

Reconfiguring Subalternity: The Politics of Centralization and the Construction of

Muslimness in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

إعادة تشكيل التبعية:

سياسات المركزية وبناء الهوية الإسلامية في رواية "نيران الوطن" لكاميل شامي

Kerkeni Rania

University of Sfax

Kerkeni.rania96@gmail.com

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تاريخ الإرسال: 2025/11/19 تاريخ القبول: 2025/12/14	ملخص بالعربية: تستكشف هذه الدراسة التحول في استراتيجيات تهميش الأقليات من الإقصاء المباشر والاختفاء إلى الإدماج والظهور المفرط في ظل "الديمقراطيات الغربية". وبالأستناد إلى "مشهد الآخر" لستيوارت هول ومفهوم غياتري سبيفاك عن التابع، فإنها تدرس عملية "المركزية" كشكل كامن من أشكال التبعية في عمل كاميل شامي "نيران الوطن" (2017). من خلال تحليل نصي دقيق للسرد، يستكشف هذا العمل كيف يعمل تركيز الأقليات المسلمة، لا سيما في وسائل الإعلام الغربية والخطاب السياسي، كألية خفية للتلاعب، وأثار ذلك على بناء الهوية الإسلامية. وفي نهاية المطاف، وتماشياً مع رؤى سبيفاك حول المهمة "المحفوظة بالمخاطر" المتمثلة في التحدث باسم المهمشين، تناقش هذه الدراسة مدى نجاح شامي في الابتعاد عن عمليات التنميط في محاولتها للتحدث نيابة عن المسلمين المهمشين وإعادة تمثيلهم.
الكلمات المفتاحية: المركزية- الهوية الإسلامية الفئات المهمشة الديمقراطية الغربية	
Article info Keywords: centralization, hypervisibility, Muslimness, Western Democracy, Subaltern	This study probes the shift in the strategies of marginalizing minorities from direct exclusion and invisibility to inclusion and hypervisibility under "Western Democracies." Drawing on Stuart Hall's "Spectacle of the Other" and Gayatri Spivak's notion of the Subaltern, it examines the process of "centralization" as a latent form of subalternization in Kamila Shamsie's <i>Home Fire</i> (2017). Through a close textual analysis of the narrative, this work explores how centralizing Muslim minorities, mainly within Western media and political rhetoric, functions as a subtle mechanism of manipulation and its implications for the construction of the Muslim identity. Ultimately, in alignment with Spivak's insights about the "risky" task of speaking for the subaltern, this study discusses the extent to which Shamsie has succeeded in departing from the stereotyping processes in her attempt to speak for and (re)present Muslim subalterns.

Introduction:

While occupying a dual position as a British-Pakistani writer, Kamila Shamsie seeks through her writings to articulate the complexities and challenges imposed by occupying middle positions and having double affiliations¹. In her novel *Home Fire* (2017), Shamsie addresses the issue of citizenship and dual nationality in Britain, a nation framed as a “Western Liberal Democracy.” Her work, which revolves around the experience of a Pakistani-Muslim family entangled with terrorism, is an attempt to illuminate the status of Muslims as a minority group in Britain under the age of the “war on terrorism”² conducted by Western powers. The novel fundamentally questions the legitimacy of specific British laws and policies concerning diasporic populations and dual nationals, particularly those of Pakistani-Muslim background.

Conceiving of Muslim minorities as subalterns—marginalized groups lacking representation in hegemonic structures, as initially defined by Gramsci—this study suggests that Shamsie’s novel uncovers a politics of subalternization and oppression in Britain that now takes new, implicit forms under the Western ideals of democracy, freedom, and social equality. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s influential notion from “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), which critiques the ethical dilemma of representation, this paper investigates the process of “centralization” as a latent form of subalternization. Spivak’s work highlights how the attempt to “speak for” the subaltern risks re-inscribing their subordination. Against the backdrop, this paper argues that this risk is amplified in the contemporary West, where subalternity has shifted from invisibility to hypervisibility. This study uses the term “centralization” to describe the political

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/17/unbecoming-british-kamila-shamsie-citizens-exile>

² see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-terrorism>

rhetoric and media practice of rendering Muslim identities hypervisible through a lens of suspicion and “othering.” This process, seemingly inclusive, functions as a subtle mechanism of manipulation.

