

SITING VIOLENCE: BODIES, MEMORIES AND RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY PAKISTANI FICTION

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DECLARATION

I, **Rukma Prince**, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “**Siting Violence: Bodies, Memories and Rights in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction**” submitted by me under the supervision of **Professor Pramod K Nayar** is an original and independent research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this university or any other University or Institution for the reward of any degree or diploma.

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“Beyond the Secular: The Postsecular Moment in Contemporary Pakistani Novels in English.”

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Introduction

This project attempts to understand contemporary (21st century) Pakistani novels written in English in conjunction with certain aspects of the social, political and cultural atmosphere which paralleled their production. The primary texts consist of ten novels by five authors of Pakistani origin—Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013) and *The Golden Legend* (2017), Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017), Mohammed Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2012), Faiqa Mansab’s *This House of Clay and Water* (2017), and Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography* (2002), *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and *Home Fire* (2017).¹ Analyses of these texts are undertaken through the employment of select concepts from a broad range of disciplines like gender studies, sociology, trauma studies, memory studies, and postcolonial studies, to name a few. These concepts are crystallised through the close-reading of the texts using literary techniques developed by the burgeoning “interdiscipline”² of human rights and literature.

As a project that pays attention to the everyday struggles of life in Pakistan, a country born from the horrors of colonialism and the subsequent Partition, and which has survived numerous wars with its neighbours along with persisting violence from within its citizenry, the reading of the primary texts is embedded in a nuanced understanding of Pakistani history. This study draws upon the history of the creation of Pakistan as an Islamic nation-state and the seven-

¹ For the sake of convenience, some of the longer titles among the primary texts will be abbreviated henceforth. *Maps for Lost Lovers* will be referred to as *Maps*, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* as *Mangoes*, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* as *Alice Bhatti*, and *This House of Clay and Water* as *This House*.

² This articulation of human rights and literature as an “interdiscipline” was first put forth by Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore in their edited volume, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (2012).

decade long journey since then that have involved blatant violations of the human rights of its citizens.³ Military dictatorships like those headed by Zia ul-Haq in the 1980s and Pervez Musharraf in the early 2000s are both notorious for the infliction of fundamentalist law on public life, infringement of personal spaces by the state and obstruction of the normal course of constitutional law and justice.⁴ Civilian governments have fared better, but were mostly ineffective in maintaining public peace. The tears in the ethnic fabric of Pakistan are visible in the separatist demands and violence arising from provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh (Talbot). Mob violence and extra-judicial killings, often with the support of the state and intelligence services have been criticised by historians like Tariq Ali for breeding public unrest. The main victims of these extreme circumstances of violence are often religious minorities like Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus and Christians, gender minorities and women, and working-class communities. This project contextualises contemporary Pakistani literature within this socio-political background of Pakistan.

In order to situate such a history of turmoil and violence, I turn to the work of sociologist Michel Wieviorka. Wieviorka has condensed the conclusions of studies on violence until the twentieth century into two strands: one, wherein violence is understood as a “legitimate” force, the use of which is necessary to oppose oppressive regimes; and two, which considers violence as a condition that predates the coming of civilisation and modernity into a society (1). Disagreeing with both of these definitions of violence, he opines that violence is too broad an idea, with endless manifestations and possibilities, for it to be described using “dichotomous

³ Human Rights Watch’s “World Report 2021” finds the government of Pakistan neglectful of growing violence against women, and religious and sexual minorities. It also reports that the nation has fared unfavourably *vis-à-vis* state-sanctioned violence either through legislation such as the blasphemy laws, or police cruelty like the growing cases of extra-judicial killings.

⁴ “Pakistan: Proposed Reforms to Hudood Laws Fall Short”

registers” employed by the language of Enlightenment and modernity. Instead, he suggests that the study of violence would benefit from using a combination of universalising and pluralistic understandings, and objective and subjective tools (2). As such, violence needs to be, “defined by a specific era, and the general characteristics of the context in which it operates” (7).

Kalpana Kannabiran, writing from a South Asian context, puts Wieviorka’s manifesto in more concrete terms:

An exploration of the field through a historiography of violence would entail unravelling the complex and layered ways in which narratives of violence—as fact, experience, affections, afflictions, trauma, memory, rhetoric, philosophy, law, and governmentality—have shifted, changed course, or boomeranged into an imagined past. (2)

Taking its cue from this methodological framework for studying violence, this project is an analysis of the fictional accounts of rights violations in Pakistan, or of Pakistani peoples, and hopes to understand the sources of such violence and the forms of resistances that it engenders in communities that exist in circumstances of persisting violence. Violence, as explained by Weiviorka, defies the boundaries of a strictly circumscribed definition. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this project, I look at various kinds of violence including physical violence—the infliction of bodily harm, sexual assault, custodial torture, murder, etc.; discursive violence—the erasure of memories, experiences and knowledges from the institutionalised cultural memory of the collective; and the denial of human rights in numerous forms. A detailed study of the corporeal bodies that are violated, and the lasting impressions this leaves on the physique and the psyche of the victim is undertaken. On the next level, the historicization and narrativization of trauma is studied, with special attention paid to forms of remembering, especially to those by

collectives. Further, by recognising such acts as violations of human rights, the project extrapolates the problematization of contemporary human rights discourse within this literature.

While the effect of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre, New York City—9/11— on Pakistani literature cannot be discounted, this project seeks to decentre 9/11 and Pakistan’s interactions with Western powers as the progenitors of the issues faced by present-day Pakistan. Next, the works will be studied as an expression of the traumatic history of Pakistan as a young, postcolonial nation, and as an effort by the native authors to speak about themselves, carving a space for their identity in a world that is simultaneously fascinated and perturbed by their background.

This does not mean that 9/11 will be erased as a marker of a cultural shift that plays a vital role in the production of contemporary Pakistani fiction. Nor does it imply that had 9/11 *not* taken place, what we know as Pakistani fiction today might be the same. The importance of 9/11 and the subsequent attention received by Pakistan in the global news cycle has been acknowledged by the writers themselves—Daniyal Mueenuddin commented in 2009, “Pakistani writers look sexy right now because of Pakistan being so much in the news” (as quoted in Shah)—as reasons for the growing popularity of Pakistani novels. This much-talked about “boom” in Pakistani fiction has been read as the result of the global readership’s need to “anthropologiz[e] Pakistani fiction” (Bilal 5). The writers act as mediators in a global cultural exchange through which Pakistan can be “accurately” represented to the anglophone world. The political nature of the novels produced by these authors has resulted in Pakistani fiction being read as a counter-narrative to the dominant narratives about Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (Ramanan 126). The role of Pakistani authors, along with writers from other Islamic backgrounds, in helping unravel the “complex, multifaceted ways” in which Islam functions has

also been studied (Chambers 13). Thus, Pakistani writers have been studied as sculptors of narratives and identities that act as a resource pool for the world to learn from. Both the conditions of production of these novels and of their reception by readers have been anchored by the event of 9/11 in most academic scholarship. The scholarship centred on 9/11 undermines the experiences that lie outside its ambit, on the lee side of the global discourse on terrorism and this project attempts to foreground the everyday warfare of Pakistani life over any geopolitical warfare.

The accuracy of attributing the ‘boom’ to merely Pakistani fiction’s engagement with 9/11 has been questioned by Aroosa Kanwal who sees it as a continuation of a literary tradition that has always engaged with history and politics. In doing this, Kanwal begins a mode of interrogation of contemporary Pakistani fiction that is not completely centred on 9/11 but understands it as one of various markers of world history that has had repercussions in Pakistan.

The purpose that the project hopes to achieve is to follow this line of enquiry and steer the discourse on contemporary Pakistani literature, and by extension, literatures of other Muslim nations away from the limiting category of ‘9/11 literature’ by studying it as a collection of experiences of a nation beset with problems like any other. Therefore, I begin my study with an analysis of the novels for the themes of difference they portray. The body is seen as the site where difference is made evident through stereotyping and performance, and used by the state to regulate the masses. Instances of this ‘Othering’ are traumatic events that have the potential to inflict a change in the collective psyche, forming a part of the cultural memory of the society. Through this understanding of individual and collective trauma, the project attempts to extrapolate the notion of a subject deserving of human rights and show how the novels are active agents in a human rights campaign. The shadow of Pakistan’s vilified global presence is

diminished in importance—but not erased—in the scope of this study, which focuses on the possibility of social justice.

The primary texts chosen for analysis in the project are novels in English by contemporary writers of Pakistani origin. “Contemporary,” here, is used to signify novels published in the twenty-first century (as the opening statement of this Introduction indicates), a period that produced a range of fiction from Pakistan that has received both domestic and global acclaim. As author Shahbano Bilgrami noted in 2008, this period has seen Pakistani literature outgrow the broad identity of “South Asian literature” to carve a space for itself in both the market and the literary imagination (as quoted in Salaam, “A Voice of their Own”). Widespread popularity—in terms of both readership and critical acclaim—was another factor that influenced the selection of primary texts. Since any study that depends entirely on reports of acclaim and second-hand opinion is inadequate in its scope, care has been taken to ensure that not only some of the more popular of the current generation of Pakistani authors, like Nadeem Aslam, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid and Mohammed Hanif were chosen, but also a debut author, in Faiqa Mansab.⁵

While the ten novels chosen as primary texts can be loosely categorised as “literary fiction”, they were selected for this project due to their close engagement with the socio-political circumstances specific to this century and for the reflections they offer on contemporary society. The project is interested in the experiences of marginalised groups in contemporary Pakistan as well as in migrant narratives, all inhabiting the periphery formed during Pakistan’s and

⁵ Claire Chambers notes how ‘[the] attention paid to the (undeniably excellent) “big five” of Hamid, Hanif, K. Shamsie, Mueenuddin, and Aslam problematically lead to neglect of other less well-known, but equally great writers from Pakistan...’ (“A comparative approach” 123). Mushtaq Bilal has also singled out these five authors as the preeminent of the current generation of fiction writers (1). Of the big five, Mueenuddin’s short stories have not been included in this project as it is restricted to the genre of novels.

Pakistanis' interactions with the rest of the world. So as to gain a well-rounded understanding of the myriad issues that come to the fore in such interactions, the authors studied have been selected from various primary locations: local authors settled in Pakistan like Mansab, sojourner authors like Hamid and Hanif, and members of the Pakistani diaspora, such as Shamsie and Aslam.

David Waterman considers "much of contemporary Pakistani fiction [to be] historical fiction" (5) and an examination of recent novels will prove that there is some truth to this claim. The present crop of Pakistani writers has not shied away from discussing infamous aspects and moments of their national history, creating a literary map of post-independence Pakistani history through their fictional works. Sorayya Khan's *Noor* is set in the thick of action in the Bangladeshi war of independence and Shamsie's *Kartography* deals with the consequences that haunt West Pakistan in the aftermath of the war. The Zia ul-Haq presidency is chronicled in Hanif's *Mangoes* and Khan's *The Geometry of God*. An infamous consequence of this period, the Soviet-Afghan War, is the subject of parts of Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Khan's *Trespassing*. A fictionalised Benazir Bhutto takes the stage in Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her*, giving the readers a glimpse of the merging of the personal and the political in dynasty politics towards the turn of the century.

The new millennium and the 9/11 attacks marked a watershed moment in Pakistani literary history as the fiction produced after it captured the global literary imagination in a way that eluded the previous generations of Pakistani writers. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* features the moment the Twin Towers fell and multiple others like *Burnt Shadows*, Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, H M Naqvi's *Homeboy* deal with the rise in Islamophobia that ensued in its aftermath. *The Blind Man's Garden* shows the ground zero of the War on Terror, set in the

battlefields of the Taliban's encounter with American forces. Thus, the corpus of Pakistani literature is rich in material directly or more subtly rooted in history and its far-reaching consequences. As Shazia Sadaf notes:

fiction writers in Pakistan have taken a two-pronged approach to human rights in their work: to highlight violations of Pakistani citizens arising from international geopolitical interferences (Shamsie, Aslam, and Hamid), but also to expose failures of the Pakistani state to protect the rights of its citizens, especially women, the underprivileged, and minorities. (144)

This project has taken into account both of these themes while selecting the primary texts for analysis. The close attention paid to history is supplemented by the consequences of repressive historical circumstances in all the novels chosen, foregrounding themes of power relations and hegemony of certain groups over others. Through discussions of experiences from the margins of the society and of the privileged positions of gender, sexual orientation, class, race, religion, etc., these works exhibit a heightened social awareness and sense of justice.

Mangoes is a political satire caricaturing the fearsome President Zia ul-Haq in a comic light, set in the days before his mysterious death. Hanif succeeds in recasting one of the most notorious figures in Pakistani history as an insecure dictator, confused about the scriptures and paranoid about his security detail, rather than the strict enforcer of military and Islamic rule that the popular imagination is familiar with. The other protagonist of the novel is Junior Under Officer Ali Shigri of the Pakistani Air Force, who carries in his blood a legacy of integrity and patriotism and has inherited his father's contempt for the President as he concocts an elaborate plan that will avenge both his father's death and end Zia's insensitive rule.

A group of people who, seven decades after migrating and actively participating in the nation-building process, are still considered immigrants is the subject of Shamsie's *Kartography*, rounding up the works of historical fiction discussed in this project. The experiences of racism and violent bigotry directed at Bengali and muhajir immigrants in West Pakistan is told through the tales of Raheen and Karim's families. The war of 1971 that split Pakistan and created Bangladesh forms the backdrop of this novel.

This theme of immigrant experience forms the heart of a number of the primary texts. Shamsie's highly acclaimed, Women's Prize for Fiction-winning novel *Home Fire* is the tale of two Pakistani immigrant families with a shared history, but a starkly different present. The Pashas are plagued by associations with Islamic fundamentalist groups, but the Lones, in contrast, are a lesson in immigrant success with the patriarch of the family becoming the Home Secretary of Britain. A modern retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the themes of community betrayal, familial loyalty and star-crossed love from the classic play are further politicised by the issues of terrorism, religious fundamentalism and national security.

The metropolis of London in *Home Fire* is swapped for an industrial town in England christened Dasht-e-Tanhaii by its large immigrant population in *Maps*. Structured as a whodunnit investigation of the missing couple Jugnu and Chanda, the novel highlights the frictions caused within the immigrant population as their relationships to each other, to other communities and to their homeland are discussed.

The refugees of *Exit West* are a group of people who found that their native countries were too unstable to fashion a life in. Moving from one location to the other in search of empathy, Nadia and Saeed live in a liminal state of half-citizenship, being neither of the home

they abandoned nor the green pastures they sought. Their movement is facilitated by “doors,” the central metaphor of the text that indicates the journey undertaken by migrants across the world.

Another kind of refugee is seen in the form of Hiroko Tanaka whose life is turned into a continuous search for asylum from some of the most horrific events of the twentieth century.

Burnt Shadows follows Hiroko’s journey as she survives the atom bomb at Nagasaki, the bloodbath of the Partition of British India, the violence of Karachi during the days of the Soviet-Afghan war and the racism of post-9/11 America.

The Blind Man’s Garden is also set in the period after 9/11, but in the battlefields of the War on Terror. The blind man mentioned in the title is Rohan, an ageing schoolmaster whose son Jeo, a young medical student, travels to the warzone in Afghanistan to treat wounded civilians. Death, in the form of the memories of his late wife, and later, of his son Jeo, haunt the grieving Rohan and seems to loom large over the narrative.

The main cast of *This House* have all experienced a hard life because of their gender: Nida, the politician’s wife who has lost herself supporting the ego of her husband; Bhanggi, the intersex person who identifies as male but is forced to live in poverty and humiliation as a transwoman, a hijra; Sasha, the middle-class homemaker who has always aspired for a liberated, luxurious life and attempts to find it as a part-time escort; and Zoya, a twelve-year-old who is neglected by her family in favour of her fairer older sister and is unable to speak up about the continued sexual abuse that leaves her pregnant. Taking centre-stage in the plot is the ill-fated relationship between Nida and Bhanggi, two souls brought together by a shared feeling of emptiness.

In *Alice Bhatti*, Hanif engages with the status of non-Islamic religions in the Islamic republic of Pakistan and the kind of future they can hope for in a society where violence against

them is semi-legitimised. The opening sentence of the novel conveys the thoughts of the protagonist Alice Bhatti who is waiting to be interviewed for a job as a nurse. She muses that it is highly unlikely that she will be hired, for she is but a lowly Christian from the sweeper caste. The privileges of religion, class and caste intersect to function against Alice, who is already at a disadvantage because of her gender.

The Golden Legend is a less tongue-in-cheek handling of the same theme by Aslam. Helen Masih and her father Lily are practising Christians who have faced the extremes of bigotry every day of their lives. Lily, like most Christians in their colony at Badami Bagh, is a descendant of the manual scavenger caste, having risen up to being an autorickshaw driver mostly because of the sympathetic treatment he received from his neighbours and ex-employers, the married Muslim couple Massud and Nargis. Helen is brought up as a surrogate child by the couple, who try their best to shield her from systemic discrimination while at the same time ensuring that she is equipped to counter it.

Mirroring the popularity of Pakistani novelists among readers was the rise in academic scholarship on contemporary anglophone Pakistani fiction. Monographs and journal articles studying various aspects of the novels and books of interviews of the authors, both by Western academics and those from South Asia, have been published in dozens in the last fifteen years. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* has included literature from Pakistan as a separate category in their yearly issue, “Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature”, since 2004, with a brief survey of literary contributions from and on Pakistan duly undertaken by prominent critic Muneeza Shamsie. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistani Studies* was launched by the Department of English at University of North Texas in 2009 and widens the scope of studying literature by examining it alongside history, politics and sociology. Picking up on the growing

interest of scholars, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* ran a special issue titled “Beyond Geography: Literature, Politics and Violence in Pakistan” in 2011. In addition to these, several edited volumes and monographs on Pakistani writing have been published in recent years, some of which will be discussed in this section. Most of these publications, especially the monographs, treat contemporary Pakistani fiction in English as a well-defined body of work dating from the last decade of the twentieth century to current times.

Writing at the dawn of the post-9/11 era, a time when the world was redrawn and grouped into oppositional sides according to the US’s War on Terror, the fiction emerging from Pakistan was seen as representing the experience of being Muslim and from the Third World (Clements). Irrespective of whether the authors intend to be speaking for a whole nation, they are hailed as speakers of truth about the Pakistani experience and their works as subverting the dominant Islamophobia of the West by offering “authentic” stories from the periphery (Khan 85, Raja). Shazia Sadaf comments on the literary tightrope these writers are forced to walk as a result of this burden of responsibility: “to write about present-day injustices caused by the failure of the state without being accused of subscribing to Western agendas that promote the same instances of violence to justify military aggression in Pakistan” (Sadaf 141)

The fiction from Pakistan has been repeatedly analysed as an alternative narrative of the events leading up to and following 9/11, often invoking Samuel P. Huntington’s prediction of a “clash of civilizations” (Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions* 14; Clements 52). In particular, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, presented in the form of a monologue by a Pakistani to an American—the latter is not allowed a chance to speak throughout the short novel—is seen as representing a movement of “writing back” to the West. To use Peter Morey’s words, these works provide a response to the “semi-fictionalised Muslim misery memoirs” that

was the predominant genre in Western literary engagement with the aftermath of 9/11 (““The rules of the game have changed”” 136). Morey’s complaint with the latter involves the quasi-justification of the Western response to actions of terror featuring Muslim perpetrators and the unnuanced portrayal of predominantly Islamic societies as opposing progress, modernity and secularism (*Islamophobia and the Novel* 26). This strain of thought is also explored by juxtaposing works by Pakistani authors against those by authors from the West. Cara Cilano studies the genre of espionage fiction from the US and Pakistan to contrast how the figures of spy, proxy, and “terrorist” are portrayed in each writing tradition (*Post-9/11 Espionage Fiction* 3). In contrast to this approach, Claire Chambers discusses the need of letting go of national allegiances so as to study Pakistani literature in conjunction with literatures from other Muslim nations as the progeny of a unique Islamic approach to the arts (“A comparative approach” 131).

As a corollary to serving as the “spokespeople” of Pakistan, these writers have also been entrusted with the duty of dispelling stereotypes about Muslims and Islam for the benefit of their global readership (Perry 122). Madeline Clements, in *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective*, examines the function of Pakistani literature—through the works of Aslam, Shamsie and Hamid—as a source of knowledge for the contemporary understanding of the ‘Islamic world’ (156). Even though her work discusses the possibility that South Asian fiction can help change the stereotypes about Muslims in popular usage, Clements’ use of the homogenising construct of an ‘Islamic world’ as different from the rest of the world is a problematic that deserves to be unpacked.

This line of enquiry begins with an approach reminiscent of Fredric Jameson’s much-debated essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” in which it is argued that the literature of the Third World is essentially a national allegory, irrespective of the

variety of themes of private life it seems to address upfront (Jameson 69). A number of problems with this hypothesis were pointed out by Aijaz Ahmad, including the problematic category of “Third World” that Jameson insists on using in spite of the epistemic hierarchy it presupposes (Ahmad 5). The study of Pakistani literature for traces of a national identity as offered by Cilano and Kanwal are notable because they refuse to treat this body of work as a homogeneous object of study. They acknowledge that the trials of postcoloniality and globalisation, among other factors, have prompted current practitioners of fiction writing from Pakistani to bypass the need for a national allegory to advocate a future that is beyond the restrictive politics of nationalism.

Timothy Brennan understands Third World literature as being “a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it” (Brennan 63). Brennan studies the postcolonial novel’s preoccupation with various aspects of nation-building, from being a vehicle of creating an imagined community to being staunch critiques of the failure of the national project. This approach is eschewed by the critical work discussed here. Cilano, in particular, insists that her work looks at Pakistani literature “as an imaginative alternative to dominant forms of identification”, and does not attempt to conjure up a singular understanding of what it means to be Pakistani (Cilano, *Idea, Nation, State* 1). Along with Cilano, Kanwal, too, insists that the political tendency of contemporary Pakistani literature is to move away from the dubious idea of “Pakistaniness” and embrace the identity of global citizens. Thus, there is a clear attempt to reject understandings of Pakistani literature as a mere national allegory or a statement of nationalism.

One of the major frames of analyses used in research on Pakistani literature has been the concept of a national identity. Historians like Tariq Ali, Stephen Cohen and Ian Talbot have argued that the problems plaguing present day Pakistan are to a great extent caused by a ‘crisis of

identity’ (Ali 44). This is attributed to the lack of a cohesive national identity that can bring together a diverse population based on a shared platform of past history or future interests. Taking this concept of a “crisis of identity” as the point of departure, Cilano studies anglophone Pakistani fiction for a narrative of what the changing concept of nationalism and nationhood means, in *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State*. This is informed by the symbols that make up an idea of the nation, such as the figure of Jinnah and that of Islam as a foundational stone of Pakistan. Cilano proposes that in spite of the specific issues they were born into—questions of democracy, nuclear weaponry, civil war, ethnic and linguistic conflicts, etc.—the literature of these authors should be termed ‘transnational’ and seen in the larger context of anglophone literature of the Indian subcontinent (2009:195). Citing the work of Shamsie (*Burnt Shadows*), Hamid (*Moth Smoke*), Aslam (*The Season of Rainbirds*) and Daniyal Mueenuddin (his short story collection, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*), Cilano concludes that it is imperative that the idea of a national identity should be set aside in favour of a “human identity” (*Idea, Nation, State* 228).

Aroosa Kanwal, in her debut monograph, also undertakes an in-depth study of the homogeneous understandings of Islam, Islamic identity and Muslims in an effort to understand the roots of Islamophobia. Using 9/11 as her temporal anchor, Kanwal discusses the role of US foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 as a form of terrorism in itself. She notes, from the writings of diasporic authors like Hanif Kureshi, Shamsie, Aslam and Uzma Aslam Khan, how the definition of the “homeland” is constantly in flux, as migrants reconfigure alien spaces to accommodate their cultural origins. Kanwal understands the Pakistani identity as a multi-layered and “hyphenated” one tempered by Pakistan’s interactions with the rest of the world and argues

that the post 9/11 migrant experiences in Pakistani literature indicate a postnational tendency, going a step ahead of Cilano's articulation of a transnational identity (*Rethinking Identities* 17).

Another aspect of the search for a Pakistani identity has been probed by Masood Ashraf Raja in his approach to Pakistani literature within the framework of reception studies. Raja points out, "no matter what these [contemporary anglophone Pakistani] writers write about, their acts of artistic representation, it seems, are caught within the politics of the nation and national representation" (1), a sentiment that has been echoed by other scholars of Pakistani literature including Clements and Cilano.

While scholarship on this field has been growing exponentially over the past decade, a defining publication arrived in the form of *The Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing*, edited by Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam, in 2019. The Companion features thirty-two essays from scholars across the world with an interest in Pakistani literature, covering both the bestselling work of its literary fiction writers and poets as well as lesser-known genres like life-writing, comics and "chick lit [sic]," to ensure "the development of a transnational perspective of canon constitution in Pakistani literature" (2). Several of the themes addressed in this thesis are a continuation of the work encountered in this collection of essays, including the importance placed on reading literature from Pakistan in light of the complex history of the region, both before and after its integration into the nation-state of Pakistan.

It is this approach that acts as an inspiration to the arguments presented in this thesis. The following paragraphs present a summary of theoretical concepts employed in the three core chapters that will frame this project's aim of identifying the potential of the primary texts as explorations into the nature of violence. Faisal Nazir, in his essay "De/Reconstructing Identities: Critical approaches to contemporary Pakistani anglophone writing" discusses the predominant

reference points that literary criticism of this genre has taken (Nazir 363). He identifies four distinct approaches used to study the construction of identities within Pakistani literature: global or cosmopolitan, which situates the text in dialogue with other works in “world literature” (Morey); national, which studies the texts’ engagement with the tumultuous relationship of the Pakistani citizen with their nationhood (Cilano); religious, which studies this literature as stemming from the religious identity that is instrumental in the making of a “Pakistani” citizen as well as in its interactions with the rest of the world (Chambers and Kanwal); and regional, wherein Pakistani writings are studied as being part of a larger South Asian contemporary (Clements). I agree with Nazir that the lion’s share of scholarly work has followed these broad classifications, focussing on the actions of higher-level stakeholders of national and international scope. Therefore, in chapter 1, “Embodying the Other,” I propose a study that is rooted in the genealogies of violence at the level of societies and communities. In this respect, negotiations of identities such as caste, gender, class and social stature, ethnicity, etc., by the characters of *Maps*, *Alice Bhatti*, *Exit West*, *The Golden Legend*, *This House*, *Home Fire* and *Burnt Shadows* are examined.

This chapter identifies the role of the body in discourses of Othering, beginning with the gaze of the dominant Self as inflicted on those demarcated as the Other. The broad framework of Edward Said’s formulation of an Orientalist gaze appraising the colonial subject is borrowed to understand how processes of stereotyping and performance fashion the subjectivity of those Othered for embodying a corporeal difference. This difference may stem from physicality, as in the case of those complicating the gender binary, or dehumanisation, such as the notions of “purity” that govern lower-caste bodies in South Asia. The Other’s response to such treatment is explored for traces of resistance that are expressed through acts of the body, whether through the

reassertion of the (Othered) identity or by conceding to the disguise offered by socially-accepted roles. The efforts involved in these performances are analysed through Judith Butler's theorisation of gender performance and the spaces of resistance it offers. The role of institutions such as the family, civil society, educational systems and religious representatives in policing these bodies by reasserting their Otherness and confining them to the margins of society is also explored. The "governmentality" of the state apparatus in seeking the aid of these enforcers to control the population through epistemic and physical violence forms the crux of this chapter.

Chapter 1, hence, establishes the everyday experience of prejudice and discrimination encountered by marginalised bodies across Pakistani society and diaspora. The chapters that follow build on this condition of Otherness in order to recognise the micropolitics involved in controlling certain sections of the population through the epistemic violence of erased collective memories of trauma, and the discussion on human rights violations.

Several critics have argued that twenty-first century Pakistani literary productions deliberately engage in "writing back" to the mischaracterisation of Islam, Muslims, South and West Asians by media and literary narratives of and following 9/11 (Morey; Chambers; Kanwal). The "boom" experienced in the wide proliferation of Pakistani fiction in the Western literary marketplace has also been attributed to the West's quest for answers to 9/11 and a need to "anthropologize" the Other that emerged post-9/11 (Bilal 5). This project agrees with these opinions, but argues that in spite of the means of being introduced into the market—as a liberal counter-argument against the hostility and irrationality of Islamophobic narratives—contemporary Pakistani novelists who have since claimed this proffered market space have not limited the scope of their work to setting the record straight about 9/11. Rather, the primary texts studied here show how, along with contextualising 9/11 within the larger canvas of global

history, the writers also use this opportunity to identify and explore a number of pertinent issues within Pakistan's history, society and polity. I consider this clever manipulation of the literary market as one of the foremost instances of discursive resistance being put up by these authors.

Chapter 2, “(Re)membering the Past: Memory, History and Cultural Trauma,” considers contemporary fiction by Pakistani authors as artefacts that are shaped by, and have the power to shape, the ongoing project of a national cultural memory. To study the processes by which collective memories of trauma are circulated and consolidated, I turn to literary representations of violence within historical events. The focus of this chapter is on how negotiations of history and memory have influenced the formation of collective subjectivities. The analysis is rooted in the national scope of the events portrayed in the novels, even when set against the backdrop of the larger geopolitical landscape. From this national perspective, the novels branch out into regional, local and individual memories, to show how the legitimacy of the cultural memory of the Pakistani nation is complicated by the domination of the memory narratives of certain privileged collectives. Thus, this chapter builds on the discussion in Chapter 1 of the various relationships of Othering and discrimination that are entangled within the Pakistani society to understand how memory narratives bleed into remembrances of trauma by historically marginalised groups. It argues that the novels themselves are designed to fit into the ruptures within the national cultural memory, by foregrounding trauma narratives that have been excluded from institutionalised history.

One of the most prominent ideas to have evolved in memory studies is that memory is not an individual entity, but can be collectively owned. The idea of memory is transformed from being a single mind's recollection of a past event to something that is spread through social and cultural systems, and passed down the generations. I base my analyses on the definition of

cultural memory formulated by Jan Assmann, who derives it from Maurice Halbwachs' foundational work on the processes of remembering through which collectives cement their subjectivity. This idea of cultural memory shaping social identities forms the basis of Jeffrey C. Alexander's concept of cultural trauma which problematizes the framing of trauma narratives. In a marked shift from the existing theory on trauma, Alexander proposes a paradigm that understands trauma not as a natural response to an event, but as a constructed reaction mediated by individuals or social groups within a collective ("carrier groups"). A reaction to any real or imagined event can be termed as trauma when the identity of the collective is disrupted or changed irrevocably by the reaction. Alexander acknowledges that the prominent psychoanalytic approach to trauma adopted by theorists like Cathy Caruth is significant in understanding the effect of trauma on the individual or collective psyche, but disagrees on its tendency to view trauma as a response to an objective event (Alexander 7). Thus, Alexander focuses on the "representations" of trauma by the carrier groups to understand how social institutions and actors including the state, media (of which literature is a part), law, etc., shape the traumatic experience, and consequently, any changes to the collective identity (18).

Thus, Chapter 2 looks at the ways in which a society remembers the same event, or the difference with which subsequent generations choose to remember history to throw light on the ever-shifting notions of what is considered ethical. The primary texts—*Maps*, *Burnt Shadows*, *Mangoes*, *The Blind Man's Garden*, and *Kartography*—are read as artefacts of the cultural memory of Pakistan's complex history as a postcolonial nation.

Chapter 3, entitled "Right(s) Lessons: Literature as a Means of Reimagining the Human Rights Discourse" looks at the primary texts as literary case studies of inflicted violence and the politics of exclusion, often in conjecture with the practice (or lack thereof) of human rights in

Pakistan. The methodology used in this chapter is heavily influenced by critical thinking about law and literature, most significantly formulated by Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore in their edited volume, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (2012):

Interdisciplinary scholarship in human rights and literature...undertakes two mutually invested intellectual projects: reading literary texts for the ways in which they represent and render intelligible the philosophies, laws, and practices of human rights from multiple, shifting cultural perspectives and considering how stories, testimonies, cultural texts, and literary theories contribute to the evolution of such philosophies, laws, and practices. (2)

Therefore, this chapter looks at how the primary texts push the envelope in incorporating critique of normalised violence that remain semi-legitimised due to the inconsistencies within the institutionalised precepts of human rights. Thus, I concentrate on the texts' handling of what Joseph Slaughter, in his discipline-shaping work *Human Rights, Inc.*, describes as the “the ruptures, paradoxes, impossible figures, and bizarre temporalities” that are revealed within the human rights discourse (6).

The attempts of the novels to steer the conversation on the human rights aspect of the global War on Terror by displacing the West from their self-appointed stature of being the sole victims of violence are discussed in detail. Rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror, most popularly initiated by US President George W. Bush's speech that called on the world to pick a side—USA, or terrorist—places the West firmly in the position of the guardians of human rights and justice. This rhetoric has been used to justify every twenty-first century war effort by the West, predominantly USA, ignoring the scores of civilians who become collateral damage in this

modern-day crusade. Sifting through the different perspectives of contemporary conflicts and the ensuing crisis of the human rights regime in texts like *Burnt Shadows*, *Home Fire*, *Maps*, *The Golden Legend*, *The Blind Man's Garden* and *This House*, this chapter ponders on the possibility of contemporary fiction as a medium of human rights.

Using Aslam's most recent novels—*The Blind Man's Garden* and *The Golden Legend*—as focal points, Monaco argues that the texts establish a common ground of trauma as experienced by various collectives to develop empathy and understanding of the suffering of others, and encourage the reader to partake in the same (Monaco). Monaco is joined in this interpellation of the empathetic reader by Shazia Sadaf, who, in her essay, "Divergent discourses: Human rights and contemporary Pakistani anglophone literature" cites "[l]iterature's capacity to invoke empathy in readers ... a key factor in recognising human dignity and humanitarian action" (139). I propose, in the vein of work done by Crystal Parikh and Lindsey Stonebridge, to go beyond the consideration of literature as merely a vehicle of transporting empathetic feelings from the victim to the audience.

Regional and local micropolitics, operating through religious, caste, class and gendered violence, is extensively studied as a means of assessing rights violations and constructing the subject of human rights. Further, the texts are studied to glean an understanding of the characters' relationship with the concept of rights itself, so as to evaluate the percolation of a human rights culture within Pakistani society. Drawing from the criticism offered by Joseph Slaughter, Upendra Baxi, Makau Mutua, and Parikh, I attempt to identify some of the pitfalls of contemporary practices of human rights, as illustrated by the novels. One of the major points of inquiry is the novels' foregrounding of the need for social and economic rights as a priority for the characters occupying its storyworlds. Delineating this feature, I argue that the writers'

advocacy against material conditions of poverty and social discrimination suggest a critique of the human rights regime and its preoccupation with political and civil rights above all else. Next, I take inspiration from the work of Judith Butler, Elizabeth S Anker and Adriana Cavarero to re-evaluate the concept of inherent dignity as the basic qualifier for the human rights subject. This chapter will attempt to show that the primary texts are capable of conveying not only emotional kinship, but suggest the means to complicate the discourse of human rights in ways that would bring substantive changes to the lives of the victim. This, I argue, is done by contextualising violence in a larger fabric interwoven with both global and local histories, understanding how violence is at times normalised and rights rendered unfamiliar, highlighting the importance of economic and social rights for a population that struggles with various kinds of inequity, and recalibrating the rights discourse through the introduction of the concepts of corporeal vulnerability and precariousness.

As much as this project attempts a reparative reading of the primary texts, it will be remiss if a caveat to my analysis is not mentioned. The question of “authenticity” of the stories told, of the characters who populate the pages, and of the nation that these Pakistani authors conjure up in the minds of their readers, is one that is frequently raised against anglophone literature from the postcolonial world. As already mentioned in this introduction, the authors who have been studied in this project are all Pakistani-born, some who have since joined the ranks of Pakistani diaspora in First World nations and others who still live and work in Pakistan. However, they are all incontrovertibly privileged members of the Muslim upper-classes, having grown up in big cities like Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi, and acquiring part of their college education in the US or UK. Some of them belonging to families with literary roots—Shamsie is the daughter of literary critic Muneeza Shamsie who herself hails from the family of famed

Indian author Attia Hosain, and Aslam's father was a film producer who also wrote poetry under the pen name Wamaq Saleem.⁶ Some others have had access to stellar mentors in the craft of writing like Hamid who counts Toni Morrison and Joyce Carol Oates as his teachers at Princeton University.⁷ Mansab's MFA dissertation, which grew into *This House*, was supervised by Elif Shafak.⁸ The analysis undertaken in this project acknowledges the apparent lack of diversity among the highly-acclaimed English language authors from Pakistan. However, this does not discount the wide readership and influence of their work among the consumers of English-language fiction. Therefore, while it is beneficial to contextualise these works as being produced by a privileged section of Pakistani society, it does not serve as an excuse to dismiss them as being oblivious to a "real Pakistan".

⁶ In a nod to these roots, Aslam's worldbuilding in his novels frequently mention the unseen "Wamaq Saleem" as an eminent Pakistani poet (Naeem).

⁷ Bilal 153.

⁸ Mansab has expressed her gratitude to Shafak in the "Acknowledgements" section of *This House* (269).

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Chapter 1

Embodying the Other

The texts under study employ an array of characters that exist in the margins—of caste, gender, social stature, ethnicity, nationality, etc. This chapter identifies the role of the body in discourses of Othering, through stereotyping and performance, and the ways in which national and global politics affect vulnerable bodies. The novels examined in this chapter are *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam, *Burnt Shadows* and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif, *This House of Clay and Water* by Faiqa Mansab, and *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid.

The study of the body, even though it most obviously presents as a biological object, cannot be restricted to the naturalistic aspect of it. Sociologists have noted that the corporeal body, long ignored in classical sociology due to the discipline's inherent bias towards the Cartesian idea of the superiority of the mind, has garnered more interest among scholars since the 1990s (Nettleton and Watson). This has resulted in a “politicisation of the body,” with theorising the body emerging as a major factor in movements steered by identity politics (Nettleton and Watson 4). In recent years, we have seen the body occupying centre-stage in discussions on gender rights, anti-racism struggles and refugee movements, to name a few. As a pointer for further studies in this vein, Chris Shilling makes the case for a composite approach to the body: “the body is most profitably conceptualized as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society” (11).

In this chapter, I focus on the body as a “social phenomenon” and chart out the “transformative” interactions of bodies in society. I begin with a study of the gaze of the dominant subject on the object body in order to understand the process by which the Self and the Other are constructed and the lasting impression these leave, both on the physique and the psyche of the victim. In the second section, the ways in which these Othered bodies are shaped by social interactions are discussed, and the chapter is concluded with a study of a group of bodies, or a population, and its interaction with the larger structures involved in the creation and preservation of Otherness. This chapter argues that the novels discussed uphold the predominance of the body as a rubric in forming and consolidating identities. Within this framework, it examines how members of socially disadvantaged groups are recognised and labelled as the Other in order to perpetuate existing power dynamics. Extending this argument, the liberatory potential of bodily self-fashioning, such as donning the veil by Muslim women, will also be explored.

1.1. What Meets the Eye: (En)countering the Gaze

The notion that individual bodies are the sum of the various subject positions attributed to them by the combination of social forces and personal responses to these has been established by social constructivism (Lorber and Martin 231). Judith Butler adds:

The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do.

(Precarious Life 26)

These subjects have limited means to control this social constitution of their bodies, and even that chance is available only after the bodies have been constructed by the “world of others”. People are ascribed identities based on how they differ from the norm, often beginning with aspects of physicality, or how their bodies are perceived. Edward Said interprets the power hierarchy within colonialism as a result of a construction of not just the difference between the colonialists and their subjects. He argues that the system thrives as it does because it also creates fertile grounds for this difference to be sustained. This is done by creating and cementing the categories of a dominant Self and a different and lesser Other, connected by a “flexible *positional* superiority” which is developed by narratives that firmly establish this unequal binary (Said 7). Thus, far from being an ontological feature, Otherness is a relational attribute framed by the Self in order to maintain an asymmetry in power within that social matrix. The creation of the ‘Other’ is not an accident—it is a requirement to ensure that the dominant Self is not threatened. In the process, the voice of the Other is routinely stifled and their stories buried. This section looks at the social construction of the Other, or Othering, predominantly through the gaze of the dominant subject on the object body.

The novels studied here all explore the uncharitable ways of the worlds which engender inequality. In Mohammed Hanif’s *Alice Bhatti*, a redesign of the female paramedics’ uniform is suggested as a way to counter the constant sexual harassment faced by the nurses, showing how trivially gendered experiences are treated. Using narratives about the immigrant experience and brushes with religious fundamentalism as faced by the Pashas of *Home Fire* and the Aks family in *Maps*, Kamila Shamsie and Nadeem Aslam, respectively, are able to throw light on the lapses exhibited by both secular democracies and theocratic nations in dealing with the question of religion. The hijra community of Lahore portrayed in Mansab’s *This House* and the Christians of

the fictional city of Zamana in Aslam's *The Golden Legend* are both persecuted groups, under constant surveillance by the patriarchal Muslim communities that subject them to frequent harassment. Through such instances, the novels discussed here betray the inequalities of these environments in terms of class, caste, gender, nationality, race and other such terms of categorisation. This section seeks to illuminate some of the ways in which these inequalities are repeatedly reinforced.

Sexual attacks and casteist slurs were a ubiquitous presence in Alice Bhatti's normal working day in her job as a nurse, where she is frequently sized up and objectified. Elaborating on how she grasped the unsaid rules of bedside manners and patient interaction, the text recounts a particularly unsavoury experience:

When [Alice] started as a nurse, she was quite easy with her hands, taking pulses, pressing flesh for invisible tumours, tracking down that evasive source of pain. On a field trip to Sargodha district she was stopped by elderly men again and again to check their pulse. One day she ... took a stately grandfather's wrist in her hand and closed her eyes for extra concentration. She opened her eyes to give him the good news about his robust heart when she noticed that Grandpa's other hand had parted his dhoti and was tugging at a long, thin, flaccid penis. When she kicked the old man in his shins and started to walk away, she heard him mutter: 'I'll cut you up and throw the pieces in that well.' (Hanif, *Alice Bhatti* 95)

Her professional interest in his body is wilfully misunderstood and taken advantage of by the "patient" to act on his sexual proclivities. Even upon discovery, he is unabashed, indicating that he does not consider his actions as objectionable, but instead views her reaction as unwarranted. His response to her act of self-defence is an open threat to dismember her. As a working woman

from a lower-caste minority community in Pakistan, she encounters men like the “Grandpa” on a daily basis, be it from her neighbourhood in French Colony or at her place of work, Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments. The first signs of threatening behaviour towards Alice are relayed through acts of looking. The reader is introduced to the character’s discomfort under the male gaze before being introduced to the character herself, when, during a job interview, Alice understands from the sinister ominousness of her interviewer’s words and actions that her workplace was not going to be any different from the rest of her world, where “lewd gestures, whispered suggestions and uninvited hands on her bottom,” were all part of a normal day (9).

