010s, the backdrop of Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* (2017) is a familiar one to contemporary readers, colored by the rise of far-right populist movements and the increase in anti-Muslim initiatives which target Muslim immigrants as a threat to Western “achievements” in terms of gender equality and freedom of speech. Widely covered by the media and increasingly adopted by mainstream political parties, including social democrats, this populist far-right rhetoric is now part of the new common sense, filling up the space of the failed social-democratic economic promises of the post-war period in Europe and the US. In this intensely fraught context, UK Muslims, Orla Lynch observes, are “becoming a national security concern, the focus of state intervention and political management, and subject to wide-ranging suspicions around loyalties to the country of residence/citizenship” (257).

Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* (hereafter abbreviated to *HF*) is an adaptation of Sophocles’s *Antigone*, where, in both cases, young women place themselves at great risk by daring to physically present themselves in hostile territory to demand the return of their brothers’ bodies. The fact that *HF* is an adaptation of a Greek tragedy, Peter Ho Davies notes, is a “shrewdly subversive move to tell this immigrant story via a tale so central to the Western canon”; Shamsie reimagines *Antigone* in a new context of transmission and reception, “quietly capsiz[ing] easy sound bites about a ‘clash of civilizations.’” For the young Muslim women protagonists of *HF*, the radicalization and killing of their brother—typecast as a “homegrown” terrorist by both the state and the media—and the subsequent dishonoring of his body alienate them from their intimates, drawing the women into the dangerous spaces configured by terrorism and conflict. Because of the action of a male family member, Sophocles’s and Shamsie’s Antigones decide they must step out of the privacy of home spaces into public arenas to challenge authorities and embroil themselves in protests which are not only deeply personal, but political.

*HF* engages with new Orientalist representations post-9/11 on two levels. Firstly, Shamsie’s novel is shaped by the political narratives of the War on Terror and, in turn, responds to the upshot of these new configurations of power, reflecting how the difficulty of making sense of 9/11 exacerbated the Orientalist binary of East and West. In fact, these rifts are far from neatly binary, as they complexify traditional allegiances and affinities. This artificial binarism was constructed through new forms of Orientalist discourse, for example, through discursive practices that draw attention to the terrorist’s use of invisibility (Dutta)—the threat lurking behind individuals with specific racial signifiers that justify the perpetuation of binary thinking. Lynch notes that, since 9/11 and the 2004 Madrid, 2005 London, and 2007 Glasgow attacks, the negative assumptions built on the racialization of the Muslim youth in Europe have become more generalized. The 2017 London terrorist attack, claimed by ISIS, which involved three Islamic extremists (Pakistani and Moroccan-born, aged between thirty and twenty-two) driving a van into pedestrians on London Bridge and then stabbing people in the Borough Market area, gave “a ghastly urgency” to *HF* considering “the focus in their aftermath on ‘homegrown’ terrorists” (Davies). Likewise, Claire Chambers comments on the timeliness of the novel’s critique of new Orientalist representation, in particular through Shamsie’s exploration of “the issue of European Muslims joining ISIS and on return being denied citizenship.” Novels influenced by 9/11 ask the important question—which Chambers observes, and is asked by *HF*—“can the oppressor listen?” In our article, we further unpack whether the oppressor can listen to women, to outsiders, and to the Orientalized Other—in a nutshell, to those it has long subalternized. Secondly, Shamsie’s novel reflects on the extension of Othering as re-orientalism through the encouragement of its self-perpetration. In *HF*, the women-kin of the dead man seem to have only the unenviable choice of either re-orientalizing or being Orientalized themselves. *HF* demonstrates that, placed in the invidious position of having to declare against their own in order to prove safe political allegiances to the West, some young Muslim women still manage to resist and refrain from re-orientalizing.

This study is framed by re-orientalism theory (Lau; Lau and Mendes, *Re-Orientalism*), demonstrating the pattern of political machinations and maintaining of power imbalances post-9/11 as the result of actions by Asians as much as Westerners. Re-orientalism offers a productive conceptual frame to examine how the East continues to engage the West in increasingly self-aware, multi-layered ways, constantly renegotiating positions of power and influence. This theory takes as starting point the fact that the “Orient” increasingly represents itself, rather than undergoes representation by the “West.” While the analysis of re-orientalism discourse has expanded into other areas of cultural expression beyond South Asian literature in English (Mendes and Lau, “India through re-Orientalist Lenses”; Lau and Mendes, “Post-9/11 Re-Orientalism”; Mendes and Lau, “The Conjunctural Spaces of ‘New India’”), Lau began by defining re-orientalism as “the perpetration of Orientalism in the arena of contemporary South Asian literature in English: no longer an Orientalism propagated by Occidentals, but ironically enough, by Orientals, albeit by diasporic Orientals”; she asserts that re-orientalism “dominates and, to a significant extent, distorts the representation of the Orient, seizing voice and platform, and once again consigning the Oriental within the Orient to a position of ‘The Other’” (571). The theorization of re-orientalism extends earlier assumptions developed within postcolonial literary studies by investigating how “cultural producers with eastern affiliations come to terms with an Orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether” (Lau and Mendes, *Re-Orientalism* 1).

