

British Muslim Identities and Spectres of Terror in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*

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In an early attempt at measuring the challenge of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath for creative writers and artists, Gerrit-Jan Berendse and Mark Williams suggest the need for “not only repoliticised modes of understanding but also a new grammar of response” (10). Their rationale is not that history recommenced with the destruction of the Twin Towers. Rather, they call for considered alternatives to “war-on-terror” rhetoric that, as Judith Butler puts it, “in its sloshy metonymy, returns us to the invidious distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as ‘Islam’ itself)” (*Precarious Life* 2).¹ That such rhetoric has become less bellicose in the post-Bush and Blair phase of intervention in the Middle East does not render its discursive strategies obsolete. Repeated tropes are, among other things, relentlessly gendered, as is illustrated by the entanglement of imperialist and feminist discourses in media coverage of Afghan women’s rights.²

This article explores ways in which Nadeem Aslam’s second novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) participates in the construction of British Muslim identities in the aftermath of 9/11. I am interested in how a writer implicated by virtue of his cultural affiliations in national and transnational constructions of Islam might engage the “apparently ‘new’ and all consuming ‘grammar’” of the war on terror and “keep making art in the face of terror itself” (Nasta with Boehmer 1). Two preliminary questions about the function of literature arise, one pertaining to an oft-cited “burden of representation” (discussed below) and the other to the status of art and its ambiguous relation to truth. Krista Hunt and Kim Ryzgiel suggest that when examining any truth claim about the war on terror, one might ask the following questions:

¹ The Orientalist binary was reinvigorated by Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, taken up by the Western media in the aftermath of 9/11: see Bonney. Gupta argues that the 9/11 attacks were calculated to divide Western societies internally and to destabilize the Middle East. He contends that the “war on terror” (which I will leave subsequently unmarked) has constructed “Islamic” terrorism and, in so doing, has encouraged resistance couched in religious terms (97-9)

² On the Anglo-American deployment of oppressed Afghan womanhood as spur for military intervention, see cooke and Part I of Hunt and Ryzgiel. The issue of women’s rights resurfaced as the war in Afghanistan regained centre stage in 2009. This does not deny the misogyny of some Afghan social, political and legal practices, but points to the *instrumental* function that Muslim women serve in Anglo-American public discourse.

Which nation, government, people, and/or ideology is produced and reinforced by this story? Who is identified as being in need of rescue/salvation and who are the rescuers? Who/what has been identified as the enemy? Whose interests are being served? How do certain gendered, racialized, classed and sexualized groups benefit from the production of certain stories and who/what are rendered invisible by these stories? (6)

In addition to identifying tropes common to colonialist and war-on-terror rhetoric, Hunt and Rygiel draw our attention to the selective, framed, focalized and narrated structures of official and artistic discourses. However, as Salman Rushdie suggests in his depiction of literature as “the one place in society where...we can hear voices talking about everything in every possible way” (“Is Nothing Sacred?” 429), fiction has particularly strong, even fundamentally heteroglossic and dialogical tendencies.

We first need to consider the relationship between terror, an affective *response* (anticipatory or reactive), and terrorism, an *act* of violent intimidation that indiscriminately targets civilians. To conflate the two terms, as in the “war on terror,” is to elide terrorizing tactics deployed by states, as in the US “shock and awe” bombing of Iraq in 2003 or Israel’s 2008-9 attacks on Gaza. The Orientalist axiom of terrorism—as Edward Said puts it, “‘we’ are never terrorists” (152)—effaces (neo-)imperialist interests and actions. In related fashion, focusing on the emotional and aesthetic connotations of terror risks deflecting attention from the geopolitical context of its production (Morton 36-7). However, given that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were presented metaleptically—terrorism as (arguably) an *effect* of imperialism was rendered a *cause* of its further expansion (36)—it is necessary to consider how war-on-terror discourse has operated.

Judith Butler’s *Precarious Lives* usefully examines registers deployed in narrating the relationship between the event of 9/11 and the US response to it. Butler relates terror to a semi-conscious awareness of the fragility of individual bodies and, by extension, the social corpus. Acts or threats of terrorism render visible an *a priori* state: life is precarious and vulnerable to the will of others. Arjun Appadurai adds that terrorism achieves its effects by producing social uncertainty about the identity and (in)visibility of agents of violence, their motives, and the location and timing of their acts; this produces a sense of permanent emergency at the heart of civilian life (68, 77-9). He reminds us that violence—whether of a state-sanctioned or non-state variety—“is one of the ways in which the illusion of fixed and charged identities is produced, partly to allay the uncertainties about identity that global flows invariably produce” (7). With reference to political discourse in the United States after 9/11, Butler illustrates that the nation was exhorted to reassert its “corporeal” integrity, partly by way of pre-emptive violence against external entities defined as enemies. Key to this process was the production of legitimate ways of narrating what had occurred: “in order to sustain the affective structure in which we are, on the one hand, victimized and, on the other, engaged in a righteous cause of rooting out terror, we have to begin the story with the violence *we* suffered” (*Precarious Life*, my emphasis 6).