During the aforementioned interview for a nursing position at a hospital, Alice is asked a question by the orthopaedic surgeon on the board: “His eyes are level with Alice’s breasts. ‘Inverted nipples. How do you deal with them? Should you deal with them? Have you any personal experiences to share?’” (9). Repulsed by this veiled articulation of suggestive sexual intent, Alice cannot help but shudder. Even though she is equipped to deal with people who have considered it their right to claim her body for sexual and other purposes—as her encounter with the “stately grandfather” shows—Alice is always left unnerved by the Othering gaze. She finds herself questioning her judgement and wondering if she is overreacting when faced with a suggestive look from a co-worker or a hint of classist indifference from a patient. Instinctively, she is aware that the threat posed by the interviewer, disguised as a commonplace action, warrants a reaction from her, but the subtlety of the threat leaves her questioning her instincts and wondering if, “she missed something about the gesture,” and “[i]s she overreacting?” (10). In this way, the threat that is barely distinguishable gets integrated into the norms of sanctioned behaviour.

The gaze of the male observer is not always as threatening as Alice encounters in her interview with “Ortho Sir”, but can prove equally unnerving, as in this instance when she is being measured for her wedding trousseau by Mr. Dulhousie, a tailor in French Colony:

Alice’s body is one of those miracles of malnourishment, which has resulted in a thin, brittle bone structure with overgrown breasts ... [S]he has acquired a body that many girls of her age would kill for, or sometimes kill themselves while attempting to achieve. Her ribs can be counted through her shirt, her collarbones stick out like sharpened boomerangs, her ankles look like a display from an anatomy lab; but her breasts have somehow survived lack of proper nourishment, in fact seem to have thrived on the lack of a balanced diet, like Persian cantaloupes that only grow in the desert and die if it rains more than once every season... Mr Dulhousie wraps the tape around her ribcage, making sure that only the tips of his fingers touch her body, and whispers, “By Lord’s grace many rich Christian ladies starve themselves to acquire this kind of figure.” ... Dulhousie gets busy with measuring her and whispers another compliment. Alice can only make out something about how it’s a privilege to have a natural figure like this. (93-94)

Alice’s physical attributes are described by the omniscient third person narrator through the sexualised gaze of the men surveying her body. Here, it is Dulhousie, under whose professional scrutiny, Alice the woman turns into inanimate objects, divided into parts that are then compared to “sharpened boomerangs”, a skeletal display in a laboratory, and an exotic fruit. These particular images, mired as they are in either Orientalist tropes—her anatomy is compared to an elusive “Eastern” fruit that grows in mysterious conditions and to a throwing stick of Aboriginal origins from Australia which has been an enduring symbol of the savage native⁹—or in the

⁹ Shawn Rowlands has written about how Aboriginal material culture including the boomerang has been used to construct and propagate the idea of the primitive native (29).

defamiliarizing imagery of the medical exhibit of a human skeleton, render her simultaneously exotic and sensual. Hiding behind the pretence of measuring her for a new outfit, Dulhousie makes an estimate of her “figure”, his observations fixated mostly on her “overgrown breasts” (93). Even as he ensures that she is not made uncomfortable by his touch, making sure that “only the tips of his fingers touch her body,” his overt appreciation for her physique through both looks and “compliments” leave her in a distressed, albeit familiar, state. She notes how, what Dulhousie terms “a privilege,” referring to her thin and curvaceous figure, is to her “a curse,” as, “people always stare. She is constantly pulling down the hem of her shirt to deflect their attention” (94). It is this stare that Alice is constantly up against, controlling her behaviour and causing her distress through the very normal act of looking.

Alice also notes how women of her religious persuasion are sexualised more often than Muslim women and preyed upon as a result of the stereotype of being sexually licentious by predators like the “stately grandfather”. For her, the worst part about being an “untouchable” is that her caste status gives anyone the confidence to treat her as they see fit:

She can live with being an untouchable, but she desperately hopes for the only privilege that comes with being one. That people won’t touch her without her permission. But the same people who wouldn’t drink from the same tap that she has touched would have no problem casually poking their elbows into her breast or contorting their own bodies to rub against her heathen bottom. (95)

As an outsider in terms of her religion and caste as well as her gender, the dominant group of upper-class Muslim men who attack her find it easy to strip her off her human dignity because of her position as the oppositional Other. Her body is practically a battleground, “a compact little

war zone where competing warriors have trampled and left their marks”, with scars from the various times she has had to defend herself (174).

Diverging from Hanif’s foregrounding of the sexualising gaze directed at the Christian woman, Aslam focuses on Helen Masih’s (*The Golden Legend*) encounters with the dehumanising gaze of casteism and religious intolerance. In the early pages of the novel, Helen is confronted by a knife-wielding preteen:

He was looking at her and the expression on his face was somewhere between a sneer and a swoon, his body partly concealed in the shadow being thrown by a shelf. As he advanced into the room Helen saw that he was in fact trembling, the sharp length of the knife in his right hand moving to and fro as he approached the ladder.

... ‘What do you want?’

In a tranced, slightly submerged voice, he said, ‘I have to see.’

‘What do you have to see?’

‘Christians have black blood.’ (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 26)

Helen’s attacker is a shop boy who was delivering groceries to her Muslim neighbour’s house, the latter having arranged for Helen to receive it in her absence. The boy, who had been taken aback at finding a Christian in the house in a capacity that was not that of a servant, returned with a knife, intending to cut her up to see what colour her blood was, as it is well-known, according to him, that Christians have black blood (23). He is barely old enough to understand the gravity of what his actions would entail, but is determined to go through with it because he has inherited a way of seeing Helen and people like her that warrants unprovoked violence on these bodies. She is saved by a ringing phone bell, but not before the crazed look in her young attacker’s eyes, exacerbated by his shadowed face that wore “something between a sneer and a

swoon”, and the “tranced, slightly submerged voice” that he spoke in, make her fear for her life. Helen asks him, in response, “Who told you that? It’s red, just like yours,” to which he replies, “My mother told me. I have to see” (26). It is clear from the exchange that the hatred directed at a body that is visibly not different from the dominant group, but is still known to be the Other, is often not based on a sound logical argument of difference. The tendency to discriminate arises out of common prejudices instilled by everyday exchanges like a mother telling her son that infidels bleed black. The boy’s opinions about the difference between Christians and Muslims is based on myths about the body, anchoring his hatred to such a foundational aspect of biological and social life.

Bhanggi (*This House*), finds that the gaze of the society is a perpetual presence, and, in his words, “sometimes it feels that I am on display always” (28). As a member of the marginalised hijra (transgender) community residing in the poorest neighbourhoods of Lahore, Bhanggi’s only source of income comes from being a sex worker, inducing his intersex body to temporarily act as a female one for his customers. However, Bhanggi’s own gender and sexual preferences are of a heterosexual man, at odds with his upbringing among the hijras as a transwoman. Thus, the multiplicity of disadvantaged positions that Bhanggi occupies on the social order leaves him vulnerable on several counts. The hijras have no influence over the narratives that frame their bodies as “unnatural”; Bhanggi, even less so. This is seldom clearer than when a white woman, a ‘gori’, approaches Bhanggi for an interview to be featured in her BBC documentary. He notices that she is not pleased with what he has to tell her, only “want[ing] a story. The truth is never interesting enough” (77). Despite her investment in featuring his story in the documentary, the truth of Bhanggi’s existence becomes malleable under her narration, probing incessantly. Bhanggi notes the origins of her control over his narrative:

“[s]uspicion, doubt, hate, ji, all are begotten by differences. She is here because I am the culmination of all differences: skin, language, gender” (78). Bhanggi recognises that the story of his life is being wrenched from his hands, but is unable to protect himself. It is up to Nida, who is witness to this appalling show of privilege on the white woman’s part and horrified that she denies him his privacy by openly questioning him about his sexuality, to stand up for Bhanggi.

Nida, too, is aware of Bhanggi’s difference, even from the other hijras in the dargah: “[Bhanggi] didn’t look like any hijra I had ever seen. His features weren’t as hard or masculine as most other hijras. Neither did he wear the bright-coloured clothes most of his kind preferred. His hair was short...” (51). However, as Bhanggi observes, “Nida sees me differently though. She sees *me*” (78). Nida notices Bhanggi’s attempts to set himself apart from the other hijras, she *sees* his self-fashioning of masculinity that will separate him from the performance of femininity embraced by his adoptive family of transwomen. Nonetheless, Nida’s gaze is different from every other look he has ever received: “When her gaze falls on me, there is nothing alien, nothing harsh, not a speck of revulsion, and that is something only she has given me. My entire life has been a spectacle to the universal gaze of hate” (218). She refuses to reduce him to his gender, sexuality, or biological sex—or the “differences” of “skin, language, gender” that were highlighted by the gori. This could be attributed to her own position as the Other, a woman “imprisoned” by social conventions.¹⁰ She does not employ the universal looks of disgust or hatred that non-binary bodies like Bhanggi’s are usually treated to.

Contrasting her gaze with the Orientalist gaze of the gori who is only interested in presenting him as a salacious story, painting him a sexual deviant and drug addict, makes Bhanggi feel more like an individual and not just a representative of the hijras (78). The gori,

¹⁰ A discussion on Nida’s subjectivity will be undertaken in the next section.

who is aware that the semi-literate Bhanggi lacks the social capital or command of English that can challenge her version of his and the hijra community's history, wilfully misrepresents facts throughout the interview. Said's remarks on the use of tropes and narratives to solidify the oppositional and asymmetrical relationship between the author of the narrative and the subject it portrays stands affirmed in the context of this interaction. When Nida corrects the gori on a historical inaccuracy which she had used to prop up her narrative of the dangerous deviancy of the hijras, she has no defence but to say, "[m]y version is more interesting, don't you think?" (80). Meanwhile, Nida's attempt to shield Bhanggi from having his story misrepresented leaves him elated: "my heart soars, and to hide my joy I bend my head" (80).

Kaukab, in *Maps*, also faces constant judgement from all quarters of her immediate universe. She is a Pakistani woman stuck in a strange country, which, even though she has been residing there for three decades, she could never grow to like (Aslam, *Maps* 461). She, like the other immigrants of the British town she lives in, is determined to recreate the culture of her home country in every way possible, transforming the industrial township into a South Asian mohalla replete with landmarks named after national heroes and friendships formed from their devotion to their respective native nationhoods (40). The town itself is never referred to in the novel by its official name, but is known to the reader only as "Dasht-e-Tanhaii" (translated as the "Desert of Solitude"), the name used by the South Asian immigrants of the town.¹¹ Like many immigrants, Kaukab holds on to the culture of her homeland fiercely, and is determined that her children should be brought up and educated in the same customs that she herself grew up in. Throughout their growing years, she worked hard to ensure that their upbringing was as

¹¹ Kanwal argues that the strategic withholding of the name of the town and non-representation of its white residents is deliberate on Aslam's part in order to raise in importance the story of its diasporic population as opposed to that of the native, white narrative (158).

embedded in Islam and the culture of Pakistan as possible: Mah-Jabin, her daughter, was barred from wearing Western shirts unless they were stitched long and loose like a Pakistani kameez (131); her son Charag was made to understand that female friendship was taboo right from his schooldays (183); and she even refused to feed Ujala, her youngest child, as an infant because it was the month of Ramadan (202).¹² However, her husband Shamas, a communist sympathiser and non-believer, is not an ally in her struggle to keep her children from what she considers the evil values of Western societies. As adults, all her children turn their back on her, seeing her as a frail and misguided old woman who is stubborn in accepting change. On her part, Kaukab is careful to “conceal everything about Pakistanis that the children might deem objectionable” (110). She has to guard her beliefs and religion from her husband, children and even strangers who all seem to be up in arms against it. Her social circle is limited to other immigrants from the subcontinent and she is careful in avoiding contact with white people. She is extremely self-conscious of the image of herself, family and country that she presents to the white outsider, and often goes to great lengths to evade them altogether.

On one rare occasion when she is forced to interact with a white person, Kaukab is cautious of how she presents herself to them. Before hosting her brother-in-law Jugnu’s white girlfriend for dinner, she uncharacteristically fusses over her appearance and demeanour (not too successfully either, due to her nervousness):

She had never met a white person at such an intimate level as she would tonight, and for several days now she had been wondering which of her shalwar-kameez she should wear ... She clicked open the lid of the face-powder container for the first time in ten years ... She plucked hairs out of her eyebrows ... She wondered which earrings she should wear

¹² Md. Alamgir Hossain comments that Kaukab “creates a cultural cocoon of her own and tries to protect her identity by resisting any cultural invasion from the exterior” (98).

as she painted her mouth with the pale reddish-brown lipstick. Too much? ... She struggled hard not to cry at that but failed; in the end, however, she had to restrain herself because she also had to practice her English in the mirror. And it too was hopeless. (48-49)

Clearly in distress, Kaukab's anxiety specifically stems from the presence of the white woman. She is determined to tailor certain aspects of herself—her appearance, sense of fashion, language—to make a good impression on the white woman, acknowledging that the standards the white person judges her by are different from what her community would judge her by. Just as she was humiliated by the doctor knowing that her husband forgot her birthday, Kaukab is acutely sensitive to what the white woman might think of her “flaky elbows”, the absence of make-up on her face, or her lack of proficiency in English.

On another instance when she had to seek emergency medical help from a white doctor, she is careful about not creating a bad impression on him. Mortified that her husband Shamas admitted to having forgotten her date of birth (which happened to fall on that day) in front of the doctor, she worries about what the doctor would assume about them from her husband's apparent lack of affection for her:

Out there [in the world outside of her home in Britain], there was nothing but humiliation: she's hot with shame at what the white doctor would now think of Pakistanis, of Muslims—they are like animals, not even remembering or celebrating birthdays. Dumb cattle. (93)

Under the medically-sanctioned scrutiny of the white man's examination, Kaukab finds herself reliving the emotions that generations of her people had experienced: humiliation and shame at being the ones evaluated, checked for faults and always found to be lacking. She is not offended

that Shamas had not remembered her birthday; what bothers her are the inferences of callousness that the doctor might draw from this act of forgetfulness. Kaukab is convinced that the white person looking at her would see the barbarity of her people, likening them to animals who are unaccustomed to such “civilised” practices as the celebration of birthdays. Her fear that Shamas’ honest mistake could stand in affirmation for the diminished intellect of those who cannot be relied on to remember a significant date carries traces of the colonial justification of the imperial project as the subjugation of inferior minds by a benevolent, superior race. Thus, such anxiety around what the white person—the former colonial master—possibly thinks of her culture can be identified as a remnant of the effects of the colonial gaze that Said has argued is an integral part of Othering.

Kaukab’s anxieties are, firstly, rooted in the awareness that her behaviour, or Shamas’, are frequently extrapolated to stereotype the groups they ostensibly belong to—Pakistanis and Muslims, historically the colonial subject and the cultural/religious Other to the white European gaze. The weight of her predecessors’ struggles continues to inform both her behaviour, and from her perspective, that of the white man as she comes under his purview. Her experiences echo the thoughts of Frantz Fanon on the moment of encounter between the black man and the white man, which made the former feel like “[he] was responsible at the same time for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors” (Fanon 84). Moreover, she understands that the next member of these groups—that she had recognised as being part of—who might have to consult the white doctor can be judged by the impression the couple leaves. Fanon, as a black man who was made to feel like a representative of all black people, understands this conundrum well: “I

knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him” (88).¹³

Being caught true to the colonial stereotype of being, in Kaukab’s own words, “unhealthy people, disease-riddled, filthy bearers of epidemics” (Aslam, *Maps* 451) or “animals” (93), is a fear shared by most of the immigrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. When a junior cleric is caught red-handed for sexually abusing children who come to the local mosque for instruction in religion, the community is reluctant to report the crime, as “the scandal would give Islam and Pakistan a bad name” (337). In this case, however, the compunction that the guilt and punishment of the cleric has to be borne collectively provides a suitable recourse for the community’s need to maintain the status quo of patriarchy. Thus, beyond merely embodying the visual signifiers of Otherness, such as differences due to skin colour, clothing and customs or language, the burden of being responsible for the perception of entire populations sharing these differences complicates the immigrants’ inter- and intra-community relationships.

It is interesting to note that Kaukab is also capable of being fiercely protective of her culture, religion and nation. She debates unflaggingly with her son Ujala about the human rights violations as practised among certain literal followers of Islamic edicts:

Ujala continues, ‘A religion that has given dignity to millions around the world?

Amputations, stoning to death, flogging—not barbaric?’

‘These punishments are of divine origin and cannot be judged by human criteria.’ (458)

Kaukab is able to counter her son’s staunchly secular logic to some extent, displaying a confidence in her arguments with him, a non-white opposer of her beliefs. This fades when she

¹³ The “physician” Fanon refers to here is an example of a black man in a public role who will be judged harsher than his white counterpart in a similar scenario, and whose conduct will also form a blueprint for the evaluation of every black person by the colonial gaze.

encounters a white person, as evidenced by the incessant planning she applies to her appearance and behaviour before meeting Jugnu's girlfriend, attempting to transcend the stereotypes she expects the white woman would view her through. While she is afraid that the doctor or her white guest would think her ill-civilised and uncouth, she is not anxious about facing this treatment from non-whites who profess the same values of modernity and secularism. The difference between Kaukab's reactions to the white woman's hypothetical disapproval and to her son's virulent attacks on her religion is what she finds herself becoming under these respective looks of disapproval; while she may argue with Ujjala as an equal, she finds that under the colonial gaze, she transforms into the historical Other.¹⁴

This postcolonial anxiety, fuelled by a knowledge of the erstwhile master's gaze is also reflected in Karamat Lone (in Shamsie's *Home Fire*), the son of an immigrant from Pakistan who navigates the vicious tides of racism and Islamophobia to rise up to the rank of UK's Home Secretary. Karamat's early life had been a constant struggle to shed the clichés associated with a Pakistani Muslim from Wembley. Raised in Bradford, one of those parts of London which is almost exclusively populated by working class immigrant families, Karamat did not have any of his life's successes handed out to him. He worked his way up the ladder of political ambition through sheer hard work, his biggest motivation being to leave behind his immigrant Muslim roots and present himself as a British citizen first. In doing so, Karamat often chose a path that his son Eamonn characterises as, "a completely enlightened preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque and [highlighting] the need for British Muslims to lift themselves

¹⁴ Once again, Fanon's words in *Black Skin, White Masks* are relevant in understanding Kaukab's experience: "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (82). Whereas, when placed alongside the white man, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (82-83).

out of the Dark Ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect” (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 59). He carefully constructs his public identity so as to avoid letting his connections to Islam or the country of his parents, Pakistan, come to the fore. He had left Bradford behind and was getting his university education when he met Terry, his future wife and a wealthy white American (16). Terry Lone supports her husband in all matters of his career and together, they form a formidable power-couple. After his marriage to Terry, Karamat is able to successfully sever most ties with the culture he was brought up in, endearing himself to the public eye as a reformed Muslim—someone who was born into Islam but had fully accepted a cosmopolitan British culture by distancing himself from his native one. In spite of stressing on his “enlightened preferences”, racial discrimination occasionally comes knocking at Karamat’s door. One such instance, referenced by Eamonn in the aforementioned quote, was this:

... LONE WOLF’S PACK REVEALED the headlines screamed when a tabloid got hold of [a picture of Karamat Lone entering a mosque that had been in the news for its “hate preacher”], near the end of his first term as an MP. The Lone Wolf’s response had been to point out that the picture was several years old, he had been there only for his uncle’s funeral prayers and would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space. This was followed by pictures of him and his wife walking hand in hand into a church. His Muslim-majority constituency voted him out in the elections that took place just a few weeks later, but he was quickly back in Parliament via a by-election, in a safe seat with a largely white constituency, and the tabloids that had attacked him now championed him as a LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims. (35)

His act of entering a mosque, particularly one with a blemished history, was publicised in an effort to smear Karamat’s carefully constructed reputation as a hard-working immigrant who had

successfully shed most of his cultural baggage to be elected into one of the highest offices in the country. Additionally, Karamat's characterisation as a wolf, a creature whose predatory nature has been the subject of children's tales and fables—the cautionary tales of “wolves in sheep's clothing” or the menacing Big Bad Wolf of European folklore come to mind—should be noted. Moreover, his labelling as a “Lone Wolf”—even accounting for the wordplay on his surname—carries inherent implications of anomaly and suspicion, as wolves are popularly understood to be loyal to their packs. This reference also calls to attention the close-knit nature of immigrant communities. The tabloid appears to be using these specific signifiers to remind its (white) readers to be vigilant in their acceptance and elevation of a brown man, who has visibly distanced himself from his community, to one of the country's most powerful positions.

Karamat, however, is able to put a spin on his actions in such a manner that he goes from being a “lone wolf” separated from a Muslim pack to a “Lone crusader” who worked tirelessly to protect British culture, even making the bold move of publicly disowning his roots. His political success, however, comes from not just effectively renouncing the brown, Muslim parts of his identity, but also by completely embracing those aspects of the liberal British identity that Muslims are accused of lacking, like gender equality. Even the framing of his victorious parliamentary run is tainted with residuum of the historical clash of cultures between the medieval Christian and Muslim worlds, the logic of which continues to inform global encounters. By turning the “Lone Wolf” into a “Lone Crusader,” the media simultaneously renews both the social memory of his cultural roots as well the cultural memory of the historical Other. Karamat is backed into a corner from which he has to “[take] on the backwardness of Muslims” as a modern-day crusader, showing how the binary reasoning of the War on Terror—“with us or against us”—functions.

His personal life is constantly under scrutiny by the public and the media for any links to the culture he was born into. In order for Karamat to be successful, he has to prove to a largely white, Christian public, watching through the paparazzi's camera, that he has reformed and is setting aside his roots to take the garb of the liberated West. At the height of his success and power, Karamat makes a speech that quickly goes viral and turns him into even more of a national favourite:

There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve...You are, we are, British.

Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say 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 that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multiethnic, multireligious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. (87-88)

Here, he is shown advising an assembly of students at a Muslim majority school in London to assimilate themselves into the mainstream British culture if they hoped to be accepted by the rest of the country. By putting the burden of assimilation on the Muslim students, he marks them as different from the conservative tilt of the nation and aligns himself with the political status quo. He sets himself up as an example of success they should all aspire to be, the model British Muslim who was able to successfully overcome the trappings of his unfortunate origins to attain a prosperous life. Karamat's speech echoes the sentiments of the Western establishment in the post 9/11 era in which immigrant populations in the First World are being frequently called upon to pledge their allegiance to the imagined community of the Western nation-state. Delivered at a time when Islamic fundamentalism and the influence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

are shaping the national dialogue on citizenship, his words were lauded by the public but had sparked outrage among the Muslim community who saw it as a direct affront to the right to practice their religion. More importantly, as Aneeka Pasha, a third-generation Briton from Pakistan points out, Karamat's words give the Islamophobic public even more reason to attack anyone who dared to not blend in, "[making] it OK to stigmatise people for the way they dress" (90). Thus, according to Karamat Lone, the only way for a brown Muslim to be successful in the First World is by carefully fashioning one's identity and shedding one's native layers to prove one's loyalty to the dominant culture.

Therefore, Karamat's success and the society's "acceptance" of his identity—indicated by his transition from being an underdog to a presumptive candidate to the post of UK's Prime Minister—betray the dominant Self's need to measure up to the superior standards they have set for themselves. Upon attributing to the Other the qualities of barbarity, violence and fanaticism—as the immigrants in *Home Fire* are accused of—the Self attributes to itself the converse of these qualities. Thus, it appears to accept Karamat into its folds on a conditional basis—that he proves that he is different from the Other, has fully accepted the superiority of the Self, and is persistent in divesting himself of those aspects considered as consistent with the Other. Karamat is repeatedly called upon to reject Islam and its practices, while being constantly watched for deviations. The media's obsession with a photograph of him entering a mosque he grew up around, and its swift backtracking once he countered this attack by releasing another picture, of his exiting a church shows how intently his actions, especially those pertaining to his position as the Other, are being watched. When he is appointed as the Home Secretary, Eamonn is on guard against "all the old muck they scrape up about him every time he's in the headlines," worrying that, "this time it'll be worse" (34). By engaging in such calculated attacks that recycle

previously reported stories about his Muslim roots and alleged loyalties to his culture, the media gaze ensures that the binary of the dominant Self and the inferior Other that is thus created is prolonged through a more deliberate act—surveillance. Society keeps Karamat's actions in check through repeatedly reinforcing the rules that govern the binary to keep the two categories separate and intact. This can take many forms, from a formalised state mechanism that watches the actions of certain sections of the population, to instruments that contribute to public information such as the media (this aspect of the state apparatus and the body of the Other will be dealt with in the final section of this chapter). These institutions are in a position to not only identify the Other, but also to continue to steer the narratives about them. As the aforementioned episode which showed Karamat entering a mosque makes clear, these categories are constantly defined and redefined according to the interests of the former and the latter is kept under strict control through constant surveillance.

Hiroko Tanaka, the protagonist of Shamsie's multi-generational epic *Burnt Shadows*, is driven out of her homeland in Nagasaki, Japan by the horrors of the nuclear bombs dropped by the USA during World War II. Leaving Japan, she arrives in Delhi to meet with the Burtons, the family of her fiancé Konrad who had perished in the bombing. At the bungalow occupied by the Burtons, she encounters James Burton, Konrad's brother-in-law: "'Are you here to see my wife?' he said. She turned, and James said, 'Good Lord,' as he found himself looking at a Japanese woman" (41). James, a British colonial lawyer working in Delhi, is unnerved by Hiroko from the moment they first met: "James was oddly perturbed by this woman who he couldn't place...this Japanese woman in trousers. What on earth was she all about?" (46). It is Hiroko's position as a racial Other that first disturbs James, whose very first words to her are an exclamation of surprise at her unfamiliar facial features.

When informed of Hiroko's connection to Konrad, James enquires in wonder, "[h]ave you come from Nagasaki?", noting that "She seemed far too...whole to belong to any of those photographs [from the aftermath of the nuclear attack]" (36). Her obvious independence, evidenced by her willingness to travel across the continent from Japan to the heart of colonial India at a time when not many women undertook such journeys, is the next thing that sets Hiroko apart in James' eyes, as he notes with distaste how he would never "allow" his wife Elizabeth to live as Hiroko does (47). Thus, as a foreigner, woman and Nagasaki-survivor, what Hiroko has to encounter is a multitude of pitiful, offensive and censoring gazes. Her self-sufficiency, in spite of being a woman and the survivor of one of the world's most horrendous disasters is unconvincing as survivors of the attack are, in James' opinion, "something barely recognisable as human" (46). James' words hint at the discursive dominance he claims over Hiroko, even on the topic of her personal suffering. Her attempts at transgressing the limits allowed to her gender while simultaneously refusing to be a sequestered hibakusha shape her position as an opposition to James, the Western coloniser. He resists the infractions Hiroko presents by questioning her victimhood—opining that only the worst of observable physical injuries, verging on the stripping away of one's humanness, could grant the survivor that position.

Hiroko detests how the tragedy had marked her for life—by the burn marks on her back as well as the accompanying tag of a "hibakusha".¹⁵ It reduced her to a mere body, an insignificant figure in a table of statistics: "It was a fear of reduction rather than any kind of quest that had forced her away from Japan. Already she had started to feel that the word 'hibakusha' start to consume her life...she was nothing beyond an explosion-affected person;

¹⁵ Akiko Naono defines "hibakusha" as "someone who has directly received injurious effects from an atomic bombing, rather than all who suffered as a result", especially with reference to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks (334).

that was her defining feature” (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 49). Her body bears the marks of her sufferings, and she finds herself being offered a “biological citizenship”¹⁶—that of a *hibakusha*—that will continue to determine every aspect of her life. This conundrum is reflected in the title of the novel as well, referring to the wounds— “the three charcoal-coloured bird-shaped burns on her back” (90)—that were seared into both her body and her identity and would never cease to follow her. Hiroko leaves behind the only life she had ever known to embark upon a journey that presents multiple challenges in search of environs that will help her grow into something new, nourishing parts of her self that is not all about the tragedies she miraculously survived. She is convinced that leaving Japan is the right decision because the rest of the world might present her with a clean slate that would not already hold details of the marks the nuclear bombs left on her person, both on tangible and emotional levels—the burnt flesh on her back and the loss of a future with Konrad which seemed inevitable in the moments before the blast.

Later, Hiroko would make a home in post-Partition Karachi with her South Asian husband Sajjad and son Raza. She would then realise that even though genetics had spared Raza from the wretched life that offspring of the *hibakusha* are at times born with, the fearful look she elicited from James would follow Raza too. Raza, born with the features inherited from both his South Asian father and Japanese mother, and with a gift of language that made him count off five tongues he was fluent in by the age of fifteen knew that he was special, a bright and confident boy who was expected to reach great heights. His first taste of rejection, at the hands of his

¹⁶ Adriana Petryna had coined this term to refer to the claims of belonging made by the survivors of the Chernobyl disaster, primarily demanding reparative healthcare and social welfare schemes (261). However, as she notes, the formation of an identity based on these claims could also prove detrimental, “intensify[ing] new kinds of vulnerability in domestic, scientific, and bureaucratic spheres” (265). Hiroko, here, seeks to escape this latter consequence of biological citizenship.

neighbour Salma, which should have been only a normal rite of passage for any teenager, went thus:

‘It’s not about [our] age [difference]. It’s your mother. Everyone knows about your mother.’

‘What about her?’

‘Nagasaki. The bomb. No one will give their daughter to you in marriage unless they’re desperate, Raza. You could be deformed. How do we know you’re not?’

Raza sat forward, gripping the phone tightly.

‘Deformed? I’m not. Salma, your father is my doctor. I’m not deformed.’

‘Maybe not in anyway we can see. But there’s no guarantee. You might have something that you can pass on to your children. I’ve seen the pictures. Of babies born in Nagasaki after the bomb.’

‘I’ve never even been to Nagasaki. I was born twenty years after the bomb. Please. You don’t want to talk to me anymore, OK, say that. But don’t say this. Don’t say you think I’m deformed.’

‘You need to know. This is how people think about you.’ (189)

When rejected by his teenage crush because of the stigma that surrounds the nuclear bombs, he suffers not only the blow of unrequited love, but also the awareness that the way he looks—courtesy his Indian father and Japanese mother—and the violent scars left on his mother's body are reasons enough for a lifetime of rejections. He stands out among the neighbourhood children and is often teased that his cousin from India looks more like a Pakistani than Raza does (190). The muhajir colony in Karachi where he spent his entire life seems to all have been talking behind his back and rejecting him silently, as Salma reports. Being told that he would never be

fully accepted in the only home he has ever known leads him to search for spaces where he would fit in, where he would not elicit questions of origin, but would automatically be accepted as a member. Raza Konrad Ashraf thus becomes Raza Hazara, a person who discovers himself only as he is observed by others, one who feels the “rightness of [pretending to be a Hazara] press against his spine” (164).¹⁷

Thus far, I have looked at how the process of Othering operates—by attributing to the Othered individual/group a set of characteristics based on a lack, which, through repeated reiterations, coalesce to strengthen existing stereotypes which will further affect future interactions. The specific lens identified include the Orientalising gaze which plays out the lingering power dynamics of colonialism, and the sexualising gaze—including the prospect of exoticizing, simply another tool employed to maintain explicit difference—which is used to objectify women and gender minorities. The eye of the media often intervenes in constructing these roles, conveying the subjects of the gaze to a broader audience and maintaining a channel of surveillance on the behaviour of the Other.

It will be fruitful to examine the reasons why the dominant Self is invested in creating the Other. Turning to Hanif’s *Alice Bhatti*, it can be understood that for the Self, it is not always about just showcasing a spectacle of their power, but a matter of reinforcing that power through calculated acts of oppression. On her only encounter with “Junior”, the spoiled scion of an old business empire and son of a patient under her care in the VIP room of the hospital, Sister Alice finds his genitals thrust in her face and a gun pointed at her head, all within a few minutes of meeting him. He demands that she satisfy his sexual urges, threatening to kill her if she would

¹⁷ Raza’s appropriation of the fluidity of his racial features within the context provided by the increased migration of Afghans to Pakistani cities in the 1980s will be explored in detail in the next section.

not obey him, as, “he pins her down with one hand and pulls out a revolver from under his shirt, then stands there with a blank face as if he has forgotten what he was planning to do. “Suck,” he says in a low voice, as if asking for another slice of cake, waving his revolver towards his crotch” (Hanif, *Alice Bhatti* 59). Even though he has made his intentions to coerce her into obeying him crystal-clear, Alice notes that he seemed to not desire her sexually, judging by his “blank face” devoid of animation, and his body’s “flaccid” lack of cooperation (60). He treats her as he would a service provider— “in a low voice, as is asking for another slice of cake”— who owes him sexual gratification. Junior’s assault does not, therefore, arise from his need to make a sexual conquest, but seems to be more of a routine chore of asserting his superior position—pre-decided by his high birth and his masculinity—through diminishing the self-worth of a woman of humble origins who dared to aspire for a position that would place her in the same room as him. The construction of his identity is heavily dependent on his exercise of power over the lower-caste woman’s body; he becomes a “man” when he reinforces this dynamic.

Another example of the rigidity of social structures can be seen in the normative restrictions imposed on the hijra community of *This House*. Bhanggi, who had been forced into sex work since he was eight, discovered at the age of fifteen that he was attracted to women (Mansab 6, 43). Abandoned at birth, presumably due to his intersex body, the hijra community that adopted him is the only family he has ever known. The community was structured by an internal hierarchy with Gulabo, “the Guru, the master,” who “[n]o one dares disobey,” at the very top; the best earners among her set, “the Nightingales” coming next; and the rest of them, including Bhanggi, at the bottom (77, 6). Outside of this hierarchy, the hijras function as a single entity, united against the hatred directed at them from the rest of the society. Thus, when Bhanggi realises that even though he had been brought up as a transwoman and groomed to work

as a female prostitute he identified as a heterosexual man, he is reluctant to share this “abnormality” with the rest of his kin: “My feelings and my reactions to [a woman’s body] shamed and thrilled me....the way my body responded to a woman’s was not something I shared with the other hijras of the chawl. I was afraid to tell anyone there about it, lest I became an outcast amongst outcasts” (43). Intimately familiar with ostracism due to the reality of his body, Bhanggi preferred to keep his sexuality to himself lest he be Othered by his own community too.

Despite his best efforts, Bhanggi’s sexuality is forced into the open and he seeks the shelter of a Sufi shrine, a dargah, where he meets Nida. The pair—Bhanggi, disowned by his family; Nida, owned and treated like property by hers—embark on a love affair that is eventually discovered by Nida’s husband, Saqib. A politician with immense influence, Saqib has no trouble ordering Bhanggi’s murder. Bhanggi was killed, not because Saqib considered him a rival, as Nida notes:

[It was] not that he had considered the importance of the hijra in my life. It was that he, the mighty husband, had been disobeyed and inconvenienced. He had been cheated out of his due of blind obedience as Husband Almighty. Bhanggi had been killed to avoid embarrassment, not because he was considered a threat. He had been killed to keep Saqib away from the idea of him, the anomaly, the disease, the abnormality. (266)

Saqib represents an idea of masculinity—the breadwinner and the fixer of all problems—who Nida sarcastically labels her “Husband Almighty” (266). His positions of power as a heterosexual man holding a political office and as Nida’s husband were never seriously threatened by Bhanggi. Bhanggi was nevertheless eliminated because of his indolence in pursuing a relationship with Nida, while publicly embodying the identity of a hijra. Contrary to what Nida says, Bhanggi was “considered a threat,” just not in the sense she assumes, as

competition for her affections. The threat he posed was against the stability of the social order that Saqib sat at the top of, transgressing the strictly defined margins that hijras were confined to. Bhanggi blurred these boundaries between the cis-heterosexual normal that Saqib and his relationship in marriage to Nida signified, by daring to desire one of his possessions, his wife. Bhanggi, thus, unintentionally set himself up in the same league as Saqib in spite of his status as “the anomaly, the disease, the abnormality,” and it was this difference that Saqib sought to eliminate.

It is a similar case of teaching someone their “place” in the social order that prompted the vigilantes of *The Golden Legend* to target Lily Masih, an auto-rickshaw driver from Badami Bagh. Lily, a lower-caste Christian widower had fallen in love with his Muslim neighbour Aysha, and their clandestine relationship is discovered only months later by Aysha’s brother-in-law, a religious fanatic who controls every aspect of her life. At this time, Badami Bagh is plagued by a series of unscheduled, anonymous announcements broadcasting secret vices and “immoral” acts of the people in the locality, judged by a rigid and literal interpretation of Islamic scriptures. In the background, there is more trouble brewing in the neighbourhood, evident in the increased friction between the Muslim and Christian communities, as in the case of Lily and Babur, another of his Muslim neighbours:

‘Your head has always been a little too big for your own good.’ [said Babur]

Lily threw up his hands.

‘I’m so sorry if I have offended you,’ Babur said, taking a step closer. ‘You think you are better than anyone else because Massud can buy you a house and a rickshaw. And now there’s the promise of the money from the tower... Nine out of ten houses in this

neighbourhood are mine. That tower should be on one of my properties.’ (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 46-47)

Babur is angered by Lily’s good fortune in having a house to his name and steady income from his day job as a rickshaw driver. The ‘tower’ referred to in the excerpt is a cell base station that is being constructed on Lily’s property by a telecom company, providing him extra revenue as rent. Babur, who makes his living by letting out his many properties to Christians, and arranging lowly cleaning jobs in the city of Zamana for his tenants, finds it difficult to digest Lily’s self-sufficiency. Financial envy is not the main reason for Babur’s antagonism towards Lily, but contempt for the descendant of manual scavengers who challenged his monopoly over much of the land revenue in the neighbourhood. If Babur’s claim of “nine out of ten houses” in Badami Bagh belonging to him was factual, one can surmise that Lily’s land ownership was one of the only outlier cases of Christians who were not dependent on Babur, thereby actively challenging his complete dominance. Moreover, Lily’s example would provide hope for the rest of his Christian brethren, making it in Babur’s interest to discipline the ambitious Lily.

It is in this juncture that Aysha and Lily found themselves the subject of an announcement amplified by the loudspeakers of the local mosque, declaring their relationship a “sinful, immoral and criminal association” (135). This is followed by a horrific episode of violence:

The voice [from the mosque’s minarets] spoke for fifteen minutes, and afterwards the noise of the crowd seemed to increase. There was gunfire and screams...it was obvious now that they had planned it all for some days, if not weeks. They had been waiting for an excuse and nothing would have stopped them from inventing one. But now they had it. There were hundreds of men out there in the lanes and alleys, brought in by the men with

the prayer-stained brows. They wanted to drive Christians out of Badami Bagh, kill as many of them as possible in the dead-end streets. (142)

When the angry mob sets out to hunt Christians and burn their property, it is the cell tower, the symbol of Lily's prosperity, that is the first to go up in flames, by Babur's specific instructions: "The men were coming in and he shouted to them: 'Bring down that phone tower'" (139). Next, they attack Lily's main source of income, the rickshaw, drenching it in petrol and burning it down (140-141). Energised by these lawless acts, the mob decides to not restrict their wrath to Lily alone: "The men were raising fists. 'Let's burn down every Christian house before daybreak.' 'No.' Babur—visibly concerned—squared his shoulders in a full display of vigour. 'We mustn't harm anyone else, just the man who lives here'" (140). Thus, the real reason for the communal riot in Badami Bagh arose from the dominant Muslim Self feeling threatened by the flourishing (albeit slow) of the Christian population, led by Lily. The discovery of Lily's affair with Aysha was only a convenient addition, an extra instance of a breached line separating The Christians and the Muslims. Lily's actions were viewed as unforgivable because of both his religion and station in life, hoping to curb any other instances of comeuppance that might threaten their position at the top of the social ladder. The murderous riots were a response to Lily improving his living conditions, moving away from inhumane forms of labour to an occupation that afforded him much more dignity.

The aim of this section has been to point out the different manners in which Othering takes place, weaving itself through existing categories of dominance and oppression. If it is the act of looking that results in the creation of the Other in cases like the eponymous Alice Bhatti, *The Golden Legend's* Helen and Lily, or *Burnt Shadows's* Hiroko and Raza, it is the sensation of being seen in a particular way that governs the actions of Kaukab from *Maps*, and Karamat from

Home Fire. The next section will look into the different ways in which these subjects perform their Otherness in an attempt at creating alternate spaces that offer protection from violence.

1.2. The Body Project: Framing the Othered Body

The tendency of social forces to create categories of the Other based on identities like race, gender, sexuality, class, religion and nationality betray an imbalance in power as the dominant groups position themselves as the Self to which the Other is seen as a binary opposite. The Self and the Other, here, are constructed identities which acquire meaning through a confluence of attributes assigned to each category. The Other is discriminated against and oppressed by the dominant Self so as to legitimise their hegemonic position. The existence of the Other is essential for the Self to maintain their social identity, as the previous section had illustrated, deriving from Edward Said's view of the Orient and Occident as oppositional forces. Taking this theory of the social construction of identities forward is the work of Judith Butler, who attributes the apparent rigidity of these categories to repeated performances of actions associated with each category, concluding that performances of social identities can be negotiated. I also scaffold this methodological framework with Chris Shilling's suggestion that the individual body can be seen as a *project*, since the "appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner" (4). I attempt to decipher the motivations that prompt the characters to modify their bodies, particularly as a response to external forces.

"Deviant" bodies are those that mark a departure from the idea of a universal "normal" body, the latter constructed at the intersection of 'superior' strains of race, gender, sexuality,

ability, caste or class (Terry and Urla 5). The construction of deviant bodies as the Other is largely a function of such identity markers, the representations of which—in everyday life, literature and art—contribute to the consolidation of the specific categories in which the bodies are located. The Otherness of these bodies are traced through their struggle to combat life while embodying various kinds of deviances, showing how the identity of the Other provides a diverse tapestry of struggles that demand detailed examination. The queer body of Bhanggi (*This House*) is safest when disguised, either as a religious man, a qalandar, or as a transgender woman, a hijra. Religion fashions the manners and attires of the Muslim-female bodies of Nadia (*Exit West*) and Nida (*This House*), adding an intersection of the performance of Islam and gender to this study. The Christian bodies of Lily, Helen and Margaret (*The Golden Legend*), and Alice (*Alice Bhatti*) are constant targets for Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan and are forced to either disguise themselves as Muslims on different occasions or rely on Muslim allies for protection. Debates on how immigrant populations can find their own space in foreign lands, a topic of paramount importance in relation to the current flux of human capital across the globe, will be better informed by examining the ways in which Isma and Aneeka Pasha and Karamat Lone (*Home Fire*), the refugees Saeed and Nadia (*Exit West*), and Raza and his Japanese mother Hiroko (*Burnt Shadows*) encounter the difference that the colour of their skin makes. As can be seen from the plethora of potentially “deviant” bodies assembled here, it is evident that Othering and the experiences it produces are diverse and challenging.

Adding to the discrimination that the physicality of being a “deviant” body is subjected to is the violence faced by anybody one who does not fit the stereotype. This raises several questions: Is there ever a “right” way to embody one’s sexuality, religion or race? How do acts of clothing, or social behaviour contribute to the creation or recreation of identities? Beginning

with the idea that identities are constantly constructed by societal norms, this section will then trace the ways in which such constructions are performed by bodies that are denigrated as “deviant”. Drawing on Butler’s theory, the consequences of such performance will be studied, focussing on interpreting it as an indicator of resistance to the Othering through the creation of alternate spaces that offer protection from violence.

Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, opened a unique line of enquiry into the social construction of gender identities on the basis of which lengthy strides have been made in gender theory. Butler posits that understandings of concepts like gender, sex and sexuality are deeply embroiled in what she calls the heterosexual matrix—a set of social norms that restrict gender identities to the male/female binary, presuming that all normal manifestations of gender are cis-gendered and heterosexual. The heterosexual matrix ensures that bodies that do not follow the prescribed norms are made to exist in a marginalised condition outside the boundaries of the matrix, but still governed by it (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 165). To identify as non-binary is not exactly a subversion to the power exerted by the heterosexual matrix, because it allows for such deviations while still holding the deviant bodies in an oppressed state. Registering resistance to such a pervasive system of suppression will be possible only by reappropriating the tools of the system to “redeploy and destabilise the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity” (166). Thus, it is by the reiterations of previously existing norms on gendered behaviour that one comes to occupy a gender identity, and these repeated performances hold the potential to rewire the heterosexual matrix. As she elaborates in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, power operates in such a way as to not only oppress the lower rungs of the hegemonic structure, but also to create the identity of the oppressed. Calling this the “paradox of subjection”, Butler explains that

power is sustained by not just active subjection, but by creating a condition of dependency that causes the oppressed to both define themselves and their resistance: “subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (*The Psychic Life of Power* 2).

1.2.1. Unravelling the Veiled Body

As important a voice as Butler’s is to queer politics, is that of Saba Mahmood’s to the gender politics of Islam. Mahmood, along with other critics of Western liberal feminism,¹⁸ presents this as an alternative to the secular politics of the mainstream feminist movements that decry the gender inequality that Islam has become synonymous with. She reads the resistance shown by Muslim women in the face of patriarchal control over their bodies as being fashioned from their faith in an Islamic way of life. She argues that within this schema, the Western notion of gender equality as the emancipation of women from all forms of power structures will not suffice, but requires a more nuanced understanding that is dependent on the Muslim women’s varied desires and goals which are informed by their religious beliefs (208). Agency, for Mahmood, is not merely the freedom to choose, but “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (203). Here, Mahmood’s argument lies very close to Butler’s in that they both prescribe that resistance to these overarching power structures stem from the “subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their own interests and agendas” (Mahmood 205). By pointing out that this

¹⁸ The work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her influential essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” discusses Western feminist theory’s tendency to “discursively colonize,” by conflating the experiences of the “Third World Woman,” robbing them of the nuanced cultural, political and economic subjectivities they hold (334). Mahmood’s work is part of this subversive criticism by postcolonial feminists.

subversion is a choice made by the individual undergoing subjection, Mahmood adds an interesting dimension of the motivations behind resistance, departing from Butler's fixation on the structure that allows for the resistance (Mahmood 211). This section will try to extend the major propositions from Butler and Mahmood to other marginal, intersectional identities to understand the role of the Othered body in articulating resistance.

The protagonists of Shamsie's *Home Fire* are treated with suspicion, and on occasion, with open hostility because of their bodies. Eamonn, Aneeka's lover and, later, her fiancé, is struck by her difference from the posh, predominantly white group of friends that form his most intimate circles. He wonders how he would introduce her to them, summarising her as she would appear to them: "Aneeka—the hijab, the refusal of alcohol, Wembley" (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 82). Eamonn's reluctance shows that he is aware of the stares that would follow Aneeka and the whispers that would ensue behind her back, all focusing on her choice of religious attire, her open Islamic beliefs, and the low social class that Wembley, London stood for in their eyes. Though Eamonn is able to hazard a guess as to how bad things could get for a hijabi immigrant in Britain, he is unprepared for the constant vitriol that Aneeka faced. When she comes home with spit on her face after an encounter with an Islamophobe on the London Underground, he is stunned. His shock is exacerbated when he learns that it was possibly due to a speech by his father Karamat, then Britain's Home Secretary, that his beloved found herself at the receiving end of such racial abuse. The speech (as discussed previously in this chapter) had been delivered to the student population of a Muslim majority school in London and highlights the normalised Othering of immigrants and Muslims in Britain. The acceptance of bodies such as that of the audience listening to the speech, and of people like Aneeka, by mainstream Britain is conditional, hinging on aspects like clothing and "outdated codes of behaviour". Unless one

performs an approved kind of identity, one that is devoid of visible forms of difference like one's dress or mannerisms, one will not be accepted as British. Even in the same breath as he hails the diversity of the United Kingdom, Karamat warns his fellow Muslims that the way they hold on to their ethnic, religious and national identities is an obstacle that keeps others from truly considering them British. Coming from the mouth of the Home Secretary, and a Muslim himself, Karamat's words further legitimise violence of the sort Aneeka faced, in effect broadcasting to the nation that it is in the right to attack Muslims who openly display their religious identity, and in extension, any body that refuses to conform to the idea of an ideal British citizen.

When Aneeka's relationship with the Home Secretary's son was exposed by the media, she was nicknamed "Hojabi" by the tabloids (204), the portmanteau indicating that her clothing would always determine what others perceived of her character, that her multi-layered identity would often be reduced to what she chose to wear, and that she will continue to be, "abused for the crime of daring to love while covering her head" (245). The text leaves no doubt that the effect of Karamat's words is immediate and directly correlated to the Aneeka being humiliated on the Tube:

"Does anyone give you a hard time because of the hijab?" [Eamonn] said.

[Aneeka] tilted her head back to rest it against his chest and look up at him. "If you're nineteen and female you'll get some version of a hard time for whatever you wear.

Mostly it's the kind of thing that's easy to shrug off. Sometimes things happen that make people more hostile. Terrorist attacks involving European victims. Home secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress. That kind of thing."

(90)

While Aneeka has to deal with the abuse that he set the spark to, Karamat is able to align himself as part of mainstream Britain even though he had been an alumnus of the same school he addresses in the speech quoted above, and had grown up in conditions very similar to those of his rapt listeners (88). He situates himself as “the home secretary [who] was being lionised for his truth-telling, his passion, the fearlessness with which he was willing to take on both the anti-migrant attitudes of his own party and the isolationist culture of the community he’d grown up in”, a sagacious figure who is intent on showing an uncivilised people the rewards of melding into a civilised culture (88). He is given an opportunity to attempt to meld in, even though his position within this conservative fold is treated with suspicion.

The veiled woman, like Aneeka Pasha in her hijab, has long been considered by Western feminism as the biggest symbol of oppression of Muslim women.¹⁹ Thus, it is not surprising that it is she who faces immediate retribution the morning after Karamat “cautioned” Muslims to not dress differently from the rest of Britain. The veil is, undoubtedly, the most ostensibly Islamic artefact that the West is familiar with (Göle 1). One of the considerations within the “humanitarian” motivation for the War on Terror has been to “liberate” the Afghani woman from the tyranny of the burqa (Abu-Lughod 784). In this equation, the West is projected as a liberal haven where women are free to behave as they please, while the veiled woman is reduced to either an unthinking follower of religious dictums or a radical fundamentalist (Göle 9). Their agency as individuals who can choose to don the veil for reasons other than the above are neglected, a fault that widens considerably as can be seen through the examination of select characters from the primary texts in the paragraphs that follow.

¹⁹ Abu-Lughod (785)

The first details *Exit West* reveals about the protagonists Saeed and Nadia are their distinctive appearances:

His name was Saeed and her name was Nadia and he had a beard, not a full beard, more a studiously maintained stubble, and she was always clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch in a flowing black robe. Back then people continued to enjoy the luxury of wearing more or less what they wanted to wear, clothing and hair wise, within certain bounds of course, so these choices meant something. (Hamid 1)

Exit West is cocooned by namelessness—Saeed and Nadia are the only characters given names, their country, city, and religious backgrounds remain unnamed—but the hints dropped, such as the beard that Saeed wears and the black robes that cover all of Nadia, by this opening description are designed to have the reader automatically assume that Hamid has set his works in an Islamic country. Hamid seems to be taunting our reliance on preconceived notions of embodied identities by studiously refusing to name Islam or the location of the story, holding a mirror up to the reader and forcing them to trace how stereotypes continue to govern our interactions with others, fictional or otherwise.

The fact that a woman like Nadia, educated, non-religious and not averse to overturning gender roles—the motorcycle she rode in a country where people are not accustomed to seeing women ride motorcycles was proof enough of that—still chose to wear the all covering black robes that carried with them the tinge of religious observance, was curious to Saeed. Even more surprising was that she wore her robes at her own behest, before it began to be insisted on by the fundamentalist militants who would take over their city later. Saeed’s interest in Nadia was thus piqued and the subject of her robes was one of the first personal questions he asked her. To his query as to why she wore the robe if she was not religious, her abrupt reply was, “[s]o men don’t

fuck with me,” hinting that the robes were a kind of protection, though she is not forthcoming about how exactly the protection functioned (16). Soon after this conversation, Saeed and Nadia became lovers and their city fell to the militants, forcing them to flee the country through illegal channels, landing up first in Mykonos, Greece. Nadia does not take off her black robes even after leaving their home country, and when Saeed points out that she did not need to observe the norms of their country any longer and could give up the robes now that they were abroad, she responds that “she had not *needed* to wear them even in their own city, when she lived alone, before the militants came, but she *chose* to, because it sent a signal, and she still wished to send this signal” (110; italics added). Nadia emphasises that the robes were not chosen for her by something external to her being, but it was her prerogative to wear them. This is the “signal” that Nadia wants to transmit to the world, the image of a woman who is certain about what parts of herself she wants to reveal to the world.

It is not just her body that she wants to keep away from prying eyes, but every aspect of her interaction with the world, so that nothing of her personality can be divined by an outsider unless she chooses to let them in. As her face is not left naked to the world, she lets herself be protected “by opaque usernames and avatars, the online equivalents of her black robes” when on cyberspace, wanting to leave “little trace of her passing” (37). She understands the hypervisibility that comes with being a woman, with a world that assumes it has a right to an opinion on how she chooses to conduct herself. It did not matter to her how her attire was interpreted by society, as she continued to wear it even in her American workplace, where “her black robe was thought by many to be off-putting, or self-segregating, or in any case, vaguely menacing” (214). In fact, her robe was the only tie to her homeland that she left unsevered, much to the chagrin of her companion, the homesick and devout Saeed. To him, “it was inexplicable

that she continued to wear her black robes, and it grated on him a bit, for she did not pray, and she avoided speaking their language, and she avoided their people and sometimes he wanted to shout, well take it off then”, his anger a symptom of his failure to understand Nadia’s reasons to wear the robes, founded in neither a religious nor a cultural association (187). Neither Saeed’s anger nor the suspicions that she is met with at work deter Nadia from wearing her robes, which remains a choice that she is determined not to part with.

When Nadia makes it clear that it is her personal choice to use an item of clothing that has long been a bone of contention between both the culture she fled as well as the culture she currently inhabits, she joins in the defiance of the female protagonists of *Home Fire*. Like Nadia, who continued to wear her black robes even though it made her life in the West notably more difficult, the Pasha sisters carry on wearing their hijab in the face of acute antagonism. For Isma and Aneeka, third-generation Pakistani immigrants born and raised in London, it is a personal decision to wear a turban and a scarf, respectively, in lieu of a head covering. It is clear that they do not wear the hijab due to compulsion from their family; Aneeka mentions how their relatives back in Pakistan “point[ed] to the sisters’ hijabs as proof that British Pakistanis were “caught in the past”” (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 169). The headscarf remains an obvious signifier of the women’s religious affiliations and creates numerous instances in which they are made to rethink it.

Isma’s headscarf had come up in her first conversation with Eamonn when he recognises that it must be difficult for her to be visibly identifying as Muslim in a world where Muslims are targeted indiscriminately, to which she replies, “I’d find it more difficult to not be Muslim” (30). This is a direct affront to the politics of Eamonn’s father Karamat, and to the secular idea of a religion that can be disposed of at will, to be kept aside from one’s personal life until it is

convenient/beneficial to accommodate it. Karamat's relationship with Islam, the religion he was raised in, will be discussed in a later part of this chapter as it is the opposite of Isma's devout religiosity.

When Isma finds herself falling in love with Eamonn, her mentor Dr. Hira Shah advises her to "reconsider the hijab", feeling that, "it might be keeping your young man at a distance. He'll read things into what it means" (43). What Dr. Shah means here is that Isma in her headscarf represents a figure that is liable to be stereotyped as the West's idea of a typical Muslim woman, one who would not be interested in romantic relationships outside of marriage. This is a role Isma is not completely ready to avoid, however, retorting to Dr. Shah, "He's not my young man and his reading won't be so wrong. And when did I say I wanted anything from him in that way?" (43). She does decide to forgo the contentious garment as the overt religious symbol might be a reason that Eamonn, a non-believer and the son of the Home Secretary, would be wary of getting better acquainted with her. Eamonn, however, reads this sign of intimacy in a fraternal manner, crushing Isma's hopes: "now that I've seen your head uncovered, I'm practically your brother, aren't I?" (52). Even without her hijab, Isma cannot be free from the web of significations associated with it.

The safety of an outer garment that veils one from the necessity of revealing integral parts of one's body is well understood by Nida, who craves the invisibility it can afford her, saying, "sometimes I wish I could just vanish, evaporate" (Mansab 3). For Nida, life in the burka is an escape from the world she currently lives in to a space that lets her vanish into a nobody. As an upper-class woman, society does not dictate that Nida should wear a burka; in fact, a rich begum in a burka is an anomaly, as her friend Sasha notes (19). She finds the burka a choice that lets her go anywhere she wanted and be anybody but herself:

All those spaces that had been cordoned off by others—keeping me outside or inside—I had since reclaimed in a burka, and no one had seen me do it. All the non-spaces of the city that were thronged and crowded with non-entities like me had, with a shrug or a blank stare of non-recognition, uncaringly and unhesitatingly allowed me to *be*. (82)

Nida prefers the burka because it allows her to not have to be the ‘ideal’ wife that everyone expects her to be, those these are expectations that she can never seem to measure up to, as, “half-hearted responses met [her] toned-down, trapped selfhood that had been fashioned to minimally offend [her] in-laws” (40). Nida constantly refers to the charade that her station as a wife is, with her having to “fashion” her selfhood so as to be the supportive, understanding and subservient being that a powerful politician like her husband Saqib needs as a wife. Her identity needs to be downplayed so that his masculinity is never threatened, leaving her only a shadow of herself. From this prison of being a good wife, Nida seeks escape by identifying safe spaces where she need not perform, where her selfhood need not be “morphed, altered, nipped and tucked away” until she is unsure of what it means to be herself (82). Nida’s need for an alternate space is fulfilled by the Sufi dargah where she spends time every chance she gets, covered head-to-toe in her burka, commenting, “Daata’s Dargah was the one place where I didn’t have to worry about [being judged for] me and my excess fat, or the yardage of clothes I wore to hide it” (18). Her life is a constant hunt for such safe spaces where she would not have to don the persona of the politician wife, pleasing all and sundry, and living up to her family’s preferences. The burka and Daata’s Dargah offer momentary solace from the imprisonment that is the identity she has to repeatedly adopt, but can never adapt to.

Thus, the veil functions in two seemingly contradictory ways. First, as a garment that covers the body of the wearer as any other garment does and can be worn in multiple fashions.

Aneeka, for example, wears a “bonnet cap... [with] a scarf of black and white gauze wrapped loosely over it,” (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 46) and her sister Isma prefers a cloth worn in the style of a “turban,” (21); Nadia (*Exit West*) is always attired in full, “flowing black robes” (Hamid 1), while Nida occasionally wears a burka (Mansab 19). Second, the veil, in its diverse forms, can be a means of incorporating cultural or religious heritage into one’s public, embodied identity. While the first function appears to be contradictory to the progressive politics of freedom and choice preached by Western feminism, the second function shows how women like Aneeka and Isma profess a far more radical politics of choice by *choosing* to veil themselves, thereby, explicitly resisting Karamat’s integrationist advice to not “set [themselves] apart in the way [they] dress” (87).

1.2.2. Disguising (Im)purity

The Golden Legend engages with the condition of a religious minority in a nation-state that was created on the basis of religion. The novel is primarily set during a communal riot initiated by the Muslim population of Badami Bagh, a locality in the fictional town of Zamana, Pakistan. The bloody conflict, which claimed as its victims the lower-class Christian community of Badami Bagh, was instigated by charges of blasphemy—disrespecting Islam—levelled against Helen Masih and her father Lily. In truth, the accusations against Helen and Lily were mere excuses to carry out an ethnic cleansing that was being planned for weeks (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 142). Nargis, a middle-aged architect, and the Masihs’ neighbour and lifelong friend, protects Helen by fleeing with her, helped by Imran, an acquaintance. On occasions when she has to be in public spaces while still in hiding, Helen passes herself off as a Muslim by covering her head with a dupatta and adopting the personality of a Muslim woman. When trapped in a

violent crowd during a demonstration that was being held against blasphemers like herself, Helen resorts to a group of Muslim women whose husbands are take part in the rally under the name of Aysha, “cover[ing] her face with her dupatta, leaving just her eyes visible,” playing the part of a Muslim woman whose strict husband does not appreciate her being bareheaded in front of strangers (199, 201). Thus, the novel acts as a vast stage on which different acts of interlinked power hierarchies play out, goaded by the intersecting modalities of religion, gender, caste, and class.

The day-to-day discrimination faced by Christians in Pakistan has been well-recorded.²⁰ Much of the existing scholarship on religious minorities in Pakistan often focus solely on daily instances of discrimination, attributing these to encounters with the country’s majority Muslim population. Such study is legitimised by incidents of persecution persons belonging to such groups face, but is unidimensional in its approach because neither are “religious minorities” monoliths in themselves, nor are their experiences of persecution repetitions of previous events. In the South Asian context, experiences of religious groups are problematised by identities formed by categories such as caste, class and gender, and its interactions with historical events like colonisation, evangelisation, and nationalisation. Therefore, any attempt at demonstrating the persecution of members of certain religious groups in Pakistan should also engage in examining its entanglements with these (Fuchs and Fuchs 59). Attempting to address this gap that has been pointed out, I will analyse the primary texts for strategies employed in combatting discrimination, rightlessness and violence to understand how the paradigms of religion, class, caste and gender interact.

²⁰ As Shaun Gregory concludes, “[t]he commonalities in these experiences [by Christians] flow from the interplay of political, legal and social factors which create a context of threat, intimidation, powerlessness and violence for many religious minorities” (197).

Aysha, the daughter of the cleric at Badami Bagh's mosque, had been widowed when her husband died in a drone strike by the US, and is kept captive by his brother in the glorified position of the martyr's widow:

[She] was in her early thirties, and after her husband was killed, the cleric had made attempts to arrange another marriage for her, but according to her husband's brother and his militant companions, a holy martyr's widow could never remarry. She had to remain untainted, for her eventual reunion with her husband in Paradise. (57)

Her neighbour Nargis also observes that "the cleric and his daughter lived in fear of her former brother-in-law, who had taken up residence at the mosque, to ensure her continued *purity*" (57, italics added). "Purity" is the gilded cage that the Muslim Aysha is imprisoned within. She continues to be defined by her dead husband's political aims and her life manipulated into a message on the docility expected of women. To this end, she is denied the right to remarry, to raise her son as she sees fit, the right to free movement outside of the mosque premises and the right to seek companionship. Her brother-in-law even confiscates her mobile phone at one juncture, since, "[w]hy does a woman need a phone anyway?... Especially a woman in your situation?" (94).

It is significant that the metaphor of purity invoked in this case echoes the myth of creation of the Pakistani nation as the "Land of the Pure". Aysha, though she is presumed to be "untainted" as long as she obeys her brother-in-law, does not seem to benefit from this state of enforced purity. Her life is restricted and bonded to the charity offered by her family, with no recourse to independence. Ironically, Aysha's "rebellion" to this enforced purity comes in the form of a romantic relationship with her neighbour and Helen's father, the lower-caste Christian Lily.

Lily had “entered Zamana’s sewers at the age of eight”, carrying on the work of manual scavenging and sanitation that his community had been condemned to (83). Caste shaped most aspects of his existence, as when he drinks water from a public tap:

he splashed water onto his face and then began to drink deeply – gulp after gulp as fast as he could. This hurry was the result of an ever-present fear. If someone were to discover he was a Christian, he could be accused of polluting the water. As a child he had had numerous beatings. (211)

Lily is the antithesis of purity, and any contact with him is considered “polluting”. However, the concept of ritual pollution is a remnant of the practice of caste hierarchies, even though the text and much discourse surrounding minorities in Pakistan attribute such discrimination to their religion. Faisal Devji has commented on the erasure of caste from the social, cultural and political vocabulary of Pakistan as a misplaced attempt at differentiating “Muslim” Pakistan from a “Hindu” India, as caste structures are widely understood to be a characteristic of the Hindu social order (Devji). The refusal to acknowledge caste as an identity marker that continues to define the experiences of lower-caste populations, most of whom had converted to Christianity, Islam and Sikhism in order to escape the caste system, which they imagined was restricted to Hinduism. Thus, a veiled casteism prevails in the Pakistani society, often disguised under the garb of religious discrimination against non-Muslims (Devji). Devji highlights the role of concepts such as purity and pollution—often attributed to Hindu practice—that seems to govern the treatment of non-Muslims in Pakistan as vestiges of this invisible category of caste. The metaphor of purity becomes a shared quality of the docile female, the upper-caste Muslim and the ideal citizens of the nation of Pakistan.

Helen realises that she is not alone in choosing refuge in the robes of a Muslim woman when Nargis reveals a secret she has kept for all of her adult life: that she had been born under the name Margaret, and had lived as a Christian until the age of nineteen after which she assumed the identity of a Muslim woman. The teenage Margaret had chanced upon the role of Nargis by accident, and initially went along with it for the sake of convenience, but very soon discovered that there is much in a name, and that the life of a Margaret, by some other names, would smell much sweeter. When mistakenly introduced on-stage as ‘Nargis’ at an inter-school event in the city of Zamana, Margaret thought that rectifying the misunderstanding would be too much of a bother for a small mix-up (189). She went along with it and played Nargis for those few days away from her hometown with the puckishness of a fourteen-year-old, but was surprised to see the difference it made, feeling “as though she had arrived in a new country” (190). Nargis was allowed to use the common cutlery while Margaret would have had to carry her own, so that she does not risk polluting the others; Nargis’ opinions were heard without being interrupted while Margaret would hardly be allowed onstage at a school debate. However, this newfound “country” was only temporary and when she came home from Zamana, Nargis had to become Margaret once again. Having tasted how life was as a Muslim, every time Margaret was discriminated against because she was a Christian, she felt “the pain [become] mixed with anger” (190). This anger is directed at the “country” which is available to Nargis but not to Margaret, one which is more respectful of her dignity.

The casualties of being a Christian in public life was never so evident to Margaret as when her older sister Seraphina became the victim of a savage gangrape that left her body and spirit in tatters (193). It is this incident, mixed with the shock and sorrow of seeing her lively

sister turn into a shell of a person that forces her to transform her identity into the hitherto fictional ‘Nargis’:

She acquired little books and pamphlets about the correct manner of saying one’s prayers, the basic stories from the life of Muhammad. She told herself to always say, ‘Peace be upon him’ after his name. In her grief-stricken mind, to pretend to be Nargis would be expedient while in Zamana, the deception freeing her from the daily aggressions of Muslims. (193)

Margaret deploys all her resources into creating her new identity, forging necessary documents, inducting herself into Islam and practicing the performance of her new personality. The older Nargis would reflect that as a result of her being constantly in disguise, she had, over the years, developed a cautious sense of detachment from the world (99). Her true identity was kept hidden from even her husband Massud, who would interpret her caution as confidence and self-sufficiency. Incrementally, Margaret discovered that the world was easier to survive if she changed her name and faith and learned a few new prayers and intonations. Nargis realised that over the years, the girl who grew up as Margaret came to “succeed in concealing herself in the false story she had constructed”, escaping into the undemanding life that her Muslim persona promised. Had Nargis remained Margaret, she would have remained a “non-citizen—a half-citizen at best”, with enough resentment burgeoning within her that—to borrow Lily’s words—“if Pakistan were a person [she] would kill it” (70).

However, Nargis’ tightly woven disguise starts to unravel when Massud is accidentally killed by a stray bullet shot by a suspected American spy in a public shoot-out. Nargis is unmoored in the life she had constructed. While processing her grief at his death, she also finds herself at the centre of an international controversy, as demands for the release of Massud’s

killer, who was arrested following the shooting, arose strongly from the government of USA who exerted great pressure on the Pakistani state. Nargis is requested, coerced, commanded, ordered, and finally, threatened with death, by a representative of the military intelligence who wants her to pardon the American who is responsible for her husband's death so that diplomatic relations between the two countries remain unscathed. Nargis' refusal to publicly "forgive" the American is not acceptable to the soldier-spy, who, in one of his visits assaults her, treating her body "as though she were already a corpse", dousing her in kerosene and threatening to set her on fire until she agreed to his demands (66). Having held her ground against the immeasurable power displayed by the national and international forces she opposed, Nargis was made aware of her bodily vulnerability, made dependent on a slight flick of the spy's wrist as he restrained himself from killing her. In short, "he had reminded her of her place in the order of things," forcing her to retract her protest (67).

Nargis is forced to introspect, to examine her life to understand if the disguise of a Muslim name and an affluent Muslim life that her alternate identity offers are fruitful solutions in the long run, since she was still at the mercy of men like the soldier-spy. She wonders if her decision to never reveal her past to Massud, who firmly believed in secular principles, was because, "[h]is response would have confirmed to her that the terrible things in her past had happened, that she wasn't just imagining them" (62). Telling him about the violations she and her family had faced would have solidified these as crimes against her dignity, necessitating a response other than that of flight. The young Margaret had been filled with anger at the indignities she had to suffer from her country, and an older Nargis, having lived as a Muslim woman for decades, remains critical of the nation-state that allowed for the ill-treatment of its

people: “Pakistan produces people of extraordinary bravery. But no country should ever require its citizens to be this brave” (10).

Hanif’s *Alice Bhatti* features as its titular character another poor, lower-caste Christian woman who struggles against the discrimination inflicted on her at the hands of the institutions supported by the majority religion, Islam. Alluding to the plight of minorities like herself, Alice Bhatti admits that if she had had time to think twice about marrying her Muslim husband, “her love story would have turned into an anthropological treatise about the survival strategies employed by Catholics in predominantly Islamic societies” (Hanif, *Alice Bhatti* 92), indicating that for someone of her station, marriage is often a mere attempt at surviving. When her whirlwind romance with Teddy Butt, a doltish hired goon, ended in marriage, everyone, including the couple, were surprised. Her superior at work, senior nurse Sr. Hina Alvi, echoed all of Alice’s well-wishers’ doubts about the union when she offered her thoughts on the union: “Congratulations. I should be happy for you. But I am worried. I hope you are not doing it just to get a different name” (132).

Alice had been determined to be happy in her marriage, but Sr. Alvi’s comments forced her to examine her motives in marrying Teddy, who does not have much that recommends him to the post of her husband, introspecting:

‘I myself was surprised. It all happened very suddenly. I have always thought I can live without a man. I always thought a proper job was all the security I needed. But that incident in the VIP room ... that made me rethink.’ Alice is startled at what she has just said. She hasn’t thought of this before. But now she has uttered these words, she thinks there might be some truth in it. (133)

In Alice's part of town where the families of manual scavengers, sweepers and sanitary workers lived, the only way one could move up the social ladder was by adopting a Muslim-sounding name for themselves and changing their profession to something other than the aforementioned ones (48). There is no way to both be a resident of Alice's home in French Colony with a Christian name and be an upstanding citizen of the society.

Alice had hoped that the hurdles that arose because she was the daughter of manual scavenger Joseph Bhatti from French Colony had been prevailed over with her becoming a nurse, and acquiring a respectable job with regular pay, but realises that what Teddy did have to offer were a few things that she counts under "survival strategies" that might help ease her everyday life. These ranged from a Muslim name that she could use to escape her lower caste Christian identity as Sr. Alvi suspected, to a man's protection against unwanted advances that an unmarried woman of her class and religion is frequently subjected to. With Teddy's name and protection on her side, she hopes that would no longer have to face people who automatically assumed she was a sweeper when they heard that she lived in French Colony or tell her that Pakistan was not created for people of her religious persuasion (172). The "incident in the VIP room" Alice refers to occurred when she, on duty monitoring a rich patient on the brink of death, was sexually assaulted by the patient's son in the middle of the night (59). She managed to maim him and escape, but her resolve to jump through all the hoops life could set in front of her gets rattled by this incident. The extent to which that night in the VIP room had affected her was a realisation which became clear only as she tried to justify her decision to marry Teddy. Being married to a Muslim are appending their names with Muslim surnames are advantageous to Alice and Margaret/Nargis, who live in a Pakistan where it is technically permissible to be non-Muslim, but practically difficult.

When Bhanggi (*This House*) admits that he feels that his body is nothing more than a “communal vessel” (Mansab 5), he unconsciously hits on a truth universal to all bodies that derive their meaning from the narratives furnished by hegemonic social forces. Bhanggi, who self-identifies as a heterosexual male, is forced to live as a transwoman in Lahore’s red-light district due to his intersex physicality. He voices his helplessness when he calls his body “[the] cage of bones and flesh that holds [him] prisoner... makes a mockery of [him] and [his] desires, destroys [him] daily”, before emphatically demanding of the reader, “How can anyone be held responsible for the body they’re born with, ji? Who can help that?” (5). Bhanggi’s childhood was marred by being abandoned at birth, after which he was taken in by a transwoman named Gulabo, who raised him only to force him into sex work at the age of eight. Bhanggi’s body and his care were thus only future “investment” for Gulabo, whose male customers preferred transwomen sex workers to ciswomen sex workers simply because the latter were too beyond their means. Both Gulabo and Bhanggi’s customers are appreciative of his body only as far as it meets their needs, the violence that arises from his “deviant” body is solely his “responsibility”, as he mentions in the lines quoted earlier (5-6). The society at large has always reduced him to the specifics of his genitals, with personalities being concocted and attributed to bodies like his homogeneously and without their consent. Even though “respectable society” found Bhanggi, Gulabo and their like reprehensible, they were allowed to exist within certain spatial confines in the old parts of the city, where their actions could be monitored and controlled.

Everywhere he goes, Bhanggi is hailed by the gender and sexual identities that Gulabo assigned to him when she got him his first customer. The abuse does not stop even after he leaves behind the garbs of the occupation she gave him, with physical and verbal vitriol frequently flung at him in the form of beatings and taunts. In a place of worship, with a “big

white dome, so *pure* and perfect,” Bhanggi is accused of “*polluting* the mosque” (109, 111). He is screamed at, dehumanised by comparisons to the “filth of the earth”, and denigrated as a “filthy animal”. The condemnation of the mullah involves charges of uncleanness, referring once again, to Pakistan’s imagination as a “pure” country where impurities or breaches such as what Bhanggi embodied cannot be tolerated: “‘Go away before I have you beaten,’ [the mullah] says, trembling with ire. ‘Look at you, with your woman’s face and man’s torso... What is down there, you hijray?’” (110). The mullah’s specific issue is a perverse need to categorise Bhanggi, especially since he had stopped carrying himself as a transwoman, a category which was reluctantly acknowledged by the social order. Agents of the power structure, like the neighbourhood moral police and the pious mullah are constantly around to remind Bhanggi of the disorderliness, the “impurity” of his physical difference and consequently, of his inferior place in the heterosexual matrix.

Bhanggi’s discomfort with his body and the traits automatically attributed to it is shared by Raza Ashraf, the son of Hiroko and Sajjad, in Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*. With a Japanese mother and a South Asian father, Raza inherited a mix of bodily features that elicited many a curious look in his hometown of Karachi. While Hiroko, who had left her own country over three decades ago, is at home with the idea of being considered foreign, Raza grows up troubled by his tendency to not fit in. He “flinched every time a Pakistani asked him where he was from,” their efforts to divine his nativity failed upon encountering his curious facial features (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 204). He despised being teased by street children, “tugging at the skin around their eyes, chanting, ‘Chinese, Japanese, money, please’” (182). He tries to minimise his difference

from the other boys from their street, avoiding speaking Japanese,²¹ his mother's "foreign" tongue in the presence of his peers, asking, "Why allow the world to know that his mind contained words from a country he'd never visited? Weren't his eyes and his bone structure and his bare-legged mother distancing factors enough?" (139). He got along with his friends exceedingly well, but attributed the camaraderie more to "a studied awareness—one he'd had from a very young age—of how to downplay his manifest difference" (139). Having been born and brought up in Karachi, Raza identifies as a Pakistani national, but the "manifest difference" on display in every contour of his body kept him from feeling connected to his friends and compatriots. He is well-liked and popular among his friends and teachers, but he is aware that his popularity is something he had to actively work towards by moulding his history, tailoring his multilingualism, and relegating to the background all those aspects of his self that did not represent the archetypal Pakistani boy. However, even such extensive self-fashioning is ineffective in minimising the difference of his biracial body, rendering Raza literally uncomfortable in his own skin.

Soon, Raza finds a way to bypass the problem of the unique physical features that kept him from fitting in all his life. He uses the conveniently fluid signifiers of his identity to squeeze himself into categories other than those that have excluded him by taking on another place and name that would make his extraordinary face look right at home—the training camps of the mujahideen soldiers fighting the Soviets at the Afghan border by concocting the identity of a son of the Central Asian tribes of Hazara. During a chance meeting, Abdullah, a Pashtun boy from Afghanistan mistakes him for an Afghan:

²¹ Even though the teenage Raza has trouble reconciling the polyglotism which adds to the long list of differences between his peers and himself, the trait gives an insight into Shamsie's project of constructing *Burnt Shadows* as a global novel, according to Ulka Anjaria (51).

‘Are you Afghan?’

Raza touched his cheekbones reflexively. Until the Soviets invaded Afghanistan he’d never heard that question; but in the last four years, as increasing numbers of refugees made their way to Pakistan, it had become something less than unusual for Raza to be identified as an Afghan from one of the Mongol tribes.

‘Yes,’ he said, and felt the rightness of the lie press against his spine, straightening his back. (164)

On paper, a seventeen-year-old Pakistani running away to join the fighting in the Afghan border can be interpreted as a young man who was brainwashed into fervent nationalism, but Raza’s decision was based more on the sense of acceptance that he felt among those who thought him to be a Hazara. Realising that Abdullah had mistaken his bodily features for those of the Hazara tribe, Raza decides to take advantage of the misunderstanding, because it was the first time in Pakistan that someone had instinctively known where to place him and his different physicality. When he is assumed to be a Mongol Hazara, Raza no longer feels the need to “downplay his manifest difference”, instead experiencing “the rightness of the lie press against his spine”, boosting his confidence.

On finding this crevice in the social topography where he can fit his body into, he soon starts living a double life—that of Raza Konrad Ashraf, a misfit who increasingly felt out of place in the nation Pakistan was transforming into, and of Raza Hazara who did not have to be self-conscious about his neither-here-nor-there body and was accepted without question as a Hazara. Raza Hazara had in himself a confidence that was difficult for Raza Ashraf to have, as the former “never had to duck his head forward so his hair would hide his features” (207). When Salma, a neighbourhood girl he felt attracted to confessed that neither she nor any other girl who

is aware of his family's history will marry him because he could be "deformed", Raza Ashraf saw that in addition to the difference he felt in his cheekbones, there was another aspect of his biological make-up that would always keep him a stranger: his nuclear lineage from when his mother survived the bomb at Nagasaki (189). It was Salma's rejection of Raza, based on his foreignness and "deformity" that pushed him further into the persona of Raza the Hazara.

Yearning to prove to her that there were people who were not repulsed by him as she seemed to be and counted him as one of their own, he decides to travel with Abdullah the Afghan to a mujahideen supply line in Peshawar. Raza had been moonlighting as a Hazara in front of Abdullah and his brothers, making up tales of family loss in the war and learning to handle assault rifles to avenge this fictional tragedy (198). He gets tired of his new identity after a while, describing it as "wearying" at one point, but is unable to completely let go of the comfortable space it provides him (207).

Raza's potential to fit in as a Hazara does not escape the notice of Harry Burton, an American family friend who worked in Afghanistan as a CIA operative, either: "Harry looked across at the dreamy-eyed young man with a gift for language, an ache for something to believe in, and features that would go unnoticed in many Central Asian states and parts of Afghanistan, too, and a thought flickered across his mind" (186). Raza's ability to speak multiple languages—a mixture of local and international languages with Urdu and Pashto joining English, Japanese and German—along with his biracial features made it difficult to pin him down to a single location and heritage, and provided him with the unique skill set required of an intelligence operative for the US in Afghanistan. Later, the "thought" Harry had when he saw Raza in this light, in terms of his "usefulness" to the US, takes root and flourishes into their common future. In his thirties, after spending a decade "acquiring languages with the zeal of a collector," Raza

finds himself even more suited to the role Harry had in mind for him at age sixteen (258). He joins Harry in the capacity of a translator and handler during the latter's second stint in Afghanistan during the War on Terror.

The teenage Raza had been enamoured by the idea of America that his honorary uncle Harry painted for him:

'In America, everyone can be American. That's the beauty of the place.'

'Not me,' Raza said. 'You look like Clint Eastwood and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. So of course you can be American. I look like not this and not that.'

'Everyone,' Harry said firmly, knowing it would hurt Raza if he laughed at the incongruous comparisons. 'Everyone can be American. *Even you*. I swear it.'

'America.' Raza rolled the word off his tongue. (185-6, italics added)

Raza views the US as his reprieve, a place that will not make "even [him]" feel like an outsider. However, in his case, US cosmopolitanism, as glorified by Harry, eventually proves to be only a mirage of cultural fluidity. First, his naivety caused him to misinterpret Harry's words as a promise of a place in an American university rather than an offer of help with the application process; when this is revealed to be the case, he accuses Harry of giving him empty hope (193). Much later, after he was taken under Harry's wing again in Afghanistan, the young Raza's prediction that he would be set apart from others in America because, "I look like not this and not that," comes true when he is mistakenly arrested by the police who had responded to a white woman's (incidentally, Harry's daughter Kim) complaint about a man who "looked suspicious" (357). Irrespective of the fact that Kim's (unfounded) complaint had been directed towards Raza's friend Abdullah, whom he persuaded to escape when he noticed the woman talking to the police, Raza is apprehended. Ulka Anjaria contends that his arrest, which followed decades of

being a contracted CIA aid in Afghanistan as a translator, shows that “Raza’s ability to be at ‘home’ in so many different contexts is in fact a liability in a [post-9/11] world [that is] increasingly divided...” (Anjaria 51). However, Raza’s arrest, I argue, is symptomatic of the “use and throw” strategy that was always employed in US’s foreign policy. His cultural fluidity was celebrated by Harry when he could be employed in a “chameleon-like”²² capacity, but was afterwards incarcerated by Kim Burton’s innate suspicion of the Other.

Raza’s arrest is a remainder of the racial profiling of South Asians by the general public of predominantly white, First World countries since 9/11. This leads one to wonder: Hailing from such hostile circumstances as this, and occupying a public office, how did Karamat Lone, a Muslim boy from the heart of immigrant London, come to be elevated in public opinion? The short answer is the one that he provides in his controversial speech—complete assimilation. Karamat’s career had been advanced by actions that supplant his image in the public mind as one who was unfortunate enough to have been born in an undesirable social location, but one who has, by the strength of his actions shown that his allegiance is above all to his country. His rise was amply aided by the decided manner in which he shed the trappings of his familial and cultural background—his marriage to the wealthy Irish-American Terry O’Flynn elevated him both socially and financially, as Terry’s connections funded his political ambitions and welcomed him into the white upper-class circles that would otherwise be closed off to people of his upbringing (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 16, 247). When a tabloid published a picture of him entering a London mosque that had been in the news for a “hate preacher,” Karamat was quick to deal with the PR implications it presented, responding with contempt for the “gender-segregated spaces” that mosques represented and promptly creating a photo-opportunity that showed him

²² Anjaria’s words (51).

entering a church with his white Christian wife on his arm (35). While the mainstream white Britain celebrated the disavowal he exhibited towards the “backward” notions of the culture that he was raised in, its Muslim population saw this as betrayal, labelling him a “sellout, coconut, opportunist, traitor” (35).²³

Like Karamat, who found for himself a (temporary) sanctuary in the form of his white family and deracinated persona, Bhanggi (*This House*) too was able to find one, right at the epicentre of a religion that refused to acknowledge his existence as a person. After being attacked for transgressing the boundaries of a hijra placed on him, he realises that it is easier to survive if he does not reveal his true identity as a cis-gendered man but lives under the disguise of a holy qalandar. The identity of a hijra, though it put him on the margins of society, offered him protection in the form of Gulabo and the rest of the hijra community of Heera Mandi. However, Bhanggi was not one of them; he never identified as transgender (Mansab 44). The only way for Bhanggi to escape a life of being raped and exploited as a sex worker is by donning the robes of a religious qalandar, performing the role of a holy man. As he confesses to his friend the kabbadiya, “They all think I am a holy hijra. Laughter bubbles in my chest but it dies long before it can coalesce in my throat. It’s because I wear green robes like Khizr and sit in a dargah. Symbols and masks are enough, ji. No one bothers to look any deeper” (76). In Bhanggi’s laughter is the quiet mockery of a moral and religious order that had kept him imprisoned within fear and self-doubt for all of his life. The teenage Bhanggi lacked agency as well as the financial and emotional independence to confess his difference from the only family he has known, the hijra community, but the adult Bhanggi is able to subvert this situation to his advantage by

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary* tags this usage of “coconut” as “slang (depreciative)” and defines it as “[a] non-white person who is perceived as behaving in a way associated with white people or as identifying more closely with white culture than his or her own ethnic culture” (“Coconut, N. (1c)”).

holding on to the hijra identity for as far as it offers him protection, at the same time disguising himself as a holy man which keeps him away from the red-light streets of Heera Mandi. Bhanggi retains the support of the hijra community, but the green robes and wise words of a qalandar function as “symbols and masks” that allow him to exist in a religious space similar to one he was accused of defiling not long before (110).

Similarly, the debate on whether Karamat Lone is a “sellout” who deserted his Muslim kinspeople or a true patriot unyielding to ties of religion and culture, is one with strong points on either side. However, what is undeniable in an examination of Karamat’s career trajectory is the extent to which his personal life enters his professional one. Karamat is constantly put in positions where “[h]e has to prove he’s one of them, not one of us,” as Aneeka puts it, voicing the Othering of ‘us’—the British Muslims—by the ‘them’—the mainstream white population—and Karamat’s hand in this (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 34). Bodies like Aneeka’s and Karamat’s elicit a perpetual suspicion which can be remedied only by a studied performance of a Britishness that is devoid of any traces of the immigrants’ native culture. Karamat, with his integrationist marriage and stringently anti-Muslim views is able to fend off this suspicion that he is one of the Other until it becomes public knowledge that his son Eamonn willingly consorted with Aneeka, the daughter and sister of jihadis. Upon this, the very same people who had hailed him as a “LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims” attacked him for being a far-too ambitious man who was ruthless to anyone who threatened his power (35, 247). Thus, the treatment of a hijab-wearing girl who never tried to hide her religion, and a politician who had carefully crafted his accent to hide his working-class roots were not dissimilar in the long run, in spite of the meticulous re-fashioning the latter had subjected himself to.