To understand this dynamic, this work also incorporates Stuart Hall's concept of the “Spectacle of the Other” (1997), which highlights how media representations (the “image”) exploit difference—shifting the colonial focus on “blackness” to the contemporary obsession with the “Islamic beard and Hijab.” *Home Fire* critically reveals how the media plays on the negative side of this difference to spectacularize and “market” the Pakistani-Muslim image as a “mediatic icon.” This constant scrutiny renders it impossible for Muslims to “pass unremarked,” effectively legitimizing discrimination and exclusion by making difference undeniable. Ultimately, this paper explores the politics of this “centralization” process and its implications for the construction of “Muslimness” and the determination of its status in the Western sphere.

Finally, given this high-stakes representational environment, the responsibility falls heavily on postcolonial authors like Kamila Shamsie. As scholars like Lau and Mendes warn, the elite of ex-colonized populations risk producing a “re-orientalist representation,” where they inadvertently reference the West as the center and engage in self-othering. Aligning with Spivak's insights about the “risky” task of speaking for the subaltern, this paper will discuss the extent to which Shamsie has succeeded in departing from these Western paradigms. The current paper will examine her attempt to authentically represent and (re)present Muslim subalterns, navigating the liminal space between counter-orientalism and self-orientalism to provide a genuine counter-narrative. Ultimately, this multi-faceted consideration of Muslims' centralization in Western spheres extends the findings of subaltern studies by demonstrating that subalternization no longer

happens through silencing and absence, but through spectacular inclusion and controlled hypervisibility.

3. Centralization and the Politics of Exposure in *Home Fire*:

3.1 "The Spectacle of the Muslim" and "The Iconography" of Muslimness in Western Media

Rather than being absented and suppressed in the realms of invisibility and denial, the Muslim man/woman is purposefully drawn towards "the centre" in the Western social and political scenes. This deliberate centralization of Muslims on the part of the West is made possible through a systematic process of spotlighting as the main subject of media coverage and political discourses, which collaborate to familiarize the Western public opinion with a certain image of Muslimness to be easily "detected" and "exposed". In this respect, as part of its major themes, *Home Fire* addresses the Western breeding of islamophobia in the aftermath of the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks through using its media and political rhetoric to construct and disseminate a ready-made image of Muslims which is conflated with potential threat and violence. In this respect, the novel evokes the mediatic coverage and interpretation of any terrorist attack which is made through interpolating a direct reference to Islam and Pakistan as synonyms of terrorism, as Isma notes: "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" (Shamsie, 38). The specific choice of words to identify and refer to terrorists in terms of their dual nationality or, more specifically, in terms of their Pakistani-Muslim background is made on purpose to construe the Pakistani-Muslim Other as a "familiar" label or image to be easily captured and read by the Western public opinion on the background of previously delivered information about terrorism and Jihad, for instance.

In order to enhance its familiarity in the British popular imagination and render it easily detected, this image is shaped with reference to certain criteria that go beyond the cultural and religious backgrounds of the terrorist to include his/her physical appearance. Echoing Hall's insights, *Home Fire* proves that throughout history, otherness has always been constructed on the basis of physical appearance to become more noticeable, tangible and concrete, and therefore real

and undeniable, while rendering legitimate and justifiable any form of discrimination and exclusion against the different Other. In the same vein, Shamsie's narrative reveals that through devoting much attention to speaking about Islam and Muslims and through spreading a spectacular image of Muslims as familiar "mediatic icons", it becomes almost impossible for a Muslim man or woman to pass unremarked and unnoticed by the Western gaze. The role of the image, whether it is visual or mental, is highly important in the process of centralizing and spotlighting Muslims within their social milieu as it makes them easily captured and "exposed" by the Western Eye. Shamsie highlights the impact of mediatic images in positioning Muslims and determining the extent of their visibility in the British environment through the shift experienced by both Parvaiz and Eamon from unnoticed and unremarkable "insignificant" teenagers to the centre of attention.