Butler proposes a twofold alternative: to redefine community on the basis of *shared* precariousness and to broaden the lens on the geopolitical distribution of security and vulnerability. An increased capacity for identification may thereby be possible with individuals and groups who have always been subject to social, economic, political and discursive violence (*Precarious Life* 20). In the case of Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (hereafter *Maps*), I similarly posit a reframing of terror. Stepping back from the conflationary rhetoric of terror/terrorism/Islam produced by macrocosmic discourses allows one to focus on uneasy intersections of ethnicity, religion, gender and class in the margins of social space. It cannot be argued that 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror function directly as background to the novel since some of *Maps*, eleven years in the writing, was written before those events and its setting is Britain in 1997. Intriguingly, however, Aslam has suggested that "small-scale September 11s go on every day," citing the central act of violence in *Maps* as one example (Brace unpag.).³ The novel proposes that ordinary people, in this case principally first and second-generation British Asian Muslims, live with *quotidian* forms of terror. This is not a situation unequivocally associated with migration and resettlement: Pakistan, too, is described as "a harsh and disastrously unjust land, its history a book of full of sad stories" (Aslam, *Maps* 9). The main effect, however, is to animate and nuance the lived experience of a particularized Muslim community, thereby challenging multicultural and war-on-terror-affiliated discourses extant in twenty-first-century Britain.

Since the turn of the millennium, the British public has been much exposed to debates about the form, function and ethical imperatives of multiculturalism, the pre-eminent policy term, in attempts to manage heterogeneous cultural space. Anne-Marie Fortier comments that "it [is] impossible not to notice just how unsettled and unsettling 'multicultural' Britain is" and proposes that multiculturalism is—for its advocates—"an *ideal* aimed at the achievement of well-managed diversity" (2, 3). This "horizon" paradoxically marks an inward turn that invokes and buttresses the nation. What Fortier therefore terms "multiculturalist nationalism" has affinities with the selectively elegiac mode that Butler critiques in US public reactions to 9/11.⁴ Aiming to knit communities into a shared sense of national belonging, multiculturalism symptomatically reveals amnesiac tendencies: Fortier argues that it is "invested in cultivating feelings within and for the nation...at the expense of examining the legacies and inequalities of racialized, gendered, sexualized class histories" (14, 22, 7).⁵ A related argument is that such histories are only selectively acknowledged, or remembered in a melancholic register (Gilroy).

³ In a subplot, a young unemployed immigrant seems to have died when a tower block in which he seeks refuge is demolished; evocatively, given the post-9/11 reading context, a peripheral character sees the tower fall silently and suddenly from a distance (Aslam, *Maps* 220).

⁴ Compare "cellular" terrorist networks not invested in the idea of nation (Appadurai 3, ch2).

⁵ Fortier reads against the grain of the Parekh Report (2000), which called, among other things, for greater public acknowledgement of Britain's imperial past.

Hybridized space/time has, rather differently, been the imaginary horizon of much post-1945 British fiction produced by settling migrants and their descendants. Diaspora literatures often project a post-nationalist future, sometimes with reference to a historical colonial contact zone, in which difference is conceived as integral rather than marginal. National identity is reformulated as what Roger Bromley terms “a performative location... constitutive and positioning, not enclosing and excluding” (6). The utopian tenor of such conceptual paradigms should be acknowledged because, as Appadurai argues, “minorities (and their small numbers) remind... majorities of the small gap that lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos” (8). In Britain, as in other former imperial nations—and not just there—the insertion of “difference” (as opposed to a banal “diversity”) into hegemonic national narratives continues *agonistically* to be impelled.

Fortier, recalling ways in which the war on terror has been framed as a “culturalization” of political conflict, observes a “taxonomic shift in Britain, from ‘ethnic minorities’ in the 1970s to ‘minority faith communities’ today,” casting “beliefs, morals and values [as] the primary site for the marking of absolute difference” (5, 6).⁶ To some extent, this is a response to Islamic revivalism produced, in large part, by “a long colonial and postcolonial history, which has shaped a community’s perception of itself in terms of the Other” (Bilgrami 832). In literary rather than policy contexts, though, perhaps due to a time lag in the relationship between events, creative work and the generation of interpretative frameworks, “difference” has tended to be defined by ethnicity. Amin Malak flags up in postcolonial literary criticism “a resistance to engage with religion as a key category pertinent to the debate about contemporary neo-colonial reality. Such an inattentive or deliberate marginalization of religion” reflects “a secular, Euro-American stance” (17). But Black British and British Asian fiction also presents a paucity of texts privileging faith as primary and positive determinant of identity.⁷ Hanif Kureishi’s early work, for example, foregrounds ethnicity, class and sexuality and a conceptual framework of boundary crossing, whilst presenting Islamic revivalism as monolithic and reactionary.⁸ In the counter-canonization of such writers, internal hierarchies of minority experience become settled. James Procter makes a cognate argument about the neglect of

⁶ Anxieties about Islam in the UK context pre-date 9/11, but the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2005 London attacks has seen unprecedented levels of surveillance and legislation that infringes upon rights, notably the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001), replaced by the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2005).

⁷ Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* and *Minaret* are recent exceptions. Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* more ambivalently foregrounds faith and religion: see Jussawalla and Malak. A politics of production and reception no doubt plays a part in what gets published, reviewed, anthologized and focused upon by the reading public.

⁸ See Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and *My Son, the Fanatic*. As Kenan Malik recalls, “Twenty years ago ‘radical’ meant... someone who was militantly secular, self-consciously Western and avowedly left-wing” (xii).

non-metropolitan and northern British locations.⁹ He recommends that we critically examine the theoretical dominance of “vocabularies of liminality, border, itinerancy, dislocation [and] hybridity,” in order to attend to the other side of the etymology of diaspora—*speiren*, to sow as well as scatter—and so to economies of dwelling and settlement and struggles over the definition of “home” (12-14).