The conflict between Western modernism and Islamic values in countries that follow the Islamic way of life has altered the latter, according to Göle (17). Göle's argument about that the Islamic way of life has seen a change due to the pervasive nature of Western modernity is proved by the suspicion and surveillance that Muslim bodies are treated to, and the manner in which they are bound to react to such treatment. It is in the crosshairs of the battle between religious and modern identities and their respective proselytising that the bodies examined in this section lie. "Islamic values" as is generally understood today cannot be seen as unaffected by Western intervention, and is, in some aspects, a product of this conflict. Peter Morey observes that in present times, "[Muslims] have been the object of heightened levels of criticism, intolerance, and abuse—their cultures homogenized and vilified and their religion depicted as backward and warlike" (*Islamophobia and the Novel* 2). As Duits and van Zoonen note, the most contentious part of Islam for the West is the blatant gender inequality which is seen as a central aspect of the religion. This is a result of the homogenising of Islam, which is a diverse religion practiced in myriads of ways (109). In this myopic view of Islam, the veil, as already discussed, becomes the most obvious sign of backwardness in Islam, followed by other symbols of the body like the beard, Muslim names, non-Western clothing and lifestyles, these unambiguously signifying the "practicing Muslim" (Göle 17). These symbols are considered not merely as an expression of religion, but is politicised to indicate that the carrier of these symbols is a potential subscriber to radical Islam, requiring every Muslim who chooses to be visibly Muslim to also be able to explain their Muslimness to the agent of Western modernity and secular identity. However, as the primary texts have shown, veiling, and the disguises offered by names, marital relationships, cultural ambiguity and religious robes, are employed by the Other with specific goals in mind. The degrees of success enjoyed by these strategies are varied and, at times, temporary, but they

significant for two reasons: one, they indicate a pressing need to resort to such manoeuvre in order to survive the violence faced by Othered bodies; second, they highlight these characters' fervent efforts to make the most of the situation handed to them.

1.3. The State Apparatus and the Othered body

While section 1.1 had been a closer look at specific acts of Othering carried out against individuals, this section looks at the larger structures involved in the creation and perpetuation of Otherness within the primary texts. It examines how states like Pakistan, a theocracy held up by an elite bureaucracy and authoritarian military, contribute to the way bodies are constructed and represented. At a time when immigration is one of the most discussed of global crises along with terrorism, the role of embodied differences is highlighted in the everyday lives of certain sections of the world population. Using Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and his work on biopolitics, this section will discuss how the apparatus of the nation-state abets the violence inflicted on vulnerable bodies.

The previous sections have argued that, in *This House*, Bhanggi is the victim of a system—patriarchy—that thrives on debasing a part of the population so that the dominant group can flourish. As a fifteen-year-old, Bhanggi engaged in a consensual but clandestine love affair with a girl in his neighbourhood, which, when discovered by the girl's father, caused all hell to break loose on not only Bhanggi, but all of the hijra community:

I barely got away with my life. There was a furore in the chawl. A fresh danger to daughters and sisters had been unmasked—a hijra. It was unthinkable. The men of the chawl took up arms against me, and thus against all hijras. We stick together in trouble,

ji. If we don't, who will? Gulabo fought hard for me, but the men decreed that I should leave, and, in exchange, the other hijras could live in peace in the chawl. (Mansab 44)

The mob in the chawl (neighbourhood) makes Bhanggi fear for his life. Neither Bhanggi nor Gulabo is able to do anything but obey the rest of the society as it dictates the most basic terms of Bhanggi's life, having a say in where he is allowed to live and with whom he is allowed to interact. The 'punishment' meted out to Bhanggi was also accompanied by a reminder that all the hijras residing in the chawl lived there at the mercy of the society. The hijra sex workers are ostracised by the rest of the society and held in deep shame and prejudice, made to live only in certain parts of the town and their employment opportunities are limited to sex work. The police, interestingly, approach the hijras only as customers or to exhort bribes, denying them of every legitimate option of seeking redressal for their indignities that they are made to bear (6). As Bhanggi explains, the hijras have to "stick together", as they are convinced that they have no one to safeguard their interests and must fight for each other's rights (44). Unlike other citizens, they have no hope of attaining justice through proper channels as even the local law enforcement refuses to acknowledge them as human beings deserving their protection.

By restricting the hijras' choice of residence, the rest of the civil society are given a free hand to control them by monitoring their interactions and reporting any transgression. The hijras are permitted to mingle with anyone outside their community only minimally and any relationship beyond that with a customer of their services is prohibited. What a hijra can do and the spaces a hijra can occupy are strictly policed using the tenets of morality, as in the case of Bhanggi's forbidden relationship with Sheila, mentioned in the earlier excerpt. These regulations are enforced on all who display an intention to fraternise with the hijra community with warnings

being summarily issued by the keepers of the moral codes of the society towards those who threaten to shift the status quo in favour of the excluded group.

When Nida decides to sit with Bhanggi at the dargah, he is astonished that a rich, upper-class “begum” like her would want to sit and talk with a hijra like him for hours. He is also aware of the scandal that this would cause among the other devotees in the dargah and is heedful of the objections that may arise from these quarters (93). His appraisal of the situation was proved right as a beggar soon approached the pair of them to reprimand them for their seeming intimacy, advising Nida, “Don’t mind my saying this, begum sahiba ... I am a mere beggar ... I overstep perhaps, but you are like my daughter, I feel I must. I have seen you often, sitting here with this hijra. He is a simple one but this world, tsk tsk, is not. Think of your father’s honour, your husband’s. Women are the honour of their men” (94). The duration of her occasional interactions with Bhanggi is all that was needed for Nida to gain a proxy father and an imaginary family, and being called upon to fulfil the wishes of a stranger who feels duty-bound to adopt the stray lamb that he considers her to be. The class divide between Nida and the beggar effectively disappears at the face of an even bigger divide—what the beggar perceives as the incompatibility between Nida and Bhanggi. The beggar casually invokes some of the cardinal notions of the patriarchal family—the woman as the keeper of the family honour, and the idea of the woman as a mere extension of the male members of her family—to shame Nida into abandoning her friendship with Bhanggi so that they may both revert to the socially-sanctioned spaces that both women and hijras are allowed to occupy—the woman to her marital home and the hijra to their isolation. Thus, clutches of a morality that is dictated by a patriarchal structure transcends the class difference, making it easier for even the beggar to be able to consider himself the rich begum’s guardian.

Similar to the patriarchal system that provided for the policing of Nida and Bhanggi's bodies in this instance, the rules of religion are also called forth to provide support for discrimination, as when the mullah abused Bhanggi for entering a mosque to pray: "You rascal, you profane creature, with your profane habits and profane body. You are filth. This is a sacred place, you dog. You are not even a dog because a dog has a gender too" (111). As an intersex person, Bhanggi is considered an abomination to the natural (and religious) order of things and accused of desecrating the spaces he passed through, with his attackers often citing religious texts to cement his less-than-human status. The mullah is enraged that Bhanggi, with his "profane" body that did not conform to the conventional male-female gender polarity would dare step into a sacred place. He not only dehumanises Bhanggi, but even refuses to categorise him with another sentient being, a dog, because of his deviation from this gender dichotomy. Figures like the mullah and the residents of the chawl frequently stop Bhanggi from freely occupying public spaces, leaving the red-light areas of Lahore the only place where he can exist without attracting assaults on his self. Bhanggi's lack of conformity to the gender binary is met with violence by the society and his conduct is dictated by the civilian keepers of the moral code bequeathed to them by the ruling ideology which is informed by the cis-heterosexual male hegemony. Even though Bhanggi is rescued from the mullah's insults by a group of well-meaning boys, the incident serves as a reminder of how religion, a powerful force influencing the governing of Pakistan, becomes a tool of policing bodies in the public sphere. In fact, the young boys who save Bhanggi from the mullah use the same tools as the mullah did to harass him, relying on religious dictums, quoting "an example from history, from Sunnah, from the Hadith, to tell the mullah that he is wrong. To convince him, they tell him stories of the kindness of Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him ..." (111). Beating the mullah at his own game, the

boys prove that religion and history are up for diverse interpretations depending on what one seeks to achieve through upholding them. If, like the mullah, one felt the need to ensure that certain identities should be marginalised, one may choose to interpret the scriptures to suit that end. The attack on a specific community like the hijras show that religion often teams up with the code of patriarchy to create agents within the society like the men in the chawl and the mullah through whom an unofficial civil code is propagated that manipulates the influence of these structures to restrict the movement of Bhanggi and the rest of the non-binary community in Lahore.

Even though Pakistan had famously been envisioned as a secular state by its founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah, its subsequent heads of state have infused the nation with a more theocratic hue. President Zia repeatedly invoked the founding idea of Pakistan as the “land of the pure” when he concentrated his efforts to rid the nation of un-Islamic elements. The hijra community of Mansab’s novel and the Christians of Aslam’s *The Golden Legend* are perfect examples of the elements that might not have made it past his attempts at purification. The latter novel features zealous fundamentalists that emerged out of Zia’s milieu as self-appointed enforcers of (their interpretation of) the Quran, and an extra-judicial establishment that serves out instant death sentences. In their hands, the law enforcement forces become mere puppets and the religious clergy is forced to include their ideology into their Friday sermons (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 59).

When Imran first pointed out to Nargis and Helen that some of the houses of Badami Bagh, the colony in which *The Golden Legend* is set, seemed to be marked with a small white circle of paint right outside their front doors, they were unsure of what to make of it (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 106). Later, it became evident that only the houses of Christians in the colony

had been marked, as these were the homes that were torched and their inhabitants hunted down to be killed by a Muslim fundamentalist mob that acted as the moral guardians of the society. The white circles were painted weeks before the massacre that left no Christian family in Badami Bagh untouched, as the mob waited for a reason to ignite the riots. The reason came in the form of Lily, a Christian, whose crucifix was discovered in a mosque, proving that he had entered a place of worship that he was strictly prohibited from. This action was forged into a weapon to turn the Muslims against the Christians by the mob, wilfully misrepresenting it as a violation of the nation's infamous blasphemy laws. Adding insult to injury was the discovery of Lily's affair with the imam's widowed daughter, Aysha, which was the cause of his being in the mosque's compound. The Christian Lily's mere presence in a mosque is seen as an affront to the sacred space, turning his and Aysha's personal affairs into a "matter of the dignity of Islam", as a Muslim resident of Badami Bagh characterised it (139). The target of this attack, the Christian community, is similar to the hijras of Heera Mandi from *This House*, and their activities too are under surveillance. Christian bodies are restricted from certain physical spaces and relationships and any transgression is met with mob violence against the entire community.

The architects of the riot use the loudspeakers of the neighbourhood mosque, delivering concise messages supported by excerpts from the holy book to incite the crowd further:

... the minaret came to life again, the speaker delivering a kind of sermon.

'Verse 51 of the Chapter named "The Table" says *O Believers, take not Jews and Christians for allies; they are allies one of another. Who so among you takes them as allies is counted as their number.*'

The voice spoke for fifteen minutes, and afterwards the noise of the crowd seemed to increase. There was gunfire and screams, the sun rising onto burning buildings. (142)

The voice emanating from these loudspeakers had been steadily creating an environment of fear and distrust among the natives of Badami Bagh through an unidentified person who entered the mosque frequently to air allegations against specific members of the public. The speaker of these rumours ensured his listeners that “people’s immoral acts and corruptions, [and] some of the most securely concealed vices were now in full view”, filling the latter with a “strange new dread” (8). The voice in the loudspeaker decrees justice without a trial, hiding behind the safety offered by the mosque establishment while spreading unsubstantiated accusations against individuals. This voice arbitrates right and wrong, decides what actions come under the purview of religion, and what consequence the flouters of religious laws should receive. The blasphemy laws, which were put in place for the protection of religious freedom (of every religion) in Pakistan, are most commonly used to target religious minorities, often causing mob violence, murders and rioting (116). The selected application of these laws to target specific groups, like the Christians in *The Golden Legend*, implies that one faction of the society, here represented by the voice in the loudspeaker, enjoys an impunity that the persecuted group does not. Lily’s transgression in pursuing a romantic relationship with Aysha, apparently the impetus for the riots, was also pronounced through these loudspeakers. The chaos it caused characterise the extreme reactions which such rumour-mongering instruments can cause. The disembodied voice in the loudspeakers represents the moral police in the strictest sense, the dread it spreads acting as a deterrent keeping people from crossing the lines drawn by the masters of the religious and moral codes of conduct.

Apart from maintaining religious purity, the perpetrators of hate crimes against the Christians also call upon a particular idea of the nation-state to justify their actions. The beliefs of the Christian community are deemed to have no place in this concept of Pakistan, as lamented

by Shakeel, the leader of the mob that incited the riots in Badami Bagh: “‘Sometimes I find it hard to believe that this is Pakistan,’ he said. ‘I am surrounded by Christians. Our mosque is a stone’s throw from a place that openly sells alcohol, and there is no restriction on the noise they can make with their church bell on Sunday morning.’” (91). Shakeel and his group of young men are fervent practitioners of their faith, and to them, the idea of Pakistan is inseparable from the idea of Islamic supremacy within it. They all, “‘had the discoloration on their foreheads [acquired from years of prostrating during the daily prayer], every one of them, even though they were only in their twenties and early thirties. They struck their heads on the floor with deliberate vehemence in order to acquire it, and they were threateningly contemptuous of men who did not do the same, whose brows were yet unmarked” (60). This group is widely believed to be the ones announcing everyone’s sins from the minaret of the mosque, ruling the locality of Badami Bagh with a code of conduct that they have drawn up, inspired by the tenets of religion and nationalism. They attempt to create a Pakistan that will invariably follow this code by meticulously driving out anyone who does not believe in the Islam they preach or by cowering them into submission. Even the cleric of the mosque is side-lined, his power diminished by having to spout sermons written for him by Shakeel’s cohorts (59). The influence of the mosque on the majority Muslim population is completely taken advantage of by this group as they steadily undermine the cleric’s position as the custodian of all affairs of the mosque. Eventually, they even take over the Friday sermons to use them to applaud the activities of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists across the world as they are believed to be the true defenders of Islam (304).

When Nargis notes that Aysha was effectively being held hostage by Shakeel, her brother-in-law, in order to “ensure her continued purity”, she recognises that Aysha’s life is not

as unchallenging as it might have seemed to her as a teenager yearning to enjoy a superior quality of life as a Muslim woman (57). Nargis' remorse at having taken what she presumes to be the easier choice is also noted by Helen when she learns the truth about the former's origins as Margaret: "The lessons [Nargis] learnt silently from her mistake, she taught them to me. So I myself don't have to make those mistakes" (332). Even though Helen is forced to go into hiding due to the blasphemy charges against her, the lesson she claims to have learnt from Nargis' experience may have coloured her choices.

Helen, who has journalistic aspirations, is a regular contributor to *Tilla Jogian*, a monthly current affairs magazine. When the office of the magazine is attacked and its staff held hostage by a group professing a brand of Islamic fundamentalism, Helen finds herself facing a gun:

They had asked her her name and had immediately connected it with the piece of writing in which the djinns were mentioned without due reverence.

They had asked her what she thought she was doing in Zamana, what she thought she was doing in Pakistan. 'You should go and live in a Christian country. This is a country for Muslims.' (122)

Even though the entire editorial team is ambushed and terrorised, it is Helen who is singled out as a Christian and held at gunpoint while they questioned her loyalty to Pakistan. This encounter is preceded by a lengthy debate between the attackers and the editorial staff of the magazine, touching upon issues that clearly point at the chasm between religion and secularism as a modality of modernity, like freedom of speech, Islamophobia in the West, Western incursions into Islamic values, etc. The attackers, though ostensibly battling for Islam and the protection of the practice of faith, are clearly dedicated to the sustainment of Islam as a central feature in Pakistan's national ethos. As echoed in their demand that she "should go live in a Christian

country [because Pakistan] is a country for Muslims,” the attackers’ disdain for Helen also arises from their vested interests in keeping hegemonic balance tilted towards the majority religion. It stems from Pakistan’s origins as a realisation of a Muslim brotherhood and the betrays the national project’s antagonism towards anyone who is different from the ideal and threatens, by their very existence, the stability of the Islamic nation. The non-Muslim, non-male, and in Helen’s case, out-caste, figure is the embodiment of this threat.

The similar experiences of Nargis and Aysha, along with Helen’s “lessons” learnt from them, highlight the fact that while Christian women do face enormous discrimination on a daily basis, it does not stem solely from to their religion, or its difference from the majority faith. Margaret and Helen do face often life-threatening instances of religious and caste discrimination, but it does not behove critical thinking to be restricting our reading of their experiences, and that of the women of other religious and caste minorities in Pakistan to these identity markers alone. Even though Margaret has to disguise herself for personal protection, better access to education and career prospects, and to bypass the notion of purity, Aysha is also caught in a similar trap, due to her status as a woman and a martyr’s widow.

Therefore, the power structures working against Margaret and Helen, and even Seraphina, who was sexually assaulted in a police station by officers of law enforcement, also work against Aysha. It would be myopic to consider the blasphemy laws targeting Christians as unrelated to the Hudood ordinances that diminish the legal voice of women, or to the caste system, which, while publicly disavowed, still functions under the garb of religion. The notion of purity is the bedrock on which institutions of the nation-state and civil society rests. *The Golden Legend* illustrates how the government, legal framework, law enforcement, and social justice systems have failed the citizens of Pakistan on multiple counts. Thus, the novel shows that while

being a Christian in Pakistan is undoubtedly challenging, the motives behind the ill-treatment of Christians cannot be explained away as mere hatred by members of the majority religion for those who are unlike them. It points to a larger deficit on the part of the state to create an environment that will promote the fading away of difference.

Foucault's concept of governmentality—a portmanteau of the words “government” and “rationality”—refers to a confluence of the various centres of power: morality, or the art of governing the self; economy, or the art of sustaining a family; and politics, or the art of statecraft. Tracing the evolution of political thought on how the act of governing should be conducted, Foucault examines treatises on the subject, starting with Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Noting that while for the former, governing involved a cementing of the hereditary monarch's legitimate claim to power through the use of force, when necessary, the modern art of governing is conducted through a more subtle exercise of coercion. The Machiavellian prince had as his goals the annexation of territories and safeguarding of his material properties, but the rulers of modern times concern themselves increasingly with the subjects of the nation, in lieu of national assets. In this transition from the importance given to territories to the rising importance of the individual human being, governmentality emerges, as the rationale that laid out the rules for controlling large groups of individuals, or populations. While the erstwhile prince had fewer threats to his sovereignty—the divine right of the prince to rule was considered supreme—modern democracies faced the need to continually prove their claim to rule (Foucault 90). With the art of governing shifting its priorities from territories to populations, there arose the need for measures that would ensure the control of large groups of sentient beings. The state becomes the keeper of the moral conscience of the population as well as the chief of its political economy. This position was consolidated by what Foucault calls “governmentality”, or the state's use of

the institutions of morality, economy and politics to govern by proxy (102). The population is controlled by these institutions, making things easier for the state.

Burnt Shadows follows the life of Hiroko Tanaka as she steers herself through some of the most consequential events in modern history. As a young woman living in Nagasaki during the Second World War, Hiroko falls in love with Konrad, a German writer for whom she worked as a translator. In the conservative society of her hometown, her relationship with Konrad, who is an enemy to Japan by the geopolitical equations of the day, is frowned upon. Konrad notes that Hiroko would not have been allowed to even be acquainted with him if she had not lost her mother prior to their meeting, as the rigid rules of the society did not condone a young woman's familiar relationships with young men, especially those who were considered foreigners (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 10). It pained him to think that it was only because of her mother's death that they had the freedom to spend time together and imagine a life together. Their dreams were shattered by the atom bomb that decimated Nagasaki, killing Konrad and forcing Hiroko to leave Japan and her memories of him behind. She later falls in love with Sajjad, a young Muslim man in colonial Delhi and the apple of his mother Khadija's eye. Sajjad and Hiroko are drawn towards each other by a common love for words and languages, but it is clear that they cannot be together, because, as Hiroko's friend Ilse put it, "his is a world you either grow up in or to which you remain for ever an outsider" (97). However, it is soon clear that the only thing that had been keeping Sajjad tied to this "world" of his, his mohalla in Dilli, was his relationship with his mother. When Khadija dies, it becomes evident to Sajjad that there was no reason to not make Hiroko a part of his life, blurring the hitherto uncrossable laws of his community (112). Hiroko, the outsider, was prevented from marrying Sajjad, not by any power of legislation that forbade their union, but by the power of moral duty that every child was expected to do unto their

mothers. As Hiroko's mother might have had the power to keep her from Konrad, so did Khadija over her son Sajjad. Only by the death of these mothers are their children free of this conundrum of morality that their loving upbringing had trapped them in. Across diverse cultures, from a Japan reeling from the horrors of war to an India caught in the throes of colonisation, family becomes the primary guardian of ethnic and racial constancy that the state desires.

Hiroko's status as an outsider is passed on to her son Raza, who is considered to be something of an anomaly in the muhajir²⁴ colony in Karachi that Sajjad and Hiroko eventually settled down in, primarily because of the Japanese-Indian genes that set him apart from the other children. In addition to this, he has also inherited a lineage of not belonging as both his parents were at best, reluctant citizens of Pakistan. When his parents relocated to Pakistan after the partition of the subcontinent, it was not a choice they made because they identified with the cause that led to the creation of this country, but because Sajjad, who had gone to Istanbul to wait out the communal riots surrounding the birth of the two countries, was labelled a deserter of India (127). Sajjad was heartbroken to find that an arbitrary rule of law had decided his nationality for him, wrenching him apart from his beloved Dilli forever. Raza grew up in the shadow of his father's regret and the blatant difference of his mother's ethnicity, an outsider in the only home he had ever known. Despite this, Raza is a gifted student with a penchant for learning languages, excelling in his studies and causing his father to swell up in pride with his academic accomplishments. With such an impressive track-record, it is shocking to everyone who knows him when Raza fails in his school board examinations, unable to scrape through a subsidiary subject, Islamic studies. This failure is the first major stumbling block in Raza's life, shaping him in far-reaching ways. Hiroko considers the introduction of Islamic studies into the

²⁴ The term "muhajir" is used for subcontinental Muslims who immigrated to join the newly formed nation of Pakistan during the Partition of the subcontinent.

school curriculum with a “long, luxurious expression of disgust”, characterising it as “devotion as public event, as national requirement” (145). However, to Raza, his inability to pass an exam which was beginning to be considered a test of one’s devoutness, at a time when Pakistan had started viewing Islam an inseparable part of the national identity, signalled that something was fundamentally wrong with him:

The jumble of words only grew more jumbled, bright spots of light appeared before his eyes as he tried to read, and nonsensical answers to questions he didn’t even understand kept coming to mind in Japanese ... how would he ever look his father in the eyes again? As soon as he thought of Sajjad Ashraf—pictured his trusting, expectant face—everything emptied from his mind. (140)

Thus, Islamic studies as a topic in a formal school examination evidently brings out all of Raza’s anxieties, from failing to measure up to his father’s expectations to his fluency in Japanese, a language that sets him apart from the rest of his country. Failing this subject at a juncture which saw that one’s status as a citizen of Pakistan was contingent on the following a particular brand of Islam added another item to the list of things that other children Raza’s age could easily accomplish but still determinedly evaded him.

Raza fails the Islamic studies paper a second time, but the reason behind this otherwise brilliant student’s psychological block with this particular paper is baffling to everyone who knows him. It would be fruitful to understand Raza’s difficulty with the paper as stemming from a life-long desire to feel at home in Pakistan, and the challenges that he faced whenever he had tried to fit in. His family’s status as outsiders had always bothered him, especially the way his Japanese mother stood out against the community-prescribed manner in which all mothers were expected to behave. Once, when Hiroko wondered why none of Raza’s friends visited the Ashraf

house, the thirteen-year-old Raza responded that he could not ask them over, “with [Hiroko] walking around, showing [her] legs,” angrily demanding of his mother, “[w]hy can’t you be more Pakistani?” (130). Raza’s frustration at his un-Pakistani mother is exacerbated by a system that sets down a uniform moral code that all mothers are expected to follow in order to be accorded a place in the national imagination. Discontent at his un-Pakistani lineage that had long bothered Raza surges to its boiling point at his failure in the Islamic studies paper.

Foucault notes that with the consolidation of the population as a unit requiring governing, the well-being of the individual and her needs become secondary to what are identified as the needs of the population:

Interest at the level of the consciousness of each individual who goes to make up the population, and the interest considered as the interest of the population regardless of what the particular interests and aspirations may be of the individuals who compose it, this is the new target and the fundamental instrument of the government of population: the birth of a new art, or at any rate of a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques. (100)

This insight can be translated into the language of human rights in order to understand that under governmentality, the rights of individual human beings take the backseat while the interests of the majority, or of the ruling nation-state, is in charge of the wheel. Thus, it is in the interest of the nation-state of Pakistan to reimagine a national identity that brings together a majority of the population, the subcontinental Muslims. However, it does not feature as a concern to this majority whether Raza Ashraf the individual feels uncomfortable living in such a Pakistan in his half-Japanese, half-muhajir skin.

Hanif’s *Alice Bhatti* features helpless subjects made so because of their relative position within a system: Christians in the theocratic nation of Pakistan. Alice, the eponymous

protagonist, hails from a derelict Karachi locality known as French Colony, where the lower-caste Choohra Christians, who are considered “untouchable”, reside. In this part of town where the families of manual scavengers, sweepers and sanitary workers lived, the only way one could move up the social ladder was by adopting a Muslim-sounding name for themselves and changing their profession to something other than the aforementioned ones (Hanif, *Alice Bhatti* 48). There is no way to be both a resident of Alice’s home in French Colony with a Christian name and be an upstanding citizen of the society. Alice understands from a young age that claiming residence in the colony has undesirable consequences, because “different rules apply outside French Colony: some people do not want to drink from the same glass that [Alice] has drunk from, others will not take a banana from the same bunch that [Alice] has taken a banana from” (95). The citizens of French colony, like the hijras of Heera Mandi and the Christians of Badami Bagh, are routinely shunned to stinky edges of the society, because, as Joseph, Alice’s father, colourfully puts it, “they think we are shit-cleaners” (50).

Alice was barely out of her teens when she had to single-handedly battle a mob of her classmates at nursing school, equipped with only a bicycle chain and padlock. The mob’s motive was not to attack Alice Bhatti the individual, but Alice Bhatti the Choohra Christian with the audacity to seek a livelihood in healthcare, and far too ambitious for someone from her manual scavenger background. Raising slogans like “Who Belongs to Pakistan, Musalman, Musalman”, the future nurses physically attack Alice, stripping her of her identity as a person and reducing her to a mere symbol of the religious and class positions she occupies. When branded as a “Yassoo slut” by the same group, she is clearly targeted because of her faith, as the profanity stems from the idea that Christian women in Pakistan are more sexually licentious than other Pakistani women. The slogans also prove that it is not only Alice’s religion that is condemned

but also her right to identify as a citizen of Pakistan, with the attackers drawing an unmistakable connection between being Pakistani and being Muslim. Moreover, they also label her a “Yahoodi,” and a “spy,” which betrays both their ignorance of Christianity and Judaism alike, and their attempt to paint her as an enemy of the state, a “spy” for a foreign power. Therefore, the use of the languages of morality and religion, and nationalism and treason by the mob both discredits Alice’s character and strips her of her Pakistani identity, effectively making it impossible for anyone of Alice’s background to lay a claim on their rights as a citizen. Unlike the other Christians who get attacked the same way, Alice embraces her faith even more dearly after this encounter becoming “the lone soldier of Yassoo”, and making sure that her faith is publicly acknowledged by displaying it in front of those responsible for the hate crimes (173). Her steadfast faith even in the face of such animosity is not unnoticed as one of the brothers of the classmates who attacked her puts a bullet mark on her cheek, a shot that she was convinced had been meant for her throat (174).

Another aspect of her identity that Alice learnt to be wary of is her status as a woman in Pakistan:

During her house job she worked in Accidents and Emergencies for six months and there was not a single day—not a single day—when she didn’t see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive ... most of life’s arguments, it seemed, got settled by doing various things to a woman’s body. (96)

Learning that it is more often than not the lot of women to be physically assaulted or tormented to the end of their wits, Alice decides that she wants to be a woman who would be effective at surviving all the agony that society would undoubtedly pile on her because of her gender, vowing not to be “the kind of girl who attracts the wrong kind of attention and ends up in the

wrong place” (96). In order to stay alive in a society that thinks nothing of killing off inconvenient females, she develops a defence mechanism against the public (male) gaze that would render her body from those of others in a crowd:

She tries to maintain a nondescript exterior; she learns the sideways glance instead of looking at people directly. She speaks in practised, precise sentences so that she is not misunderstood. She chooses her words carefully, and if someone addresses her in Punjabi, she answers in Urdu, because an exchange in her mother tongue might be considered a promise of intimacy ... When she walks she walks with slightly hurried steps, as if she has an important but innocent appointment to keep ... She never eats in public. Putting something in your mouth is surely an invitation for someone to shove something horrible down your throat. If you show your hunger, you are obviously asking for something. (98-9)

By having to learn how to tailor her speech, stride, glance, gestures and manners to avoid “sending the wrong signal”, Alice exhibits a fear that is internalised to such an extent that it lends its colour to every action one performs and every thought that passes through one’s mind. The violent treatment of women in Pakistan sets a precedent in Alice’s mind that leads her to be cautious of every individual’s motive in their interactions with her. Later, while working as a nurse at a hospital in Karachi, Alice marries Teddy Butt, whose primary occupation is as a hired muscle in the police force. In this capacity, he looks up to the leader of the local force, Inspector Malangi as a confidante and mentor in all matters of life and love. When Teddy’s blind jealousy leads him to suspect Alice of having an extramarital affair with a co-worker, he takes the Inspector’s seemingly simple suggestion to get out of his loveless marriage: killing Alice slowly with a haphazardly accomplished acid attack. The everyday tone in which the conversation takes

place, with Malangi handing Teddy a bottle of highly potent acid and advising him, “Try this and she’ll always remember you. This is the only thing that’ll hurt as much as love hurts”, is remarkable (211). It lends credence to Alice’s mistrust of men, considering how women like her are thought to be nothing more than an easily disposable object, with her life and death being decided in a few casual utterances, as the Inspector’s advice to Teddy shows. Malangi also reveals that he has ulterior motives for wanting to finish off Alice, as a powerful political family had been waiting to exact revenge on her for having attacked their son when he sexually assaulted her in the hospital (212). The Inspector’s manipulation of Teddy to harm Alice is an example of how the state uses representatives among the public, schooled in the rights and wrongs of gender roles, to contain anyone who attempts to overstep the boundaries of their socially sanctioned roles as females and/or untouchable Christians from places like French Colony.

Thus, the “docile” bodies of the population that are created by the government begin to be the enforcers of governmentality upon their fellow beings. In contemporary times with their issues of immigration and terrorism, states depend on the narratives of racial Othering, community consolidation, threats to the home economy and national security to ensure that citizens are active participants in the politics of exclusion. The threat of deportation is something that every “desirable” country holds over its “undesirable” citizens. In the British immigrant town of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, “the heart of every woman in the neighbourhood sinks whenever there is an unscheduled “newsflash” on TV, making them think the government is about to announce that all the Asian immigrants are to be thrown out of Britain, just like they had been expelled out of Uganda two decades ago” (Aslam, *Maps* 64). The people of Dasht-e-Tanhaii are not refugees who escaped their subcontinental homes as *Exit West*’s Nadia and Saeed were, but are full-time

residents of Britain, and most of them are British citizens. Even then, the probability of being unceremoniously “thrown out” is always present, proving that irrespective of the length of one’s stay in the foreign country or the legality of one’s status within it, the fear remains in the same ballpark.

The immigrants are always kept at arm’s length from the activities of the state authorities, and it is only through Shamas’ initiative as the director of the Community Relations Council that the people of the town were able to access some of the most common facilities like the state-run healthcare services. Most of the immigrants experience a language barrier while living in England, and in the absence of any official programme that would enable them with better access to the services offered by the welfare state, they are unable to avail many of the perks that comes with being a citizen of a rich country. Even Kaukab, Shamas’ wife, finds that the hours that she spends trying to learn to speak English fluently were in vain, when she rushes out on her own to take a train to see her son in London urgently: “at the ticket-office window she lost heart on being told that she would have to change trains, fearing she would be lost without her lack of English as she searched for the correct platform, too humiliated by her pronounced accent and broken words to ask someone to guide her to the connecting trains” (445). Shamas works hard at bridging this gap, translating official healthcare directives into the immigrants’ native tongues (232), dealing with aggrieved parents in legal matters concerning their offspring (250), or helping tackle instances of racism through official channels (256). He describes his job in a nutshell, “At his office he and his staff have to explain various procedures to men and women who are unemployable in two languages, loathed in several, who know no English or are too intimidated to walk up to someone white-skinned for help” (272).

This intimidation is manifested in several ways, ranging from being shunned by the welfare state to episodes of microaggressions aimed at undermining the immigrants' self-worth. The immigrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii consider themselves as always being under a scanner, constantly afraid of the natives' impressions of them. Every one of Kaukab's interactions with a white person is coloured by her anxiety about what they might assume about herself, and by extension, her religion or her country (93). Her fears are not without reason; once when she had accidentally dialled the wrong telephone number, the person at the other end asked her to, "Get off the phone and go back to your country, you Paki bitch" (422). Kaukab dreads having to meet and converse with white people, and in situations when she is forced to do so, like having her son's ex-wife Stella over for a family dinner, she is extremely conscious of her speech and behaviour, to the extent that the omniscient narrator notes, "every time Kaukab has spoken to Stella, she has surreptitiously breathed into the hollow of a hand and sniffed it to see that her breath isn't stale" (448). Throughout the course of the evening, Kaukab is assailed by fears about her bearing that Stella might construe to fit a stereotype about Muslims or Pakistanis, on occasion worrying that, "she has forgotten to brush her teeth in time for their arrival, to get rid of any bad odour before the white girl came" (451). Between the constant fear of being sent back to their country and the vitriolic racism they are subjected to from the white population, it is the thought of worse plights in their home country that made the immigrants continue in their adoptive country.

The upscale London mansion that Saeed and Nadia (*Exit West*) live in had been turned into a large refugee colony almost overnight, receiving much attention from the media and the police. There were always numerous rumours floating around, of military forces being mobilised to drive out the refugees (Hamid 160), of "a tightening cordon being put in place, a cordon ...

sending those unable to prove their legal residence to great holding camps that had been built in the city's green belt" (135), of people being burned down in large numbers, or of a massacre having taken place in Hyde Park or Earls Court (160-61). These stories are as effective in keeping the immigrants in a state of constant fear and unsettlement, afraid to venture out of the houses or the neighbourhoods that they were cloistered in, as the physical presence of large troops of the military that the rumours said were coming. Adding to these fears was the variety of deprivations that were used to slowly wrench the immigrants out of their makeshift homes. First, the electricity and water supplies were switched off, after which food became scarce as community facilities like the soup kitchen was closed down and food rationed to such an extent that "Saeed and Nadia [got] a handful of almonds each one day, and a tin of herring to share the next" (161).

The refugees of *Exit West* are also met with suspicion, anger and vengeance in the foreign lands that they seek shelter in. Nadia and Saeed see these emotions unfold in close quarters in London:

After the riots the talk on television was of a major operation, one city at a time, starting in London, to reclaim Britain for Britain, and it was reported that the army was being deployed, and the police as well, and those who had once served in the army and the police, and volunteers who had received a weeklong course of training. Saeed and Nadia heard it said that the nativist elements were forming their own legions, with a wink and nod from the authorities, and the social media chatter was of a coming night of shattered glass ... (132)

The fact that the refugees are survivors who had escaped even worse violence in their native countries is forgotten as their existence is vilified and demands are made that they go back to

where they came from. At one point, the anti-immigrant propaganda heightened to the extent that it seemed to Nadia that the people of their host country were capable of doing anything, including killing the refugees (162). She was surprised by the similarity between the situation that she had escaped and the one she found herself in then, as the “fury of those nativists advocating wholesale slaughter was what struck [her] most, and it struck her because it seemed so familiar, so much like the fury of the militants in her own city” (156). Left to wonder whether her ‘escape’ from the horrors of her home country was a mistake as she felt equally hunted down in London as she did back home, Nadia takes comfort in the company of other people like her, the camaraderie afforded to a people united by persecution. Eventually, through sheer perseverance that was aided by the fresh memories of having endured even worse conditions, the refugees are able to overcome the stiff opposition that their presence was met with by the natives of London, and win the right to coexist alongside them.

Thus, the state uses the narratives of refugees as an unwanted burden on the host country’s taxpayers by emphasising on the cultural differences between the natives and the immigrants, and questions of citizenship to generate an anti-immigrant mentality among the general public. This rhetoric is also an indicator of how Western powers often conveniently prioritise their national subjects over the human subjects that all immigrants are.²⁵

Isma is a third-generation British citizen of Pakistani origin and the daughter of Adil, a British-Pakistani who chose to fight alongside the *mujahideen* factions in the proxy war against Communist forces and later, for the *jihadi* cause in Afghanistan. During this time, he was an absentee husband and father to his family in London, leaving them for years at a stretch. When he ‘disappeared’ on a journey from Pakistan to Afghanistan, the family was left in the dark about

²⁵ This concept of Western exceptionalism from the practice of human rights will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

his whereabouts until they were interrogated by investigators for the state. The Pashas, as immigrants aware of the precariousness of their situation, are unsure of how to act:

my mother said if we tried looking for [Adil] we'd be harassed by the Special Branch, and by people in the neighbourhood, who would start to suspect our sympathies. My grandmother went to the mosque looking for support, but the Imam sided with my mother—he'd heard too many stories of abuse suffered by the families of British men who'd been arrested in Afghanistan. One of my grandmother's friends had said the British government would withdraw all the benefits of the welfare state—including state school and the NHS—from any family it suspected of siding with the terrorists.

(Shamsie, *Home Fire* 49)

The episode described here is imbued with secrecy and intimidation. Isma's family receives an inkling that something might be wrong at Adil's end only when the British intelligence agency pays them a visit, and even then, they are left without any answers about Adil or what instigated the interrogation. The family lacks the connections that might get them information about Adil, being destitute immigrants. The air of intimidation created by the government forces was stifling as their very presence induced suspicions about the rest of Isma's family and their allegiances. In such a scenario, the general public, familiar with the narrative of such covert probes by the country's premier investigative agencies, is left to deduce the story of Adil Pasha and his family, and ensures that the latter is treated like a deadly infection, isolated and quarantined. Isma's mother is cautious of having their cause for justice rejected by their home community who she suspects would be inclined to take the side of the government against the grieving family. If the larger public was turned against the Pashas because of the racism and Islamophobia inherent in the post-9/11 British society, the Muslim community is cowered into submission by rumours of

welfare programmes being discontinued to their community. That such a discriminatory measure would come to pass through legitimate channels was unthinkable and the effort required to do this would be impractical. But these unsubstantiated threats work just as effectively, ensuring that the Pashas are deterred from seeking help to gain information that might even jeopardise the government's ethical foundations. Facing intimidation from the government and hostility from the public, the Pashas are forced to live their lives shrouded in uncertainty about Adil's survival.

Power is applicable only when those subjected to power have an option to act in whichever way they please (Gordon 5). Power relations, therefore, presuppose agency, not deny it. In a situation of power, one party is coerced into performing an action not because there is no possibility of acting contrarily, but because the conditions are such that only the former seems possible. Thus, even the concept of free will or the ethical code of conduct become catalysts aiding in the creation of unbalanced equations of power between the people and the state (Gordon 6). These nuanced methods of subjugation do not seek to dominate by the erasure of established codes, but by the manipulation of pre-existing moral and ethical understandings, as Foucault explains here: "with [the modern] government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics—to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved" (96). The power of the government, thus, arises not merely from enacting legislation that would prevent a certain kind of behaviour on the part of the population, but from creating an atmosphere that will ensure that the laws are obeyed. Even though the most frequently used tool for ensuring this is law enforcement, or the power to police (Gordon 10), it is evident that governmentality depends on informal actors, from the mothers of *Burnt Shadows* and the native population of *Maps*, *Exit West* and *Home Fire* to the general

public in *The Golden Legend*, *Alice Bhatti* and *This House*, that utilise the power structures of patriarchy, morality, religion, and racial supremacy, to rule the population at the micro-level.

The modern nation-state survives through the “imagined communities” that are created in the minds of their populations and the repeated reinforcements of this national imagination (Anderson 12). Thus, the bodies and minds of citizens replace the battlefields of yore to become ideological war zones in the nation-state’s fight to maintain sovereignty. Institutions such as the family, and the religious and civil society, act as foot soldiers, enforcing racial and casteist “purity” through social and spatial marginalisation. Such insights into the working of contemporary governmentality and the flux of power relations as it flows across the world shows that it is important, for the purpose of this project, to bear in mind the inherent contradiction that such a system poses to the human rights discourse which features a set of inalienable rights that every human being is set to inherit. The conditions sustained by governmentality are not conducive to the protection of individual freedoms as it recognises and utilises discriminatory institutions to achieve its ends. This challenge to the human rights regime is one of the focal points of this project and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.4. Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has attempted a study of socio-cultural interactions to understand dominance and subjugation on the basis of identities, as reflected in the embodied person. The characters of these novels constantly negotiate their identities, framing and reframing them in response to the codes dictated by the dominant Self. As such, the oppression of certain identities as the not-Self, the Other, is used to create and establish a social structure which aids the Self in continuing their reign at the top of the order. The novels offer examples of several strategies used

by the Self to highlight and maintain the difference between them and the Other. First, is the gaze through which bodies are subjected to calculative or threatening visual appraisals in order to both define the asymmetrical balance of power as well as to convey the consequences of this imbalance to the Other. Such interactions between the Self and the Other, through the expression of prejudice and discrimination, impart to the latter that they are, often, functionally reduced to the appearance of their bodies. Their identities are quite literally conflated with “what meets the eye,” drawing from and constructing narratives about their lives and that of the communities they belong to in an endless cycle of stereotyping.

Nevertheless, the potential of Othered bodies in countering such discursive violence cannot be discounted. The novels also offer ample evidence to show that various survival strategies are attempted by characters who embody “undesirable” traits of religion, nation, race, gender or caste to resist such attempts at pigeonholing. The reactions of such Othered bodies upon encountering such attacks, either by reclaiming the Othered characteristics in subversive ways or through carving out safe spaces and disguises that can allow the Other to escape scrutiny support this argument of attempts at resistance. These resistances, however, enjoy varying degrees of success. I attribute the endurance of these hegemonic structures against such relatively minor oppositions to the role of the state in solidifying and institutionalising processes of Othering. This, I argue, is one of the ways in which the state cements its own legitimacy. By controlling bodies using strict categories as operated by non-state institutions, the state ensures that the idea of difference which separates it from other nation-states is maintained.