For Parvaiz, who has long suffered from invisibility and unrecognition, confirming to the icon of the bearded Muslim is enough to make "the men on the street corner back away *frightened*." Suddenly, "At nineteen he was *terrifying* to grown men." He is no longer an insignificant teenager, but he has become "*The State*" (Shamsie, 174) (My emphasis). Growing his beard and wearing the Islamic Kameez, Parvaiz is not simply seen and noticed, but he is also given the impression of gaining power and control over those who had never paid attention to his existence among them before. The beard and the Kameez turn Parvaiz into an easily identifiable icon symbolizing terrorism and violence in the British popular imagination, which seems alert to the detection of such threats.

The same happens to Eamon, who is suddenly turned into the object of visual targeting and observation once he got engaged in a relationship with the hijabi Aneeka. In one of the meetings, his friend Max comments on the change in his attitude as "*exhibit[ing]* rapidly altered pattern of behavior, cut[ing] himself off from old friends, mov[ing] *under the radar*" (ibid, 82) (My emphasis). This comment reflects how Eamon's new habits are perceived by his British friends in terms of exhibitions that bring him to the centre of attention to be carefully watched. The sudden shift in Eamon's attitudes and behaviours makes his friend end his comment by asking: "are we sure that's an evening shadow rather than an incipient beard? I think *we may need to alert the authorities*" (ibid, 84) (My emphasis). Although his friend's comment might appear as a joke, it

actually tells a lot about the British prejudices about the Muslim Man which are inspired by the stereotypical image of the bearded man as an alarming threat, which makes Eamon reply with: "What would you have done if I had walked in with a full beard?" (ibid, 83). Eamon's question further stresses the significance of the beard in the British collective consciousness as a genuine threat conflated with Islamic terrorism. He appears to recognize that the absence of a beard is the only factor preventing his classification as a real threat. This suggests a heightened awareness of the stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in society, where the mere presence of a beard can lead to unwarranted suspicion and profiling.

It is, actually, significant that while he was detached from Islam, Eamon had been regarded and treated as an unremarkable normal British young man. Yet, his relationship with a hijabi girl and the change it caused in his habits and attitudes towards Muslims would bring him to the spotlight and turn him into an object of scrutiny by his friends who are "suddenly" reminded of his Muslim origins and start to identify him with reference to the stereotypical image of Muslims. Instead of identifying him as the British young man he used to be, Eamon would be identified with reference to his Muslim origins as "a Twenty-something unemployed male from Muslim background" (ibid, 87). Although he does not practice any Islamic rituals and does not show any religious commitment, his relationship with the hijabi Aneeka proves enough to trigger the sudden evocation of his Muslim background. Regarding Eamon through the lens of his Muslim heritage also makes his friends describe him in a way that echoes the mediatic description of terrorists as barely identifiable ("twenty-something, unemployed, male"), except for their "Muslim background", which is the only certain information about them, as terrorists.

Not only the bearded man but also the hijabi woman is presented as an icon which is loaded with negative connotations related to terrorism and violence. *Home Fire* equally captures the Western politics of centralizing and spotlighting hijabi women mainly through the media and the public treatment of the relationship between Eamon and Aneeka. The latter is referred to as "miss hojabi knickers" (ibid, 209), the manipulative woman who "hunted down the Home Secretary's son, Eamon, 24, and used sex to try and brainwash him into convincing his father to allow her terrorist brother back into England" (ibid, 214). The title of the article treating Aneeka's affair with Eamon "Ho-Jabi! Pervy Pasha's Twin Sister Engineered Sex Trysts with Home Secretary's