An engagement with identity politics is clearly not a requirement for writers, whether or not they identify as Black British, British Asian, British Muslim or Asian Muslim, to cite categories with shifting currency.¹⁰ However, the “burden of representation” is often voluntarily assumed. As Ruvani Ranasinha argues, “[i]n contrast to predictions of assimilation...stories such as...Aslam’s...suggest that the complexities of multicultural Britain continue to be fertile ground for novelists” (67). In *Maps*, the character Shamas’s reflections on his son’s artistic practice gesture toward a possible motivation on the part of the author: “He hasn’t known how to read Charag’s paintings in the past...but now, now that he has mentioned that he might do something with the photographs of immigrants, Shamas knows that he is maturing...becoming aware of his responsibilities as an artist” (319).

Aslam was born in Lahore in 1967. Due to the communist affiliations of his father—formerly a poet and filmmaker, and a likely influence upon the character of Shamas—the family elected exile during Zia ul Haq’s presidency. Aslam spent his adolescence in Huddersfield, near Bradford. Whilst he is not British Asian according to conventional requirements of birth in Britain, he claims a hyphenated identity and has described himself as culturally a Muslim, but a non-believer (Brace unpag.). Malak provides an interpretative paradigm for this statement, claiming that in its distinction from “Islamic,” which should refer to sanctioned theological traditions, the term “Muslim” allows for an “individual writer’s conception, vision, and rendition of the culture of Islam.” Moreover, it can be extended to include a “person who voluntarily and knowingly refers to [him or] herself, for whatever motives, as a ‘Muslim’ when given a selection of identitarian choices; and/or... who is rooted formatively and emotionally in the culture and civilization of Islam” (6, 7). One’s “identity” is a shifting and multifaceted thing, even in the face of external or internal drives to define it, and “Islam” is a worldview enabling heterogeneous modes of interpellation and critical engagement. Akeel Bilgrami’s statement remains relevant:

There may be some for whom Islam is nothing short of a monolithic commitment, overriding all other commitments, whenever history or personal encounter poses a conflict. But I think it is safe to say, despite a familiar tradition of colonial and postcolonial caricature in Western representations of Islam, that

⁹ Kureishi describes his own encounter, as a metropolitan, middle-class British Pakistani, with the vernacular, Northern, working-class British Asian culture of Bradford: “I could have been in another country” (“Bradford” 43).

¹⁰ See Ranasinha.

such an absolutist project is the exception in a highly diverse and internally conflicted religious community. (823)¹¹

Feroza Jussawalla's identification of a South Asian syncretic version of Muslim culture (65) provides a further illuminating frame for Aslam's novel, as I will discuss.

Maps is set in the post-industrial north of England in a town loosely modelled on Huddersfield and centres upon a family who arrived from Pakistan in the 1970s. The location of the action enables Aslam to home in on a particular community. Nearby Bradford, which Philip Lewis has called the centre of Islamic Britain, has witnessed the "Honeyford Affair" of 1985, the first burnings of copies of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 and riots in 2001.¹² The strand of Islam promulgated at Aslam's fictional mosque is probably the Barelvi populist and conservative tradition, strongly represented in the Leeds area (see Modood). The characters Shamas and his wife Kaukab are of the first generation of migrants to Britain. The largely Pakistani community in which they live is defined by semi-elected segregation and "institutional completeness": members of the community participate in their own socio-cultural activities and patronize ethnic institutions, thereby reducing the potential for meeting outsiders, in particular white Britons (Breton; Dahya 94-5; ctd. in Chambers 4). Shamas's and Kaukab's three young adult children, by contrast, are integrated in mainstream society but alienated, to varying degrees, from their parents and their community. The town is described almost exclusively from the perspective of its minority communities and its official name is never revealed. Each road is renamed with reference to a part of the Indian subcontinent from whence a specific minority group hails.¹³ These names ironically reflect a legacy of European colonial presence, as well as the nationalist politics that subsequently divided the Subcontinent:

As in Lahore, a road in this town is named after Goethe. There is a Park Street here as in Calcutta, a Malabar Hill as in Bombay, and a Naag Tolla Hill as in Dhaka. Because it was difficult to pronounce the English names, the men who arrived in this town in the 1950s had re-christened everything they saw before them. They had come from across the Subcontinent, had lived together ten to a room, and the name that one of them happened to give to a street or landmark was

¹¹ Bilgrami points out a relative absence of reformist thinking amongst moderate Muslims, contributing to "the susceptibility of Islamic polities to constant threat from powerful minority movements that assert Islamic identity [as] nonnegotiable" (824).

¹² The "Honeyford Affair" concerned a headmaster suspended for criticizing multicultural educational policy. The riots in and around Bradford in 2001 involved confrontations between groups of white and Asian youths and the police.

¹³ This process of renaming appears to be a common strategy. In Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers*, refugees from the Partition of 1947 transpose the topography of Lucknow: "As soon as they recovered their breath after reaching Karachi, the entire city emerged from their hearts, brick by brick" (13). In her study of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Julie Peteet describes processes of remapping the UNRWA camps: "As the refugees strived to settle, as much as possible, along family and village lines, the social mapping of the camps had a resemblance of sorts to pre-1948 Palestine, a familiar and safe social landscape. An attempt was made to cast space as place using former regional and social maps" (173-4). I thank an anonymous reviewer for these examples.

taken up by the others, regardless of where they themselves were from. But over the decades, as more and more people came, the various nationalities of the Subcontinent have changed the names according to the specific country they themselves are from—Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan. (Aslam, *Maps* 29)

Communities are affiliated respectively to mosque, church, and (Hindu and Sikh) temple and defined by their region of origin. The citizens agree exclusively on the name of the town: “Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The Wilderness of Solitude. The Desert of Loneliness” (29).