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Chapter 2

(Re)membering the Past: Memory, History and Cultural Trauma

In this chapter, I attempt to trace the formation of trauma narratives in the primary texts focusing on the articulation of “traumatic” events. Continuing the engagement with identity-construction, this chapter will look at memory, “the central medium through which identities are constituted” (Misztal 1). Memory, I argue, is integral to the process of constructing individual and group subjectivities through personal and communitarian forms of remembering the past.

Notwithstanding the psychological and neurological aspects of the process of remembering, this chapter considers memory as a phenomenon of the social life of the remembering subject. As a socially formulated aspect of the individual’s conception of their past, remembering outgrows the layman definition of an act of recall of past events to a political action, as one does not remember all of one’s past, but only selected parts. Thus, what one chooses to remember, the importance accorded to various memories and the associations memories hold in the individual’s mind become particularly telling, especially in relation to recollecting disruptive events that pose injury to the collective consciousness of the group. The central arguments of this chapter will use this idea, based on Jeffrey C. Alexander’s concept of cultural trauma to understand the nexus between remembering the past as a means of (re)constructing events from the past as trauma.

2.1. Literature as a Medium for the Production of Cultural Trauma

The postcolonial experience, according to Homi K Bhabha, should be understood and overcome through the re-membering of the trauma faced by the colonised. This re-membering is

integral for the postcolonial subject to understand the cultural identity of the present and reconcile it with the barbarity of the past. This production of a cultural “present”, or what Bhabha calls “barbaric transmission of culture” signifies how the events of barbarism or torture are expressed in the “now”. For Bhabha, barbarism affects the transfer of culture from one entity to another as it creates an interstitial void of inarticulacy that is as much part of the cultural identity of the ‘now’ as the images and expressions that resemble the traumatic past. Postcolonial cultural memory should take into account both aspects of re-membering, the images that persist in the consciousness of the survivor of barbarism as well as the part that has to be left inarticulate. It is only through this displacement “of the angle of vision” that periods of oppression can be fully understood (Rothberg 368).

Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have divided the relationship between literature and cultural memory into three practical roles: literature as a “medium of remembrance”, focussing on the narrative and aesthetic means by which literature acts as a conduit for historical events; as an “object of remembrance”, which looks at the intertextual relationship between texts across time periods; and as a “medium for observing the production of cultural memory”, reflecting “upon the epistemology, ethics, and workings of collective memory and, as such, it engages in a dialogue with historians and sociologists regarding the interpretation of the past and the forms appropriate to it” (112, 113). This final role of literature, analysing practices of memory that the novel acts as a witness to, leading the reader to draw important conclusions on the processes involved in remembering, commemorating and mourning historical events, and ensuring their continued afterlife in cultural memory will be the primary methodological approach taken in this chapter. The kind of memories the novels choose to emphasise and the narrative they seek to

establish hold the key to understanding the historical motivations steering the plot of the novels and unlock its dominant political allegiances.

One of the most prominent ideas to have evolved in memory studies is that memory is not an individual entity, but can be collectively owned. With Maurice Halbwachs as one of its pioneers, the idea of memory was transformed from being a single mind's recollection of a past event to something that is spread through social and cultural systems and passed down generations: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). The process of remembering is set in motion by certain prompts—people or inanimate objects—that cause one to summon a certain memory from the past, anchoring it to one's social environment. Halbwachs emphasises on the social structure that encourages the recalling of certain events as the starting point of an individual's act of remembering, concluding that, "there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection" (38). Halbwachs posited that the forces of the society, including family, kinship systems, religious institutions and professions, act as the shapers of individual memories into a collective experience, making the members of such groups remember certain memories according to their relevance to the milieu in which the process of remembering takes place (51). Therefore, the recollections of an individual are contingent on the social groups that they can claim membership to as well as to their present circumstances. Contemporary memory studies have adopted these basic principles from Halbwachs, who paved the way for memory to leave the realm of the private mind and enter the public arena.

Halbwachs further proposes that the integrity of society depends on the consensus of a collective understanding of history: “society can live only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and groups comprising it” (Halbwachs 182). Social groups emphasise those events, or aspects of events, that lead to the perpetuation of the memories that ensure the continued influence of the group over its members (Misztal 51). This character of collective memory as a socially-motivated interpretation of history is also the reason for the fading of certain memories of the group as they fail to make sense in the group’s present. This difference between enduring memories and those that disappear once they are deemed unnecessary for the collective’s present milieu is elucidated by Jan Assmann’s classification of collective memory into two forms, communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is conveyed through everyday speech and rituals, and persists in the lives of only three generations, or for about 80-100 years. It pertains to stories about individuals and provincial occurrences that do not hold much significance after this time period has passed. Cultural memory, on the other hand, endures the test of time to remain relevant for several millennia. Surviving in the form of symbols, icons, places, and different forms of media, cultural memory is the frame through which present generations make sense of history. It is, therefore, one of the building blocks of collective identities, aiding in the formation of large institutions like the nation-state. Communicative memory, on the other hand, is smaller in scope, intertwined in the autobiographical tales of family members or intimate social groups, and passed on to other members of the group through retellings of memories (J Assmann 126). Events of historical importance can exist in the realms of both cultural and communicative memories, each contributing to the identity of the group, albeit in different ways.

While Assmann's approach to collective memory builds on Halbwachs', it emphasises the "concretion of identity" through processes of remembering (J Assmann 128). In doing so, Assmann problematises Halbwachs' tendency to think of the transition from "*mémoire*" to "*histoire*" as uncomplicated, by differentiating between communicative and cultural memories as different aspects of collective memory and exploring the role of group identities in transforming the private communicative memory to the public cultural memory (129). Assmann also foregrounds the process of "institutionalisation" that leads to the survival of the short-term communicative memory into the more enduring cultural memory, an emphasis which is significant because it suggests that there are intervening factors that determine this recasting.

Barbara Misztal summarises the sociological approach towards memory as, "the construction of memory as a social and cultural process and [analysis of] institutions' aims and operations responsible for that construction, while also examining objects, places and practices in which cultural memory is embodied" (3). She emphasises the role played by social establishments in channelling the creation of a cultural memory that consolidates the collective identity of a particular group of people. Tangible and intangible practices of culture, like "cultural routines, institutions and artefacts" and "set of ideas, knowledges, cultural practices, rituals and monuments" are seen as vessels of cultural memory (6). Thus, cultural memory takes into account the cultural influences on what societies choose to remember and how these memories become the means to a political end. As the archaeologist Michael Galaty succinctly put it, collective memory is "a symbolic, social-structural system that situates cultural behaviors in space and time by linking them to a constructed past" (2).

Astrid Erll follows a typically Halbwachian tradition of identifying collective contexts as the forces that shape individual recollections, or "literal memory" (Erll 6). Thus, for Erll, cultural

memory is produced at two levels, the individual and the collective, the latter being a more “metaphorical” understanding of memory that is not merely a sum of individual recollections but a collective set of ideas that is actively influenced by “media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past” (6). Going back to Halbwachs, such “collective frameworks of memory”, are “the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs 40).

In line with this definition, the texts discussed here can be viewed as both a product of a collective cultural memory as well as an enforcing framework which ensures the perpetuation of these memories as they are important for the present times. However, there are pitfalls involved in these theorisations of collective memory, as Marianne Hirsch notes:

Jan and Aleida Assmann’s typological distinctions do not specifically account for the ruptures introduced by collective historical trauma, by war, Holocaust, exile, and refugeehood: these ruptures would certainly inflect their schemas of transmission. Both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural/archival memory would be severely impaired by traumatic experience. (111)

Thus, Hirsch contests that the Assmanns’ definition of cultural memory does not problematise the interruptions caused by “ruptures”, or events that can be classified as inflicting collective trauma on a social group that would interfere with the relatively uncomplicated process of the consolidation of cultural memory that they had formulated.

The question of remembering traumatic events has famously been addressed by theorists like Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman. This school of trauma studies that emerged in the 1990s has since been heavily critiqued by postcolonial theorists for a number of reasons.

Stef Craps, in a comprehensive study of the Western bias of trauma theory titled *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* has elucidated in detail its deficiencies. Craps points out how trauma theory pioneered by Caruth is heavily dependent on the Holocaust, ignoring other historical events like colonialism or slavery that affect the West's "other". Even when such events are recognised as traumatic events worth study, they are only seen as addendums to the principal trauma of the Holocaust and are dealt with from Eurocentric perspectives (14). Craps and Gert Buelens, while editing a special volume of the journal *Studies in the Novel* on "Postcolonial Trauma Novels", describe the detrimental effects of Caruth's dependence on individual psychology, stating, "[c]olonial trauma... is a collective experience, which means that its specificity cannot be recognized unless the object of trauma research shifts from the individual to larger social entities, such as communities or nations" (4). Their insistence on displacing the individual as the focus of trauma studies opens up larger frameworks of reference in studying traumatic experiences that are not centred on a single catastrophic event. They end their introductory article in the special issue with a call for alternate frameworks of addressing historical trauma that are not only inclusive of non-Western victims but also engaged in deconstructing the implicit imperialism in the existing scholarship on trauma (5).

Jeffrey C Alexander's work on cultural trauma seems to be an appropriate answer to this demand. Alexander too, finds fault with Caruth's tendency to whittle down trauma to the level of the individual through inordinate use of psychoanalytic tools to "reclaim" repressed memories of trauma and treat them as "objective reality" (Alexander 8). As an alternative, he proposes a theory of cultural trauma that views it as a socially-mediated process of reconstructing the past in order to render it "traumatic". Alexander's emphasis is on how events come to signify trauma and does not assume that certain events are "inherently traumatic" (8). Thus, Alexander is not

concerned with the veracity of facts concerning events, but in the factors that went into constructing it as traumatic (9).

Thus, Alexander's paradigm of cultural trauma is particularly befitting for studies on fictional narratives. Combining this with Erll's concept of literature as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory, this chapter undertakes the study of the primary texts to understand the production of cultural trauma through collective cultural memory.

2.2. Writing from Memory: Novelists as Conduits of Cultural Trauma

The novels studied in this chapter all vary in their historical scope, or the recorded events of accepted global and national history that they address. *Burnt Shadows* can be considered the most broad and ambitious in this regard, covering experiences of the nuclear bomb attack of Hiroshima, the chaotic Partition of the Indian subcontinent, the instability of postcolonial Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan War and finally, the event and aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York. Another of Shamsie's novels, *Kartography*, is also examined for its reflection on the brutal civil war of 1971 which resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. *Kartography* provides political commentary on the ethnic violence that rocked Karachi in the 1980s and 90s, linking it to the collective forgetting that gripped Pakistan during the decades following the civil war.²⁶ *Mangoes* explores the corridors of the political and military power centres that changed the course of Pakistani democracy in the 1980s under the premiership of Zia ul-Haq. *The Blind Man's Garden* follows the history of the Pakistani people as they are dragged

²⁶ Recent evidence of this tendency to erase the war of 1971 from public memory is the last-minute cancellation of a well-publicised five-day academic conference on "War, Violence & Memory: Commemorating 50 Years of the 1971 War" to be held from March 23rd to 27th, 2021. The event was conceived and meant to be jointly hosted by Lahore University for Management Studies and Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, both premier educational institutions in the country (Jalil).

into the battlefields in Afghanistan once again, albeit in a different role—as the protectors of the global Islamic brotherhood against the Western powers—in what has been dubbed the “War on Terror”. The novel offers a scathing critique of global Islamophobia which has problematised the Western response to Islamic fundamentalism and highlights the Pakistani nation-state’s complicity in this. The commitment of the aforementioned novels towards providing a critique on the socio-political developments in Pakistan since its creation is not immediately apparent in *Maps*. Even though it ostensibly deals with the private experiences of a family as it recovers from the anguish of losing a loved one, the novel identifies the social and cultural frameworks that have led to this deeply personal loss. Each of these novels reproduce memories and counter-memories of the political history of Pakistan, an approach which is one of the prominent points under discussion in this chapter.

Kamila Shamsie, the author of *Kartography* and *Burnt Shadows*, was born in Karachi in 1973 in a muhajir²⁷ family and weaves her fiction as a postcolonial inheritor of the past, nuancing the novels with questions of the lingering effects of historical events that lead to their reiteration as traumatic experiences. *Kartography* is the intimate history of two couples whose interpersonal relations and politics were irrevocably challenged by the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, affecting not only them, but the futures inherited by their children who were born after East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Familial remembrances create within the later generations a vivid recollection of those scarring episodes from which they were temporally and spatially absent—postmemory, in Marianne Hirsch’s articulation—but which remain a part of the cultural identity derived from the event (Hirsch 103). According to Hirsch, “postmemory is not an

²⁷ “Muhajirs” (or “mohajirs”), in the context of Partition, is the term used to refer to Urdu-speaking migrants from present-day India who moved to Pakistan upon Independence. In Islamic history, it has also been applied to “Muslim refugees fleeing for religious reasons” (Talbot and Singh xii).

identity position but a generational structure of transmission deeply embedded in [various] forms of mediation” (114). The novelist, hailing from a family that was divided by Partition,²⁸ and lived in Pakistan through the 1971 war can be considered a member of the ‘postgeneration’ of these events, similar to the character Raza in *Burnt Shadows*, and Raheen and Karim in *Kartography*, all of them possessing overlapping group identities of being the children of survivors of these historical tragedies. This reading of the novels encounters postmemory on two levels: firstly, of the text as a work influenced by the authors’ postmemory of the past as a part of their family’s intimate history; and next, of characters in the novels as the textual embodiment of this postgeneration and the delineation of these as maps of the inherited memory of historical events including colonialism and Partition as well as its lingering afterlife. This section will trace the ways in which the postgeneration, as depicted in the novels, inherits the memories of trauma as experienced by their family who lived through it.

Similarly, Nadeem Aslam, Shamsie’s senior by seven years, was born in 1966 in Gujranwala, a city in Pakistani Punjab that witnessed massive displacements of people, bloodshed and violence during colonial rule and Partition. For the politically-inclined Aslam family, the years following independence also brought loss and eventually, self-imposed exile, after his father, a Communist, was forced to leave Pakistan with his family due to President Zia ul-Haq’s intolerance of dissenters²⁹. Aslam has also spoken about how subcontinental history informs his writing, saying, “As a human being, if you forget about the past, psychologically

²⁸ “When I was growing up, partition was not so much a historical event as a family story,” Kamila Shamsie begins in a newspaper piece commemorating the 70th anniversary of Indian and Pakistani Independence (“Partition, 70 years on”).

²⁹ In a 2017 interview, Aslam recollects the Zia regime which, “for people like my father and my uncles, things were going to be hard. My uncle was taken away from us; he was then handed back to us broken. We had to leave.” (“Within Three or Four Years the Texture of Pakistani Life Changed”)

there is something wrong with you. And as a nation, if you forget the past or try to forget or erase the past, then there will be some kind of trauma” (“Within Three or Four Years the Texture of Pakistani Life Changed”). The emotion behind this remark, of keeping alive a cultural memory in the face of the trauma of collective forgetting is also addressed in this chapter.

Mohammed Hanif, the third Pakistani novelist studied in this chapter, was born in 1964. While his career as a pilot for the Pakistan Air Force clearly prepared him to write the perspective of Junior Under Officer Ali Shigri of the same cadre, but it is his subsequent career as a journalist that is visible in *The Case of Exploding Mangoes*’ irreverent caricature of Zia-ul-Haq and satirical take on the events surrounding his death. When asked in an interview about the interplay of history and fiction in the novel, Hanif remarked:

The central incident that the plane crashed is the only truth in it. Everything else is made up. How would you research something when five inquiry commissions haven’t been able to find anything? But we have lived through the period, so we know what it feels like. (quoted in Bilal 122)

Indeed, the episode of Zia’s death is mysterious to the extent that it cannot be ascertained if it was an accident or a planned assassination, as Hanif points out here. *Mangoes* uses this uncertainty to its advantage, relying on the cultural memory of countless conspiracy theories—as well as creating some of his own—to retell a period from the experience of having “lived through [it]”. The events of the Zia years (1977-1988) are particularly attractive material for the contemporary crop of Pakistani novelists as they experienced it first-hand.³⁰ General Zia’s reign was critical because it changed the character of both the state of Pakistan—through his

³⁰ See Aslam, “Within Three or Four Years the Texture of Pakistani Life Changed”, for his memories of the Zia regime, and how it turned into a pivotal moment in Pakistan’s history affecting the nation’s course till present times.

government's decision to join forces with the USA and turn Afghanistan into the primary battleground against the Soviet Union—as well as the nation—through his Islamisation policies which saw the nation become a theocratic state. As Shamsie explains:

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

Evidently, the memories of the past inherited by this postgeneration of writers through the archives of their families' stories and other artefacts of history, are primary influences in their practice of fiction writing. This chapter looks at the historical events which they experienced in person play out through the novels they produced, reflecting an interesting dialogue between experienced history, "official" history and fictional reimagining of history.

2.3. Cultural Trauma: Narrating the "Ruptures" of History

This section examines the process of articulation of cultural trauma, closely following the field-defining work of Jeffrey C Alexander. As briefly indicated at the beginning of the chapter, Alexander introduced the concept of trauma as not merely an event resembling a crisis, but the result of the social construction of an event as "traumatic". In particular, he finds "lay trauma theory" that treats trauma as spontaneous reactions to events as severely lacking (2). Lay trauma theory is heavily influenced by the psychoanalytic approaches to trauma which focus on individual reactions and the solving of psychological effects like repression of memory. This

proves to be the point of departure for the next major development in the study of trauma, its application in humanities by Cathy Caruth, who locates trauma in the inexpressible mark it leaves on the mind of the victim (6-7). Alexander disagrees with the psychoanalytic school of trauma and its descendants on their assumption that events are “inherently traumatic”. Instead, he situates trauma in the social-mediation of an event as trauma, a process which can take place before, during or after its occurrence in real-time (8). Traumatic events, in his “social theory”, are considered so because of their “imagined” effect, and not necessarily because they were harmful in themselves. “[E]vents do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma,” but “[o]nly if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged” by an event, leading to the group “experiencing trauma” (8,10,22). To summarise,

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (1)

Thus, Alexander recognises that all disruptive events do not become cultural trauma and attributes this to the absence of a social process that will transform narratives around the event to understand it as trauma. This process begins with “claim-making” which features a member or group of members of the collectivity recognising “the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action such causes imply” and disseminated within the group through symbols and narratives. This claim to injury is widely circulated by “carrier groups,” who have the position or talent to articulate such claims to larger sections of the collectivity. Once the carrier groups are successful in convincing the social group they argue has been the victims of

trauma, a wider appeal for recognition of the cultural trauma and reparations for the same can be made by the traumatised group (11-12).

Such a process of construction of cultural trauma is heavily dependent on the methods used by the carrier group and the rest of the collectivity in their efforts to persuade the wider society beyond the group to accept the event as traumatic. These methods are referred to as “meaning work” and typically touch on four broad aspects of the trauma: “nature of the pain”, “nature of the victim”, “relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience”, and “attribution of responsibility” (12-15). The forging of this trauma narrative is also influenced by the relationship of the collectivity to institutions such as religion, aesthetic modes, legal frameworks, mass media and state bureaucracy (15-19). Once trauma has been thus “experienced” through acknowledgement by both the group and the audience, it becomes institutionalised as widely accepted as a “regrettable past” and becomes a part of the cultural memory of the entire society (23).

I will examine the novels for signs of the process of cultural trauma outlined by Alexander to understand the progress made in the narrativization of historical events that took place in the subcontinent such as colonisation, Partition, and subsequent disruptive events in Pakistan like the civil war of 1971, the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s, and the War on Terror that followed the 2001 terrorist attacks in USA.

2.3.1. Colonial Rule

Most of the primary texts are set in contemporary times and deal with the period of colonisation through memories, experienced in the past and inherited by the present. The only exception to this is the beginning of *Burnt Shadows*, which is set in Delhi in the months

preceding independence and Partition. Shamsie uses the story of Sajjad Ashraf, a young Muslim man from old Dilli who works as a British lawyer's assistant in Delhi, to bring to life the everyday experience of colonial microaggressions. For Sajjad, Dilli is "the rhythmically beating heart of cultural India", which exists side-by-side with Delhi, "the city of the Raj" (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 33). He comments that the metaphor that best conjures up the difference between these two parts of the same city was the nature of its cultivated gardens: Dilli, with trees growing unhindered in close quarters with the humans that lived around it, and Delhi, "where every Englishman's bungalow had lush gardens, lined with red flowerpots" (33). The separation of each species by clear demarcations represents the spirit behind Delhi where the Englishman, Mr. Burton, pretended to treat Sajjad as his equal by deigning to let him wear jackets from England and playing chess with him, even though in reality, Sajjad was allowed to bloom only within the confines of his flowerpot, confines which Mr. Burton decided.

Sajjad is able to identify invisible boundaries separating Dilli and Delhi in the interactions between the British and the native Indians, as well as in their individual habits and inclinations. Dilli remains a place that was organic in growth yet steeped in tradition, allowing trees to grow in the courtyards of homes that were inhabited by dozens of people and with skies that were crowded with the kites of children. Delhi, on the other hand, has clear skies, red flowerpots and social distinctions set in stone. James Burton attempted to set a precedent by showing that he was beyond the constraints of the social ranks that separated them by treating Sajjad—in a manner Mr. Burton assumed to be—as an equal, making him privy to discussions on literature and politics. However, Sajjad notices that, "it was only in James's hands to choose when to undercut and when to reaffirm [social] barriers", a detail that he "accepted as inevitable

and James never even considered” (39). Thus, the difference between Delhi and Dilli is emblematic of the barriers erected by colonialism and the values it espoused.

Sajjad notices that in the days leading up to the British departure from Indian soil, there was one topic that was hotly debated in his neighbourhood:

Pakistan was all anyone could talk about now, with the Imam and the most conservative members of the congregation arguing that you could not divide the Ummah, there was no place for nations in the brotherhood of Muslims; and the Muslim League supporters arguing back that it was already clear from the behaviour of the Hindus that they would not agree to share any power with the Muslims in a post-Raj India, and hadn't the descendants of the Mughals, the Lodhis, the Tughlaqs, fallen far enough already... (53)

In both, the religious ideology of the clergy that calls for a pan-Islamic identity over that of any nationality, and the political aims of the League that argues for Islamic dominance within the administrative structure of the nation-state, there is one common factor: the dependency on a common cultural past while appealing to the masses, in order to mould a political entity.³¹ The League, through its evocation of the past glory of Muslim rulers in Delhi who were forced to surrender to the British, attempts to call up any feelings of resentment among the people of Delhi, who lived in the midst of the ruins of these empires and who could be relied upon to want to avenge their downfall. In addition to the British, the Hindus of the subcontinent are named as perpetrators of harm and responsible for the deteriorating conditions of the Muslims who have

³¹ Yasmin Khan notes how, “[o]n the threshold of Partition, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs... lived with an awareness of difference. This was not grounded on how often someone prayed or went to the temple; it transcended individual levels of piety. It was a strongly felt kinship with others of the same faith that was preserved and promoted through intermarrying... shared histories and myths, and the instillation of customs, habits and superstitions from an early age. But it was pragmatic. It was not easy to hook together co-religionists in political allegiances across great expanses of territory; there was no such thing as one Muslim, Hindu or Sikh community in South Asia...” (21).

“fallen far enough already”. All those who identified as Muslim were thus called upon to remember a past of political power as wielded by the “Mughals, the Lodhis, the Tughlaqs”, and to identify themselves as “descendants” of both this triumphant past and the bleakness of defeat and marginalisation that followed. The League, claiming to be the voice of subcontinental Muslims during the struggle for independence, evoke this narrative of a bygone Muslim era that was terminated by the British, constructing a cultural memory of lost glory that aided in the creation of a narrative that framed this loss as a traumatic event that required urgent action. The creation of Pakistan was legitimised by the invocation of a cultural memory of past wrongs, living on in the landscape of Dilli. This injury was portrayed as being inflicted on the identity of subcontinental Muslims as descendants of such illustrious rulers, resulting in the mobilisation of a vast section of people who were roused to claim active membership of the Muslim collective. Having “experienced” the past trauma they could be persuaded by those advocating the cause for Pakistan to fear a similar one in the future at the hands of the same perpetrators. Thus, *Burnt Shadows* portrays how these Muslims of British India used select historical narratives of pre-colonial grandeur and colonial mistreatment of Muslims to consolidate an Islamic identity based on a shared idea of a traumatic past.

Echoes of the colonial period are also seen in Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps*. The cultural memory of colonialism of the immigrants living in the British town of Dasht-e-Tanhaii is most strongly symbolised by the Koh-i-Noor, a legendary jewel from the subcontinent that has been part of the Crown Jewels of the British monarch since colonial times. When faced with anti-immigrant policies and the possibility of deportation from England, the immigrants stake their claim to the country’s resources by citing the Queen’s possession of the famed diamond: “they plan to put up a fight and say they’ll go back with pleasure as soon as the Queen gives back our

Koh-i-Noor” (Aslam, *Maps* 64). For these South Asian immigrants, the Koh-i-Noor had outgrown its reputation as merely a beautiful stone to become a signifier of colonial plundering, creating a nostalgic longing for pre-colonial times and the viewing of the British reign in the subcontinent as the primary reason for the issues of poverty and cultural deterioration that the postcolonial nation faces. The constant demand for its return bears the flag in a quest for reparations for centuries of colonial torture which has resulted in “a country that’s poor because the whites stole all its wealth, beginning with the Koh-i-Noor diamond” (64). Since it was the poor conditions of their home country that had forced them to leave it in search of better financial prospects, the Koh-i-Noor, a jewel that was forcibly taken from its home in the subcontinent to be trapped in a foreign land, became particularly relatable as the central metaphor in their longing for the homeland.

Thus, the remembering of the home country is actively influenced by the immigrants’ position as diaspora whose memories are mediated by simultaneous feelings of homesickness, nostalgia and a constant feeling of being outsiders in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, even though the town was predominantly populated by this community.³² This is not helped by the recurring instances of racism the townspeople are faced with from their limited interactions with the—mostly white—native population (this aspect of life in Dasht-e-Tanhaii has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter). The local “Asian” radio station in the town advertises “a phone-in about the problems of life in England: . . . Are you tired of being treated like a coolie by the whites? Give us a call” (231). The experiences of racism in British society of the late 1990s (when the novel is set) are connected to a past of being “coolies” to the “whites”. Evidently, the continued indignity

³² Md. Alamgir Hossain considers “memory of the home” one of the factors influencing the degree of assimilation of the diasporic individual in *Maps* to the culture of the UK, and adds that this nostalgia “creates a crisis in the immigrant’s relation to the host country, which results in unsuccessful negotiation of identity” (103).

suffered by this immigrant community in a postcolonial world can be easily identified as originating in the countless injustices of colonial times, such as the “stealing” of wealth like the Koh-i-Noor. However, the popular demand that the Queen return the Koh-i-Noor indicates that the cultural trauma of colonialism has been acknowledged and accepted by the South Asian immigrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, who are now in the process of demanding justice for the trauma inflicted on them. Thus, there is hope that the racist treatment that continues will also be understood as cultural trauma affecting their community by future generations of immigrants.

The Blind Man's Garden opens with the words, “history is the third parent”, capturing the importance of elements of the past in nurturing personalities, helping distinguish between right and wrong, and defining one's identity, just as a parent would nurture a child (Aslam, *Blind Man's Garden* 5). History is anthropomorphised to be an inevitable part of the family unit, influencing all of the protagonist Rohan's life's work—as educator, father and citizen—which has been a quest to atone for “the century-old taint” that his ancestors caused him, his family and their nation (11). This “taint” is traced back to Rohan's great-grandfather, a famous horse-breeder whose animals were held in high esteem for their stunning physical attributes and equally for their usefulness on the battleground. In the wake of the “First War of Independence” in 1857, when entreated by the Mutineers for a supply of his best horses to aid the revolt against the British forces, he lied to them and caused their lives to be in danger (9). Rohan is ashamed for his family's part in quenching the mutiny which resulted in “one thousand years of Islamic rule [coming] to an end in India... [and a] Muslim land lost to non-believers” (11). Tainted by this blot on his family history, Rohan devotes his life to the meticulous observation of Islam in all aspects: educating himself about the world's injustices, especially those committed against

Islam, the founding and management of a school for boys called Ardent Spirit, and applying the moral philosophy of the religion to every action and relationship of his.

As co-founder and headmaster of Ardent Spirit, Rohan ensured that the school campus was filled with details that served to “remind the children of their legacy, Islam’s long inheritance of knowledge and achievement” (19). Built on the same stretch of land as the one his grandfather bred horses on, the structure of the school was singular in conception and design:

Before building it he had visited the cities of Mecca, Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, Delhi and Istanbul, the six locations of Islam’s earlier magnificence and possibility. From each he brought back a handful of dust and he scattered it in an arc in the air, watching as belief, virtue, truth and judgement slipped from his hand and settled softly on the ground. That purifying line, in the shape of a crescent or a scythe, was where he had dug the foundations. (8)

The schoolhouse was also constructed in the shape of a crescent, symbolising that phase of the moon which is revered in Islam, and divided into six rooms named after the aforementioned six cities that, according to him, functioned as “centres of Islam’s bygone brilliance” (19). The crescent shape also stood atop the ground where his forefathers had dug a trench to keep their horses hidden away from the Mutineers of 1857, “the century-old taint that Rohan had tried to remove by spreading the soils of Allah’s six beloved cities [t]here” (11). The “purifying line” along which the soil is scattered is reminiscent of the rhetoric used for the creation of Pakistan, “the land of the pure”,³³ by ousting the British and drawing a line across the subcontinent that

³³ Stephen Cohen comments that the etymology of Pakistan can be taken to be a celebration of Islamic purity in opposition to Hindu conceptions of purity as well: “In Persian, Pakistan also means “land of the pure,” an implicit gibe at the ritually “pure” high-caste Hindus who dominated the Indian National Congress” (26). Farhanaz Ispahani attributes to this idea of “pure” Islam, “embraced by Islamist activists since the country’s founding”, the religious persecution of minorities in Pakistan since its creation (7).

was intended to rid the new nation of impure elements brought in by non-Muslims. The school's motto was a bone of contention between Rohan and the school's other founder, his wife Sofia, who objected when Rohan amended the original motto, "Education is the basis of law and order" by adding the word "Islamic" before "education" (30). As Rohan's faith grew in response to the world's shunning of Islam, the motto reflected the changes in his political outlook, "going from Islamic education is the basis of law and order to Islam is the basis of law and then to Islam is the purpose of life" (31).

The school acts as a site of memorialising the intellectual history of Islam through the visible presence of "the six locations of Islam's earlier magnificence and possibility" and is responsible for ensuring the close association of the religion in the students' everyday life.

Mecca House, one of the sections of the school building, has,

...[a] tablet carrying the name affixed beside the entrance, reading, *It was in order to determine the exact direction of Mecca that Muslims had developed an interest in geometry and mathematics, and had eventually invented trigonometry.* The words were intended to remind the children of their legacy, Islam's long inheritance of knowledge and achievement. (19)

Similarly, Baghdad House stood for the fact that "in Baghdad there was a 'House of Wisdom' as early as the year 830"; Cordoba House commemorated the time when "the Muslims of Spain had manufactured the first paper in Europe around 1150"; Cairo House celebrated "Cairo, where the 'House of Science' was created in 995 and where the Fatimid palace library had... staff comprising mathematicians, astronomers, physicians, grammarians, lexicographers, copyists and readers of the Koran"; and Ottoman House, to mark the astronomical achievements of "Istanbul's first ever observatory" (19-20). Thus, the history of Islamic scholars in fields like

geometry, mathematics, science and innovation, and astronomy, was commemorated in every nook and cranny of the school building, with the purpose of “remind[ing] the children” of advancements made by Muslims of the past in empirical areas of knowledge. By equating “Islamic brilliance” with advancements in these rational spheres of “knowledge,” Ardent Spirit upholds an aspect of the religion that has been ignored in contemporary caricatures, especially those from the West.

Along with celebrating these advances, Ardent Spirit also instructs its pupils how Islam was persecuted, often by Western forces. The tablet outside Cordoba House that describes the manufacture of paper by Spanish Muslims also goes on to lament how “in 1221 the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II had declared all official documents written on paper to be invalid—paper having become associated in Europe with Muslims” (20). Coupled with the shame about the family that played a part in quenching the rebellion that formally ended Muslim rule in the subcontinent, Rohan’s insistence on remembering the glory of Islam alongside its downfall at the hands of Christian forces across history—from the Crusades to British imperialism—indicates a strong cultural memory of past injustice, something that he works to “remind” his students of.

Thus, the narrative of a group of people—Muslims of South Asia—having previously experienced trauma under the aegis of non-Muslims, and the possibility of history repeating itself, was instrumental in bringing to fruition the campaign for Pakistan. Through the primary texts, I examine how power relations shape group remembrances and influence their consolidation as cultural memory. In this symbiotic relationship, the memories preferred by powerful groups are used to further their situations of power, while simultaneously taking advantage of this influence to extend their control over the construction of a narrative that suits them. This section has attempted to trace how the cultural trauma of colonialism was constructed

among South Asian Muslims by invoking images of the ill-treatment meted out to Islam and Muslims in the past by non-Muslims. This past injustice is constructed by social groups to forge collective identity, and subsequently, injury to that identity. The nationalist zeal for Pakistan displayed by the immigrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, the Muslims of Dilli (*Burnt Shadows*), and Rohan can be traced through their recall of specific cultural memories of injustice directed at the social group they claim membership to as Muslims of the subcontinent or Muslims of Pakistan. The national sentiment that ensued was a result of this cultural memory of trauma, resulting in the creation of Pakistan and the consolidation of a religion-based nationalism. However, as Jeffrey K Olick states, “memory is never unitary, no matter how hard various powers strive to make it so. There are always subnarratives, transitional periods, and contests over dominance” (381). As individuals are simultaneously members of several groups—as seen in the previous sections—the construction of such a unitary national identity is not a straightforward task. This is evident in the subsequent sections that present counter-memories to the institutionalised cultural memory of a unified nation through the fractures of postcolonial Pakistan, often a battlefield of ethnic and sectarian divides. *Kartography* shows the tension between contesting social groups, their respective claims on national cultural memory and the interstices of official history. The attempts of the dictatorial Zia-ul-Haq to enforce a uniform cultural memory on Pakistan is portrayed in detail in *Mangoes*, revealing the mechanism by which power becomes a decisive factor in the construction and manipulation of cultural memory and group identity.

2.3.2. Inheriting Partition

“It seemed the most extraordinary privilege—to have forewarning of a swerve in history, to prepare for how your life would curve around that bend” (K Shamsie 58).

When Hiroko Tanaka from Nagasaki finds herself in colonial Delhi in the months leading up to British departure from the Indian subcontinent, she is amazed by the calculated efficiency with which the end of the Raj seemed to approach. To a person like her who lost everything she called her own—family, fiancé, and homeland—in the split second that it took US forces to drop the nuclear bomb at Nagasaki towards the end of World War II, to be part of a historical change that was discussed throughout the land, inviting diverse points of debate, appeared to be a boon. Reading Hiroko’s thoughts as a line from historical fiction seven decades after the event, makes them sound ominous, considering how recent historical scholarship has largely agreed that the botched and hasty decisions surrounding Partition had led to it becoming an incomparable human disaster³⁴. Hiroko’s words not only create dramatic irony for the reader, but also foregrounds the rewriting of history to meet political ends, as seen in the efforts by the independent states of India and Pakistan at eliding the voices of the victims of such suffering when it came to historiography on the decolonising process.³⁵

Recent attempts at understanding Partition have moved away from earlier historiography that restricted itself to examining the “high politics” surrounding the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, with almost exclusive focus on the demands and decisions made by key political players representing the British Empire, Muslim League and the Indian National

³⁴ Yasmin Khan’s *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* captures the rushed nature of the Partition plan, placing a good part of the responsibility for the loss of life due to the events of 1947 on the British need to exit the subcontinent following World War II.

³⁵ Ayesha Jalal has written about “the selective uses made of history after the acquisition of state power” in the context of Pakistan (“Conjuring Pakistan” 75).

Congress (Gilmartin 1069). The increasing acceptance of history as a narrative with political implications and the turn towards historiography has aided research into past events using memory as an instrument to uncover new histories (Nora 10). This climate in historical research gave Partition studies a new lease of life, resulting in work that has privileged voices that were previously left out of “official” sources of history, but survived as eye-witness accounts by survivors, majorly in the form of stories passed down through families, and most conspicuously, in literature.³⁶ Moreover, such approaches to Partition history have also highlighted the “afterlife” of the event on the collective consciousness of independent nations of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to date (Kaul 2). Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh have emphasised on the need for revisiting Partition history to focus instead on the “human consequences—subjective, individual and collective experiences drawn from oral testimonies and personal memories” (Talbot and Singh 4). Yasmin Khan agrees with this call for a more inclusive historiography, opining, “Partition stories are personal, intensely subjective, constructed through memory, gender and ideas of self, and span the subcontinent” (Khan 10). In this regard, literature on the Partition provides an important source for (fictional) memories that nevertheless open a window to view traces of remembering this event. It presents an opportunity to compensate for the forced silences in official history through narratives of the event that calls attention to the experiences of ordinary individuals, away from the seat of power in Lutyens’ Delhi.

Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar considers the splitting up of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan as only the beginning of a series of events of violence that continued to shape the citizens of these two nations, a phenomenon that she terms “the long Partition” (2). She

³⁶ A few early examples of this groundbreaking trend in academic writing are Veena Das’ *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (1995), Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998), and Gyanendra Pandey’s *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (2001).

argues that Partition should be placed “alongside other histories of a twentieth century, marked by all the violence of making modern, “ethnically cleansed” national identities, that we can interrogate the postcolonial world that we are forced to inhabit, and from which meanings of culture and identity continue to be contested” (12). *Maps* provides countless instances of the continued effects of Partition; for example, the convoluted route that letters exchanged by the people of this formerly unified land had to take:

The hostility between the two neighbours makes it necessary for a letter to Pakistan from India, or one to India from Pakistan, to be posted to a third country—to a friend or a relative in Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia or the countries of the Persian Gulf—from where it is forwarded to the intended recipient in a new envelope... Direct correspondence is often destroyed out of pettiness disguised as patriotic duty, or violated by the authorities who are quick to see a regular communicator with the other side as a traitor. Countless thousands of families wait for the news of their loved ones from the other side of the border—a wall that also effectively cuts the whole of Asia in half—but what they feel is less important than nationalistic ideals. (Aslam, *Maps* 104-5)

While Zamindar’s work focuses on the bureaucratic manifestations of Partition violence on the lives of the displaced, I would extend the core idea of the extended, and often, ongoing, impact of Partition on not only those who lived through the violence of 1947, but also those who inherited its memories. Hence, this discussion finds Marianne Hirsch’s work on the generational transmission of trauma articulated as “postmemory” invaluable.

Burnt Shadows presents the tragedy of a Muslim family that is torn apart in equal measure by the Radcliffe Line as by the volatile atmosphere of the eve of Partition. On a fundamental level, the novel lets Kamila Shamsie join the rich company of writings on the

violence that accompanied Partition like Khushwant Singh, Saadat Hasan Manto, Bapsi Sidhwa and many others. However, *Burnt Shadows*, with its vast canvas of history spanning six decades and across five nations, also presents a truly global understanding of twentieth century history, foregrounding geopolitical relations as felt at the grassroots level. The novel acts as a witness to historic events spanning seven decades and across three continents through two interconnected families, the Weiss-Burtons and the Tanaka-Ashrafs. I will attempt to understand the enduring effects of the long Partition passed down to the postgeneration of historical events through Raza, the son of Sajjad and Hiroko. The novel presents ample opportunity for the examination of memory as an heirloom, passed down families in the form of names and namesakes, languages and cities, and ambitions and expectations.

Hiroko, who lost her entire world to the atom bomb which had killed her father, and fiancé Konrad Weiss, and erased much of her home city of Nagasaki, has a penchant for creating tangible monuments to personal and cultural loss (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 47). With her roots obliterated beyond salvaging, she decides to travel to Delhi to find Konrad's family at his half-sister Elizabeth "Ilse" Burton's (née Weiss) home, attempting to hold on to the last prospects of family she has remaining, even though Ilse was a virtual stranger. Upon arrival, Hiroko wonders if her journey to Delhi had been too impulsive a decision, disturbed as she is by Ilse's striking resemblance to Konrad, as "seeing [her] descend the stairs made it only yesterday that Konrad walked away from her to his death" (43). However, as Ilse makes friendly overtures towards Hiroko, who arrived on her doorstep with no prior contact or connection, the latter is able to shake off this unsettling feeling, finding that Ilse's kindness towards her "removed the ghost of Konrad from between them", eventually allowing both an opportunity to grieve their respective losses, of brother and lover, together (43). As their friendship develops, they find in each other

representatives of different periods of Konrad's life—Ilse, of his German childhood, and Hiroko, of his Japanese adulthood—giving both women a chance to understand those aspects of Konrad each of them were not aware of earlier. They trade stories about him, once finding that “from the moment Hiroko had mentioned Konrad they had started to speak in German, and that doing so felt like sharing the most intimate of secrets” (70). Konrad had become an invisible force in their unity, giving them a language that only the two of them could understand, and a vast reservoir of material about him that they alone could share. Hiroko's connection to the Weiss family is preserved by her friendship with Ilse, supplanting the permanent connection she would have had with it if the bomb had not stolen it by ending Konrad's life. In the process of rebuilding her life away from Konrad and Nagasaki, Hiroko marries Sajjad, who works for Ilse's husband. The pair is drawn to each other by the pain of “too much loss in [their] lives, too early,” causing them to “understand those parts of the other which were composed of absence” (163).

In pre-Partition days, Sajjad Ashraf had been the bright young star of his mohalla in Dilli—part of what is known as “Old Delhi” in post-independence India—setting out to work every day in a suit tailored in Savile Row, London, and assistant to one of the top barristers in the British India. Granted, the suit was a hand-me-down from his employer James Burton, the English lawyer, but for Sajjad, the suit signified the first step in realising his ambition of becoming a lawyer. Sajjad prepared himself for a profession that would allow him to work in the ordered lanes of Delhi which held the administrative and professional offices that ran the capital city of India. Even as he laboured hard for a career in Delhi, his heart would remain in Dilli, which he romantically associates with the richness of the Urdu couplets that his family traded with each other (34). Sajjad spends his life trying to live up to the glory of his ancestors, the Slave kings of the Delhi Sultanate, and reverentially fantasising about “the Rani of Jhansi and

Razia of the Mamluk Dynasty: powerful women who led troops and sat in council with men” (52).

These ambitions were forced into a jarring halt when, in order to keep Hiroko safe as “the Partition riots [overtook] Delhi, and the Old City [became] a virtual siege town”, the couple left the country to take refuge in Istanbul until Delhi resumed normalcy (124). When they attempted to return, they were barred from re-entry, as the Indian government had identified them as Pakistani (125). Sajjad’s loss of Dilli reveals much about the abrupt nature of Partition violence, making Hiroko’s thoughts on “the extraordinary privilege” of a well-planned British departure that helped “prepare for how your life would curve around that bend” (quoted at the beginning of this paper) seem particularly foolhardy. Unceremoniously wrenched away from the city he was born in and hoped to die in, Sajjad settles down in Karachi into an uneventful life and unambitious career.