The choice of a postcolonial adaptation that speaks to the Western canon as a case study is key for an examination of re-orientalism discourse. *HF* explicitly draws from Western frames of reference—a characteristic of re-orientalism—to speak to Western readers on their own terms. Borrowing from Stanley Cohen’s (2002) foundational study on the emergence of Mods and Rockers and the “moral panics” surrounding these subcultures in the 1960s, Shamsie’s novel explicitly plays with the expectations of her Western readers regarding Orientalized “folk devils” post-9/11. The strategic production of these “folk devils” highlights the dangers posed by foreigners/strangers to Western society, nurturing the “moral panics” of this era and pushing an agenda of increased state intrusion and surveillance. The banalization of a populist, anti-immigrant discourse positions Muslim communities, and particularly the Muslim male youth, in a space of Orientalist, radical difference to the West.

Examining the impact of re-orientalist discursive strategies in terms of identity negotiations, we look at how 9/11 has created new oppressors, ready and even eager to oppress their own in an extremity of re-orientalism, in order to nail their colors to their mast and declare their allegiances to the dominant groups. As Birte Heidemann notes, “The very fear of being labelled a ‘terrorist,’ or even a mere visit by FBI agents, would suffice to erupt fissures and fears within and amongst minorities by way of Orientalizing each other in order to confirm the dominant culture’s normative codes” (296). In this latest manifestation of Orientalist exploitation, Orientalism is forcing the already Orientalized to re-orientalism and thus deepen the fissures between self and other, to reaffirm the very binary of “good” Muslim and “bad” Muslim which has so discriminated against them. In what follows, we observe how in *HF* this Orientalizing of each other by Asians—a mutual Orientalizing which is tantamount to re-orientalism—is the backlash of a terrified community which has felt itself positioned ever more perilously on the edge of non-acceptance. Re-orientalism theory assists us thus in examining how it is not necessarily the preference of Asians, but the “choice” of those placed in such precarity of position that throwing each other overboard seems the only route left to survival.

**Where Is the Post-9/11 Novel?**

Go online to find friends or perv

But click the wrong site for a free trial later detention first

(Riz MC, *Englistan*)

Although there have been many explicitly post-9/11 novels, there are even more which were molded by 9/11 without purporting to be directly about those events. This is the case of *HF*, a novel where the fallout is not just the radicalizing of young men, but its impact on their families, and the way families become implicated regardless of overt politics. Shamsie previously called out North American fiction writers who refused to grapple with the US’s role as a global power before and after 9/11; in fact, she contends that literature can hardly avoid being political: “All these countries around the world have had their histories in some ways defined by, manipulated by, what goes on in America” (qtd. in Felsenthal). In that sense, even though they may not intend to be, many novels are inevitably post-9/11 novels.

The beginning of *HF*—depicting one of the main characters, Isma, a British woman of Pakistani descent, being interrogated in Heathrow Airport—is deeply political:

“Do you consider yourself British?” the man said.

“I am British.”

“But do you consider yourself British?”

“I’ve lived here all my life.” She meant that there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive.

The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the *Great British Bake Off*, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites. After that early slip regarding her Britishness, she settled into the manner that she’d practiced with Aneeka playing the role of the interrogating officer, Isma responding to her sister as though she were a customer of dubious political opinions whose business Isma didn’t want to lose by voicing strenuously opposing views, but to whom she didn’t see the need to lie either. (Shamsie5)

This is a crucial moment, in which Isma has to prove her Britishness, the moment that defines whether she gets on the airplane to the US or not, so she must not have any “wrong” answers. Not only is she expected to have an opinion on such diverse topics as “Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the *Great British Bake Off*, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites,” she also has to give all the “right” answers to prove herself an upstanding citizen—a “good” Muslim. Shamsie depicts the delicate balancing act the Ismas of the world have to manage, which, as she notes, takes practice, forethought, and intensive preparation. Seen as non-British, or as outsiders, she and other Ismas have to tread with particular care, not being free to embrace and proclaim whatever politics they believe in, but always acting and speaking in such a way that would reassure authorities they are no threat, that they are “good” citizens, that they have no radicalized inclinations and no “wrong” sympathies.