The novel opens with a classic motif in literatures of migration—the first view of snow.¹⁴ Shamas is made to seem aware of the citational quality of the landscape when he describes snow-covered houses “tangled with fables and myths” and each street as “a row of books on a shelf” (24). Aslam’s use of setting is richly allusive. For example, “the deep snow has at its base a thin sheet of packed ice through which the dry leaves of the field maples can be seen as though sealed behind glass. They are as intricate as the gold jewellery from the Subcontinent—treasures buried under the snow till a rainy day” (8). Shamas’s bifocal cultural perspective reveals a profoundly present but symbolically frozen South Asian reality. When he takes some snow in his hand, it melts “into a monsoon raindrop,” making him recall that, amidst “innumerable other losses... to come to England was to lose a season,” that of the monsoon (5). The image thus also signals an aporia, recalling “years of exile and banishment” from Pakistan (6). This absent presence is duplicated in the text’s structure, organized around the four English rather than the five Pakistani seasons.

The imbuing of images of lyrical beauty with foreboding undertones—as when an “icicle breaks off from above and drops like a radiant dagger towards Shamas” (3)—is typical of Aslam’s style. An ironic debunking of putative improvements in the immigrant experience, for example, culminates in the following passage:

There were violent physical attacks. At night the scented geraniums were dragged to the centres of downstairs rooms in the hope that the breeze dense with rosehips and ripening limes would get to the sleepers upstairs ahead of the white intruders who had generated it by brushing past the foliage in the dark after breaking in. (11)

Most importantly, the opening scene of Shamas at the threshold of his house introduces a signature technique: the bearing across of motifs and references from the Pakistani to the northern English context in order to render the depressing urban landscape pastoral, even exotic. The text’s creative touchstones, as suggested by its dedication, are the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the painter Abdur Rahman Chughtai, whose deer and cyprus illustration graces the book’s section breaks and the cover of a book of poetry published by Shamas. One chapter title is borrowed from an etching by Lahori-born Anwar Saeed; another from a painting by the Indian artist Bhupen Kakar.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ See, for example, V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*, ch1. I am indebted to Chambers (5) for this point.

¹⁵ The chapters are “You’ll Forget Love, Like Other Disasters” and “How Many

qawwali singer and musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan performs for the townspeople; he later dies and is mourned by the Pakistani community. Key symbols in the novel—facilitated by the fact that Aslam’s brother Jugnu is a lepidopterist—are butterflies, moths and peacocks, stock tropes of Urdu literature: Jussawalla explains that winged creatures are a feature of the *dastan*, a longwinded love song or complaint to the beloved (54, 70; see also Brace unpag.). *Maps* does not closely resemble the *dastan*, a linear but loosely strung together series of episodes (Hanaway 142; ctd. in Jussawalla 69), but its multiple plots suggest an underlying influence. The trajectory of Shamas’s life narrative is also reminiscent of the structure of the *ghazal*, showing “the rejection of Islam for some new object of epistemological and erotic devotion” (Suleri, “Contraband Histories” 609).

In *Maps*, rumour has it that the missing man and woman at the heart of the narrative have turned into peacocks, a reference, the novel explains, to the Islamic sacred texts, in which a peacock inadvertently lets Satan into Eden (Aslam, *Maps* 334). Butterflies and moths are associated with the dangers of sexual transgression. The closing image of Chapter One evokes female sexual agency, in particular, in spectacularly ambivalent fashion:

The female was motionless except when it swished its wings gently to disperse the odour that had gradually flooded the two houses with the faint electricity of a yearning inexpressible in any other way, undetected by the humans but pulling the nineteen males towards its source slowly at first and then hand over hand a yard at a time as they learned to distinguish truth from lie and arrived to drape the entire cage in reverberating velvet. (22-3)

Metaphorical patterning seems to implicate Shamas’s brother Jugnu (in whose house the above scene takes place), who apocryphally has luminous hands that no moth or butterfly can resist, but lives in a house full of *dead* creatures: “there are numerous glass-topped cases containing moths and butterflies...the long pin impaling each body reminiscent of the shaft that passes vertically through the wooden horse of a carousel” (25). But Jugnu is also victimized: in the opening pages we discover that he disappeared five months earlier with his lover Chanda: both are assumed dead, purportedly due to an “honour killing” by the latter’s brothers.

As in *Alf Layla wa Layla*, the set of originally oral tales known to English readers as the *Thousand and One Nights*, illicit sex sets in motion “a set of tales” (61) involving violent crimes. In *Maps*, two of the three female characters to express sexual desire are killed and the affair of the third (Kiran) is the indirect catalyst for the central murder. The parallel murder involves a young Muslim woman with a Hindu boyfriend who is killed during a violent exorcism organised by her family. In the third narrative strand, Kiran is discovered by her occasional lover, Chanda’s brother, reunited with her first love, Kaukab’s brother. The earlier relationship was forbidden because Kiran is Sikh; the later one points up the double standard that pertains

Hands Do I Need to Declare My Love to You?”

to men and women who engage in extra-marital and cross-faith sexual relations. The same point is made about Kiran's neighbour, a white prostitute presumably visited by British Asian men in the community: "had she been Indian or Pakistani, she would have been assaulted and driven out of the area within days of moving in for bringing shame upon her people" (16). As Shamas reflects, "the poet-saints of Islam express[ed] their loathing of power and injustice always through female protagonists" (191). Aslam seems similarly concerned to evoke the experiences of women "screaming, cooing, reassuring, out of control, in charge, shouting in pain, in pleasure, laughing, sobbing. Charag sometimes feels that to come to this old neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, these Asian streets and lanes of his childhood, is like entering one large labour room, full of the voices of women expressing a spectrum of emotions" (132).