Having become resigned to the fact that nuclear poisoning would leave Hiroko unable to birth a child, the Ashrafs were taken aback when their son, the uniquely named Raza Konrad Ashraf, was conceived, two decades into their marriage and after Partition. Hiroko honoured the life she might have built with Konrad, and the friendship that she preserved with Ilse by naming Raza after Konrad. Thus, Raza inherits his mother’s memory of the loss of both Konrad and her life in Nagasaki.

Sajjad, on the other hand, bequeaths to his son the masculine form of the name of one of his most admired figures in history: Razia Sultana, ruler of the Delhi Sultanate and “an amazing woman—a brilliant administrator, a glorious fighter” (81). Razia Sultana is not merely a legend, but is family for Sajjad, a man who carries within him the history of his ancestors’— “soldiers in the armies of the Mamluks ... the Slave Kings”—centuries long rule in India (80). He grew up

with his mother's stories of Razia and is proud to trace his connections back to those dynasts who arrived in the subcontinent as slaves but rose to become rulers. Sajjad's cultural memory of the glory of the Delhi Sultanate is especially pronounced when understood alongside his resentment of the British who ended that long tradition of Muslim rule in India. On a sightseeing visit to the Qutb Minar, a monument that, according to James Burton, Sajjad "once insisted [that he has] some ancient familial link" to, he finds himself explaining to Ilse the history of the place, of "what's left of [his] ancestors in Delhi" (79), wryly commenting on the culture that her kind stole from the subcontinent with their tendency to treat his history as their "picnic grounds" (81). The memories of this significant dynasty are discontinuously distributed in cultural memory, existing sparingly in monuments like the Qutb Minar, and the stories of individuals such as Sajjad. When he calls the cenotaph "what's left," Sajjad illustrates how power, in this case political, is intimately tied to the half-life of cultural memory. Neither can sustain themselves in the absence of the other.

In a rare moment of camaraderie, Sajjad reveals to her his admiration for the incomparable Razia and his wish to name his daughter, should he ever have one, after this illustrious ancestor (81). This detail of their son's name signifies much about the ways in which Hiroko and Sajjad remember and reflect on the scars of their past. By giving Raza a name which is an amalgamation of their cultural memories of surviving loss, personal and political, Hiroko and Sajjad bestow on him a complex inheritance of the histories of their respective families, labelling him a sign of hope amidst the distressing odds they have overcome.

Now, the question arises, how would Raza cope with the weight of two of the twentieth century's worst human disasters enshrined in his name? More pertinently, how does a parent

explain a tragedy resulting in unimaginable loss to their child? A curious friend once asked Hiroko how she told a young Raza about the scars the nuclear bomb left on her body:

‘How did you explain it to Raza?’

... ‘Fairy tales,’ she said. ‘I made up fairy tales.’ (176-7)

Raza is not aware of the extent to which the events of Partition and the bomb affected his parents. By the time he was born, both his parents were in their forties and more than two decades separated them from their respective life-altering tragedies. While this could be one of the reasons why Raza grew up in an atmosphere that was relatively free of details about these events, his parents’ silence about their past is also protective. Hiroko made up “fairy tales” to describe the aftermath of the bomb, stories that would begin in a benign fashion suited for the innocent ears of a child— “there was the one about a girl...”—but would rapidly distort into the fantastical and outlandish nature of the aftermath of the nuclear bomb:

There was the one about the girl whose dying father slithers towards her in the shape of a lizard; she is so horrified by his grotesqueness it takes her years to understand that his final act was to come towards her, after a lifetime of walking away. The one about the boy shaken out of his life and told that was a dream, and so was everyone he loved in it— this charred world, this prison, this aloneness is reality. (177)

However many tales Hiroko conjured up, she never narrates them to Raza, procrastinating so that he may remain in the dark about the details of such horror for as long as possible. He is made aware of only the bare skeleton of events surrounding his mother’s experience of loss in Nagasaki. It was only when he came across a photograph of a mutilated victim of the bomb, that the impact of his mother’s surviving the same tragedy became more than anecdotal information to him. As the reason behind the silence about Hiroko’s life in Japan becomes clear to him, he

learns to be silent about it too, according to Hiroko: “Raza showed [the photograph] to me, nodded his head, and never said anything about it again” (178). Thus, it is only when a taste of the grotesqueness of the event is finally revealed to him through the photograph that he understands the gap between what Hiroko had told him herself and what it actually entailed. His conception of how Nagasaki constituted a significant trauma to his mother, and by extension, to him, becomes clearer the more he learns about it.

Similar reticence from Sajjad about his experience of Partition is evident in Raza’s understanding of the event, unable as he is to separate it from his father’s expectations of him:

Every father in this neighbourhood of migrants, each with stories of all they had lost and all they had started to rebuild after Partition, made a similar speech to his son. Perhaps he should be grateful that it was law, not medicine or engineering, that he was expected to spend his life pursuing. (136)

After his efforts to become a lawyer had been thwarted by the technicalities of the new era following Partition, Sajjad settled into a job that earned him his bread and butter but failed to satisfy his ambitions. Once Raza was born, Sajjad’s unrealised dreams were bequeathed on to him, along with the same jacket from Savile Row that had embodied the father’s ambitions (135). This burden of expectations represents Raza’s inheritance of the trauma of Partition, or specifically, the trials of living with a survivor who had suffered the loss of home, homeland, family and a promised future. Raza’s inheritance of his parents’ trauma thus takes a different form from that experienced by them.

When faced with the final paper of his Inter exams to graduate high school, Raza’s mind hits a blank:

... nothing fell into place... he remembered that this was a compulsory paper, failing it would mean failing everything, and how would he ever look his father in the eyes again? As soon as he thought of Sajjad Ashraf—pictured his trusting, expectant face—everything emptied from his mind. (144)

The weight of his father's unfulfilled dream and the prospect of failing at the one thing Sajjad needed for himself as well as for Raza, incapacitates him, filling his mind with the same silence that his parents employed in communicating their trauma with him. Language fails him during his attempts to force an answer out, as the "jumble of words only grew more jumbled, bright spots of light appeared before his eyes as he tried to read, and nonsensical answers to questions he didn't even understand kept coming to mind in Japanese" (144). It is interesting that it is Japanese that comes to him in this time of crisis, the language that he shares with only his mother and his deceased namesake, Konrad, and not any of the other four languages that he had mastered at fifteen. Hailing from a land he has never visited and that only signifies loss—in the form of Konrad who was memorialised through him, and in his mother's reluctance to talk about her homeland—Japanese appears to him uninvited, to fill a void that no other language seems to be able to, but nevertheless remaining incomprehensible. Raza's despair of not living up to his father's dreams leads to extreme confusion wrapped up in the language of his mother's loss. His parents might have understood "those parts of the other which were composed of absence" because of their first-hand experiences of tragic loss, but Raza was left stranded in this familial relationship defined by the absence of words.

Reflecting on Raza's troubles, Hiroko grants that there was inconsistency between what she assumed his resilience in the face of setbacks would be and what he exhibited:

There was something she had learnt to recognise after Nagasaki, after Partition: those who could step out from loss, and those who would remain mired in it. Raza was the miring sort, despite the inheritance he should have had from both his parents, two of the world's great forward-movers. (146)

Like Sajjad's unconcealed articulation of his expectations from Raza regarding his career, Hiroko's expectations of his toughness were disguised by silence. Hiroko never taught Raza to be tough, she expected that his descent from survivors of Nagasaki and Partition, of having the histories of Konrad and Razia memorialised in his name, would ensure that he did not "remain mired" in his loss. Reinterpreting Hirsch's exposition of the intimate family archive of stories as the basis of the inheritance of the trauma of survivors by their children, it becomes clear that in Raza's case, his understanding of trauma was shaped more by the lack of communication in the Ashraf family than by his parents' recollections. The multiple ways in which the novel portrays this unspoken trauma inherited by the postgeneration can also be interpreted as an allegory of the national "conspiracy of silence", a phrase used by Dietmar Rothermund as an alternative to the commonly (mis)used term "amnesia" in discussions on the collective state of forgetting that large social groups—like the nation—often engage in. Rothermund explains his differentiation of the terms: "This kind of silence is the very opposite of amnesia. Whereas those who suffer from a loss of memory usually try to recover it, the participants in a conspiracy of silence do not want the silence to be broken" (5).

Similar to the paternalistic manner in which Hiroko and Sajjad "protect" Raza from inheriting memories of their trauma citing his young age, the newly decolonised nation-state of Pakistan also engaged in wilful silence about the violent and dishonourable aspects of Partition. Yasmin Khan attests to how institutional sources of history, especially in the form of school

textbooks, in Pakistan have downplayed the human tragedy that accompanied Partition. The violence is acknowledged only for the purpose of inciting anti-India and anti-Hindu sentiment by “rewriting the history of Partition as one of martyrdom, courage and victimhood” of Pakistanis (Khan 201). Thus, these official histories of Partition are silent on select aspects of the event, conspiring to enforce a sanitised narrative in the paternalistic fashion of a family member.

While discussing the parallels *Burnt Shadows* draws between the modes of remembering within the family and the nation, it is significant to note that the examination paper Raza was unable to answer in order to graduate from school was “Islamic Studies”, an example of one of the most potent instruments of state propaganda that Pakistan has witnessed.³⁷ Through this allegorisation, Shamsie attempts to draw attention to gaps in national historiography, filling them through the medium of fictional writing. In this she seems to follow Mushirul Hasan’s advice that, “[i]f histories of partition are to be re-written, then creative writings provide a foundation for developing an alternative discourse to current expositions” (2662). It can be hoped that the filling up of such gaps through literature would create counter-histories that lead to the survivors and postgenerations gaining clarity on the articulation of personal/familial memory narratives that reflect national/cultural trauma narratives. However, this line of thinking does not mean to imply that textbooks like Raza’s are unfailingly propagandist while the primary texts studied invariably engage in truth-telling. The strict dichotomy that usually characterises these modes of literature, one, as formal and normative, and the other, as imaginative and entertaining, further problematizes any such implication.

Cultural memory of colonial plunder shared by the community at Dasht-e-Tanhaii includes, in addition to a sustained demand for the return of cultural artefacts, an arsenal of

³⁷ See Elisa Giunchi’s work on the rise of exclusionary politics and religious fundamentalism in Pakistan as a result of the state’s school curricula.

family stories that weave in and out of everyday conversations and neighbourhood gossip. Shamas recollects a story from his father Chakor's childhood in Gujranwala in 1919, a time when anti-colonial agitations were garnering strength across the subcontinent and British efforts to subdue it were brutal. Having received news of the infamous Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre two days previously, the "enraged" people of Gujranwala protested, damaging public property and even endangering the life of some British officers (Aslam, *Maps* 69). The novel notes that in Gujranwala, "Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had forgotten their differences and rioted together and the British knew from experience that such amnesia meant only trouble for them" (69). To curb the demonstrations, or, as Aslam suggests, the inter-religious solidarity that was being established which was potentially dangerous for the colonial regime, the British RAF was ordered to conduct airstrikes on Gujranwala, in the midst of which Shamas' father Chakor was caught.

Chakor had been born to a Hindu family under the name Deepak and was eight years old at the time of the Gujranwala bombing. The little boy was described as "stunned" by the impact of the bombs and could not remember anything about himself or his past afterwards (108). The lost Deepak was found in a Muslim place of worship, and named and raised as a Muslim, but the memories of his childhood would return to him as an adult, by which time it was too late to trace down his family, particularly his sister Aarti. Once Chakor's memory was restored, the family attempted to find Aarti, but could not, as, "there was little access to India. Nor was there any way of knowing whether [Aarti and the rest of Deepak's family] had survived the Partition massacres..." (105). Aarti would thus remain undiscovered because of the turmoil that Partition caused, leaving Chakor to wonder about her place of residence and even if she was alive, as their town of Gujranwala, which became part of Pakistan, had been one of the many sites of the

bloody massacres that accompanied the creation of India and Pakistan. Even though this obvious manifestation of memory loss following a violent attack is consistent with psychoanalytic representations of trauma, I will be focussing on how this memory, or lack thereof, percolates down the family tree to Shamas' generation and the rest of the community at Dasht-e-Tanhaii. This story about Deepak/Chakor became a part of the verbal remembrances of colonial aggression for not just his family but a section of his compatriots as well, who would describe the episode decades later in vivid detail: "among the many things the white people stole from the Subcontinent was that ten-year-old boy's memory, back in 1919" (66). Even though it is not possible that any of the people recounting the story experienced it first-hand, it is evident by the familiarity of the retellings that the tale has emerged as a shared memory of postcolonial trauma.

Writing about the diasporic characters of Maps and their attempts at reconciling with the alien culture of the host country, UK, Md. Alamgir Hossain attributes Jugnu and Shamas' liberal outlook—though he excludes Shamas' elder brother from this reading—to Chakor's tolerance of religious differences, since he himself had transgressed religious and cultural boundaries at a very young age (Hossain 99). In this upbringing, Hossain argues, lies the brothers' ability to adjust to the cultural and religious differences of the UK lie, in contrast to Kaukab, a cleric's daughter who spent her childhood in a mosque (98). Picking up from this analysis of Chakor's legacy as it lives on in Shamas, I contend that the parallels between Chakor and Shamas can also be found in their respective, life-long search for their siblings.

Jugnu and his partner Chanda had gone missing after their live-in relationship was condemned by the Pakistani community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, particularly her family, who was suspected by the police to have harmed the couple because they were "living in sin" (20). Caught

in the uncertainty of the criminal investigation that ensued and sorely worried about his brother, Shamas is repeatedly reminded of Chakor's futile search to locate his sister Aarti:

She is lost forever. It is conceivable that, as a grown man, he would not have felt the loss of an aunt with as much intensity as he sometimes does Aarti's—but she's linked with the tragedy of his father, and his mind keeps returning to her for that reason. And also, it could have something to do with his advancing years: has he, perhaps, come to see life as little more than darkness and separation? (106)

Inheriting his father's tragedy—of being separated from family and feeling unable to come to their aid, Shamas feels the themes of separation and a lack of information reflected in his life more keenly because it seems to be a continuation of his father's. He feels her loss—the absence of an aunt who he was not personally acquainted with, and whose presence was felt only in his father's memories—compounded at a time when he has lost another member of his family in a manner that had so far proven inexplicable.

Jugnu's life before his disappearance also presented a parallel to Chakor's, after his childhood as a Hindu became known in their town in Pakistan. The prime suspects in Jugnu's and Chanda's disappearance are the latter's brothers, who were enraged with their unIslamic conduct, and who are suspected of harming them to avenge the family honour. They, along with the rest of the conservative Islamic society, had shunned the pair, considering their conduct "immoral," "deviant," and "despicable" (20). The community's cruelty towards those who did not follow the strict rules laid out by them mirrored the ostracism faced by Chakor's family in their town of Sohni Dharti, where, "a shopkeeper whose hand had accidentally brushed against Chakor's had immediately washed it, saying, "I wouldn't touch a Hindu even with a meat hook.'" (114). The community at Sohni Dharti, within which Chakor had been a respected

figure, treated him with disgust once his lost memories, of a time of great turmoil and suffering, had returned. Even though it is coloured by the communal sentiment against Hindus, wrapped by a discourse on purity and pollution, and packaged into a questioning of the loyalty of the Other to the nation-state, this disgust is based on a refusal to acknowledge Chakor's retrieved memories. The shared understanding of leaving the colonial rule behind also extended to the censoring of memories, as seen here.

Even members of the family turned against each other, with Shamas's elder brother, who followed an "austere and volatile form of the faith that was alien to his parents and brothers", unable to digest his father's origin story which he thought delegitimised his existence as a Muslim (118). When Chakor was discovered to be dying of pancreatic cancer, his eldest son considered it "Allah's punishment". Wanting to die in the same faith he was born in, Chakor expressed a desire to be cremated in the Hindu manner than buried as a Muslim. When his wish was denied, he set himself on fire, "out of his mind with excruciating pain" (120). The memories of separation and religious intolerance that Chakor's life produced found new meaning in the wake of Jugnu's plight as a victim of honour killing, the honour in question being based on an idea of a Pakistani Muslim that had been defined by Partition. The family had had a complicated relationship with Islam, with Chakor's Hindu past as Deepak, Shamas' Communism and Jugnu's atheism, alongside their brother's fervent Islamic fundamentalism. This heritage continues to haunt them through pestering neighbours in Dasht-e-Tanhaii who persisted in their gossip about Jugnu's disappearance in association with Chakor's past, commenting on "the confusion of faiths [that] had torn to pieces the life of his and Shamas-brother-ji's father" (66). Tales like Shamas' family history are discussed freely years after the formal exit of the British to highlight the extent of the injury to individual families and to the community as a whole. It is also an indication of

the young postcolonial nation's struggle to mould a national identity that will bind its people together and ensure its survival. From officials who obsessively track communication from across the border to weed out "traitors" to Chakor with his Hindu past, every citizen is compelled to prove their belonging to the new nation.

Such efforts to keep memories of the home nation alive is seen in the efforts of the South Asian immigrants of the novel, even though it is set in the late 1990s, half a century after the subcontinent was partitioned. The immigrants rename their town in Britain "Dasht-e-Tanhaii", Urdu for "Desert of Loneliness" (40). The novel does not mention the official name of the town because for all intents and purposes of this community, it remains Dasht-e-Tanhaii:

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 ... [o]nly one name has been accepted by every group, remaining unchanged. It's the name of the town itself. Dasht-e-Tanhaii. (40)

This collective celebration of a shared past by subcontinental immigrants in England reminds one of the colonisers who once descended upon the Indian subcontinent to take over native cities and rename them. Even though the circumstances of these migrations are significantly unlike each other in terms of the power hegemony that drove the colonial project as opposed to the desperation that led the immigrants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii to come to England, this renaming is nevertheless a small act of subversion. The grey streets of the British town are taken over by the women who immigrated from the subcontinent, and they go to great lengths to reproduce the traditions of their homeland. They held on to family recipes and homemade beauty treatments

with the same refusal to assimilate as displayed by the corsets and crinolines of colonial memsahibs in India as “the clothes the white women wore were an announcement that they weren’t going native” (67). They flock to the neighbourhood convenience store—run by a Pakistani family—to procure products exotic to the English landscape, from Multani clay to be applied as a face pack to rose essence used as a flavouring agent in subcontinental desserts. The former is prevailed on to improve the skin while noting that it is “also used to clean the marble façade of the Taj Mahal”, the ultimate symbol of the beauty of the East (307). The rose essence, commonly accompanying pistachio nuts and dried coconut to ensure that their vermicelli dessert was as good as any served in Pakistan, is also revered as “the sweat of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him” (433).

Kaukab, like the rest of the first-generation immigrant mothers in the town, is pained by her family’s lack of interest in continuing to live as Pakistanis even in England and worried that her grandchildren’s generation would be unaware of her cultural memory (439). Kaukab is determined to insulate her family from “Western” influences that might supersede the Pakistani values she tries to instil. Her daughter Mah-Jabin “was allowed to wear “Western” clothes to school but only if they mirrored shalwar-kameez in cut and style: the shirts had to be long-tailed and had to remain untucked whenever she wore trousers” to emulate the ideals of modesty that Pakistani women were supposed to embody (131-2). When Charag, her eldest son, blossomed in art as a child, leading to his teacher entreating Kaukab and Shamas to encourage him to pursue a career in it, Kaubab considered it “the mischievous attempts of the whites to lead the boy astray... an attempt to prevent the Pakistanis from getting ahead in life, encouraging them to waste time on childish things instead of working towards a position of influence” (176).

This upbringing leads to the children being extremely critical of Pakistan's culture and customs, especially those highlighting the influence of religion on everyday life. Charag, who grew up to be a painter, made a scathing critique of his parents' decision to raise him in conservative Islam through his artwork titled "*The Uncut Self-Portrait*", in which he:

 painted himself without any clothes standing in a pale grove of small immaculate butterflies, fruit- and flower-heavy boughs, birds, hoopoes and parakeets and other insects and animals, the mist rising from a lake in the background—and he has an uncircumcised penis. (456)

Framed by a burgeoning garden reminiscent of the scriptural Paradise, he pictured himself with the same innocence, untainted by the influence of man-made religious practices. To his shocked and disapproving mother, he explained his creation: "What I am trying to say is that it was the first act of violence done to me in the name of a religious or social system. And I wonder if anyone has the right to do it. We should all question such acts" (456). He rejected his parents' ideas of child-rearing that are rooted in their practice of Islam and used his art to undo the—literal—scars it left on his body. In doing so, Charag points to his disinterest in inheriting the rituals and customs that consolidate their identity as Pakistanis, marking a resistance to his family's function as an institution perpetuating the cultural memory of a Pakistani Muslim.

In the face of such vocal opposition, Kaukab is constantly forced to be defensive about her faith in Islam and her patriotism towards Pakistan. She guards the conversations she has with the neighbourhood women,

 [lowering] her voice to a whisper, not wishing her children to hear anything bad about Pakistan or the Pakistanis, not wishing to provide Shamas with the opportunity to make a

disrespectful comment about Islam, or hint through his expression that he harboured contrary views on Allah's inherent greatness. (59)

The women of the town act as guardians of the memory of their nation and faith, crafting a narrative that will portray it in the best light and willing that it be inherited without a blemish. The community is held together by these women, who spend time establishing relationships based on this shared cultural memory, helping each other in a foreign land by imitating the neighbourly interactions of Pakistan:

... the dozens of cloves of garlic got peeled as though all by themselves when the matchmaker stopped by [Kaukab's house] in the evening and the two of them talked as they worked, the topics under discussion varying from recipes to djinns, from the new fabrics to become available in the clothes shops to all the successful marriages the matchmaker had arranged this year... (421)

By discussing and advising each other on family affairs like the difficulties of bringing up children in the West and arranging marriages, the women support each other whenever one of them feels like they "are stranded in a foreign country where no one likes [them]" (388). The collective identity of the community of Pakistani Muslims is thus maintained through the renaming and reorganisation of the town as an immigrant neighbourhood, by raising the next generation with rigid codes of conduct borrowed from the society of the home country, readjusting their aspirations of profession and education to attain "position[s] of influence", etc. These practices ensure that the religious and national institutions of Islam and Pakistan, respectively, remain uncorrupted even on the soil of the former colonisers.

The cultural memory of colonialism as the sole reason behind the impoverished and troubled state-of-affairs in Pakistan is not without challengers like Charag, who is unable to see

that his mother's insistence on continuing Pakistani traditions is born out of her experience of a newly postcolonial Pakistan that clung on to them in order to concoct a national identity. His painting, a critique of his parents' culture and the unprovoked violence it disbursed to unsuspecting bodies as a way of consolidating a national identity based on religion, counts as a counter-memory, or a "transitional period" (Olick 381) in the dominant cultural memory.

Hirsch's statement that "family life... is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance" is worth reflecting upon at this juncture (Hirsch 114). In this, she follows Halbwachs, who considered the family as the first social group that an individual belongs to and noted its significance in shaping crucial patterns in one's thought processes, "No matter how we enter a family—by birth, marriage, or some other way—we find ourselves to be part of a group where our position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent of us that existed before us" (Halbwachs 55).

These statements also anticipate how Raza Ashraf inherits the loss of Nagasaki and Dilli through his name. Raza's postmemory of his parents' trauma is also not a direct transference of their memories of the events onto him, but is shaped by experiences of the present, through institutions like the state, educational systems, etc.

This section has examined the primary texts to gain insight into the 'afterlife' of historical events such as the Partition through the exploration of memories as passed down from the survivors' generation to their descendants in a manner that emphasises their traumatic aspects. While the memories of trauma are mediated by the survivors' generation in response to their present, they also undergo considerable changes when inherited by their children.

2.3.3. The Civil War of 1971

As seen in the previous section, once the demand for a new Muslim country, framed as necessary reparation for past wrongs as well as a safeguard against future torment at the hands of Hindus, was achieved, a cultural memory of independent Pakistan needed to be created, in order to consolidate a post-colonial, national identity. However, as the 1971 civil war and the ethnic strife in Pakistan existing till date show, the process of cementing a stable and unified Pakistani identity has encountered multiple roadblocks. This schism within the nation is clear in *Kartography*, which showcases the hostilities between regional and ethnic groups like Muhajirs, Bengalis and Sindhis from the time of Independence.

It is to be noted that the themes of memory and forgetting in *Kartography* have been the topic of several critical engagements with the text. Daniela Vitolo has examined how the novel has negotiated the idea of a fractured nation, in terms of borders, unvoiced memories and national identity, in the aftermath of 1971. She argues that the novel has highlighted the need for revisiting the past to start the process of healing for the individual through the development of “multiple, non-fixed, fragmented conceptions of national identity” (44). Qurratulaen Liaqat and Asia Mukhtar also employ the framework of cultural memory to study *Kartography*. However, their analysis differs from the one I attempt in several important ways. Firstly, Liaqat and Mukhtar understand the novel as an example of a “mythistory,” which, “records the historical memories of postcolonial Pakistan, reconfiguring them into a myth...” (156). On the contrary, I argue, citing examples such as the invocation of the tales of Karachi and the artefacts from Rahim Yar Khan, that the novel uses these apparently unconnected bits to perpetuate the (select) cultural memory of historical events for the benefit of future generations. Secondly, I disagree with Liaqat and Mukhtar’s take that, “the condensation of individual characters into stereotypes

shapes the country's cultural memory.... The individual characters stand as metonyms for their racial, ethnic, sectarian and geographical associations" (157). As Vitolo has pointed out, *Kartography* is imbued with a vibrant hybridity of opinions and nuance in character development (Vitolo 43-44). In agreement with Vitolo, the present discussion of the novel has attempted to show that while characters like Zafar and Raheen are susceptible to prejudice and inflicting violence on their loved ones, they are equally capable of reviewing their behaviour and revising it in recompense. Nevertheless, Liaqat and Mukhtar's conclusion that the novel seeks to "promote the politics of inclusion" (163) is an opinion shared by this project as well, though the means of arriving at this point differ.

The protagonists of *Kartography*, Raheen and Karim, wade through their parents' memories of violence in the form of abandoned wood carvings and remorseful letters that tell a story, albeit a partial one, about the 1971 civil war that ripped Pakistan into two and led to the birth of Bangladesh. Raheen is the first-person narrator of nearly all of *Kartography*—excluding those portions which deal with her family's history preceding her birth—narrating her childhood and adolescence, as an adult. The novel can be read as a *bildungsroman* of Raheen's personal development from being a privileged teenager who is willing to turn a blind eye to injustices that do not directly fall in her path to being an informed adult who is able to acknowledge that privilege and empathise with her less-fortunate compatriots. As she narrates events that happened in the past, it is interesting to see what aspects of her life she has considered important enough to include in her narrative as this holds the key to unlocking her process of remembering injustice. Raheen is self-reflexive about her storytelling, confessing that the apparent fluidity of her recollections is the result of a carefully put-together narration— "While you weren't looking I've melded the memories into a story [with a] beginningmiddles, and don't you dare interrupt

with your version of what-really-came-first and that-was-cause-not-effect”, she tells Karim in a comment that can be equally interpreted as a warning to the dissenting reader (Shamsie, *Kartography* 4). The latter interpretation gains credence as the narrative progresses, with Raheen consistently breaking the fourth wall and issuing directions to the reader, like “this narrative demands tangents, but, for the moment, remain befuddled” explaining her need to stick to the aforementioned “beginningmiddlend” to forge a tale of continuity (21). Thus, *Kartography* is, in its entirety, a story made up of memories that are carefully stitched together to form a cohesive narrative. In this aspect, the novel mimics society’s ways of collective remembering, drawing attention to how memories are not accurate retellings of the past. Raheen’s manipulation of her narrative is typical of both remembering as well as the analyses of remembering, adding structure to seemingly disconnected memories in a process that Halbwachs describes as an “obligation” that society demands of individuals, “not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them” (Halbwachs 51). Caught in family secrets, hidden prejudices and half-stories of war and violence, Raheen’s narrative is a jigsaw puzzle of memories that reveal themselves to her from different persons at different points in time to shape her relationships in the present. However, it becomes clearer as we delve deeper into the novel that despite her attempts at ensuring continuity, the narrative eventually falls apart as long-buried memories tumble out to complicate Raheen’s linear storyline. Such a splitting of the seams is integral to the way we understand the power behind cultural memory formation.

Raheen is the daughter of Zafar and Yasmin, and her best friend Karim is the son of her parents’ closest friends, Ali and Maheen. The two married couples had been matched differently prior to their weddings for Zafar and Maheen were in love and engaged to be married, and

Yasmin and Ali too were engaged to each other, the latter duo pairing up more out of convenience and mutual regard than love. Growing up, the children were told that their mothers had “swapped fiancés and wondered why they hadn’t earlier” sometime during 1971, but they were not made privy to the reason behind this “swap” (8). The details behind this life-changing decision is not something that bothers them since the two sets of parents have apparently held no grudges against each other and remained intimate since. Raheen, and Karim, “[her] best friend, [her] one-time crib companion, [her] blood brother”, grew up in the warmth of their parents’ friendship and were inseparable as children (15).

Their childhood, cushioned by their class status as Karachi’s elite, is largely unaffected by the ethnic violence that ripped the city apart in the 1980s. One winter, the two thirteen-year-olds are sent away to Rahim Yar Khan, the countryside home of another couple of their parents’ social set, Asif and Laila, in order to secure them from the instability of a violent city. It is at Asif’s house that the children are first introduced to the setting of their parents’ lives before their existence—Rahim Yar Khan had hosted much of the couples’ courting and is littered with symbols from those days, which Raheen and Karim stumble upon with curiosity. Climbing the old tree at the edge of the backyard for sport, they chance upon a carving on its bark spelling “Z+M”, to stand for the Zafar-Maheen couplehood prior to the infamous “swap” (30). They are affected by this tangible monument of Raheen’s father’s love for Karim’s mother, which is especially disturbing for Raheen as she considered “abominable” that “[her] father who hated exertion, [had] done that for someone, and for that someone to not be [her] mother” (31). The carving on the tree presents a challenge to the uncomplicated narrative their mothers had presented to them when they were told about the “swapping” as it hinted at a whole range of events which was left undisclosed to them. This set into motion Raheen and Karim’s quest to

discover the “whole story” bit by bit, piecing together unpleasant memories which were intentionally left out. In this journey, partly together, partly solitary, they learn to examine every family story and artefact with newfound suspicion:

Taken at Karim’s parents’ wedding, [the photograph] showed my parents flanking the bride and groom, all four of them laughing. There was no such photograph at my parents’ wedding, which had taken place just months earlier, because Aunty Maheen hadn’t been present. She’d been in the newly created nation of Bangladesh, spending her last weeks as a single woman with her family there. At least, that was the version I’d always been told.

As I looked at the photograph, I began to distrust their laughter. (36)

The photograph is not new to Raheen; she has seen it countless times, displayed in both her home and Karim’s. She surmises that there is more behind the story of why her parents’ wedding was not attended by one of their best friends, suspecting that the reason why Maheen avoided the wedding of her former fiancé to her best friend was because everything was not as straightforward as her mother had told her. She and Karim continue to speculate about what might have happened, discussing each of their parents’ motives for the swap. In spite of her search for reasons, when a friend of her mother’s tells her that Zafar broke off his engagement with Maheen because of her racial identity as a Bengali, Raheen dismisses the entire tale without hesitation: “What an idiot, I thought. Does she really expect me to take her seriously?” (74). She is surprised when Karim does not share her incredulity when the story is repeated to him, reasoning that even if that was not Zafar’s motive, “it was 1971... [t]he year of the Civil War. East Pakistan became Bangladesh... of course people must have assumed that the ethnic thing was a factor” (75-76). Karim’s willingness, even as a thirteen-year-old, to understand how

divisions based on ethnicity functioned presented the first departure from what had so far been his and Raheen's unitary worldview. This schism would only widen with time and their increased involvement in the identity politics that had shaped their families in decisive ways.

It was in England, where Karim's family immigrated soon afterwards, that he discovered the circumstances of his parents' marriage, affirming the story Raheen dismissed as gossip years ago in Karachi: Maheen had left Zafar during the tense days of the Civil War when she overheard him insult Bengalis in a heated argument with a friend (307, 232). When they were separated by the move, Raheen and Karim had attempted to keep their friendship alive through long and frequent epistles, but he ended the communication after discovering the truth about Zafar. Karim's reasons for this are inexplicable to Raheen, who was still unaware of her father's dishonourable behaviour. Later, when Zafar begins to disclose what had transpired between Maheen and him, Raheen admits, "I had never heard much about 1971, but I'd heard enough to allow me to know where [my father's] sympathies lay" (230). While she correctly assumes that Zafar had opposed the state military's project of ethnic cleansing in the erstwhile East Bengal, she is unprepared for the momentary lapse in judgement that cost him his love—when a grief-stricken friend from West Pakistan who had just lost his brother to the Civil War demanded of Zafar, "[y]ou're going to marry one of them [Bengalis]. You're going to let her have your children. How?", he responded in a rare moment of bitterness, "think of it as a civic duty. I'll be diluting her Bengali blood line [sic]"³⁸ (231, 232). Zafar's offence is unforgivable to Karim, but to Raheen—at the time—it appears almost inconsequential a truth to be revealed after a lifetime of knowing a father who has, at every opportunity, taught her that she should stand up for the

³⁸ Mass rapes of Bengali women was a prominent war tactic by the Pakistani armed forces to suppress the uprising in East Pakistan, and this reprehensible concept was "seen as a means to 'improve the genes of the Bengali Muslims' and to populate Bangladesh with a new breed of 'pure' Pakistan" (Mookherjee 39). Zafar, even in bitter sarcasm, was parroting the popular line.

underprivileged. Her first reaction is to wonder: “What did something that happened nearly a quarter of a century ago have to do with our lives?” (233). While acknowledging the hurt it would have caused Maheen to “register betrayal ... and loss”, she is unable to completely comprehend Karim’s anger towards her father since it was not he who Zafar had hurt (238).

When they reunite in Karachi as adults—before her father confesses his ignoble conduct towards Maheen—Raheen becomes increasingly aware of Karim’s resentment, but is unable to hazard a guess at the origins of the underlying rage that accompanies his peculiar questions like: “Which stories do you want me to pay attention to? Or, more to the point, which stories have you deliberately turned away from, Ra, and why?” (181). Referring to stories about his mother’s experience of racism that had, for a long while, been left out of the official narrative maintained by their respective families and friends, Karim expresses his hurt at—what he imagines to be—Raheen’s avoidance of those stories that do not fit in with her idea of her father as a fair-minded man. Even though he realised its plausibility, Karim had been able to brush off the rumour in Karachi about how Zafar and Maheen had separated, because of his faith in Zafar’s goodness—a person who constantly acts as an advocate for the lesser privileged, whose sense of justice was too evolved to hurt another human being, and a man who Karim had been heartbroken at being separated from, “wrapping his arms around Zafar’s waist and weeping”, before he moved to England (142). However, upon hearing his mother Maheen’s account of it later, he is able to wade through the sugar-coated memories that were a part of the combined lore of the two families to accept a story that had been “deliberately turned away” by the rest of the group. He realises that his mother’s memories of 1971—an event after which she lost her home country as well as the future she had dreamt of with Zafar—were never accepted as legitimate by her friends and had been hidden away to enforce a collective memory that favoured the rest of the

group's identity as West Pakistanis. This erasure of Maheen's memory of loss also functions as evidence of West Pakistan's collective forgetting regarding the Civil War. As such, *Kartography* pivots around the slow process of uncovering memories that Raheen's and Karim's blood families, along with their group of friends who at times are stand-ins for extended families, choose to avoid. It is the absence of Maheen's and the others' intimate memories of war and prejudice that is conspicuous, revealing the influence of such social groups in ensuring the dominance of certain preferred narratives.

It is not only the collective memory of this small social group that 1971 seemed to be absent from. "What happens when you work so hard to forget a horror that you also forget that you have forgotten it?", asks Zafar in a letter to Maheen, a few years after the war in East Pakistan had ended (312). After he had uttered those unforgivable words that implied that Maheen was an inferior Bengali who would only be elevated through association with him, Zafar realised the hurt he was capable of inflicting, and the need to recognise the "monster that sometimes lurks in the dark corners of [his] life" prompting him to voice a malice he never knew lived in him (311). Recognising his moment of weakness in being unable to suppress this "monster", he understands the importance of remembering it in order to stand guard against unsavoury aspects of himself and avoid repeating his behaviour towards Maheen. Through this introspection into the flaws of his character and the depths to which he could sink, Zafar is free of delusions about his empathy for the wronged and becomes more sensitive to the discrimination faced by others. He was not alone in making such personal discoveries, as Maheen explains to Raheen, decades later:

That's what it did, you see. Bangladesh. It made us see what we are capable of. No one should know what they are capable of. But worse, even worse, is to see it and then

pretend you didn't. The truths we conceal don't disappear, Raheen, they appear in different forms. (305)

With these words, Maheen summarises the relevance of her memories of the war—their absence from the public consciousness is particularly telling of the nation's unresolved problems with ethnic difference. If Pakistan had decided not to “see it and then pretend [it] didn't”, the reasons that precipitated the war would be fresh in the collective memory of the nation which would act as a deterrent from recreating such circumstances, which would lead to events like those in the violent Karachi of the 1980s.

As much as Zafar and Maheen agreed on the paramount importance of ensuring that the horrors of the war should persist in the collective memory of the nation, Raheen and Karim's generation is brought up in a Pakistan in which “the Civil War [is] treated as a long-distant memory that had nothing to do with [their] present lives” (44). Why did the dominant postwar narrative of West Pakistan reduce such a monumental event in its national history to mere anecdotes? “What terrible things we must have done then to remain so silent about it,” Raheen wonders, “[i]s it shame at losing the war, or guilt about what we did to try to win that mutes us?” (270). She confesses that she has heard of the war only in “story fragments” that upper class Karachi nonchalantly dished out alongside their evening tea (306).

Zafar's prediction about Pakistan's readiness to refashion stories of the war in a more benign avatar highlights the betrayal that Bengalis in the erstwhile West Pakistan had to suffer even after Bangladesh's formation. They were denied the opportunity to take stock of the atrocities that were committed to them in the name of racial and cultural superiority. The communal tendency to forget that seems to have gripped (West) Pakistan once the war culminated is clear in their disinterest in engaging with experiences such as Maheen's—racially

insulted, accused of treason and in a final blow, insulted by her fiancé, causing her to leave him. Such stories are wilfully removed from the nation's memory of the event to give way to recollections that cast them in a less incriminating light, but still attest to the fact that the nation did live through a war, as Zafar elaborates in his letter:

It is less than two years since Bangladesh was born, and already we in Pakistan have become so efficient at never speaking about it. When we do refer to those events, it's as personalized stories... we tell these stories and make war personal but not in the way it should be, not in a way that makes it touch us personally. (311)

Thus, along with the promotion of select memory narratives through history, consolidation of a national cultural memory also involves the side-lining, and eventually, the “forgetting” of other memories and objects of remembering, which is what Rothermund terms a “conspiracy of silence”, as explained in the previous section.³⁹ Ernest Renan calls this wilful forgetting “an essential factor in the creation of a nation,” as “unity is always brutally established” and then erased from the history of the nation (Renan 253).

However, such a conspiracy of silence is not water-tight; it would leave behind traces that may consolidate to form the cultural memory of smaller groups within the nation, leading them to put together a narrative of trauma as it transpired within their group. *Kartography* shows how the system that perpetrated atrocities against Bengalis was born in the social structure that anointed them “Bingos” and made sweeping statements such as, “whatever the Bengali masses might want, they're just rabble, and our army will decimate them if they try to make some kind of one-legged stand”, as Asif does when discussing the possibility of a civil war for Bengali

³⁹ Madhurima Sen has read *Kartography* as an allegory of “collective amnesia” regarding the 1971 war (Sen). My reading wishes to further complicate this analysis by attributing a definitive motive and agency on the part of West Pakistan *vis-à-vis* the deliberate avoidance of this history.

liberation (182). The semantics of “them” being “rabble” who will be easily disposed of by “our” state’s military power signifies a culture of Othering the Bengalis within what was still their country and by those who were then their compatriots. This was equally perpetuated by bureaucratic and social justice systems that painted the Bengalis as a lesser people than the rest of the nation. As Maheen’s husband Ali explains, the reasons behind Bengali resentment towards West Pakistan were also partially rooted in the economic agenda set by a central government that favoured the latter’s interests:

East Pakistan is the majority wing of the country in terms of population, and yet... [i]t gets less than 30 per cent of foreign aid allocation, less than 20 per cent of civil service jobs, less than 10 per cent of military positions, fewer schools, fewer universities, it makes up near 70 per cent of the country’s export earnings but receives the benefits of less than 30 per cent of our import expenditure. (182)⁴⁰

This all-pervading nature of institutionalised racism within the actions of the Pakistani state—pertaining to administration, economy, military, education and trade—represented a factual basis to decades of Othering, making these institutions a part of the collective memory of injustice for Bengalis.

⁴⁰ The statistics mentioned are corroborated by research into the disparities between East and West Pakistan due to state economic policies. Pakistani historian Tariq Ali places foreign aid allocation to East Pakistan at 20-30%, civil service jobs at 16-20%, military jobs at 10%, export earnings at 50-70% and import expenditure at 25-30%, using figures from *Pakistan Statistical Yearbook and Pakistan Economic Survey* (86). Tariq Ali also uses figures from *Education Statistics of Pakistan (1947-57)*, and A. O. Huque’s article “Educational Disparities in Pakistan” to show how in the years between 1947 and 1967, the number of primary schools in East Pakistan reduced even as the number students doubled, the number of secondary schools increased only marginally (3,481 to 4,390), and the number of universities increased from 1 to 2, even though the enrolment increased from 1200 students to 8000 students. During the same time period, the number of primary schools in West Pakistan increased from 8,413 to 33,271, secondary schools from 2,598 to 4,563, and universities from 2 to 4, to accommodate 10,000 students (Ali 87). Thus, all the figures used in the novel are identical to those in the official records for the years preceding the civil war.

The foremost artefact of memory in *Kartography* is, as the title suggests, maps. The metaphor of the map has incited much discussion among scholars analysing the novel. J Edward Mallot points out the complex interrelationships between maps and memories that Shamsie creates by having Karim navigate upheavals in his life through maps (281). Using Karim's eventual realisation that maps, like life's experiences, can never be completely objective, Shamsie attempts to steer clear of the trappings of "nationalist-produced geography" to suggest a "form of "postnational geography"" that welcomes maps overlaid by multiple memories (Mallot 262). As Mallot suggests, the plot is woven around shifting national borders and the unlikely groups of people that this brings together: the Muhajirs who left their homes when British India was split into three distinct geographical territories—East Pakistan, West Pakistan, and India—and the Pakistani Bengalis who later fought to form the nation of Bangladesh. These social groups struggle to place their stories within the history of the Pakistani nation, as questions of what sufferings can hold legitimate inclusion in reiterations of the past, the lessons to be imbibed from such sufferings and the impact of the experiences of certain groups on the rest of the politic are repeatedly raised.