Son" (ibid, 204) reflects how the Muslim girl is not only objectified but also sexualized in a dehumanizing and stereotypical manner. This sexualized stereotypical representation is not only made on the basis of her gender as a female but also on the grounds of her cultural difference as a hijabi Muslim. It is worth considering, in this respect, that the British media uses the Arabic word "Hijab" instead of veil or head cover to bring to the fore the connection between Aneeka's actions and her Islamic faith and to further centralize Muslim hijabi women as potential threats through turning their hijab into a stigma. Likewise, the British public opinion establishes a link between Aneeka's hijab and her use of sex to manipulate the disillusioned Eamon, while comparing her to the "72 virgins of Heaven", which are believed to be one of the Islamic promises to pious Muslim men (ibid, 192). Centralization, hence, becomes equated with exhibition, exposure, and "show-ification", whereby the Other's difference is turned into a stimulus to unleash the human repressed and socially tamed instincts of lust and fear. The centralization of the Other's difference, as the only vantage point from which s/he could be perceived and identified, is in this sense, meant to facilitate the process of its containment within the frame of an anamorphic portrayal as a monstrous and ambiguous object of scrutiny.

"The Spectacle of the Muslim", which is simultaneously informed by colonialist and orientalist representations, thus, plays a significant role in keeping him/her under the constant surveillance of the Western Eye, or to use Eamon's friend's words "under the radar". Muslims, are, therefore, driven to endure the pressure of centralization and hypervisibility, which does not only facilitate their (mis)representation, but it also allows the panoptic supervision of their difference to keep it under control and manipulation. By keeping them in the spotlight, the Western gaze does not only supervise Muslims, but it also drives them to engage in the processes of self-discipline and self-control, whereby they willingly engage and contribute to "taming" their differences to avoid any suspicions and be able to pass unnoticed. The opening scene of the novel at the airport is one of the illustrations of the Muslims' engagement in self-surveillance through Isma's attempts to normalize her behaviours as a British citizen, hoping that she would be treated as such. Meanwhile, Isma is also aware that her image as a hijabi girl which is loaded with stereotypical connotations for the British is very likely to make her the centre of attention at the airport as a

potential threat. Hence, she seems to embody and confirm the Islam/terrorism dichotomy which makes her easily “detected” by the officer as suspectable and threatening.

3.2. *The Subaltern “Can” Speak in Western “Democracies”*

Western centralization of Muslims exceeds the scope of visibility to take the form of inclusion within the political sphere. As a “democratic and liberal” nation, Britain seems to promise the racial and cultural Other a legal position within its social and political spheres as an admitted British citizen. It, therefore, seems to allow the Other to leave the margin area as a member of second-class minorities and grant him/her access to the centre as a legal member of the British society. Moreover, Muslims are not only granted the right of British citizenship but they are also allowed access into critical positions of political power and authority to be able to represent and speak for themselves. However, through the experience of the Pashas and their struggle to be treated decently by the British state, Shamsie shows that these apparently democratic laws are designed to camouflage and facilitate the unjust practices that are exercised on Pakistani-Muslim minorities on the basis of their dual nationality. She shows that Muslims are, in reality, the victims of a systematic process of “selective citizenship”. This process is not only enforced by means of a panoptic surveillance that targets Muslims in particular but it is also implemented by putting their citizenship under the constant threat of being revoked or stripped away. Commenting on the British double standards in treating diasporic populations, Avtar Brah notes that

[a]ccording to racialized imagination, the former colonial Natives and their descendants in Britain are not British precisely because they are not seen as being native to Britain: they can be ‘in’ Britain but not ‘of’ Britain. The term ‘native’ is now turned on its head. Whereas in the colonies the ‘colonial native’ was inferiorised, in Britain the ‘metropolitan Native’ is constructed as superior. That is, nativist discourse is mobilized in both cases, but with opposite evaluation of the group constructed as the ‘native’. (191)

Through playing on the double conceptualization of “the native”, the British state could trace a line of demarcation between its ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ citizens to allow the legitimization of its unjust laws and unfair policies. Connectedly, centralization and visibility, are “turned on their head” from privileges into means to exercise more pressure on Muslims. Based on the double standards of

nativism, the “right” or “privilege” of citizenship functions as an implicit form of subalternization, while also facilitating the Muslims’ classification into “good” and “bad” Muslims¹ with reference to their abiding by the criteria and the conditions set by the British state.