Such is the world Isma finds herself occupying in Britain post-9/11, where binaries are so clearly laid down and fears and suspicions so ingrained. This is the world that pits “good” against “bad” Muslims, those who are anxious to prove their allegiance to the West and those who are responsible for terrorist acts, to draw on the title of Mamdani’s book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, written in the aftermath of 9/11. The binary reproduced in this title is based on the distinction made by the British American Orientalist Bernard Lewis, an expert on the history of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the modern Middle East, and an adviser to the US policy establishment. For Lewis, in Mamdani’s estimation, “the West must remain a bystander while Muslims fight their internal war, pitting good against bad Muslims” (23). While Lewis’s suggestion was that, in time, “good” Muslims would conquer over “bad” Muslims, this point of view was readily appropriated into George W. Bush’s official validation of the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq, and onto public discussion in the US where “unless proved to be ‘good,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad’” (Mamdani 15).

It is revealing that Shamsie has chosen an airport experience, in a space of mobility and ambivalence, to pull the reader into the storyline of *HF*. The fact that she had her character Isma feel like she had to prepare with her sister for the questions she was expecting to get at the airport—echoing actor and rapper Riz Ahmed’s (also known as Riz MC) comparison of navigating airports while Muslim to his acting auditions—illustrates just how far minorities have to roleplay to allay fears raised by images of “good” and “bad” Muslims. As Ahmed claims, airports

are places where the threat of rejection is real. They are also places where you are reduced to your marketability or threat-level, where the length of your facial hair can be a deal-breaker, where you are seen, and hence see yourself, in reductive labels—never as “just a bloke called Dave.”…these airports auditions…involved the experience of being typecast, and when that happens enough, you internalize the role written for you by others.

Airports are increasingly liminal, border spaces in which there is negotiation and interrogation of identities deemed marginal, and attempted control of undesirable bodies. In a seeming parallel to Isma’s experience of being interrogated by Heathrow’s authorities, Shamsie herself has apparently practised for interrogation:

I was very aware of Googling while Muslim while writing this book. When I started to research, I would do stupid things, like look at three relevant websites, then go look at some really trashy celebrity stuff for a while. There was a part of my brain that was saying, what will I say if intelligence agencies come to my door and want to know why I’m looking up this stuff? In my head I worked out my defense. (qtd. in Felsenthal)

The fear itself generated by these experiences is portrayed in the novel in various instances, such as when Isma is trying to find a place to live and almost refuses a studio with a skylight because she is still nervous about the Heathrow interrogation and is afraid of surveillance satellites (*HF* 9).

In *HF*, Shamsie demonstrates the fraught loyalties amongst family members across different continents, directly affected by world affairs, and particularly by the fallout of 9/11 and the embittering of those cast by the West as Other. Near the end of the novel, Aneeka goes to Pakistan to bring her brother home—possibly an action she is only able to take as a result of the protection from being British herself—and is vilified by her cousin in Karachi whose position feels more precarious, and who thus resents any association by relation to the possible implications of Aneeka’s actions. The issue of going through airports while Muslim resurfaces:

“…did you or your bhenchod brother stop to think about those of us with passports that look like toilet paper to the rest of the world, who spend our whole lives being so careful we don’t give anyone a reason to reject our visa applications? Don’t stand next to this guy, don’t follow that guy on Twitter, don’t download that Noam Chomsky book. And then first your brother uses us as a cover to join some psycho killers, and then your government thinks this country can be a dumping ground for its unwanted corpses and your family just expects us to jump up and organise a funeral for this week’s face of terrorism. And now you’ve come along, Miss Hojabi Knickers, and I have to pull strings I don’t want to pull to get you out of the airport without the whole world’s press seeing you, and it turns out you’re here to try some stunt, I don’t even know what, but my family will have nothing to do with it, nothing to do with you.” (*HF* 209)

Shamsie incorporates personal tragedies within public, political tragedies by representing the rejection of diasporic family members to safeguard those not in such good standing legally with the authorities who are forcing this wrenching apart of family ties and devastating re-orientalizing.