The Muhajirs, represented in the novel by Raheen's family, are considered as outsiders⁴¹ who have "no understanding of ties to a place", because "they all left their homes at Partition", in the words of Asif, a landowning native of feudal Sindh (39). Asif and his wife Laila have long been friends with Raheen's Muhajir parents, but that does not stop them from being dismissive of the immigrants' movement to assert their identity and achieve equal rights, especially the lower classes who had, at the time, begun to mobilise their resistance through the formation of

⁴¹ Sarah Ansari connects "the [Sindhis'] pre-1947 suspicions of outsiders" to "the 'ethnic' clashes of the post-independence period" between Muhajirs and Sindhis, implying that the former continued to be thought of as "outsiders" even after the formation of Pakistan. She considers both of these developments as "part of the longer continuum" of Partition (107).

Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). MQM protested the preference given to ethnic Sindhis in the “quota system” which governed the allotment of public sector jobs in the province. The Sindhis assert their superior right to the land and its opportunities on account of familial ties to it that are older than that of the Muhajirs, and resist the latter’s efforts to assimilate into the society:

Laila said, her voice exploding as though it had been held captive somewhere for a long time... ‘Karachi’s my home, you know. Why did those bloody Muhajirs have to go and form a political group? Once they’re united they’ll do God knows what. Demanding this, demanding that. Thinking just because they’re a majority in Karachi they can trample over everyone else. Like they did in ’47. Coming across the border thinking we should be grateful for their presence... Do you hear the way people like Zafar and Yasmin talk about “their Karachi”? My family lived there for generations. Who the hell are these Muhajirs to pretend it’s their city!’ (40-1)

Laila’s anger is incited by Zafar’s vocal disgust at the feudal system of exploitation that she is party to, which is particularly disadvantageous to the Muhajirs along with the affirmative action policies (also colloquially called the “quota system”) which sought to improve the poor Sindhi population’s access to education and employment and bridge the gap between the Muhajirs and the Sindhi in these aspects. However, Laila, a native Sindhi, does not base her disapproval of Muhajir politics on the need for social justice for the poor of her community, but on the Muhajirs’ status as outsiders in Karachi—their insolence at “[pretending] it’s their city!” is her particular grievance against them.⁴²

It is in such institutionalised vestiges of being labelled outsiders—constantly battling both a feudal system that privileged the Sindhi elite, as well as a social justice system that aimed

⁴² Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar estimates that Karachi’s “population as a whole had tripled with the arrival of Muslim refugees from north India” in 1947 (6).

to use affirmative action to achieve social equality but instead further deepened the class and ethnic divide—that the Muhajirs locate their cultural memory of persecution in a country they helped create. Zafar reminisces about the dreams of his Muhajir family: “I must have heard my parents say a thousand times “we came here to be Pakistani, not to be Sindhi””, highlighting the national pride—which at times translated to cultural superiority—that the community brought with them to Pakistan, eschewing cultural difference for a larger national identity (224). The tragedy of the Muhajir community can be seen in their forced return to identity politics and community mobilisation—which Zafar’s parents were against—as a reaction to the vestiges of discrimination persisting in the system. This systemic injustice evokes the memory of the reason the Muhajirs joined Pakistan in the first place: the fear of being side-lined because of their (religious) identity in post-independence India.

Even as Laila bemoans how Zafar and Yasmin claim Karachi as their own though they are migrants to the city, the postgeneration of Partition, Raheen and Karim, are fully integrated Karachiites. Raheen begins her story thus:

[T]he garden is located where all our beginnings, Karim’s and mine, are located: Karachi. That spider-plant city where, if you know what to look for and some higher power is feeling indulgent, you might find a fossilized footprint of Alexander. The Great. He led his army through Karachi, long, long before the spider-plant effect took hold, when Karachi was a harbour named Krokola. (3)

Karachi, thus, is a city which exists in its inhabitants’ minds as an idea as much as a lived reality. The mythic origins of Karachi are everywhere, and as Karim tells Raheen— “If you squint, can’t you almost see Mai Kolachi rowing a boat through the hibiscus in search of her husband, and

look! over there, through the bougainvillaea you can see a wave made up of the tears Alexander wept for Bucephalus”⁴³ (4).

Raheen and Karim are brought up amidst these myths of Karachi as the ancient city of Krokola which fell in Alexander’s path of conquests, of Karachi as the descendant of the fishing village which was home to the brave fisherwoman Mai Kolachi,⁴⁴ and many such legends that meld together to forge an identity for the city that derives from its courageous predecessors. The city’s cultural memory starts from over two millennia ago, living on in tales that its inhabitants are well-versed in, even though there is little factual evidence to support them. Raheen comes from a family of Muhajirs who migrated to Karachi only two decades before her birth, but is intimately acquainted with the city’s history, both factual and anecdotal. The veracity of such legends does not matter, as Raheen repeats these origins stories without needing to believe in them as facts: “it’s never been proved that Karachi is Krokola, and even if it is Alexander probably never stepped foot on its shores”⁴⁵ (3). The identity of their parents’ social group is believed to be firmly rooted in an idea of Karachi that is rich in history and origin myths, with a population that depends on one another.

⁴³ Alexander’s favourite horse, which is believed to have died in the Battle of Hydaspes and was buried on the banks of River Jhelum in Pakistan (McCrindle 110).

⁴⁴ Laurent Gayer explains this origin story in detail: “According to the legend... Mai Kolachi, the fisherwoman who gave her name to Karachi, lived with her seven sons, six of whom lost their lives to a gigantic crocodile (or shark, according to some versions), until the last one—the physically challenged Mororo—defeated the mighty beast” (127).

⁴⁵ J.W. McCrindle, however, in his book on Alexander’s invasion of the subcontinent, uses early archeological discoveries to trace the Greek advance. He identifies Krokola as Karachi: “The island of Krokala... [is] no longer exists as an island, but forms part of the mainland... The headland which Arrian [of Nicomedia] calls Eiros is to be identified with the eminence called “Clifton,” the eastern headland of Karâchî Bay, the “narrow creek” which the fleet entered on leaving Krokala, is Chini Creek, which leads into Karâchî Bay and harbour” (xxii). McCrindle also quotes Plutarch to state that Alexander’s campaign had to halt in Karachi for twenty-four days due to the harsh monsoon weather (396).

It is this unilateral idea that *Kartography* seeks to unpack through its central and prevailing metaphor, that of the map as a reliable means to understand the social relations that exist with the collective imagination of the city of Karachi. The title is a portmanteau of Karachi and cartography—map-making—and emphasises on the mark that changing lines on maps have left on the city's identity. Karachi, as the city that had received a majority of Muhajir refugees during Partition, is, at the time that the novel is set in, a battleground of a raging ethnic war between the pre-Partition inhabitants of the city, the native Sindhis, and those that arrived to partake in building the new nation.⁴⁶ Crisscrossing the battlelines drawn along ethnic identities are also invisible lines representing the class divide in Karachi society. Neighbourhoods are segregated based on class and ethnic differences: “Karachi at its worst is a Karachi unconcerned with people who exist outside the storyteller's circle, a Karachi oblivious to people and places who aren't familiar enough for nicknames. What [is] sometimes mistaken for intimacy is really just exclusion” (331). Every part of town speaks a story steeped in history and houses a people that are so unfamiliar with each other that Raheen from up-scale Clifton cannot travel to another part of the city where she has lived her entire life without being bothered by how “the comparative order of Defence [gave] way to the narrow alleys and tiny store-fronts of

⁴⁶ Nandita Bhavnani traces the tension between Sindhis and Muhajirs back to the days following Partition which saw a large influx of migrants from northern India into the Sindh province. Bhavnani attributes this strife to several reasons: the provincial government's interest in preventing economic instability by keeping the Sindhi non-Muslim population from migrating to India, which created resentment among the Muslim refugees who sought to fill the place — socially, economically — that would be left vacant by the former; the competition between Sindhis Muslims and the Muhajirs who both vied the evacuee property of the Sindhi Hindus who had migrated; the relatively greater representation of Muhajirs in offices of the central government and the side-lining of Sindhis; and the administrative separation of Karachi (which acted as the Pakistani national capital before Islamabad was established as the capital in 1966) from the rest of Sindh which gave an unfair advantage to the urban Muhajirs (Bhavnani 799-800)

Mehmoodabad”, echoing the same difference in orderliness and intimacy that Sajjad Ashraf (*Burnt Shadows*) had noticed when contrasting Delhi and Dilli, respectively, in colonial India.

Karim, wanting to draw Raheen’s attention to the inequalities caused by ethnic and class divisions attached maps to his letters to her:

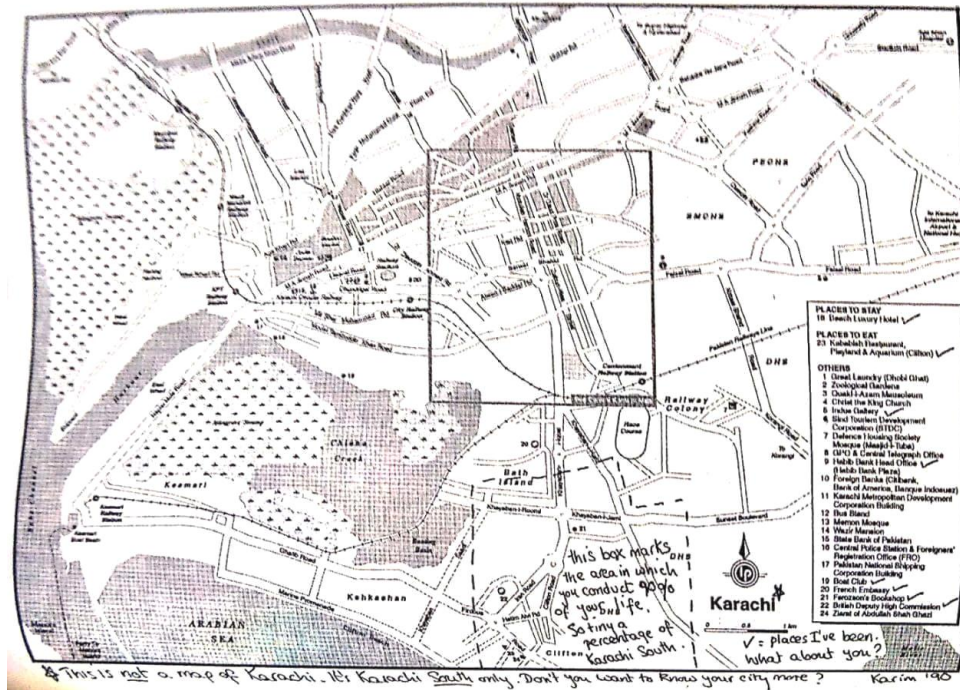


Fig. 1. Kamila Shamsie (*Kartography* 134)

This is a standard⁴⁷ map on which Karim marked out the small area of Clifton in the southern, affluent part of the city with the words, “this box marks the area in which you conduct 90% of your life. So tiny a percentage of Karachi South” (134). The whole map, which is titled Karachi but does not feature areas like Korangi or the areas to the north-west of the River Lyari that runs through the city, also faces criticism from Karim, who inscribed below it, “This is not a map of Karachi. It’s Karachi South only. Don’t you want to know your city more?” (134). The divide is implicit in how only certain parts of the city are present in the group imagination of the

⁴⁷ The original map, sans Karim’s markings, was reproduced in the book by permission of the popular travel guide publication, *Lonely Planet*.

privileged elite class that Raheen and he belong to, residing in the most affluent part of the city and refusing to acknowledge the rest of it. When faced with the possibility that memories like those of his mother were left out of the cultural memory of the city he was familiar with, it were these cartographical investigations that revealed to Karim that the stories he was told and the Karachi he knew were only, like Raheen's, a "tiny percentage of Karachi South", and could hardly resonate with the rest of the large, diverse city he called home. Karim's insulated childhood changed when he was uprooted from Karachi to move to London and later, when he was told the real reason why his mother Maheen did not marry Zafar. He distanced himself from Raheen, not talking to her for four years until they meet again in Karachi, when it is clear that he had still not forgiven her for her father's mistake and the trauma that the episode signifies to him, demanding of Raheen, "Do you know how hard your heart beats when you're lost? Do you know what it is to wander out of the comfort of your own streets and your own stories?" (181). Karim, who sought out the *Dawn* newspaper every day in London to follow the tense situation unfolding in Karachi and "read through the articles detailing the dead and [went] to [his] map and [looked] up the places where they were killed, just as a way of taking a moment to think of them and mourn their deaths", is unable to come to terms with Raheen's idea of her home city as "a brash, glittering, laughing Karachi that makes [her] want to sleep for ever". This jovial recollection is challenged by a Muhajir from the lower-class area of Mehmoodabad who has faced the brunt of unemployment because of systemic discrimination against the immigrants.⁴⁸ He asks Raheen,

⁴⁸ Multiple policies of affirmative action have been used by the Pakistani state to ensure proportional representation of various groups that came together to form the nation. *Kartography* discusses the state policy to uplift the more rural and lesser-educated ethnic Sindhis in the province of Sindh, of which Karachi is the capital. In the 1970s, the quota system in Sindh allotted positions in the bureaucracy and in educational institutions based on an urban-rural difference, with urban areas like Karachi being entitled to compete only in 40% of the vacancies and the rest going to the rural parts of the province. However, this "rural/urban quota, in practice, meant an ethnic quota for Sindhis (rural) and Urdu-speaking Muhajirs (urban)", which resulted in

“You live in this city, how can you not suffer with it?”, exposing the fault lines of her idea of a seamlessly integrated Karachi where suffering is shared (175).

While attempting to assure the Muhajir man that she identifies with him and acknowledges his suffering, Raheen finds that even the word he used to describe his relationship with the city is not in her vocabulary: “... I felt compelled to respond. ‘We’re Karachiwallahs, too,’ I said, the word stumbling on my tongue. It just seemed a bad idea to use the more Anglicized ‘Karachiite’” (175). Introspecting on this conversation, Raheen realises that their respective memories of the same city were at odds to the extent that they differed even in the demonyms used to link themselves to the city. Raheen refers to herself as a “Karachiite” throughout the book, the demonym used widely in English. The only time she uses the Urdu word “Karachiwallah”, to connote citizenship of Karachi, is in the line quoted here, when she attempts to respond to the Muhajir man’s attempt to concoct a concept of Karachi that was alien to her. Even then, she “stumbles” over the word, unused to thinking of herself as a Karachiwallah like the Muhajir man, and familiar only with the “more Anglicised ‘Karachiite’”. She is made to face the fact that her memories of the city are not consistent with those of the majority of Karachi’s residents by a homesick Karim, who, after his family’s immigration to England is determined to research and commit every nook and cranny of the city to his memory, using maps and newspaper reports on the city. Exposed to his relentless interest in those aspects of the city that they were sheltered from, she is able to admit that the Karachi she inhabits was one in which:

a situation in which “the Muhajir upper and upper-middle classes... continued to do well, [but] the middle and lower-middle class Muhajir youth felt the constraints of the quota system” (Haq 992). By late 1980s, the resentment against the quota system and other systemic instances of racism fueled a muhajir mobilisation, primarily under the Muhajir Qaumi Movement.

Privilege erased the day-to-day struggles of ethnic politics, and however Karim might want me to feel about the matter I couldn't pretend I was sorry that I had been born on 'this side of Clifton Bridge' where class bound everyone together in an enveloping, suffocating embrace, with ethnicity only a secondary or even tertiary concern. (175)

Even this realisation, however, does not generate in her empathy for the Muhajir man and others like him who have been forced to resort to violence in order to register their claim on the city, since "the quota system in the province discriminated against Karachiites, particularly Muhajirs who had no family domicile outside the city" (175). The geographic markers of privilege, from the vastly advantageous social capital garnered by those born on the right side of Clifton Bridge,⁴⁹ to those who are denied jobs because they lacked a native connection to the province and could not claim to have a "family domicile" outside the urban borders of the city, indicate the role that maps and origin stories played in perpetuating the class-ridden social cartography of the city. Raheen understands the plight of people discriminated on the basis of ethnicity but lacks proximity to such experiences that would make her identify with them and feel the rage and resentment that Karim harbours, as seen in her momentary inability to enunciate "Karachiwallah" and in her slipping back to the demonym "Karachiite" for the rest of the narrative. Despite the wake-up call to her privilege as a "Karachiite" that she received from the Muhajir man, she continues to set much store by the resilient nature of the city, commenting,

[i]f we had more reliable systems of law and governance, perhaps our friendships would be shallower. But with no one to rely on except one another, Karachiites come together in

⁴⁹ See Oskar Verkaaik on the postcolonial remembering of the city of Karachi as the vibrant city of Muhajirs. Verkaaik also notes how, "Karachi is known to Karachiites as a 'city divided by a bridge', by which is meant the Clifton Bridge that separates Clifton and Defense from the rest of the city" (71).

times of crises with attitudes which suggest that no matter what else we are in our lives...

our real vocation is friendship. (209)

Her naïve ignorance of divisions that cut through the heart of the city is a reiteration of the “glittering” Karachi she believes in, a highly romanticised version of the city in which everyone relies on a common code of friendship to help a fellow Karachiite—but not Karachiwallah—out. This shallow understanding of the highly class-ridden city which, at the same time as she glorified it, had been groaning under the impact of ethnic violence, shows her inability to truly empathise with the experiences of those parts of Karachi that fell on the other side of the Clifton Bridge. It is the “foreigner” Karim, not she, who follows up their conversation to the Muhajir man with action, trying to find him a job, proving that Karachiites do not always support each other, “no matter what else [they] are”; on the contrary, what they are, and where they are, matter to a great extent (177).

The cosmopolitan nature of the city as a place which has historically welcomed foreigners and turned them into permanent residents is conveyed through the stories that place Mai Kolachi and Alexander, the invader, as both contributors to build the Karachi Raheen and Karim are familiar with. It is this faith in the city’s ability to accept everyone that is challenged when Raheen starts to comprehend that divisions by class and ethnicity flourished in the close-knit community that she had believed in. These not only fractured relationships between the city folk but also questioned some of their claims to belong. Raheen believes in the cultural memory of Karachi as a cosmopolitan, tolerant space to such an extent that it comes as a shock to her that not everyone was appreciative of the presence of Muhajirs like her parents who were still seen as outsiders.

At this point in the narrative, Raheen was still unaware of Maheen's encounters with racism, even though Karim believes otherwise and resents her for her apparent indifference towards it. Karim, aware of his mother's rejection based on ethnicity, was able to identify with the Muhajir man and the exclusionary politics that worked against him. When Karim disclosed his Bengali identity, he asserted his belonging to a group that, in Raheen's words, "had broken away twenty-five years earlier and who no one ever spoke of any more". He chose to inherit the undesirable ethnicity of his mother over the more acceptable one of his father's, thereby extending a hand of allyship towards the man suffering due to his Muhajir status (176). Upon hearing Karim was Bengali, the man's reaction was instantaneous: he "straightened up, [asking] 'We didn't learn anything, did we? From '71.'", to which Karim replied, "[w]e learned to forget" (176). Even though the man and Karim both use the collective pronoun "we" to refer to the people of the country, it is evident that not everyone could claim to be part of this selective forgetting by the nation, as ethnic minorities like the Bengalis and the poor sections of the Muhajirs would always be forced to remember those episodes of history that others find convenient to forget. The use of "we" suggests a sign of recognition on the part of both Karim and the Muhajir man that their memories of the nation, though different from the dominant narrative, could potentially unite in challenging the conspiracy of silence that worked against them. This process of claim-making along with creating an inter-group solidarity based on shared trauma also signals a commitment to the project of the nation, signifying an unwillingness to be separated from it despite its role in deleting their suffering from its remembered history.

2.3.4. The Zia Years

The Zia ul-Haq regime of the 1980s made a huge impact on the public imagination and became a source of material for the contemporary Pakistani novelist, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is set during this defining moment in Pakistani history. Hanif reimagines the months leading up to Zia's death in a plane crash, the exact cause of which remains a mystery till date (Talbot 284). Zia's death is one which has been the subject of many conspiracy theories, as his indestructible stature gave the illusion that he was invincible—as the narrator of the novel, Ali Shigri, notes, Zia was a figure he thought “was never going to die” (Hanif, *Mangoes* 373). Thus, *Mangoes* is an attempt to remember and re-member a contentious—and for some, fearful—historic episode in which real-life individuals who played a hand in shaping the Pakistan of today are reassessed. The story of Zia's rule and his mysterious death are an integral part of Pakistan's cultural memory and the novel is a study on how public memory of such important periods are shaped.

Ali Shigri's opposition of Zia is not directly based on his politics, but is the result of a personal vendetta—revenge for the alleged murder of his father. Ali's father was Colonel Quli Shigri, described as “Zia's right-hand man”, one of the chief army officers in charge of the Afghan war (182, 141). Ali grew up in the midst of Colonel Shigri's professional success, with their ancestral house on Shigri Hill full of photographs that displayed the Colonel scaling numerous career highs in the military. Hence, Ali found the apparent suicide of a man who single-handedly designed the army's torture chambers and who, by all accounts, was one of the most unsentimental officers in the regiment as shocking as it was suspicious: “I would have understood if it was the barrel of his gun in his mouth. He was that kind of a man. But it was his own bed sheet” (190). He suspected foul play in his father's death, a hunch that was later

validated by American Drill Instructor Bannon, who tells him that US Intelligence believes that the colonel was killed by Pakistan's government, and that "orders came from the top", implying that Zia was responsible for Shigri's death (191).

To Ali, not only was Zia to blame for the death of his father but also for the resentment his father came to harbour towards his profession, distraught at Zia's lack of ethics during the Afghan war, turning his country (and the army) into "pimps and prostitutes," who pandered to America's promises of economic and strategic support (299). The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back for Colonel Shigri came in the form of a suitcase, filled with US dollars to the tune of twenty-five million, for which he had to desert a wounded comrade-in-arms, leaving the latter to die. Being ordered to choose money over a fellow soldier's life made Shigri question the principles of the war that he was engaged in, and by extension, the principles of the leader that gave him such orders, General Zia. Unable to forgive himself for turning into a soldier who was more a collector of "pimp money" than a principled fighter, he throws the contents of the suitcase into the fire, helped by his son Ali (301). The memories of "Colonel Shigri's whisky-soaked sermon" on the night they burned the money, and the day that followed when he found his father hanging from the ceiling fan suspended by his own bed sheet, propelled Ali to concoct a plan to assassinate the President (311). Ali begins to "see everything with Colonel Shigri's dead bulging eyes", noting that, "[t]hinking about Dad and the ceiling fan and the bed sheet always makes me either very angry or very sad" (330, 27). This signals that the disquiet he experiences is because the inexplicable nature of his father's death pointed to the involvement of top brass in the military. While Ali's plans to kill Zia are seemingly motivated by personal reasons, it is also a reaction to the larger grievances his father had voiced. Thus, Ali imagines his plan to be the culmination of a job he believed his father started with burning the tainted money:

ridding the country of an unethical leader. His personal loss shifts his perspective, acting as the spark that led him to grasp, to some extent, the pain that the Zia regime was inflicting on the nation.

President Zia ul-Haq's ten-year rule was a turning point in Pakistan's economic and foreign policies, but its most lasting changes on everyday Pakistani life were inflicted through the legal and socio-cultural changes as the Islamic shariah was enshrined as the law of the land.⁵⁰ This Islamisation of Pakistani life, with strict sanctions imposed on movement, clothing and conduct of the citizens and with deviant behaviour treated with archaic forms of punishment, is one of the factors responsible for secularism being a distant dream in present-day Pakistan. The period pushed many citizens, deemed unfit to be given the full privileges of being Pakistani, or even of being human, to abject suffering. The main victims of Zia's Islamisation policies were women.⁵¹

A prominent subplot in *Mangoes* is the public furore surrounding the trial of Zainab, a visually challenged woman who was kidnapped and raped by a group of men, but is unable to prove the assault due to the Hudood laws that requires four male eye-witnesses to testify in court on behalf of the woman. In the eyes of Zia's judiciary, Zainab is not a survivor of rape, but a "fornicator", and is sentenced to death by stoning. The novel also weaves into the narrative the protests staged by women's groups across Pakistan's cities as one of the ways in which Zia's rule was unravelling, throwing the country into chaos (Hanif 173). "Blind Zainab", as she is

⁵⁰ Ian Talbot calls Islamisation "the most identifiable feature of the Zia regime and increasingly its main *raison d'être*" (270).

⁵¹ Jalal writes, "[b]y far the most egregious of Zia's initial volley of Islamic laws were the Hudood (literally limit or restriction) ordinances introduced in February 10, 1979 specifically targeting women. The *zina* ordinance obscured the distinction between adultery and rape. Anyone accused of adultery (*zina*), even in the case of rape was liable to be stoned to death... Downtrodden women bore the brunt of this injudicious and inhumane law" (*The Struggle for Pakistan* 224).

christened by the press, also captures international attention when the *New York Times* carries an interview with her. Running the story as an example of Zia as a “wily dictator”, the headline read “BLIND JUSTICE IN THE LAND OF THE PURE” (170, 169). The negative press coverage infuriates the fictional Zia, who orders that Zainab be locked up in the dungeons of the Mughal era Lahore Fort with other political prisoners so that the press and the protestors are unable to be in contact with her, leading to the story disappearing from public memory (215). In the face of such inhumane treatment, Zainab represents the violence of the Zia rule on Pakistan’s women, and joins Ali and a long list of people who have a reason to wish Zia dead: “May worms eat the innards of the person who is taking me away from my home. May his children not see his face in death” (214).

Mangoes also portrays, in considerable detail, the insidious arms of state propaganda and its role in attempting to create a unitary identity. General Zia’s moves to turn Pakistan into a Muslim state is shown to have begun with the standardisation of religion:

all God’s names were slowly deleted from the national memory as if a wind had swept the land and blown them away. Innocuous, intimate names: Persian *Khuda* which had always been handy for ghazal poets as it rhymed with most of the operative verbs; *Rab*, which poor people invoked in their hour of distress; *Maula*, which Sufis shouted in their hashish sessions [disappeared] ... In the name of God, God was exiled from the land and replaced by the one and only Allah who, General Zia convinced himself, spoke only through him. (Hanif 44)

By installing “Allah” as the only legitimate way to address God in a country with diverse spiritual traditions even though they fell under the large umbrella of Islam, Zia brings spirituality into the public sphere. Belief systems, which were individual choices, become matters of

national importance. The government becomes the arbitrator of an official state religion as well as the practices of that religion. Through the regulation of two aspects of every citizen's personal choice—language and spirituality—the government seeks to fashion a unified cultural memory that remains faithful to a unified national identity. Traditions that do not fit in—the idea of God as “intimate”, common, and mystical, as remembered by Persian, lower-class, and Sufi believers, respectively—are erased to make way for “Allah” who functions through the head of the state.

Changing such fundamental nomenclature to build a state-approved Islam was only the beginning of the fictional Zia's forays into stitching together a national identity. His administration is always mindful of ways in which a new Pakistani citizen can be created by carefully managing the national narrative. Newspapers have their headlines decided for them by the Information Minister and the obliging publications are accordingly rewarded—when Zia is pleased with a series of photos of him in the *Pakistan Times*, he nominates its editor for the national literary award (114). Trainees in the army found that the entertainment provided by the “Annual Variety Show” had been deemed too facetious for the military and was replaced by “Quran Study Circles and After Dinner Literary Activities” (22).

The National Day Parade which Zia hosts is replete with symbols of nationalism curated to be broadcast to every television set in the country. The missiles on display are named after “Mughal kings and birds of prey”, like “Ghauri-2”, and the live commentator relaying the events to the spectators are chosen for his poetic talent in “describing military hardware in metaphors borrowed from Urdu ghazals” (243, 242). The exhibition of scenes from across the country on the parade floats were also carefully spiced with icons pointing to the government's diplomatic friendship with the USA:

The first float represented rural life: men harvesting and pulling in their nets brimming with paper fish, women churning milk in fluorescent clay pots under the huge banners of Pepsi, sponsor of the floats. Another float passed by carrying drummers and Sufi singers in white robes and orange turbans. (244)

From these examples, it is clear that the Zia administration is comfortable tapping into the existing cultural memory—of Urdu poetry and the glory of the Mughals, the last Islamic rulers of the subcontinent—to create a new pride in the nationalistic symbols of Pakistan like the military and a unitary Islamic culture. The choice of Urdu for state purposes, beginning with its anointment as the “national” language of Pakistan, has been the battleground for much political and ethnic strife in the country, the most famous of which is the East Bengali struggle for independence.⁵² However, the same ideology that banned the Persian *Khuda* chooses to name its military weapons after Muhammed Ghauri, a ruler of Persian origin who established Muslim rule in India. The poor people’s *Rab* was replaced by Allah, but the floats at the Parade cannot do without the representation of lower-class fisherfolk. Similarly, the Sufis were made to give up their *Maula*, but the aesthetic appeal of their tradition is retained in the form of “singers in white robes and orange turbans”.

Aleida Assmann’s categorisation of cultural memory into the “canon” and the “archive” is a prescient point in this discussion. For Assmann, the canon is the “actively circulating memory that keeps the past present” while the archive acts as a metaphorical warehouse of memories about the past that can be resurrected at the will of institutions of power like the state,

⁵² Tariq Ali notes how Bengali dissonance with West Pakistan first arose with the question of language, as Urdu was declared the official language of Pakistan, despite “[t]he Bengalis argu[ing] that there should be two state languages, Urdu and Bengali. The suggestion was a constructive one, since Bengali was spoken by 56 per cent of the population” (44). Ali also argued that the Bengali resistance and subsequent secession would open the floodgates for renewed ethnic conflict in Pakistan (148-50).

in this instance (A Assmann 98). Cultural memory, here, is the reincarnation of older memories, drawn from the archives of a shared collective past, that are picked to coalesce into a new canonical collective memory that will serve the interests of the state. The state does not completely erase contesting memories to supplant it with a completely new one, but exploits the people's familiarity with them to its advantage.

Jalal comments on Zia's military coup over Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's elected and populist administration, "...Pakistanis have not recovered from the psychological trauma of seeing an elected prime minister sent to the gallows in disregard of domestic and international calls for mercy" (*The Struggle for Pakistan* 222). It is the sequel to this blow to the national consciousness that Hanif attempts to voice by encapsulating the main injuries inflicted by the Zia years on the idea of Pakistan. The next section looks at another far-reaching consequence of this moment in Pakistani history.

2.3.5. Soviet-Afghan War: The Road to 9/11

... I can see, literally chronologically, the emergence of the Taliban, the coming out of Al Qaida, the first attacks on the American warship USS Cole in Beirut and on the American embassies in Dar-es-Salam and Nairobi. Why did we not know that this was going to come and get us? In fact, the history of the past 30 or 35 years in my region of the world and how it connects with the West through Al Qaida is so predictable, you couldn't make it up... Americans are now dropping missiles into a tribal area in Pakistan called Waziristan... Once again: What did you think was going to happen? As a fiction writer, as someone who creates narratives, it is quite humiliating to have to tell this really

predictable story. (Aslam, “Within Three or Four Years the Texture of Pakistani Life Changed”)

Nadeem Aslam, in this interview argued that the events of the Cold War as it played out in Central and South Asia were direct precedents of the rise of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism in the region that seized Western imagination through the 9/11 attacks. He recognises the American hypocrisy that was painfully evident to most Pakistani observers. This line of thought was also brilliantly articulated by Mahmood Mamdani who pointed out the Orientalist and Islamophobic strains that predominated Western response to 9/11 in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Global War Against Terror*. Mamdani examines the contexts that led to a group of Muslims launching a suicide attack on the heart of the American political economy, presenting a counter-narrative to the popular understanding of the rise of political Islam as the result of an inevitable “clash of civilizations” as imagined by Samuel Huntington (Mamdani 20-22). He focuses on the American project of establishing and utilising a political identity of Islam to unite Muslims in Central, West and South Asia in order to fight a proxy war against Soviet Communism that was making inroads into Asia in the 1970s and 80s. Aslam suggests that the outcome of empowering men with both advanced armament and a political cause dressed in the garb of religion—jihad against un-Islamic forces—was laughably predictable. Similarly, Hanif notes how, “[t]here is no dearth of western academic sneering at bewildered Pakistanis and telling them that they brought it upon themselves,” to which he adds the rejoinder, “[t]ry saying that to survivors of the 9/11 attacks” (Hanif, “What impact did 9/11 have on the world?”). This section will look at how the fictions of Aslam, Hanif and Shamsie all

portray an interest in exploring this part of Pakistani history, one that the United States' political establishment has tried hard to erase from public memory.⁵³

Mangoes, in true satirical fashion, features a cast of the key players in the political drama that was the US-Pakistani relations under the aegis of Zia, including William "Bill" Casey, the Director of US' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) General Akhtar, US Ambassador to Pakistan Arnold Raphael, and a playfully written cameo appearance by a young Saudi contractor referred to as "OBL", who works for "Laden and Co. Constructions". The novel highlights the American involvement in the Soviet-Afghan war, overseeing Pakistan's military operations and sustaining a steady flow of funds and arms to Afghanistan. The Americans left no stone unturned to ensure a comprehensive war effort, as the fictionalised Ambassador Raphael realised:

A year into his job, Arnold Raphael was feeling increasingly isolated as dozens of American agencies ran their own little jihads against the Soviets along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. There were those avenging Vietnam and there were those doing God's work and then there were charities with names so obscure and missions so far-fetched that he had a hard time keeping track of them. Now that the last Soviet soldiers were about to leave Afghanistan and the mujahideen were laying siege to Kabul, some Americans were tearing at each other's throats to claim credit, others were just lingering, reluctant to go home, hoping for another front to open. Just last week he had received a demarche about a group of teachers from the University of Minnesota who were writing

⁵³ Ninan Koshy observes how, "...in the extensive official documentation of the [US government] administration on the war on terror, one finds no coherent explanation of the origins of [the targets, Taliban and Al Qaeda], their social and ideological base, and their rise to power and influence. The omission is no accident because any serious examination of these organizations will reveal the culpability of Washington in fostering them" (44-5).

the new Islamic books for Afghanistan and sending them to Central Asia. He investigated and was told to keep his hands off as it was yet another branch of yet another covert programme. Every American he met in Islamabad claimed to be from ‘the other agency’.

(262)

Hanif foregrounds the eagerness with which Americans upheld General Zia’s dictatorship, even as they fought the Soviets in the name of sustaining democratic values. Zia’s zealous plans to refashion the state apparatus along Islamic lines and create a pan-Islamic network of nations with Central and West Asia aligned with American interests in transforming tribal Islamic people with advanced weapons and an indoctrinated idea of a holy jihad to fight the Soviets (Koshy 45). Moreover, the prospect of an impending confrontation with India that had plagued every administration in Pakistan, especially after 1971, was a major concern for Zia. America was able to fully exploit this fear and guarantee international support to Pakistan in the event it became reality.⁵⁴ Hanif’s version of Ambassador Arnold notes how, in addition to military offensives against the Soviets, other branches of the US administration engaged in parallel operations to harness the power of “jihad” among the Muslims of the region by “writing new Islamic books”. This shows how the cultural memory of jihad was appropriated and institutionalised—through rewritten books on history and religion—by the American cause to wield control of Muslim bodies and resources. The novel, as a fictionalised account of a period in history that has been left out of the cultural memory instituted by a dominant Western narrative of trauma due to terrorists who claim to fight in the name of Islam, seeks not to be factual, but to remind readers that a time existed when the following exchange could possibly have taken place:

⁵⁴ A Z Hilali quotes CIA Director William Casey, “[Zia] needed practical help and a guarantee against the Indian threat which we provided and used Pakistan as the pipeline for Afghan mujahideen to erode Soviet power” (Hilali 294).

OBL soaked up the atmosphere, laughing politely at the light-hearted banter between the Americans and General Akhtar. He felt that warm glow that comes from being at the centre of a party. Then suddenly the CIA chief put his hand on General Akhtar's shoulder, turned towards OBL and said, "Nice meeting you, OBL. Good work, keep it up." (266)

By creating a (fictional) scenario in which the chief of US Intelligence forces that was lauded for ending Soviet influence shares a close friendship with the chief of Pakistani military and intelligence, while at the same time acknowledging the "good work" by OBL—clearly referring to Osama bin Laden, one of the most vilified persons of the twenty-first century for his role in orchestrating the 9/11 attacks—*Mangoes* resurrects an alliance that could be understood as a significant moment in the events leading up to 9/11. By having the CIA chief congratulate OBL, Hanif remembers bin Laden in his role as "as star recruit"⁵⁵ for the mujahideen and not as the primary target of the War on Terror.

Political history, led by scholars like Mamdani understood the repercussions of the Zia era to have extended to present times by linking it to the rise in militant Islamic fundamentalism in South Asia, infamously represented by 9/11. *The Blind Man's Garden* fictionalised the story of a family that finds itself on the battlegrounds of the War on Terror and is a study on the impact of the violence it brought to the hinterlands of Pakistan. Upon hearing about the American forces waging war in Afghanistan, Rohan is reminded of every injustice suffered by Muslims for centuries in the name of religion. Reading the history of the Spanish Inquisition, he notes how "two hundred thousand Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity... corpses [were] dug up to make sure they had not been buried facing Mecca, and women were forbidden

⁵⁵ In Ninan Koshy's words (47).

from veiling themselves” (26-7), later remarking to his daughter-in-law how “the Catholic monarchs ordered the destruction of all Islamic books and manuscripts. Thousands of Korans and other texts were burned in a public bonfire” (203). Though it is not mentioned what the exact source of this view of history is—the novel only specifies that he reads from “a book of history”—it is noteworthy that Rohan collects instances from sixteenth century Spain, nineteenth century British India and twenty-first century Afghanistan, to come to the conclusion that Islam is under attack across the world, and vows to do everything in his power to join the global resistance.

When he learns that his son Jeo has volunteered to be part of a medical aid team tending to wounded Afghans in Peshawar, Rohan knows that if it were not for his advanced age and blindness, he too would be joining the Afghan forces, not just as a medic working from the sidelines but as a soldier in arms (27). His son’s contribution to the cause fills him with pride. Jeo had lost his mother when he was only a few days old, and it was his father who had taken care of his upbringing and education, embellished with fables that imparted life lessons. On one such evening of storytelling in his childhood, Jeo is scared by the villain of the story, but Rohan consoles him— “[H]ave you ever heard a story in which the evil person triumphs at the end?” (5). To this, he retorts, “No... but before they lose, they harm the good people. That is what I am afraid of” (5). Even as a young boy, Jeo displays a mature prudence at understanding the checks and balances of good and evil. If Rohan considers history as the third parent—as discussed in one of the previous sections of this chapter—in Jeo’s case at least, it could be argued that history was his second parent, as the early demise of his mother caused him to be raised by Rohan and his memories and stories of a grave past for Islam. He was brought up as an avenging soldier who would follow in his father’s path of atonement, a vision which becomes reality when he

travels to the borderlands of Pakistan to join the frontlines of the jihad against America, only having pretended to be joining the medical team to worry his family less (13).

Rohan's nationalism was built on a sense of injury to the collective Muslim identity from a series of past events. This is also the driving force behind characters like Ahmed and his brother Kyra, Islamic fundamentalists who are intimately involved with the jihad in Afghanistan against American forces. However, Rohan's shade of nationalism, which relies heavily on the cultural memory of religion, differs from Ahmed and Kyra's, because of their use of children, barely in their teens, to fight in the jihad. He had cut off ties with Ardent Spirit after it was taken over by Ahmed, who was also a former student there. Ahmed used the school as a covert training centre for young recruits for the state agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, to plan missions in Kashmir (31). After Ahmed's death, the school is passed on to the management of Kyra, his brother, a senior army man who had resigned because he was "unable to accept the alliance that the Pakistani government has formed with the United States and the West, helping these empires as they annihilate Afghanistan" (30). He believes that 9/11, the event that prompted America to kickstart the campaign called the War on Terror, and which had spread to include the most prominent Western countries uniting against Islamic fundamentalism, was "all staged, to invent an excuse to begin invading Muslim lands one by one" (30). Kyra's national identity is most informed by his religious identity, as he supports the jihad in Afghanistan even though the state of Pakistan had officially washed its hands off the struggle with the army and the ISI working with the Americans to flush out Islamic fundamentalism. He had resigned from the army as an act of resistance against the Pakistani state's betrayal of Islam (30). His alignment with the state is conditional on their efforts towards helping the pan-Muslim brotherhood—provided that they are only defending Islam—and his idea of a Pakistani nationhood is based on this fraternity

between Muslims on a global scale above all else. For the nation to flourish, it requires Islam to be unafraid in the face of attack.

Under Kyra, Ardent Spirit becomes a training institution for young jihadis, “moulding them to be warrior saints” who are inspired by “teachers and the older children [who] were telling stories of rescue and heroism from Islam’s past, of populations in distress saved by pious gallants” (30-1). The younger children are energised by this narration that exalts Islamic chivalry, galvanising their imaginations of a possible victory as well as their indignation at the injustice. Supporters of the jihad base their loyalties on a narrative of a Muslim brotherhood which has historically been protected by courageous jihadis in the face of every threat to Islam. Thus, to a majority of the people, a national belonging is also determined by the need to avenge memories of historic wrongs. This strand of nationalism is supported by a Muslim identity that is further defined through an emphasis on evoking the East-West binary:

‘We can’t know what the Westerners want,’ the old man says. ‘To know what they want you have to eat what they eat, wear what they wear, breathe the air they breathe. You have to be born where they are born’... ‘No one from here can know what the Westerners know,’ the man says. ‘The Westerners are unknowable to us. The divide is too great, too final. It’s like asking what the dead or the unborn know.’ (397)

The essential difference between the East and the West, based on the point of everyday lifestyle, is what this unnamed old man from a remote village in Waziristan uses to stress the point that the East and the West can find no common ground at any point. His statement that the “divide is too great, too final” carries echoes of colonial propaganda, and can be understood as being rooted in the cultural memory of a people who have long been reduced to “Eastern” identities.

This difference is further emphasised by statements from US officials who evoked similar historic analogies to explain the motivations for the War on Terror. Kyra speculates that the Western forces are on a rampage against Islamic countries under the guise of suppressing terrorism, noting, “The US President used the word “crusade” in the first speech he gave after the terrorist attacks ... And they said if Pakistan did not help them in fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, they would bomb us back to the Stone Age. These were their exact words” (207). The term “crusade” is loaded with the implication of a war based solely on faith, clearly implying that the motivation behind the War on Terror is religious—a Christian West fighting for domination over the Muslim East. The President’s inflammatory remarks were remembered by the Pakistani commoner in conjunction with another made by a high-ranking US official:

In 1996, this lady named Albright Madeleine [*sic*], the US ambassador to the United Nations, was asked on television how she felt about the fact that five hundred thousand Iraqi children had died as a result of US economic sanctions. Do you know what she said? She said that it was “a very hard choice” but “we think the price is worth it”. These are her exact words. (399)

Madeleine Albright’s words are seen as an example of the West’s denial of even the most basic human rights to that vulnerable category—children—just because they belong to a Muslim nation.⁵⁶ The tribulations of every other Muslim nation is felt by the Pakistani Muslim to whom the US President’s statement had made it clear that the on-going war is a “crusade” with the same kind of brutality that they had not encountered for centuries. The choice of words and notions make it clear that both sides base their reactions on inherited memories of both East-

⁵⁶ Albright, in a television interview in 1996 had said on the topic of Iraqi sanctions, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it” (Mahajan).