This classification leads to the division and fracturization of the Muslim diaspora as it seems to direct its racial and ethnic battles inward. The Other, in this sense, becomes the Self in its Westernized version; it is no longer about *they* vs *us*, but it is turned into an internal conflict among the “us”. This classification, which is made on the basis of British conditions of citizenship seems to facilitate the containment of the Other’s difference through feeding assimilationist and conformist tendencies among the ranks of diasporic populations. It equally contributes considerably to waging nationalist and resistant reactions that become mainly directed towards the “good” Muslims. The clash between Lone and the Pashas in the novel is, in this sense, illustrative of the ruptures and fractures that underlie the Pakistani-Muslim diaspora. It is also this same clash which seems to set members of the same family apart as it is the case of Isma and her twin siblings, and Karamat and his son. The real challenge for Lone and Isma as “good” moderate Muslims who do not pose any serious threat to the British state becomes how to prove their allegiance to Britain and be worthy of the “privilege” of its citizenship. This allegiance, however, does not only impose on them a certain pattern of behaviours and attitudes, but it also forces them to act as guardians ensuring the implementation of these behaviours among their relatives, who would ultimately choose to cut ties with them as traitors and accomplices to the British state’s crimes against Muslims.

From another angle, Karamat Lone as a Home Secretary from a Pakistani-Muslim background seems to serve as proof of Western Democracy, while giving the impression that Muslims are represented and spoken for by someone of their own kind. Lone, however, proves to be no more than a pawn manipulated by the British government to further enforce and spread its exclusionary discourse among Muslims. Instead of speaking for Muslims, Lone actually facilitates the transmission and the injection of Western dictates among them as he invites them to “lift themselves out of the Dark Ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect”

¹ Borrowed from Mahmood Madmani’s *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (2004)

through conforming to the British standards and criteria.ⁱ Lone also seems aware of this ideological mission of “converting” Muslims to British nationalism as an alternative to their Islamic faith as he chooses to deliver his speeches specifically at schools as educational institutions for young generations. In one of those speeches at a predominantly Muslim school in Bradford, he declares:

You are, we are British, and Britain accepts this. [...]. Don't set yourself 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 it does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom *of ours*. (87-88) (My emphasis)

Ironically, Lone blames Muslims for being responsible for their own discrimination and marginalization by choosing to express their difference. His speech gives Muslims the illusions of agency and free choice as they could choose to be treated decently as British citizens if they give up their religious beliefs and practices. It is also highly ironic that Lone calls Muslims to denounce their difference in “multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multitudinous” Britain, which is indicative of the deceptive aspect of Western Democracies that pretend to host differences on an equal basis.

Lone's speech is highly paradoxical in the way it wraps the reality of oppression within the promise of freedom, and juxtaposes the possibility of unity guaranteed by “our” Britain to the threat of division imposed by “your” Islam. Lone's anti-Islamic speech equally shows that he is appointed to play the role of an “eye-witness” to Muslims' backwardness and barbarism, while functioning as an “authentic” and “trustworthy” narrator of the Western story about Muslims and Islam, being a Muslim himself. For Lone, to detach himself from Islam and Muslims is a way to prove his detachment from terrorism and religious fundamentalism. In this respect, Birte Heidemann notes that “the very fear of being labeled 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). Lone, indeed, sets himself apart from the population, he originally belongs to and is supposed to represent and speak for, while adopting an orientalist discourse that further inferiorizes Muslims and deepens their state of subalternity. While elevating himself above his population, the Pakistani-Muslim Home

Secretary seems unaware that he is also inferiorizing and subalternizing himself in the process, believing that he is just doing the right thing to protect his right to belong to the nation that “treat[s] [him] and them [Muslims] with respect” (Shamsie, 59). Lone, however, tries to convince his surroundings that he is the one who has been betrayed and underestimated by Muslims “who had turned their backs on [him] and voted him out, despite all the good he’d done for his constituents” (ibid).