**At Home in Britain?**

Shamsie made it clear that she could never have written a novel like *HF* before obtaining British citizenship. In an interview she stated: “It was something I was very aware of when I was becoming a citizen…I had British friends saying, be careful, because you’re taking on the home office. I don’t think this is a book I would have written before” (qtd. in Felsenthal). After obtaining British citizenship—dual British and Pakistani nationality—Shamsie said she had thought it would feel like a gain, but instead found herself reflecting on “what it means to be from a country in which acquiring a second passport is regarded across the board as reason for celebration” (qtd. in Felsenthal). Shamsie is astute enough to realize that the joy of obtaining a second citizenship is another clear Othering of the first citizenship as lesser, riskier, less desirable, or even inadequate in some way, rendered by the global political climate and augmented by post-9/11 politics and institutional practices.1

Felsenthal tells us that, in 2014, when Shamsie became eligible for British citizenship and Theresa May was the Home Secretary, the British Government had the “power to revoke the citizenship of naturalized citizens suspected of terrorism,” when before “only those with dual nationality were at risk.” *HF* illustrates the resultant ambivalence and sense of being disowned, of being rendered stateless under particular circumstances, on the part of the British Pakistani community. In the novel, Isma says about certain British citizens:

they’re rhetorically being made un-British….The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as ‘British terrorists.’ Even when the word ‘British’ was used, it was always ‘British of Pakistani descent’ or ‘British Muslim’ or, my favourite, ‘British passport holders,’ always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism. (*HF* 40)

These arguments, which Isma links to the enforcement of colonial laws on Indian subjects, prompt her advisor, the Kashmiri lecturer Dr. Hira Shah, to quip: “*Well you have quite a voice when you decide to use it*” (*HF* 40; italics in original). Indeed, Lynch’s arguments support Isma’s contentions voiced in the fictional narrative of *HF*:

Since 9/11, and particularly since 7/7, the phrase used to describe the British perpetrators of Islamic-inspired terrorism in the United Kingdom has been “home grown terrorists”…and “the enemy within”….In an effort to distinguish these extremists from the rest of British society, they were increasingly described as “British born” or “British educated,” and the focus became their country of origin or their parents’ or grandparents’ country of origin, rather than their Britishness. (243)

The novel illustrates how, post-9/11, a “failed cosmopolitan conviviality” (Mendes) impacted the Pakistani British community in particular, further isolating and denying them a sense of belonging and communal solidarity through Othering. The main characters in the novel, the Pasha family—represented by the siblings Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz, and the Lone family, represented by Eamon and his father Karamat—would be expected to have much in common (a Muslim background and British citizenship), but this is not enough to guarantee their mutual understanding. In fact, what they have in common sets them apart.

The concerns voiced in Shamsie’s story world are neither trivial nor unfounded—as the UK and the rest of the world discovered in the real-life Shamina Begum case in February 2019, where a British citizen with Bangladeshi heritage (but not of dual British and Bangladeshi citizenship) who travelled to Syria to join ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) was stripped of her British citizenship rights. Sadiq Khan, mayor of London, said the decision of the then British Home Secretary Sajid Javid “risk[ed] creating a second class of citizenship—one that can be removed at the whim of a politician,” and called into question what it means to be British and, in particular, a British citizen: “This could affect millions of Londoners of dual or immigrant heritage, and anyone who may be eligible for citizenship from another country” (qtd. in Addley).

***Home Fire*’s Multiple Re-orientalisms**

Shamsie’s cast includes five key characters. Isma Pasha, whom the novel first depicts, is the elder sibling of twins Aneeka and Parvaiz. Their father, Adil Pasha, had been a terrorist (who fought in Kashmir, Kosovo, Chechnya, and Afghanistan). Adil was a charming but mostly absent father who died from a seizure in Bagram, when he was put on a plane to be transferred to Guantanamo Bay. Isma (twenty-eight years old) is nine years older than the twins, who were twelve when they were orphaned. (The children also lost their grandmother a year before their mother died.) It fell to Isma to bring up the twins, and only when they were nineteen did she continue her own studies, applying for a scholarship to Amherst for a PhD in sociology. Aneeka is earning a law degree at LSE and Parvaiz is working on becoming a sound engineer, working part-time as an assistant grocer. The twins have always believed they were like two sides of the same coin.

In Amherst, Isma meets Eamonn, son of Karamat Lone, the British Home Secretary, who is taking a gap year. The two begin to develop a relationship. At this juncture, Parvaiz goes missing, and Isma reports him to the authorities, in order, as she explains to a furious Aneeka, to protect the rest of the family from their brother’s action. Aneeka accuses Isma of making it impossible for Parvaiz to come home. Thus does Shamsie represent how fear of the state authorities divides families. These families are torn by loyalty to beloved kin, but also needing to make a public display of being “good” Muslims, by reporting to the authorities, for example, of where their loyalties lie, in order to keep other family members in the UK safe from suspicion and harassment.