Although Aslam distinguishes between institutional conservative Islam, on the one hand, and a Muslim cultural heritage, on the other, it is nevertheless the case that *Maps* is loaded with examples of religious abuse. Whereas the community's Hindu priest is presented as empathic and tolerant, the Imam is arrested for paedophilia. The dominant point of focalization belongs to the resolutely secular Shamas, whose father was born into a Hindu family but separated from them in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar (1919) and brought up a Muslim. This narrative device embeds British colonial violence in the family archives and implicitly undercuts recent definitions of Pakistan as Muslim that can be seen to betray its secular founding principles. (A similar allegorical technique is deployed when Shamas remembers that his father's aorta ruptured and his body "consume[d] itself" (82) on the day the Indian army moved into secessionist East Pakistan in 1971, underpinning the formation of Bangladesh.) For these reasons, Aslam's demurral about the influence of 9/11 on his writing seems a little arch. The relentless coupling of intolerance and violence with Islamic institutions and politics may even be seen to throw into relief that which it ostensibly excludes: "Islamic" terrorism.

The novel's ambivalence hinges centrally on the character of Kaukab. However, although she is critically presented as vehicle for the most intractable ideas about identity, Kaukab's viewpoint is worlded in a way that makes her character credible and, to some extent, sympathetic (the same can be said about the less-developed character Suraya, Shamas's lover). Having arrived in Britain with a rudimentary grasp of English, her education incomplete due to her marriage to Shamas, Kaukab has become increasingly reclusive, to the point where she wears special "outdoor clothes" to protect herself against contamination by "dirty whites" and has a particular antipathy toward her eldest son's white partner. Consistently shown indoors, in contra-distinction to her husband, Kaukab's claustrophobic experience and limited engagement with other epistemologies are mutually informing. Discussing a material shop with the neighbourhood matchmaker, she says: "I don't go there often—white people's houses start soon after that street, and even the Pakistanis there are not from our part of Pakistan" (42). Pathos is created through the contrast

between her current mindset and her memories of arriving in Britain “bright with optimism” (32). Kaukab quickly discovered that, due to her downwardly-scaled class position, unemployed status, limited English skills and visible religious identity, society was closed to her: “It was as though, when the doors of Pakistan closed upon her, her hands had forgotten the art of knocking” (32). She became, in her words, “a beggar who did not want to stretch out her hand because that hand was dirty” (313). Kaukab’s failure to integrate, shaped by a lack of opportunity to do so, is painfully demonstrated through her propensity to malapropism and difficulty with proverbs in English. It opens a chasm between her and Shamas who, in an apposite reminder of British multicultural ideals, is Director of the Community Relations Council, “the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own” (15). Kaukab’s marginal status is compounded by what she perceives as the desertion of her three children: “Her children were all she had, but she herself was only a part of their lives, a very small part” (30).

In the latter stages of the novel, the family is temporarily reunited at an elaborate meal—Kaukab consistently sublimates her feelings in the preparation of food—in order to commemorate Jugnu’s death. Here long-buried secrets emerge, with Kaukab held to account for various acts of violence. Her second son Ujala accuses her of poisoning him as a child with bromide, given by a cleric in the guise of consecrated salt (304). Although his mother protests her innocence and has revealed to the reader a more ambivalent attitude toward the Jugnu-Chanda affair than her family realise, we do see her as perpetrator of violent acts. Her daughter is aware that “[t]rapped within the cage of permitted thinking, this woman—her mother—is the most dangerous animal she’ll ever have to confront” (111). Mah-Jabin has earlier been abused by a husband procured through “that organized crime called arranged marriages” perpetrated by women of her mother’s generation (106). And when she dares to remind her mother of the differences between them, she is threatened with a kitchen knife described as “the sharp edge of her [mother’s] despair and defeat” (114). As Mah-Jabin realizes, though, many of Kaukab’s actions are the result of her fear and incomprehension. It is no accident, given the partial loss of her children to “Englishness,” that Kaukab’s womb is graphically falling out. She appears to herself, in her dreams, as both executioner and murdered corpse (58). Poignantly, when Ujala accuses her of supporting a religion which denies dignity to women, she responds: “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...?” (322).

Aslam intertwines perspectives and gradually reveals back-stories as a means of contextualizing human motivations, desires, limitations and frustrations. At the end of the novel, an omniscient narrator ties together all the preceding testimonies. The Jugnu-Chanda double murder is reframed as the culmination of multiple, interconnecting coincidences, complicities and silences. Kaukab has earlier voiced a collective belief 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). This suggests a cautious approach on the part of the author toward intensely topical subject matter. The privileged position in this work of fiction is the combating of silence: “shame, guilt, honour and fear are like padlocks hanging from mouths... The place is bumpy with buried secrets and problems swept under the carpets” (45). But the use of shifting perspective and the interweaving of speech and silence suggest that subaltern experience may be transmittable only in contingent and aporetic fashion. Moreover, when Shamas reflects that “[l]anguage can provide some refuge from terror” (25), he implies that narration can euphemistically conceal truth as well as transform reality.¹⁶ The destructive potential of speech, as well as silence, is clear in representations of the neighbourhood 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” (176).