Despite his apparently authoritative position, Lone seems to be the one who most endures the consequences of the good/bad Muslims dichotomy, as he seems to fall into the category of bad Muslims for the Pakistani-Muslim population, while being considered as a good Muslim by the British. This classification, which is created by the West and sustained by Lone and his likes, further deepens his state of hyphenation and ambivalence, since he is neither accepted as a full Pakistani Muslim nor as a full British citizen. Albeit a “good” Muslim as perceived by the British, Lone is not immune to their racism and stereotyping. As a political figure occupying a critical position while having a Muslim background, Lone’s movements and utterances seem to be always kept under the loop to be scrutinized and surveilled. He, who was once subject to a fierce wave of racism, when “a section of the press tried to brand him as extremist” simply because he was captured out of a mosque, is pushed to avoid any “suspectable” action or word that may remind the British of his Muslim origins (ibid). Evoking Lone’s Islamic background makes him easily identified by the British media either as an extremist or a traitor, who conceals his bad intentions under the cover of moderation. His picture entering a mosque, for instance, is simply interpreted by the media as “LONE WOLF’S PACK REVEALED”, reflecting a general tendency to associate Islam with hidden threat and potential danger (ibid, 35).

Consequently, being constantly in the spotlight further fuels Lone’s assimilationist attitude and practices as he feels obliged to continuously prove his allegiance and devotion to the service of the British nation. He, therefore, peels off his Pakistani-Muslim skin by marrying an Irish woman and opting for Eamon as a name for his son, with “an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name— Ayman” (ibid, 12). He, also, engages in directing the racist practices inflicted on him on the population he is supposed to defend and speak for, and believes that family bonds are better cut off if they may cause disintegration into British society, declaring that terrorists should not get

back to Britain neither alive nor dead because their relatives are “better off without [them]” (ibid, 50). In the same vein, Lone sacrifices his son hoping to save his position as a State officer as he announces: “James until this thing is over I don’t have a son and I don’t have a wife. I have a Great Office of State” (ibid, 246). Lone does not only represent the assimilationist and integrationist wing within the Pakistani-Muslim diaspora, but he also functions as a spokesman for British extremist nationalism, while elevating the British nation and state above any other considerations. Through Karamat Lone, Shamsie makes it clear that the inclusion of Muslims within the political sphere as a democratic practice proves to be rather a “trap” that further subalternizes them through dividing them and turning them against each other. Evoking Spivack’s sentence “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (92), Shamsie shows how the British state could preserve its image as just and democratic, while allowing Muslim minorities to be represented in its political sphere, only to make them engage in the process of self-Othering through contributing to oppressing and subalternizing each other.

4. Shamsie and the Responsibility of Speaking for and (Re)presenting the Subaltern: Potential and Limits

Although the novel’s potential to subvert Western meta-narratives and stereotypical representations of Muslims cannot be denied or undermined, an examination of a selection of its scenes puts its success in accomplishing this objective into doubt. It is almost undeniable that Shamsie seems to draw the human face of the Muslim Other by shifting the vantage points from which their anamorphic representation is made possible. This is most illustrated in her portrayal of the Muslim terrorist that departs from Western representations and stereotypes without romanticizing his image. In her juxtaposition of the two sides of the terrorist profile through the characters of Farooq and Parvaiz, Shamsie does not totally deny the Western portrayal of terrorists as manipulative and heartless “bloodthirsty” warriors, yet she equally draws attention to another category, which is simultaneously the victim of both fundamentalist and Western types of terrorism and violence. Parvaiz, the disillusioned and naive teenager who is blindly classified by the British under the range of terrorists, deprived of coming “back home” even as a corpse, functions as an alarming signal to the British government, which plays a significant role in breeding

terrorists through its generalist classification of Muslims and its rigid exclusionary measures against them. In this regard, Shaheen et al. note that

Shamsie, by narrating the story of a family with a history of a terrorist father and terrorist brother, intervenes in time by asserting that such families deserve more attention, both socially and governmentally, to keep them in solidarity with the nation by being more warm and considering to them rather than putting them under constant surveillance and demonizing them as 'Others' for the misgivings of their family members 'lost' to fundamentalism and terrorism. (153-154)

Shamsie, in fact, unveils the role of the British state and society in breeding terrorists through its exclusionary and marginalizing practices towards Muslim minorities. By projecting a ready-made image on them as potential terrorists, the British government and public opinion contribute to turning many Muslims, like Parvaiz, into real terrorists. It also does not allow them the chance of "redemption" once they manage to uncover the reality of their disillusionment and manipulation, which proves that Islamic terrorism is, to some extent, a Western creation. In this sense, Shamsie's portrayal of Parvaiz is not merely a counter-stereotypic imaging, but it equally functions as an overt and direct condemnation of the policies of the British government in relation to the issue of terrorism.