In a nutshell, the plot shows how not only members of the same community, but also close family members are forced to re-orientalize their own. Shamsie chooses different narrative paths, corresponding to the five parts of the novel, to reflect how each individual character—Isma, Eamonn, Parvaiz, Aneeka, and Karamat—deals with that re-orientalizing pull. The fear of being Othered, of being regarded as the enemy, of being suspected of harboring terrorists, even of sympathy with radicals, of being a “bad” Muslim—in fact, the fear of any conflation at all with anything which may cause their British status to be questioned or, worse, imperilled—is what drives deep wedges into families where politics strain love and family bonds to the breaking point. Because Isma reported Parvaiz to the authorities, performing as a “good” Muslim should, Aneeka tells her she is no longer her sister. Isma tries to explain to Aneeka: “Why can you never understand the position we’re in?…Remember him in your heart and your prayers, as our grandmother remembered her only son. Go back to uni, study the law. Accept the law, even when it’s unjust” (*HF* 198).

Isma and Eamonn’s fledgling relationship flounders because of his family’s politics. Isma disapproves of Karamat Lone’s hard line against British Muslim radicals—which results in the epithet “LONE WOLF” following his portrayal in the national tabloids as the “LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims”—regarding him as a “[s]ellout, coconut, opportunist, traitor” (35). Having been raised Muslim, and still reciting Muslim prayers when anxious, Karamat “expressed a completely enlightened preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque, and spoke of the need for British Muslims to lift themselves out of the Dark Ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect” (59). Karamat renounces his attachments to the British Muslim community for political sway—for fear of being seen as a “bad” Muslim—but often gets caught between the expectations of the communities he is linked to: “He was nearing a mosque, crossed the street to avoid it, then crossed back so as not to be seen trying to avoid a mosque” (59). Karamat is stuck in the middle, literally and metaphorically, too Eastern to fully embrace the West, and simultaneously too reluctant to embrace his Eastern background. He tries to distance himself from his background out of his desire to be accepted like Ranjitsinhji, the “first Indian cricketer to be loved by the English” (233). The hypervisibility of Karamat’s Pakistani-Muslim background foregrounds his dual-identity in public perception.

This situation of in-betweenness recalls the one described by Said of his own positionality as an Arab Palestinian in the West: “There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental” (27). Karamat’s controversial, re-orientalizing advice for young British Muslim students is:

You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this…don’t set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently—not because of racism, though that does exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multireligious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. (87)

The speech, delivered “at a predominantly Muslim school in Bradford, which counted amongst its alumni Karamat Lone himself” (87), goes viral on social media, and people start calling him the “future Prime Minister” (88). What Karamat is selling is a rendition, an acceptance of submission to a culture that has already set an unmovable dominance over their community. The way Karamat puts it sounds almost like an expectation to conformity; he has given in to performing as a “good” Muslim. In this, he recognizes that the dominant culture is unwilling to change in order to acknowledge and recognize the Other, so they should—must—be the ones coming around. As expressed by Aneeka, this kind of speech, especially presented by a person in a position of power and supposedly representing the group he is addressing, normalizes the stigmatization of a certain group of people for the way they dress and express their beliefs (90).

Eamonn explains why his father enacts pro-British sentiments with such a heavy hand, and why he has to re-orientalize other British Muslims like himself:

“It’s harder for him,” he said. “Because of his background. Early on, in particular, he had to be more careful than any other MP, and at times that meant doing things he regretted. But everything he did, even the wrong choices, were because he had a sense of purpose. Public service, national good, British values. He deeply believes in these things. All the wrong choices he made, they were necessary to get him to the right place, the place he is now.” (51)

Eamonn offers to set up a meeting between Isma and his father, and she imagines the conversation: “Mr British Values. Mr Strong on Security. Mr Striding Away from Muslimness. He would say, ‘I know about your family. You’re better off without your brother, too.’ And Eamonn, his devoted son, would sadly have to agree” (52). Ultimately, Isma’s conviction that Eamonn is his father’s son was what made it impossible for the development of their relationship: “It didn’t matter if they were on this or that side of the political spectrum, or whether the fathers were absent or present, or if someone else had loved them better, loved them more: in the end they were always their fathers’ sons” (51). (Ironically, this holds just as true for Parvaiz and Adil Pasha.) Politics, as Shamsie points out, disrupts not only blood bonds, but also bonds of romance and friendship, forcing would-be lovers to stand on different sides of divides that have become increasingly entrenched post-9/11.