The novel also abounds with examples of failed attempts at communication, transposition and translation: from seeds, sent from Pakistan, that will not take in English soil (95), to the heart of a dead white woman stolen and buried by her son so that it would not be transplanted into a black man’s body (153), to a hidden letter indicting Mah-Jabin’s husband of abuse that Kaukab discovers belatedly (108, 306). Due to hostile relations between Pakistan and India, letters between the two places have to be sent via a third destination, “the entire procedure reminiscent of a rubber ball being made to bounce off a wall by the left hand to be caught on the return journey by the right one” (74). Shamas once wooed Kaukab by writing marginalia in “invisible” ink on the literary supplement of newspapers borrowed from her father; she transposed his verses on to the patterns of her wedding dress. Later, feeling isolated in Britain, she burns the dress, causing Shamas to strike and temporarily leave her. While in Kashmiri legend, paisley-shaped footprints lead Shiva to Parvati (164-5), Shamas dies seeking his lost lover, Suraya. And when, in the penultimate chapter, Shamas repeats his ritual with the snow, the fact that it again melts in his hand hints that Suraya, watching from an upstairs window, has miscarried or aborted their foetus (291). To give a final example, a poem written by the young Hindu man for his dead Muslim lover is forbidden from being buried with her.

A scrap of this poem is, however, discovered by Suraya, who reads: “the heart is the first organ to form and the last to die” (204). This fragment survives as a trace of transformative if contingent transplantations and translations, illustrated elsewhere in the culturally and linguistically hybrid landscape—for example, in the modification of racist National Front graffiti to read “NFAK Rules” in reference to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (162)—and, in a wider sense, by an

¹⁶ Shamas makes this comment when he hears that the police have named the murder investigation “Operation Ivory.” He muses that they are expecting to find bones, but the use of a term that recalls a normative British whiteness and is redolent of colonial exploitation is surely not accidental.

intersubjective ethos. Counterbalancing tragedies that tear the family and wider community asunder, on the final page a peripheral character reflects that he will “go out into the world again. If a calamity is coming then where else would he rather be than with his fellow humans? What is there but them?” (369). This echoes an earlier thought of Kaukab’s when she queries: “surely no-one—no people, no civilization—would think other people were Hell. What else was there but other people?” (33).

Shamas considers that the work of an artist is to “reveal the ideal to us, telling us what’s truly worth living for, and dying for, in life” (168). In an intertextual echo, a *qawwali* foregrounds a female protagonist in love with the “wrong” man and commemorates her act of mourning. In a rather pointed use of symbolism, she dies “with her head resting on *the crescent shape*” of her lover’s camel’s footstep (189, my emphasis). Once again, though, religion should not be seen as unilaterally critiqued; the novel also exposes the limitations of Shamas’s secular perspective. He “is not a believer, so he knows that the universe is without saviours: the surface of the earth is a great shroud whose dead will not be resurrected” (20). Various lost lovers do, however, maintain a spectral presence in, for example, “the names and initials lovers have carved on the wood [of the jetty] in Urdu, Hindi and Bengali as well as English” (149). In the penultimate chapter, Shamas encounters the Hindu man who believes he sees his own spirit and that of his lost love walking by the lake (the same ghosts are identified as Chanda and Jugnu by other members of the community). While Shamas dismisses the vision as irrational, the intertwining of the two men’s illicit love stories revealed at the same time—the husband of the dead Muslim woman has remarried Suraya—reminds us of the complex reality of this text’s world that the secular Shamas can never entirely comprehend.

Michael O’Riley draws our attention to ways in which postcolonial writing unearths colonial histories as spectres of the European nation’s heritage (2). Homi K. Bhabha has argued that such “hauntologies” insert a disruptive temporality into national teleologies (251-7).¹⁷ O’Riley also considers the trope of haunting in postcolonial theory, proposing that it “represents a suspended condition, in-between because it is symptomatic of an era posed between the traces of an increasingly inoperative colonial history and uncertain transnational forms of hierarchy and oppression” (2). He reminds us that a colonial past may be evoked in order to justify a politics of victimization and culpability; or competing memories of a colonial past might impede cohesion amongst minority communities; or colonial memories might veil new forms of oppression and resistance (4). It may also lead to a fetishization of cultural difference, not to mention forms of Othering that can result when constructions of gender and sexuality are at stake. It becomes crucial, given the ways in which a postcolonial rubric can screen complex ongoing struggles, to find ways of theorizing about “contemporary contexts that find postcolonial communities grappling

¹⁷ The term “hauntology,” which (p)refigures “ontology” as an absent-presence, is Derrida’s.

with globalization as well as the sharing of diverse, often conflicting memories of colonialism” (4). O’Riley calls, in other words, for the kinds of situated haunting that Aslam’s novel privileges.