Nevertheless, despite her subversive project, Shamsie could not really do justice to the female Muslim subaltern, specifically, through her portrayal of Aneeka. My argument is that the novelist somehow contributes to the objectification and show-ification of Muslim women, while fashioning a spectacular and stereotypical image to represent them. A close analysis of the characterization of Aneeka shows that it serves to confirm many of the Orientalist superficial beliefs about hijabi women. Shamsie, for instance, seems to reduce the Muslim woman's hijab and Islamic practices into mere inter-generational habits devoid of any real significance. Like the Western media, she too seems to treat them as icons or images that are the mere objects of reading and interpretation, while detaching them from any spiritual value. Portraying Aneeka as a hijabi girl who does not mind removing her head cover in the presence of a strange man like Eamon with whom she engages in intimate meetings and sexual intercourses, albeit forbidden by her Islamic faith, Shamsie seems to confirm that the Islamic veil is no more than a facade or an image that may

conceal a secret sexual (or violent) life. Aneeka also does not pray regularly which actually makes her mocked by Karamat who initially perceives her as a “good” Muslim who cannot pose a real threat to the state (Shamsie, 101). The same could be said about Lone who would recite some Islamic prayers only in moments of anxiety despite his anti-Muslim and atheist attitude. Considering these instances, it is possible to argue that the Pakistani-British writer presents Islam as an occasional practice devoid of any real significance or any serious commitment, while confirming the Orientalist reduction of Islamic practices and appearances (beard, Hijab, Kameez) into mere images or objects of scrutiny and investigation. This is most evidenced in the scene of Aneeka’s performance of the Islamic prayer in the presence of Eamon. While she was praying, “[h]e should have left immediately, but he couldn’t help *watching* this woman, this *stranger*, prostrating herself to God in the room where she had been down on her knees for a very different purpose just hours earlier” (ibid, 70) (My emphasis). This scene does not only sexualize and show-ify Aneeka as the other/object of the masculine gaze, but it also presents the Islamic prayer as a spectacular practice loaded with sexual connotations.

Alongside the aforementioned instances, the confrontation between Aneeka and Lone which is transmitted through intense media coverage further puts Shamsie’s success in truly voicing Muslims’ concerns into question, as it enables its comparative reading against “The Spectacle of the Other” conducted by Western media. This confrontation most adheres to “The Spectacle of the Muslim” through adopting the same processes of showification and exposure adopted by the West. Shamsie’s attempt to turn the tragic scene of Aneeka’s mourning beside her brother’s corpse into an appealing image that could be suitable for mediatic transmission in the novel’s context makes her risk to turn it into a show that incites “voyeurism, fetishism, and the colonialist/imperialist appetite for possession” rather than comprehension and sympathy (Sanchez-Palnezia, 99). Commenting on Aneeka’s portrayal in this scene, Carolina Sanchez-Palenzia notes that

[p]laced under public scrutiny, she is eroticized and stigmatized by virtue of patriarchal and orientalist associations of Muslim women with passivity, precarity, victimhood, and submissive piety, as evidenced through some of the insulting Tweets that caricature her as “Aneeka Knickers” (Shamsie 2017a, 214), who “can do things

those 72 virgins don't know about" (Shamsie 2017a, 196). This fetishization of her image illustrates how "the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying" (Phelan 1996, 6). (ibid)

It is Aneeka's hypervisibility and show-ification which turn her act of resistance into an expression of helplessness and inability that further relegate her to a marginal position while being subjugated to more stereotyping and sexualizing insults. In this scene, Aneeka seems to embody the patriarchal and orientalist prejudices that conflate the sexual and oriental Other with uncontrollable emotional excess. In this sense, spotlighting her in such a state of vulnerability and emotional collapse further facilitates the mass dissemination of Orientalist assumptions about Muslims as incapable of "reasonable" reactions, while being the slaves of their untamable anger and violent urges.