Parvaiz, a dual British Pakistani national, is depicted by Shamsie as a gentle young man who has an obsession for recording soundscapes. He is radicalized within weeks by a man called Farooq, an ISIL recruiter who is the cousin of Abdul, one of the boys Parvaiz knew in as a child. Farooq starts by reeling Parvaiz in using his curiosity over his father, telling him the man was a hero, and the women in his life have kept him a boy. He gives him a history lesson:

[T]he terror with which Christendom had watched the ascent of Islam, the thousand years of Muslim supremacy…and then the bloodlust with which the Christians had avenged themselves for their centuries of humiliation: imperialism, with its racist underpinnings of a “civilizing mission.” Followed by the cruel joke of pretending to “give” independence when really they were changing economic models via the creation of client states…. (129)

Farooq tells him that life in the UK of democracy and freedom is a mirage and a sham, that Muslims are tortured and murdered (as his father was), and he can find a land of order and peace where men work for the Caliphate: “So this was how it felt to have a nation [the Caliphate] that wielded the sword on your behalf and told you acquiescence wasn’t the only option, dear God, the vein-flooding pleasure of it” (149). Under the pretext of going to Karachi, the dissatisfied, self-doubting Parvaiz absconds to Raqqa to join ISIL. Isma, the “good” Muslim, informs the British authorities of this, denouncing her brother, the “bad” Muslim. Parvaiz endures the Shariah training and is taken on by the media wing to work in their sound studio. He tries to escape by going to the British Consulate in Istanbul to arrange “a new passport that would allow him to return home” (244) but is killed in a drive-by shooting. His body is repatriated from Turkey to Pakistan, and the British Government refuses to let it return to the UK. By this point, Parvaiz is a Pakistani citizen who cannot return to Britain to be buried. Shamsie explainswhy a British Muslim or an American Muslim of Parvaiz’s age would feel at odds with the state: “Because there’s this other history—of Guantanamo, of extraordinary rendition, of Bagram, of illegal wars. You can’t just pretend that’s not part of what’s going on” (qtd. in Fesenthal). Parvaiz and all the Parvaizes of the world who run the risk of having their citizenship rights revoked based on the suspicion that they have joined the enemies of the state—the “bad” Muslims—are in part the creation of 9/11, of Bagram, of Guantanamo, and of US-Islam relations.

Meanwhile, in the UK, upon returning from Amherst, Eamonn goes to deliver a package on Isma’s behalf to Auntie Naseem in Wembley. He catches sight of Aneeka and falls for her at once, and they swiftly become lovers. He continues to stay with her even after she admits that she first wanted to get close to him because he is the son of the Home Secretary and she wanted to get her brother home:

“That’s my twin. I’ve spent every day of the last six months sick with worry about him. Now he wants to come home. But your father is unforgiving, particularly about people like him. So I’m not going to get my brother back. And I don’t really know what to do…half of me is always there, wondering if he’s alive, what he’s doing, what he’s done. I’m so sick of it. I want to be here, completely. With you.”

It was what she’d say if she were still only trying to manipulate him. It was what she’d say if she’d really fallen in love with him. (*HF* 99–100)

Shamsie depicts how lovers’ loyalties are divided because of their family politics—the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet repeated in countless permutations—with more and more lines drawn up and etched ever more deeply between families and stances. Post-9/11, there will be a corresponding proliferation of Romeos and Juliets in ever more tragic love stories. When Eamonn tells his father he intends to marry Aneeka, daughter and brother of terrorists, Karamat retorts: “How could he possibly do that to this man who had always offered him the most unconditional of loves?” (108). Eventually, Eamonn pays the ultimate, deadly price for selecting his lover over his loyalty to his father, and another family—a cross-racial, cross-religious family, which has been striving to be part of not just mainstream British society, but its very establishment—is directly wrecked by post-9/11 politics.

Aneeka plans to bring her twin brother home no matter the cost. She goes to Karachi and has Parvaiz’s body brought to a park outside the British Deputy High Commissioner’s compound. She sits with his decaying body under a banyan tree while the world’s press reports, and the story is twisted and spun. As Home Secretary, Karamat does not allow Parvaiz’s body to be returned to his homeland, opining that those who set themselves apart, the “bad” Muslims, deserve to be treated differently. It is almost as if Shamsie and her novel have anticipated the real-life case of alleged jihadist Shamina Begum and the Home Secretary Sajid Javid’s response. Aneeka, speaking for her family, addresses Karamat Lone through the media:

In the stories of wicked tyrants men and women are punished with exile, bodies are kept from their families—their heads impaled on spikes, their corpses thrown into unmarked graves. All these things happened according to the law, but not according to justice. I am here to ask for justice. I appeal to the Prime Minister: let me take my brother home. (224–25)2

When the press challenges Karamat, after he claims the majority of British Muslims support him, and asks if he hates Muslims, he replies: “I hate the Muslims who make people hate Muslims” (231). Karamat stated before: “the day I assumed office I revoked the citizenship of all dual nationals who have left Britain to join our enemies” (188). For him, “citizenship is a privilege, not a right or birthright,” and he thinks it his duty to strip any British passport holder of their citizenship “in cases where they have acted against the vital interests of the UK” (198), as opposed to an earlier law that only applied to dual nationals. While some human rights groups call out this act of “removing the right to have rights” as “a new low” (198)—“Statelessness is a tool of despots, not democrats,” they claim—the Home Secretary remains adamant in his position. Moreover, he reiterates it on various occasions, especially when the situation with Parvaiz becomes public, sending “an unequivocal message to those who treated the privilege of British citizenship as something that could be betrayed without consequences” (231).