The relationship between a transmitting perspective and occulted subaltern subjects is negotiated in *Maps* through the use of structural aporia, the interplay of speech and silence and the conceptual figure of the ghost. The novel is centred upon absent protagonists: Chanda, Jugnu and the young unnamed Muslim woman are already dead when the narrative opens and Shamas dies in the denouement. It is permeated by partially buried histories anchored to experiences in the Subcontinent as well as in Britain and contains a surplus of subplots that supplement the work of excavation and commemoration performed by its dominant narrative. *Maps* is structured and stylized by loss as well as the plenitude of a double cultural affiliation, asserting the continued affective resonance of places left physically behind. Inclusion and marginality are calibrated according to generation, gender, ethnicity, religion and economic status. In sum, this novel evokes a liminal phase in postcolonial relations between communities in Britain as they struggle over definitions of nation and modernity. The tone is indubitably melancholic. The ghosts at the lake glow with the residue of their incomplete life-narratives: if they are understood to be Jugnu and Chanda, then “Chanda’s stomach glow[s] brightly because of the baby she’s carrying”; if it is the other Muslim woman that the Hindu lover sees, then “her stomach glows because that’s where on her dead body [her lover’s] letter was [temporarily] placed” (Aslam, *Maps* 365).

O’Riley suggests that a critical turn toward affect—obviously central to the imaginative architecture of *Maps*—might produce the nexus of a *transformational* haunting in postcolonial work (5). While he privileges anxiety as an ethical register (6), for Ranjana Khanna, melancholia resists the palliatives offered by hegemonic national memories or “monumental scripts of cultural heritage” (“Post-Palliative” unpag.). Butler, for her part, eschews what she sees as the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia and calls for a more inclusive mourning (*Precarious Life* xiv, 30). Comparing 9/11 obituaries for US citizens and the missing narratives of Afghan and Iraqi victims of “retaliatory” military invasions by Coalition forces, Butler argues that “the derealization of the ‘Other’ means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (33-4). Ghosts signify the trace of a withheld mourning that would acknowledge a common humanity and shared responsibility for the violent state of the contemporary world. Butler responds by promoting a radical interdependency: “the primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fibre of the boundary that contains me (one meaning of ‘incorporation’), but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded” (28). She extrapolates the foregoing to an image of the nation in which “topographies have shifted, and what was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site, if not the very definition of nation, confounding identity in what may well

become a very auspicious direction” (49). Butler actually invokes a melancholic paradigm in which the encrypted “unconscious dimensions of nation subjecthood”—its marginal inhabitants and their marginalised memories—haunt and exert pressure on definitions of the nation over time (Khanna, *Dark Continents* 12, 19).¹⁸

Tensions regarding British national identity have recently often coalesced around the figure of “the Muslim woman.” As Fortier illustrates with reference to the 2005 “veil row” instigated by MP (and at that time leader of the House of Commons) Jack Straw, although moderate Muslims are distinguished from an orthodoxy perceived as threatening to the British way of life, we are simultaneously presented with “signs of a sex/gender system that is, even in its moderate manifestation, ‘less equal’ to the British one, and that is an expression of inherent cultural differences” (96). Former Home Secretary David Blunkett proposed in 2002 that there is a “continuing tension between modernity and the cultural practices of some of those entering highly advanced countries” (ctd. in Fortier 97). Such casual conflation of geographical space and historical time¹⁹ stalls conceptions of multiculturalism between the poles of intractable difference and unproductive relativism. As Fortier points out, “within popular and policy discourses, different versions of multiculturalism co-exist,” including assimilationist and differentialist models (68), but these models can be mutually constitutive, as was made clear by Straw’s comments on the *niqab* as obstruction to cross-community and interfaith dialogue. Since the “Cantle Report” (2001)—commissioned in response to the Bradford riots of that summer—official policy has emphasized a politics of propinquity (neighbourliness) and community cohesion. Yet “concealed within a generalized ‘inter-ethnicness’ are several conditions that prescribe who can mix with whom and under what circumstances” and “technologies of corrective citizenship [that aim] to groom men and women into proper citizens of multicultural Britain” (69).

Aslam’s novel is not focused on “loving thy neighbor.”²⁰ Rather, it emphasizes, as other invested parties have pointed out, that multicultural policy “fails to deal with problems *within* communities (such as forced marriage)” (Southall Black Sisters; ctd. in Fortier 73). In 2003, the Metropolitan Police set up a strategic task force to

¹⁸ Butler describes melancholia as a refusal to incorporate loss, hence as withheld mourning (*Precarious Life* 37). However, her argument, that “if my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the ‘we’ is traversed by a relationality” (22), resonates with Freud’s later conception of melancholia. While in “Mourning and Melancholia” he thought the latter produced an impoverished ego, in *The Ego and the Id*, he states: “the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and... contains the history of those object-choices” (29). As Butler herself argues elsewhere, the melancholic ego should be read as “the archaeological remainder...of unresolved grief” (*Psychic Life* 133). Melancholia thus undoes the ego’s boundaries, leaving a trace of the other.

¹⁹ Fortier makes the same point (97-8).

²⁰ Aslam’s tight, indeed claustrophobic, focus resonates with a point made by Bilgrami, that if the West is cast in “a strictly limited and circumscribed role,” Muslims might overcome a “third-person” defensive or victimized perspective and attain “a *first-person* point of view, essential to the idea of agency” (836, 837).

investigate current and past incidents of honour killings in the UK. A study commissioned by the UK Centre for Social Cohesion (an offshoot of the right-wing think tank Civitas) claims that community networks, including women and second-generation migrants, are involved in assisting and covering up 12 or 13 such crimes per year (Brandon and Hafez). Honour killings, it is agreed across the political spectrum, represent human rights violations that must be confronted in both national and international forums.²¹ This is, however, a sensitive issue in the British context, concerning as it does members of minority groups who may have uneasy affiliations to the nation and/or transnational “elective affinities” (Hesse), and given an already well-documented tendency in Western political and critical discourses to demonize Islam. Conscientious objection will be most effective when initiated from within the communities that it affects most violently.