Not only Aneeka but also Karamat Lone is spotlighted in this confrontation, "with the cameras on him", as the centre of pointing fingers accusing him of having personal enmity with the girl who misled and disillusioned his son (Shamsie, 214). Because he has Muslim origins, Lone, like Aneeka, is also the target of a "chorus of tweets, hastily written online columns, and morning TV interviews all placing the Home Secretary on trial" (ibid, 248). On this basis, the love story in the novel between Aneeka and Eamon contributes, to a large extent, to distracting attention from the real cause and concerns of Muslims, to be rather directed towards questioning the real intentions of Aneeka and whether Lone takes her resistance as a national or personal issue, because of implicating his son in his political affairs.

The scene between Aneeka and Lone, thus, seems to fix the Muslim subaltern at the centre of the Western gaze, for whom the role of the spectator and the observer is reserved. It takes the form of a suspenseful and intense battle between the "good" and "bad" Muslims initially fashioned by the Western audience. Therefore, it does not only prove the Western triumph and success in dividing Muslims and in turning their battle against otherization and subalternity into an internal conflict, but it also presents this battle in the form of a show and a spectacle in which the Western Other is not really implicated, echoing Timothy Mitchell's the "world-as-exhibition" (qtd in Lau & Mendes, 5). Lau, in this respect, points to the powerful position of Orientalists as they are "able to see and represent without being seen in turn or having to declare themselves" (100). By

eliminating the direct implication of the British in the confrontation between Aneeka and Lone while offering them the position of the unseen spectator, Shamsie seems to grant the British observer the power and authority to notice, judge and represent without directly intervening in the scene. The real cause of Muslim minorities against their oppressors, hence, seems to be camouflaged and neglected, while the focus is rather shifted towards the war among Muslims themselves. Both Aneeka and Lone, as archetypes representing the “bad” and “good” Muslims become spotlighted and condemned while assuming the accusations of pointing fingers and the expectations of scrutinizing eyes. This portrayal, hence, risks to plague the novel with a re-orientalist undercurrent that contributes to subalternizing Muslims, who are kept misrepresented and Otherized by their likes.

5. Conclusion

The centre in *Home Fire* is turned from the site of power and authority to the site of impotency and vulnerability. The novel shows how the centralization and hypervisibility of Pakistani Muslims are the basic strategies adopted by the British state and society to maintain the former's state of subalternity and oppression. Affected by the “post 9/11 Syndrome”, the British people, as portrayed in *Home Fire*, are too sensitive to the presence of Pakistani-Muslims among them. This sensitivity is translated into a state of paranoia, insecurity, and hypervigilance that makes the British government and society work to tighten their stranglehold on Pakistani-Muslim families as breeding grounds for terrorists by putting them on centre stage to be constantly watched and supervised. In this article, I attempted to unveil the processes of centralization displayed in the novel which include mainly the mediatic spotlighting and “exposure” of Pakistani-Muslims as potential threats and their inclusion in the British political sphere. The second one proves how some of the “democratic” practices and policies, which are supposed to be privileges guaranteeing equality and justice among the different social categories, are turned into means of manipulation and control. Additionally, this article examined the challenges imposed by the centrality and “the authority” of the author while attempting to speak and represent subaltern populations. Reading Shamsie's representation of the Pakistani-Muslim subaltern in light of “The Spectacle of the Other” adopted by the West, this research showed that despite its subverting potential, the novel has a re-orientalist undercurrent that makes it adhere to the “Spectacle of the

Muslim". Through adopting the Western processes of centralization and show-ification in her portrayal of the hijabi woman, specifically, Shamsie fails to do justice to this category which is the victim of double marginalization. In this sense, the novel seems to confirm Spivack's claim that ex-colonized intellectuals risk contributing to the re-inscription of their population's subalternity by "inheriting" their oppressors' strategies of representation.

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