This underlines how, post-9/11, Muslim communities have been forced to subdivide amongst themselves, to create categories of Muslims and “other Muslims,” “good” Muslims distinct from “bad” Muslims, in order for some to feel safe in Western host countries, by denying and refusing their kin and community, in a public demonstration of embracing new loyalties. Karamat himself is perhaps at the forefront of this public demonstration, but he too pays the highest of prices because he loses his son twice over. Before going to Karachi to join Aneeka, Eamonn releases a damaging video to the public that accuses his father of “personal animus” in not allowing the return of the body. In the video message, he asks: “Is Britain really a nation that turns people into figures of hate because they love unconditionally?” (245). He thus betrays his father’s trust in him, before accepting a suicide belt and giving his life for the love of a woman, who in turn acts out of love for her twin, who in turn has acted out of love and loyalty for a dead father. As Davies notes, Shamsie is “acutely attuned to the vagaries of allegiance, whether to nation, faith, family or club.” *Home Fire* unpacks how it is love which spools bonds of loyalty, which in turn rips families, communities, and countries apart.

In Shamsie’s representations, post-9/11, the effects ripple out from the most private of domestic relationships to the most public of international relations. As Home Secretary, Karamat Lone turns to the Pakistani High Commissioner, who in turn draws the battle lines between his country and the UK post-9/11 with great clarity:

Let me put it in language you’ll understand: the people, and several opposition parties, have decided to embrace a woman who has stood up to a powerful government, and not just any powerful government but one that has very bad PR in the matter of Muslims and as recently as yesterday insulted us directly. So, now it’s political suicide for my government to get involved. (228)

In all cases, more and more stand-offs are created, demanding the rejection of those cast as Other to prove loyalty, and requiring the selection of very particularized allies, rather than friendship to all. There is a gender divide in Shamsie’s depiction of conflicted loyalties. Eamonn struggles between his love for his father and for Aneeka until he capitulates and selects his lover. Karamat takes a hard line, but a lot of what he does is from love for his son: “I’m the one who never wanted you to know what it feels like to have doors closed in your face. To have to fight your way in” (110). Parvaiz also struggles with his loyalties but is tipped over the edge by alienation: “How he hated his life, this neighbourhood, the inevitability of everything” (123). Instead, he finds shelter in a radical community. The women in this novel, by contrast, seem very clear about where their loyalties lie, even if they do not agree with each other. Isma and Aneeka are both sure of their correctness. They are shown as always knowing just what to do—although they decide in opposite directions—and neither is internally conflicted.

**Conclusion**

This article was written at the time of Brexit, when the UK formally left the EU, in a clear refusal to share open borders, and when borders—British ones at least—are even more rigorously policed against all perceived Others. As Gamlen points out, borders today, although very much open to the flows of trade and finance, are comparatively closed to the flows of people. This, apparently, is what the UK will maintain post-Brexit. What new Orientalisms and re-orientalisms may arise as a result of such increased nationalistic discourses? And what will be the price of such damage to so many people and their lives? Dorling and Tomlinson argue that Brexitis in no small part a colonial hangover that is the result of an education system set up to create an empire and a still pervasive, nostalgic, imperialistic attitude: “It takes a particular colonial mindset to see the misery of others as a necessary but largely insignificant piece of collateral damage” (297).

Brexit is part of our post-9/11 world where we see the rise of nationalism, hard right-wing groups, and increasingly isolationist and divisive politics. Post-9/11 novels are invaluable in the creation of a new discourse that the regime of terror necessitates: “Postcolonial writing…supplies ways of thinking through and beyond terror, and of developing workable political responses to it” (Boehmer 7). Such novels give voice to the complexity of situations where allegiances are ever shifting and precarious, where the private can be criminalized in the public, and where national security becomes a stick with which all, but particularly those at the peripheries of mainstream society, can be threatened into cowering obedience.