Analysts remind us that honour crimes are not peculiar to a particular geographical area of belief system: they occur in various Mediterranean and Latin American as well as Muslim collectivist and patriarchal societies (see Jafri; Sindhi). Honour crimes can also be committed against men (Brandon and Hafez; Jafri 90). However, the perpetrators are most commonly male agnates of a woman’s family who “consider it their duty to restore their family honour by killing their kinswoman who has acted outside the acceptable code of what is considered honourable behaviour” and Pakistan has among the highest incidents of such crimes (Jafri 4, Preface).²² According to Amir H. Jafri, part of the rationale for the nomination “honour killing” or “honour crime” in that context has been to shift the emphasis from the (vernacular) “blackness” of the imputed transgressive sexual act to the retributive act of violence.²³ While there has seemingly been a surge of such crimes in the last decade, Jafri suggests that figures reflect more extensive coverage and an increased awareness of women’s rights.²⁴ He adds that, since 9/11, social, religious and political dynamics “have been under major internal transformation and intense international scrutiny” because Pakistan is seen both as a centre of terrorism and as a US ally. In this context, a non-Islamic custom is often co-opted as rallying point for an increasingly influential “fundamentalist” strain in the Pakistani body politic that wishes to rid the nation of “foreign ideological influences” (5, 7, 8, 9-10).

²¹ See the homepage of the International Campaign Against Honour Killings (ICAHK) and sources drawn upon by Jafri that include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports.

²² Ghulam Hyder Sindhi says that in excess of a thousand cases are reported per year (22).

²³ The official term in Pakistan is *ghairat ka qatl*. Jafri explains that the vernacular term specific to some regions is *karo kari*, literally “blackened man, blackened woman” (2).

²⁴ See Jafri for ways in which both the Constitution of Pakistan and the Islamic sacred texts attempt to secure rights for women and condemn violence against them. On the highly contested Hudud Ordinances introduced in 1979/80 under Zia ul Haq, see Suleri (“Woman Skin Deep”). These were revised and replaced by the Women’s Protection Bill in 2006. The Pakistani Criminal Law [Amendment] Bill (2004) increased punishment for honour killing and defined it as premeditated murder.

Jafri makes two particularly interesting points about honour killing. First, he links *sharaf* or *qairat* (honour) to the formation of the masculine self in relation to community regard and to a defensive definition of a group's social boundaries in the face of competing claims (12, 20). Second, he describes honour killing as "a message, a vivid rhetorical move": honour crimes function as "a loud public proclamation" (Preface, 11). Jafri therefore champions kairoitic feminist interruptions of hegemonic discourses on a spectrum that runs from *strategic intervention* in political and legal domains by women who can articulate their own position, to *tactics* deployed by subaltern groups that might include oral testimony and embodied protest (105-6). Aslam performs a principled act of testimony in placing honour crimes, clearly denounced as terrorizing cultural practices, at the heart of the community of *Maps*. He foregrounds the spectrum of enunciation identified by Jafri, intertwining the first-person narrative of a subaltern woman (Kaukab) with the trace of *more* marginal testimonies (such as that of the addressee of the fragmented letter) in order to reveal the limits of his principal narrator's perspective. The hauntology of *Maps* figures "the silenced centre of the circuit... marked out by epistemic violence" (Spivak 283) and attends to the "plural, incommensurable genealogies of time [and] categories of knowledge" that constitute the deep structure of violence (Boehmer 6-7). Helpfully, too, the fact that honour killing is confronted in a male-authored novel with a privileged male narrator, through a dominant narrative that also has a male victim, militates against a full imbrication of postcolonial and female identity that might produce "an iconicity... altogether too good to be true" (Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep" 758).

A viable objection might be that Aslam "references every headline-grabber: from an exorcism that leaves a rebellious girl battered to death to the aborting of female children. 'A woman in one Pakistani province is killed every 38 hours', [Aslam] says, and points out that each shocking incident in the book is based on a true case" (Brace unpag.). Against possible charges of opportunism or of courting controversy with British audiences, Aslam contends, rather unsurprisingly, that "there's no message in my books [which are] my way of exploring my own life and the workings of my own consciousness" (Brace unpag.). While this may be less than satisfying, positing an author's motivations and unravelling the intertwined effects of lived experience, creative inspiration and market demand is a tenuous business. Nor can Boehmer's question be definitively answered, "whether the postcolonial, rather than merely repeating and confirming the structures of the global, is able diagnostically to explicate and interrogate, even narrativise, those resistances and reversals within the processes of empire which express as terror" (4). Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, as one example of postcolonial literature—that is, *one kind* of truth claim—nevertheless represents a thought-provoking complement to Butler's plea for a retelling of the story of 9/11 and its aftershocks. One possible "beginning of the story" of local, national and global Muslim discontent is presented as the massive movement of groups in the wake of colonialism, resulting in

conditions of social, economic and political privation as new homes are precariously established in former imperial centres. Official definitions of security and vulnerability are imaginatively reconfigured by way of a re-examination of the nation from its margins and from within the contradictions of multiculturalism. And readers are encouraged to consider in what ways memory, melancholia and mourning might be put at the service of a more inclusive conception of national and global communities. Aslam's novel contributes, in the artistic domain in which voices can still be heard talking about everything, in every possible way, to a "grammar of response" that acknowledges the psycho-corporeal foundation of terror: that each of our lives is radically dependent on the lives of others.

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