Shamsie’s novel shows that, despite such a menacing stick perpetually held over the heads of minority groups, it is nevertheless inadequate in the face of family bonds and bonds of love. In *HF*, Parvaiz becomes a terrorist for the love of his dead father as much as to fight for a world in which Muslims would have more dignity. Aneeka challenges the British government for the love of her twin, and Eamonn becomes a suicide bomber for the love of a woman. That the state raises the price of their actions does not deter them in the least. It does deter Isma, whose sense of responsibility for safeguarding the physical safety of her family outweighs her personal outrage, indignation, and sense of justice. But even she cannot stop her brother and sister from Othering themselves and breaking her heart and their family—no more than Karamat can stop his beloved son Eamonn.

KEELE UNIVERSITY AND UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

NOTES

1 As Chambers discloses, “The author recently shared that after the EU referendum she started using the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ about the British for the first time in her life. The disaster of Brexit reportedly made her feel at home, chiming with the violent political disarray of her homeland, Pakistan.”

2 In a most ironic parallel, in 2019, Shamima Begum appealed to the British Government. “She also said that she wanted to return to Europe, citing the difficult conditions of the camp: ‘I’m scared this baby is going to get sick in this camp. That’s why I really want to get back to Britain’” (Callimachi). Her baby, who would have been a British citizen, died in Syria, and Shamima Begum’s British citizenship was revoked.

WORKS CITED

Abbas, Tahir. “Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28.3 (2007): 287–300.

Addley, Esther. “Shamima Begum Citizenship Decision Criticised by London Mayor.” *Irish Times.* Feb. 22, 2009. www.irishtimes.com/news/world/uk/. Accessed Aug. 28, 2019.

Ahmed, Riz. “Airports and Auditions.” *The Good Immigrant*. Ed. Nikesh Shukla. London: Unbound, 2016. 59–68.

Boehmer, Elleke. “Postcolonial Writing and Terror.” *Wasafiri* 22.2 (2007): 4–7.

Callimachi, Rukmini. “Child of Shamima Begum, ISIS Teenager Trying to Return to Britain, Dies in Syria.” *New York Times.* Mar. 8, 2019. www.nytimes.com. Accessed Aug. 29, 2019.

Chambers, Claire. “The Ones We Love are Enemies of the State.” *The Hindu.* Aug. 5, 2017. www.thehindu.com/books. Accessed Dec. 5, 2017.

Chaudhuri, Arun. “Multiculturalism, Minoritization and the War on Terror: The Politicization of Hinduism in North America.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.3 (2012): 252–64.

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Davies, Peter Ho. “An ‘Antigone’ for a Time of Terror.” *New York Times*. Sept. 29, 2017. www.nytimes.com.Accessed Dec. 5, 2017.

Dorling, Danny, and Sally Tomlinson. *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*. London: Biteback Publishing, 2017.

Dutta, Nandana. “The Face of the Other, Terror and the Return of Binarism.” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6.3 (2004): 431–50.

Felsenthal, Julia. “Kamila Shamsie’s Brilliant *Home Fire* Is a Greek Tragedy for the Age of ISIS.” *Vogue*. Aug. 16, 2017. www.vogue.com. Accessed Dec. 5, 2017.

Gamlen, Alan. “‘An Inborn Restlessness’: Migration and Exile in a Turbulent World.” *Migration Studies* 3.3 (2015): 307–14.

Heidemann, Birte. “’We Are the Glue Keeping Civilization Together’: Post-Orientalism and Counter-Orientalism in H. M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.3 (2012): 289–98.

Lau, Lisa. “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals.” *Modern Asian Studies* 43.2 (2009): 571–90.

Lau, Lisa, and Ana Cristina Mendes, eds. *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Lau, Lisa, and Ana Cristina Mendes. “Post-9/11 Re-Orientalism: Confrontation and Conciliation in Mohsin Hamid’s and Mira Nair’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 53.1 (2018): 78–91.

Lynch, Orla. “British Muslim Youth: Radicalisation, Terrorism and the Construction of the “Other.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6.2 (2013): 241–61.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Three Leaves/Doubleday, 2005.

Mendes, Ana Cristina. “Sunjeev Sahota’s Fictions of Failed Cosmopolitan Conviviality.” *The Limits of Cosmopolitanism: Globalization and Its Discontents in Contemporary Literature*. Ed. Aleksandar Stevic and Philip Tsang. New York and London: Routledge, 2019. 53–69.

Mendes, Ana Cristina, and Lisa Lau. “The Conjunctural Spaces of ‘New India’: Imagined Geographies of 2010s India in Representations by Returnee Migrants.” *Cultural Geographies* 26.1 (2019): 57–72.

—. “India through re-Orientalist Lenses: Vicarious Indulgence and Vicarious Redemption.” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17.5 (2015): 706–27.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.

Shamsie, Kamila. *Home Fire*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.