West and Muslim-Christian conflict dating back centuries, and a narrative of trauma inherited from these conflicts.

Shamsie adds to this direction in Pakistani fiction of retelling the events and consequences of US involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s through *Burnt Shadows*. The character of Harry Burton acts as a collaborator, witness and, eventually, critic of America's role in the events leading to 9/11, in his transition from CIA operative in Islamabad during the Soviet-Afghan war to military contractor hired by the American armed forces deployed in Afghanistan during the War on Terror. In a post 9/11 world, Harry reflects:

He had always been uneasy about the introduction of 'foreign fighters' into the Afghans' war against the Soviets. It wasn't, he'd be the first to concede, because he had any inkling of how history would unravel over the next two decades—it was simply that some lingering idealism in him had found a nobility in the struggle of a people to win back their land from a superpower, and he could find no corresponding nobility in the men who arrived to fight infidels who had overtaken a Muslim land. It seemed so medieval.

(Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* 279)

Here, "foreign fighters" refers to the US policy of recruiting "Arab mujahideen" Muslims from West Asia and North Africa, using the narrative of jihad against non-believers who presented a threat to Islam in order to create a pan-Islamic resistance to Communism (278). From the perspective of the American, this "medieval" strategy—though initiated by the US—interfered with the legitimate cause of a people fighting for their homeland. Harry's blind spot is revealing. He conveniently forgets that the US was also "a superpower" that was, at this point, funnelling tremendous amounts of capital and weapons into a land halfway across the world from them in order to decimate their only rivals in a simultaneous ideological and military confrontation. The

“foreign fighters” in the war, in Harry’s view, are only the non-Afghan mujahideen, but not the US forces, of which he is a part. America’s interests in defeating the Soviet front are considered legitimate and reasonable, whereas the idea of Muslims fighting for their religion is an anachronism. However, even Harry could not but anticipate consequences for the lack of efforts on the part of the US to rehabilitate the war-torn region, authoring “a blistering article in an influential defence journal about the CIA’s decision to turn its back on Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal” (280). This sentiment echoes Nadeem Aslam’s despair when he demands, “What did you think was going to happen?” (Aslam, “Within Three or Four Years the Texture of Pakistani Life Changed”)

Thus, by portraying the years of the Soviet-Afghan war as a close contract between the US interests in defeating the Soviet powers and Zia ul-Haq’s personal campaign to mould Pakistan as an Islamic country and establish Islam as a political identity, these works of fiction attempt to give voice to a narrative that, though widely applauded when it originally took place, was conveniently and painstakingly obscured in the post-9/11 dialogue. This wilful omission is part of the construction of 9/11 as an event engendering unprecedented global trauma, though an objective look at the damages incurred—though highly condemnable—does not warrant this characterisation. Western rhetoric in the days following the attacks set the tone for US policy towards Islamic populations across the globe (and even on their own soil) for decades to come.⁵⁷ The exponential rise in Islamophobia after 9/11 has been well-documented and represented in fiction and cinema. I argue that the depiction of America’s Cold War incursions into Afghanistan with Pakistani support in the texts under study is an attempt to present a counter-memory to what

⁵⁷ The title of Mamdani’s *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* is a reflection on US President George W. Bush’s (in)famous lines that separated “good Muslims” from the “bad” terrorist Muslims, provided the former proved their innocence despite being Muslim (13).

has largely been a Western effort to “forget” that history. This claim-making arises from a global rise in anti-Muslim sentiment that informs the war on terror that led to a need to re-member and reanimate the past to create an opposing narrative of trauma due to the global Othering of Muslims as inherently “bad”.

2.4. Conclusion: Fiction as Counter-memory

Writing about the contemporary postcolonial historical novel, Hamish Dalley observes that “plausibility is a key principle articulated by many postcolonial writers” (52). Such fiction about the past is an intertextual exchange between vocational history and literature, he notes, and demands to be considered on par with historical narratives. To justify his argument, Dalley uses Ann Rigney’s formulation of “invented exemplars”—historical evidence which is fictionalised by integrating into it imaginary elements like characters and intimate plot settings (Dalley 57). Thus, both Dalley and Rigney rely on realist historical fiction that, through “paratextual frames... make plausibility and potential verifiability key criteria against which the [fictional] representation asks to be read” (Dalley 54).

While I agree with Dalley on the importance of backing realist historical fiction as a co-text of historical writing, I have attempted, in this chapter, to diverge from his study on what historical fiction borrows from historical archives to focus instead on contemporary Pakistani novels as a mediation of the shortcomings of certain forms of historiography. Thus, processes of remembering the past that also offer comment on historical writing, by foregrounding counter-histories, have taken centre-stage in this chapter. This dialogue between history and contemporary Pakistani fiction has yielded important insights into the cultural memory defining various collectivities in Pakistan. Events like colonialism and the Partition of the Indian

subcontinent, internal turbulence experienced by a young postcolonial nation, and the global outrage against Islamic fundamentalism fuelled by the 9/11 attacks in New York has undoubtedly had its reverberations in the collective imagination of Pakistan. The novels under study have recalled periods in the past to understand how they interact with historical narratives and offer insightful comments on historiography. This discussion of the framing of what Hirsch calls “ruptures” demonstrates how cultural memory plays an important role in defining group identities and determining the construction of cultural trauma. The violent mode in which memory is transmitted to the members of a group (through trauma narratives) leads up to traumatic remembrance as a fecund starting point for a discussion on the human rights subject, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

While this chapter has demonstrated how through practices of narration and imagination the primary texts have been effective carriers of lost history and of episodes that can be effectively narrativized in the mnemonic spaces offered by the creative medium of fiction, it should not pass unnoticed that there are larger practices of cultural production involved in their creation and dissemination. The dawn of the twenty-first century will be marked in history books of the future by the 9/11 attacks. Taking into account that this event occurred on US soil against American nationals at a time when American control of the global culture industry is at its heights is a detail of paramount influence while studying any contemporary medium of artistic production. Therefore, the scope of these novels as carriers of cultural memory are also determined to a certain extent by gatekeepers of the publishing industry. Thus, I argue that Pakistani novels of the present age become artefacts of cultural memory, which, as per Aleida Assmann’s understanding, is the cumulation of active and passive forms of remembering. According to Assmann’s classification, cultural memory refers to all forms of communication

which require the circulation of pre-existing values and artefacts whose very existence in the present is indicative of their value for the future (A Assmann 98). The power to influence the production of both the canon—especially in artistic realms like literature—as well as the reference memory or the archive—which Assmann eloquently describes as a “as a space that is located on the border between forgetting and remembering” (103)—rests with those holding monetary and political influence over the book publishing industry. Literary scholarship has largely agreed⁵⁸ on the centrality of 9/11 in leading to what is commonly referred to as a “boom” in the Western publishing of Pakistani writing in English in response to a growing interest in Pakistan among those audiences. This offered opportunities to unprecedented numbers of Pakistani writers to reach a wider readership than the generations that preceded them. Thus, the proliferation of literary fiction of Pakistani origin is indicative of social and cultural institutions that carefully select and monitor works of art in terms of their potential to become part of the cultural memory of the present.

Aleida Assmann, while differentiating between the canon and the archive as active and passive forms of cultural remembering, respectively, also posits that neither category is close-ended (104). The archive, which Assmann depicts as a warehouse of information that is stored for future dissemination or interpretation, also resembles the gaps in “official” history that are waiting to be uncovered, reframed and rearticulated (106). The advantages enjoyed by the vocation of storytelling in bringing forward such forgotten counter-histories are as important for Assmann as it is for Ann Rigney: “While historians have to adjust their research and questions to the extension and range of the archives, literary writers may take the liberty to fill in the gaps” (A Assmann 106, Rigney 348). This chapter has attempted to highlight the multifaceted

⁵⁸ See Chambers (13), Bilal (1).

properties of contemporary Pakistani fiction: as narratives filling historical gaps, thereby bringing the forgotten archived memory to active realms of remembering, and as cultural artefacts that mark a shift in the marketplace of literature to embody a new tradition of anglophone (canonical) writing.

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Chapter 3

Right(s) Lessons: Literature as a Means of Reimagining the Human Rights Discourse

The previous chapter redefined the idea of trauma, and argued that narrativization constructs trauma as an event causing injury and requiring reparations. Thus, the importance of an evocative story of suffering in channelling support towards seeking justice was established. This chapter will apply the methodologies of literary criticism to the largely politico-legal discipline of human rights in order to address the shortcomings of the much-touted human rights regime, especially as a witness to the era of “humanitarian interventions”.

Keeping in mind Pakistan’s place in this cultural history of human rights as a newly decolonised nation which readapted its anti-colonial stance to become an ally of the West during the Cold War, the primary texts—*The Blind Man’s Garden*, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, *This House of Clay and Water*, *Exit West*, *The Golden Legend* and *Home Fire*—will be analysed to understand which rights are understood as fundamental and how human rights subjects are redefined within this corpus. Inquiries along these lines are expected to reveal a clearer picture of the prevalence of a human rights culture and the characteristics of this within the society of Pakistan, as demonstrated through its literature.

Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore note that scholarly interest in reading literature using the framework of human rights showed a marked uptick in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. They understand this trend as an attempt to configure this event, and the proclamation of war that followed it, which led to massive changes in global relations (2). Sophia McClennan and Moore, in their Introduction to *The Routledge Companion to*

Literature and Human Rights (2016), also attribute the renewed interest within humanities scholarship in human rights discourse to the radical shifts in geopolitical power relations precipitated by 9/11 and the War on Terror (6). Even though they confess to being aware of the dangers of situating 9/11 as a turning point in this field, McClennan and Moore argue that academic reactions to this event gave rise to “a productive way to interrogate a new age of empire, geopolitical conflict, and human suffering” (3).

The “interdiscipline” of human rights and literature, as it has been described as by Goldberg and Moore, has broached several debates intended to broaden the theory and praxis of human rights. Goldberg and Moore situate their work within the broad assumption that human rights should present a normative framework for the ending of all kinds of suffering (1). To achieve this aim, they propose a trans-disciplinary approach that forgoes the “compartmentalization of knowledge” by adopting a “human rights–oriented literary criticism” (3). In their description of this approach, they foreground the need for “recognizing the particular situations and positions of those who suffer,” indicating that despite the assumptions made regarding a “universal” human rights subject, there is a need to focus on the circumstances of rights of *particular* victims of violation (3). Thus, they register their contribution to one of the central debates that have occupied scholarship on human rights—the dissonance between the universalist and particularistic approaches. This tug-of-war between the universal and the particular is also embroiled in the associated argument that human rights is a Eurocentric concept which has been weaponized in the post-imperialist age as a reiteration of the colonial “civilising mission” through its insistence on a definition of “universal” as framed in reference to the Western liberal subject. McClennan and Moore draw from the work of scholars like Upendra Baxi to argue that in contradiction to the tenuous connection traced between the “universal” and

the “western,” anti-colonial struggles have made use of the “universal” coverage of human rights to argue for their emancipation (McClennan and Moore 33). Therefore, neither the dismissal of the need for a “universal” nor a rejection of the claims of greater attention to particular victims of rights violations can be favoured over the other. Domna Stanton searches for a resolution to this conundrum, pondering on the viability of the articulation of “a new universal,” which would re-examine the commonalities shared by humans as explained within the Enlightenment-centric idea of a liberal human rights subject (Stanton 28). Such a revision of the “universal” would involve the inclusion of critical dialogue on resistance arising at the regional level: “Instead of hiding behind a humanitarian, im-partisan neutrality, which is never one, the practices of the [Human Rights Regime] must affirm their identification with progressive political claims and put concrete struggles at the center of human rights politics” (33-34).

This debate has exposed the need for the widening of the ontological possibilities of the complex subject of human rights. McClennan and Moore agree with most other contributors to this interdisciplinary that literature is a suitable space for such an expansion, listing three major routes that research along these lines may take: one, the use of literature to understand how rights are imagined by subjects; two, the relevance of literature as a medium that spreads the concept of rights; and three, the usefulness of literature in revealing “the complexity and contrasts among cultural representations of rights” (1). Further scholarship on human rights and literature should, they advise, “help make greater sense of human rights—its conceptual inconsistencies, political applications, and lasting claim on the imagination” (16).

Crystal Parikh also argues for the unique suitability of literature as a fertile ground for such discussions due to its inherent tolerance of ambiguities, providing an alternate space for the imagination of the concept of human rights unburdened by the requirements of legal practice

(Parikh, "Introduction" 8). Dispensing with the need to enforce clear demarcations separating a saveable victim and a punishable perpetrator, literature is free to function as "a strong co-creator of ideas about humanity and justice" (Stonebridge 4). Lyndsey Stonebridge finds that literature contributes to the development of human rights by using its fictional licence to let readers imagine rights as well as violence in a more intimate and entertaining medium (41). Makau Mutua voices the need for a similar "multiculturalization of the [human rights] corpus... [by] balancing between individual and group rights, giving more substance to social and economic rights, relating rights to duties, and addressing the relationship between the corpus and economic systems" (Mutua 6-7). Mutua finds the contemporary practice of human rights firmly yoked to the liberal systems of government and market preferred by Western capitalism and contends that cultures and ways of thinking outside of these systems are "savage" and require the services of a "savior" (23). This Othering of cultures that exist outside the framework established by institutionalised human rights faces flak from Parikh as well. Parikh criticises the recent efforts of liberal humanitarianism, as led by the US' internationalist policies, in reducing those whose rights they seek to restore to objects embodying victimhood. These "victims" must be saved through their installation within an American "good life" which values neoliberal market policies and capitalist ideas of "freedom" (Parikh, *Writing Human Rights* 10). This line of thinking is inherently biased towards the free market and its promise of more consumer choices, hinting heavily at a prioritisation of civil and political rights (10).

Another issue that has been identified as a problematic within human rights discourse is the language(s) of rights. Upendra Baxi expresses his concern with the changing language of human rights, citing the fading away of certain forms such as labour rights from the normal parlance of rights, even as he lauds the inclusion of other subjectivities under the umbrella of

rights-speak like women's and children's rights (Baxi xx). Through these examples, Baxi attempts to point out how rights are made available only through the approved language of the discourse at any given time, and concludes that the "varied and precarious" nature of the survival of certain languages of rights—as illustrated by the "extinction" of labour rights (xx)—reveals the influence of hegemonic forces of power on the discourse. This leaves normative human rights with "an enormous potential capacity to reproduce human/social suffering" (xvi). Joseph Slaughter agrees with Baxi on this count, noting that, "[a]lthough human rights are presupposed to be self-evident, they must be publicly and officially articulated as such, named as self-evident to be made self-evident" (*Human Rights Inc.* 14). Lyndsey Stonebridge observes that this chasm in the language of rights reflects a rift in the discourse on rights:

Where ideas about equality and justice, autonomy and dignity are a given for some, others are offered what in effect can hardly be called human rights at all, but is really a watered-down humanitarianism: bare sustenance, minimal dignity, zero self-determination....for some they are meaningless because they are so self-evident; for others they are meaningless because they are self-evidently absent. (11)

A remedy to this challenge is suggested by Slaughter in his proposal of employing literature as a means of bridging the gap between the writing down of rights and its percolation into practice. He opines that:

the legislative history and practice of human rights shows that "to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance" (UDHR) is not just a simple matter of writing down the unwritten ethereal principles of obviousness; rather, it requires the collaboration of writers...and the cooperation, or complicity, of literary and cultural forms to make the

common sense of human rights norms both legible and legislatable, imaginable and articulable. (*Human Rights, Inc.* 6)

Thus, Slaughter attests that literary forms are central to the translation of written rights into claimable rights. Stonebridge agrees with the need for literary creators to be part of the human rights discourse, as writers “do much more than to humanize an inhuman tragedy,” by “expos[ing] how the terms of judgment and justice are currently, and devastatingly, inadequate to our current age of impunity” (18). In this vein, this project attempts to explore Pakistani literature as both the imagination and critique of human rights.

This chapter has been split into four sections. One of the primary aims of this project is to decentre 9/11 as the pivot around which the study of contemporary Pakistani literature revolves. The assertion that 9/11 and the US response to the attacks reinstated the importance of human rights scholarship due to the novel forms of violence it created serves to further prove my point that the undue attention given to 9/11, at the cost of erasure of other events and experiences in recent history, needs to be corrected. One manner of doing this is addressed under the first section of this chapter. The next section is a close examination of how people of various subjectivities, especially those of Othered subjectivities (as seen in Chapter 1), comprehend the possibility of using the legal and political concept of human rights to address the constant violence that they are subjected to. The bias of contemporary human rights practice towards civil and political rights over economic, social and cultural rights have been widely discussed (Hammond 43, Slaughter, “Hijacking Human Rights” 755, McClennan and Moore 7, Goldberg and Moore 6). Hammond traces the precedence accorded to the latter set of rights to the clash between the neoliberal capitalist agenda of First World nations like the USA with the protectionist socialist reforms of the erstwhile USSR during the Cold War period. The near-

complete defeat of the Soviet paved the way for American domination of the global market in the subsequent decades and the human rights culture that emerged out of this conflict placed emphasis on the freedom of the individual (consumer) (Hammond 43). Slaughter agrees with this assessment and notes the erosion of collective struggles during this period, a stark contrast to the slew of decolonial movements that absorbed the logic of human rights a few decades earlier (Slaughter, “Hijacking Human Rights” 757). The third section will see how this rift is reflected in literature from Pakistan. The final section addresses the unsuitability of “inherent dignity” as a quality capable of capturing the full range of human experiences. It employs concepts such as “vulnerability” and “precariousness” as explained by Judith Butler to argue that the primary texts recognise both the importance of the body as a site of violence and its centrality in the understanding of human rights.

3.1. “Who Will Speak Out The Complicated Truth?”:⁵⁹ Re-embedding the Subject of Rights

It’s October. The United States was attacked last month, a day of fire visited on its cities. And as a consequence Western armies have invaded Afghanistan. ‘The Battle of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon’ is what some people here in Pakistan have named September’s terrorist attacks. The logic is that there are no innocent people in a guilty nation. And similarly, these weeks later, it is the buildings, orchards and hills of Afghanistan that are being torn apart by bombs and fire-shells. (Aslam, *The Blind Man’s Garden* 6)

⁵⁹ Quotation borrowed from the pages of *The Blind Man’s Garden*, as explained further into this section (126).

Aslam lays out the skeletal details of the War on Terror right at the beginning of *The Blind Man's Garden*, speaking through the thoughts of Rohan, a former teacher in Pakistan who is about to accompany his son Jeo as he travels to Peshawar to treat those wounded in this war. We learn that the story is set in October 2001, a month after the 9/11 attacks, the repercussions of which continue to shape global politics till date. Natsu Taylor Saito has characterised the American offensive as a “a shape-shifting “war on terror””, which, “has been a conflict with neither geographical boundaries nor a clear definition of what would constitute victory...” (11). Aslam seems to be in agreement with Saito’s description of the declaration of the War as a haphazard response, pointing out the disproportionate military counter-reaction it elicited. The “invasion” of Afghanistan is depicted by the US as a grandiose “War on Terror,” attempting to mask its origins in the vulnerability felt by a nation that considers itself the leader of the free world (Butler xii). However, this fails to hide the fact that the war in Afghanistan is a brutal display of raw military force by a rich nation against a much poorer population that had to stand witness while its homeland became both an ideological and a literal battlefield once again.⁶⁰

Beginning with the characterisation of the Western armies as “invaders,” the novel proceeds to give a voice to “people in Pakistan,” in whose opinion, 9/11 was merely one of the many episodes that led to the war currently being fought at its borders. Flipping the logic of the War on Terror that conducted military attacks on civilians in Afghanistan, these unnamed opinionators justify the casualties of the attacks on 9/11 as the deaths of those who collaborated with the enemy—clearly echoing the sentiment of President George W Bush’s exclusionary

⁶⁰ I am referring to the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1970s — discussed in the previous chapter — primarily a struggle between capitalist and communist factions for global ideological dominance. I will reference this war later in this chapter as one of the formative factors behind casting global human rights culture into its present shape.

comments following the attacks.⁶¹ The merciless offensive on unsuspecting people, along with “the buildings, orchards and hills of Afghanistan,” propounds this concept of guilt by association, which effectively claims that all Afghans are responsible for the acts of a select few, and unilaterally condemning them to death in punishment for these.⁶² Thus, the narrator’s observation that “there are no innocent people in a guilty nation,” in reference to American lives, turns on its head the rationale that the victims of 9/11 were innocent people killed by terrorists, whereas the victims of the War on Terror are culpable associates whose lives are expendable. The fallacy of this line of argument that has only led to the loss of human life and environmental destruction on both sides (albeit a much greater loss to one of the two parties), is pointed out by the casually applied “similarly” that concludes the narrator’s summary of the geopolitical situation. This hypocrisy is stressed throughout the novel, as will be explained later in this chapter as well.

This approach does not intend to diminish the importance of the attacks on various institutions on US soil within the literature studied here. In fact, the events of 9/11 can be legitimately considered the reason for an accretion in demand for narratives by Muslim authors in the opening years of the twenty-first century. As Madeline Clements notes, Muslim authors, including some studied in this project, were expected to present their side of the story in the days and years following 9/11 when the idea of Islamic fundamentalism as a global threat captured public imagination (Clements 3). Peter Morey attributes this interest to the need for the largely white readership of the West to illuminate themselves on the—perceived—foreign and

⁶¹ Bush had famously declared, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (“Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People”).

⁶² Saito lists this as one of the unique precepts of the War on Terror: “Terrorists and Those Who Harbor Them Are the Enemy” (12).

immediate threat to their selfhood, creating what he calls “the market for the Muslim” (Morey 6). However, Morey dismisses most such writing as “Muslim misery memoirs,” which catered to the liberal white audiences’ propensity for those stories of suffering of the Other which casts them, the readers, as heroes championing the voice of the victim of a savage Islamic society, and thereby, justifying the War on Terror (26).

Similar to the decentring of 9/11 from recent literary history, a case can be made for the diminishing of the colossal importance given to this event in discussions of contemporary global politics. Oftentimes, 9/11 is characterised as a singular event, untethered to any other in human history, as an aberration that did not emerge from the past but should reverberate in every second of the future. This project, following the spirit of recent attempts in literary scholarship to resignify this event,⁶³ ensures that 9/11, when discussed, is not understood as merely an injury done to the victims of the attacks on US soil, but also as the beginning of an era of US foreign policy that impinged on the freedoms and rights of peoples across the globe. Thus, 9/11 will be emplaced firmly in the continuous reams of history, to “provincialize”⁶⁴ the USA and understand both Western military interventions as well as the rise of political Islam in South Asia as part of a historical trajectory including colonialism, decolonisation, the growth of the global neoliberal market and the assumed progressiveness of the secular democracy. For this, the chapter will employ methodologies of postcolonial and poststructuralist origins which interrogate the ethical basis of US’ War on Terror, especially its humanitarian claims, through the work of

⁶³ While Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* is one of the earlier and most popular writing in rethinking the centrality of 9/11 in critical history, see also Jayana Jain’s work, succinctly titled *Thinking Past ‘Post-9/11’: Home, Nation and Transnational Desires in Pakistani English Novels and Hindi Films*.

⁶⁴ I borrow this term from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s seminal work on dismantling the hegemonic position occupied by European history and thought within scholarship on the humanities and social sciences.

theorists like Upendra Baxi, Makau Mutua, Joseph Slaughter, Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler, among others.

The Western exceptionalism from the practice of human rights principles is a geopolitical theme that catches the interest of most of the novels discussed in this chapter. In Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, this aspect is explored by examining how instances of violence involving refugees and those involving citizens of the more privileged nations they attempt to enter, are perceived in public opinion. In order to understand the context of these interactions, I begin with a brief look into how the movement of people across borders is seen in the unnamed city that the novel is initially set in (evidently located in the so-called Global South), and the city of London, UK, that later sees an influx of migrants from poorer shores. Saeed and Nadia, the protagonists, are used to their city being "swollen by refugees," who had been migrating to the duo's home country due to the seizing of their own lands by militant groups (1). This is the first descriptor Hamid uses to introduce the reader to the unnamed city, defining it in terms of the people who swarmed to it, abandoning other homes and lives they may have enjoyed. These refugees were not welcomed into this city, which was also under threat by the same war that drove the refugees to it, but they were not turned away either, quietly accepted and left undisturbed in their penury as they tried "to recreate the rhythms of a normal life" (23). The understanding displayed by the citizens of the host city—even if tempered by the resignation that the war might soon extend to their own lands to make refugees out of them as well—towards the rush of refugees, is in stark contrast with the conventional Western response that would be encountered by Saeed and Nadia when they become refugees themselves, as depicted later in the novel. Their situation of homelessness and displacement then becomes a topic "discussed by world leaders as a *major global crisis*" (83, italics added). This response brings to light the hierarchies within the

migratory routes taken by refugees—movements within regions outside the so-called First World cause contained ripples of discontent whereas movements into it are met with waves of outrage, suddenly of a “global” scale.

In the world of *Exit West*, people are transported to other countries via “doors” that could be entered from a certain location and seem to magically open out into another. With this hint of magical realism, Hamid compresses the arduous journey of refugees—who are often forced to travel by unauthorised and distressing modes traversing circuitous routes—to a seemingly instantaneous and fantastical opening-and-shutting of doors. Nadia, for example, simply “took [Saeed’s] hands in hers and held them tight, and then, releasing them, and without a word, she stepped through [the door]” (98). The journey, while reduced by the narrative into a mere entering and exiting, is not easy, as the “passage” is experienced as a “gasping struggle...she felt cold and bruised and damp as she lay on the floor of the room at the other side, too spent to stand” (98). Thus, the novel circumvents the need to describe scenes of migrant journeys that have been popularised by the news and other forms of media—of unsecure boats, sometimes capsizing; or of cramped trucks sneaking packed bodies across international borders. The torturous and claustrophobic aspects of the passage are not denied by the novel. However, this evasion of the well-documented, shock-inducing scenes of such migration lets the reader refocus on other, little-explored impressions of the passage in our cultural imagination. The figure of the refugee is granted an opportunity to be more than a mere sufferer of the indignities of the passage, repining their problems onto other sources.

The doors are most often used by those seeking to escape the dire political and economic conditions of their home countries to reach “safer” environments, like Saeed and Nadia who travel via several doors, first to Mykonos; subsequently to London; and finally, to California.

Gaining access to a door is neither easy nor inexpensive; Saeed and Nadia's first passage was facilitated by the payment of a large sum of money to an anonymous "agent" in their home country and their second passage came as a tip-off from an acquaintance (85, 114). One of their desperate tries to find more doors taught them that, "the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would go back to where they came from—although almost no one ever did..." (101). This observation on the disproportionate demand for access into "richer destinations" and the corresponding lack of desire to move into, or move back into, "poorer places" highlight that even though contemporary mass migrations are largely framed as responses to domestic terrorism and violence, it is overwhelmingly underscored by global economic conditions. Saeed and Nadia's own transit reflects the busiest migratory routes—the one-way journeys embarked on by people of war-torn and economically depressed countries like their own to reach richer nations which promised freedom from tyranny and violence, in order to attain better standards of living. The history of the flow of capital across the world is a defining factor of these migrations, though one that is conveniently pushed to the background in discussions on civil unrest in these poorer places as well as on listing the reasons why its citizens choose to leave them.

While *Exit West* primarily follows Saeed and Nadia in their journey, it also positions this central plot within a web of vignettes featuring unnamed characters from locations around the globe who all seem to share a sense of unsettledness with the places that they are situated in. One of these vignettes tells the story of an accountant from Kentish Town, London, who stumbles into an opportunity to leave his deeply unhappy life in the form of a door to Namibia. This presents an interesting contrast to the migrants of Saeed and Nadia's acquaintance who have had

to search desperately for doors into the accountant's native city, London, while he but "woke one morning to discover the blackness of a door where the bright entrance to his small but well-lit second bedroom had been," in order to gain entry into a land like their own (128). Once in Namibia, he sends word to his family and friends about where he is and invites them to join him, instructing them that, "if they chose to [accept his invitation], a door could be found in his flat" (128). The ease of the accountant's entry into Namibia and of extending invitations to others, is worlds apart from the case of Saeed, who had noted, during his heart-breaking farewell with his father prior to his passage, that, "when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (94). Saeed's separation from his father when he went through the door out of his city was final, unlike the accountant's with his family. For Saeed, there were no channels of communication left, nor was there any chance his father would survive the brutal passage out and into a richer country that Saeed might "invite" him to. Thus, the loss of his father, or his "murder," was imminent following Saeed's departure. The novel drives home the difference between these two journeys by having the accountant settle down to a pleasant life on the picturesque Namibian shores, while Saeed exits the door in the seaside destination of Mykonos to find himself in a refugee camp, "with hundreds of tents and lean-tos and people of many colours and hues" (100). Therefore, the metaphorical gulf that separates the escape routes of the accountant and Saeed, respectively, establishes the context of continued deprivation surrounding the latter's journey.

While the device of the doors makes the act of travelling appear effortless in *Exit West*, *Home Fire* focuses on the machinations that prove it to be anything but smooth, even in the case of "legal" attempts to travel. Isma Pasha, a British citizen moving from London to Boston, is kept from proceeding with her journey even though the usual screening procedures as applied to

all other passengers in her flight showed that she posed no security risk. Additionally, she is made to undergo a rigorous questioning by security personnel at the airport which leads to her missing the transatlantic flight. Having foreseen the possibility of such an interrogation, Isma, helped by her sister Aneeka, had practised for the daunting interview, anticipating questions and preparing answers that will give her the best chances of not being arbitrarily denied freedom of movement. Isma has also packed her luggage with the understanding that her personal effects are not guaranteed to remain private and will doubtlessly be scrutinised in great detail: “She’d made sure not to pack anything that would invite comment or questions—no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her area of academic interest” (Shamsie 3). She is forced to strip herself of the markers of her identity—her familial, religious/spiritual, and academic ties, as signalled by the books and photographs in her possession. Even though Isma had prepared herself for the ordeal, anticipating the interrogation and surveillance and even enacting the scenario with Aneeka playing the interrogators, the actual experience is much more unsettling. She had not expected that “it would feel so humiliating to have the contents of her suitcase inspected” (3). The interrogation seemed to have been designed to put her on the defensive, probing details that are meant to paint a picture of the person being questioned in a censurable light. Isma is asked if she “consider[s] herself British?”, a test of loyalty to the nation that, unless answered in a way that indicated unwavering faith, could be deemed as grounds for curtailing her personal freedoms (5). Her questioning “continued for nearly two hours. [The officer] wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, *The Great British Bake Off*, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites” (5). To each of these, Isma replies cautiously, to make sure that her interrogators find no loopholes to hold her back. The barrage of questions and the hostility of the questioners repeatedly force her to unwittingly take a defensive stance, which she

later realised made her sound “guilty” and “evasive” (4, 5). While answering the questions, her thoughts flit between the picture of herself she imagined the officers were drawing from her answers and the image she was painstakingly trying to craft, that of someone with “dubious political opinions,” who did not care much either way (5). This is particularly relevant because Isma is fully conscious of the need for this careful curation of her voiced opinions and understands that her objective would be allowed only if she proves her docility towards the nation-state.

At the same time as answering her rehearsed responses, Isma’s mind replays her role-playing sessions with Aneeka. Isma’s docile answers are shown in contrast to the tongue-in-cheek responses suggested by Aneeka, who tells her, “[y]ou know, you don’t have to be so compliant about everything...it’s important to show at least a tiny bit of contempt for the whole process” (6). Isma ignores this bit of advice and attributes Aneeka’s disregard towards authority to her being, “not quite nineteen, with her law student brain, [one] who knew everything about her rights and nothing about the fragility of her place in the world” (6). Aneeka’s resistance to the surveillance and incursions into Isma’s privacy by the state takes the form of clever quips that toed the line of good behaviour that Isma preferred to exhibit. Her methods are not intended to have any positive consequence—it is unlikely that the “contempt” she advocates would improve the situation for Isma or others like her—but it does possess the potential to make it much more difficult for Isma to fulfil her travel plans. Isma chalks this up to her sister’s naivety of youth and the idealism of a young law student with little experience of the vagaries of law in practice. Isma herself is not uninformed in matters of law and her rights as a citizen. She is a researcher in sociology, particularly focussed on state policy and its employment as a means of denigrating certain groups of citizens to a lower status, and hence, is well-versed in the language

of human rights (38). This knowledge makes her aware of Aneeka's and her own "fragility" in relation to the rest of the world, a sentiment that carries echoes of Butler's formulation of vulnerability. Aneeka's strategy is not designed for change or redressal, but a frivolous attempt at resistance, an attitude that would change as her character becomes more aware of the "fragility of her place in the world". Therefore, her final act of protest, as a grieving sister fighting for the rights of her dead brother's corpse, is a far cry from the benign one she suggests to Isma here. This aspect of Aneeka's character development as a figure of resistance will be discussed in section 3.4.

Isma is allowed out of the interrogation with an "unconvincing" apology and "an air of magnanimity" even though her flight has long departed (5). There is no avenue for Isma to claim a refund for her missed flight because "the airline took no responsibility for passengers who arrived at the airport three hours ahead of the departure time and were escorted to an interrogation room" (3). The fiscal cost and the "responsibility" of embodying an identity that calls for such an interrogation is on Isma, and there are no avenues that will address her grievances. At this juncture, when she could neither get a refund on her ticket nor afford a fresh one, help comes in the form of "[t]he woman in customer services at Heathrow—a Muslim—who] had found her a place on the next flight out, without charge" (7). It is telling that the only reparation Isma receives comes from another Muslim woman, who can be presumed to have been a victim of civil rights violation at an earlier instance and thus, feels empathy for Isma. While the keepers of the behemoth systems of governmental and capitalist forces—the intelligence-security aides and the airline company—wash their hands off her, it is an act of solidarity by a relatively less powerful cog in this system that comes to her aid. This action, by an employee of an airline which does not offer refunds to people delayed due to interrogations by

government authorities, is unlikely to be condoned by the company and makes it an act of resistance as much as of solidarity. However, it takes a more material manifestation than the rhetorical rebellion Aneeka had suggested and which Isma had found naive. The contrast in these two minor acts of resistance against a nexus of power functioning against Isma also reflects the material and tangible reparations that claims of human rights violations would benefit from than merely refashioned verbiage that human rights discourse is at times reduced to.

The futility of certain kinds of human rights practice is perhaps best illustrated by the curious job of the bird pardoner who frequents Rohan's garden (*The Blind Man's Garden*). The titular arboretum becomes the scene of a redemption plot:

[The bird pardoner] rode through town with the cage full of birds and people paid him to release one or more of them, the act of compassion gaining the customer forgiveness for some of his sins.

'I am known as "the bird pardoner",' he said. 'The freed bird says a prayer on behalf of the one who has bought its freedom. And God never ignores the prayers of the weak.'

(Aslam 7)

The pardoner sets up snares to capture birds atop the tallest trees in Rohan's garden without his permission, much to his chagrin. The hawker trades meaningless acts of penance in exchange for money, preying on his customers' feelings of guilt and contrition for acts—"sins"—that have no association with the avian prisoners for whose release they pay. This orderly transaction of useless charity in return for a clearer conscience is reminiscent of what Slaughter calls "human rights markets," that facilitates a benevolent humanitarianism, run by brokers in the form of international aid agencies and NGOs that appeal to the saviour complex of the liberal West. The currency of these markets are "suffering and sympathy" (Slaughter, "Hijacking Human Rights")

766). Empty gestures of philanthropy will earn the guilty party a “pardon,” conveniently bypassing long-term solutions involving the redistribution of resources to those who have historically been denied. The allegory of the unfortunate bird also resembles Makau Mutua’s description of contemporary human rights activism as the manifestation of a “savage-victim-savior” metaphor, wherein those “who are privileged globally as a people...redeem themselves by “defending” and “civilizing” “lower,” “unfortunate,” and “inferior” peoples. The metaphor is thus laced with the pathology of self-redemption” (Mutua 14).

Rohan, reflecting on this commerce of absolution that lets the pardoner earn his livelihood, finds a crucial flaw in his reasoning, wondering “[i]f a bird will say a prayer for the person who has bought its freedom, wouldn’t it call down retribution on the one who trapped and imprisoned it? And on the one who facilitated the entrapment?” (7). This observation is crucial: does the bird, which was a free agent before being captured precisely for the monetary advantage of the pardoner and the spiritual benefits of his customers, owe gratitude for the misfortunes it had to undergo due to no fault of its own? Is it not more likely that those like the bird, exploited for money and resources before being benevolently “given freedom” would seek vengeance, or even reparations, for its trauma? If the bird chooses to take this latter route of retribution, should the moral judgement of its actions against the pardoner and his associates be based solely on the act of revenge, or should it be contextualised on the basis of its initial imprisonment?

These are some of the questions that lead Slaughter to conclude that the contemporary human rights corpus while recounting stories of violations centres these narratives on the “disembedded individual” subject, individualising and isolating the violation of rights by focussing on a single victim and a clearly identified perpetrator (763). Such an approach obfuscates the larger historical context that may have contributed to the rights violation under

discussion, devalues the social, cultural and political identities claimed by the victim, and oversimplifies the power relations at play. Thus, as Rohan suggests, the plight of the individual “bird” which was “rescued” from captivity should be understood in terms of the conditions that led to its capture as well as the complex social locations of its captors.

Butler notes the resistance put up by the US’ mainstream media against such a contextualisation of 9/11: “The cry that “there is no excuse for September 11” has become a means by which to stifle any serious public discussion of how US foreign policy has helped to create a world in which such acts of terror are possible” (3). The events of September 11, 2001, are ripped out from the tapestry of history and reframed as a single, isolated occurrence, the actors and motivations of which are to be judged based solely on the events of the day. Contrary to this, the War on Terror is always narrated as a warrantable response to 9/11, the event that seemingly sprung from oblivion. Such dehistoricization produces a subject of rights against whom violence is permissible, even sanctioned. Additionally, it creates a linear narrative of events, lacking in sophistication and crystallised into a victim-perpetrator dichotomy. This simplistic equation is further abetted by theories such as Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” which enforces a strict bipolarity among the parties involved.

The nuance that escapes this characterisation of the events preceding and resulting from 9/11 is brought out by the diverse ensemble populating the worlds of *Home Fire* and *The Blind Man’s Garden*, and in a more oblique fashion, in *Exit West*. Next, a comparative analysis of the systemic violations of the rights of Othered Pakistani Christians and Kashmiris caught in the middle of military occupation and an ongoing guerrilla resistance in *The Golden Legend* will be undertaken to drive home the complexity and messiness of the situation. I also look at how novels like *Alice Bhatti* and *This House* re-embed the human rights subject as capable of

simultaneously being victims and survivors of rights violation as members of complex social orders. The novels take numerous routes to depict the intricacy of violence, voicing a multiplicity of experiences, opinions and approaches to human rights and justice. This discussion is an extension of the arguments made in the previous chapter on the use of historical narratives to construct cultural trauma. However, it is important to revisit this methodology from a more oblique angle to understand one of the ways in which the primary texts underscore the importance of socio-political history in recognising the rights that are still owed to the victims of pertinacious violence and unrest.

When Rohan travels to the city of Peshawar, Pakistan in early days of the War on Terror, he encounters a series of demonstrations expressing support for the Afghan victims of the war: “raised placards...[demanding,] ‘Why didn’t three thousand Jews turn up for work at the World Trade Center on 11 September ...’ someone is asking, while another says, ‘The West wants to take over Pakistan’s nuclear weapons...’” (Aslam, *The Blind Man’s Garden* 45). Conspiracy theories that pin the blame for 9/11 on Jewish New Yorkers and suspicions about Western influence on the Pakistani state’s actions during the war are expressed at the public protest rallies. Thus, the popular opinion among this crowd of Pakistanis is decidedly anti-American, occasionally anti-Semitic, and firmly against the Western incursions into Afghanistan.

The events of the war on Afghan soil are closely followed by Rohan’s townspeople in Pakistan as well. They are greatly distressed upon hearing of the first major setback, the capture of Kabul from Taliban control by the Western armies: “Sounds of grief were heard from a number of houses in Rohan’s neighbourhood in Heer when Kabul fell. The cleric at the mosque near Rohan’s house had wept for most of his two-hour Friday sermon, the tears broadcast over the loudspeaker” (119). In contrast to this, a news report of the event noted: “Afghanistan is

liberated and American troops are being handed sweets and plastic flowers by the free citizens of Kabul, music shops are being reopened...[and] men are shaving off their beards” (113). At the same time as when the people of Heer, Pakistan mourned the advance of the West and what they perceive to be an attack on Islam and their Afghan brothers, the news from the battlegrounds seem to suggest that the civilians there welcomed the defeat of the Taliban. The tidings arrived in Heer via radio broadcasting, placing under doubt the veracity of the report as it might have been manipulated by the Pakistani state. Much to the chagrin of a section of its citizenry, including the lamenting population of Heer, their government had continued to support and contribute to the war against the Taliban.

Belonging to this disapproving section of the population is Major Kyra, a senior member of the Pakistani military who resigned from his position, “unable to accept the alliance that the Pakistani government has formed with the United States and the West, helping these empires as they annihilate Afghanistan” (30). Kyra’s plan to combat the Pakistani state’s unholy alliance includes funding and overseeing the operations of a jihadi training camp that sends school-aged boys to Afghanistan, “moulding them to be warrior saints, brilliant in deceit against the West and its sympathisers here at home” (31). The camp, functioning under the guise of a boarding school, had been set up by Kyra’s brother Ahmed, who supplied young fighters for the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency for their operations in occupied Kashmir. Ahmed too had switched alliances, withdrawing support from the ISI and pledging his resources to the Taliban. Ahmed continued to be part of the Taliban defence until he was killed by civilians in Afghanistan: “Every ounce of rage – every rape, every disappearance, every public execution, every hand amputated during the past seven years of the Taliban regime...was poured into [Ahmed’s mob execution]” (47). This account of Ahmed’s murder by a “group of ordinary citizens”

corroborates the news report on widespread support for the Western cause against the Taliban. It also paints a picture of a society under extreme duress, one that has been faced with attacks on their corporeal integrity so much so that they are moved to administer violent, extrajudicial mob justice. The high death toll of the Afghans killed in the War on Terror—technically played out between the US and forces of “terror” such as the Taliban, and in which Afghan citizens should not be caught in the crossfires—does not remain undiscussed. As one villager in a town along the Pakistan-Afghanistan remarked, “[s]eventy people from my village were killed when the Americans dropped a bomb... I blame America but I also blame the foreign fighters [from Pakistan] who the Americans were trying to kill” (123). The war is clearly one involving numerous parties, each acting on their best interests, though the Afghans seem to be on the losing side irrespective of whom victory favours. “The US casualties number twelve in the two-month war, whereas countless thousands of Afghanistanis have perished, fighters as well as bystanders,” Rohan recollects, before wondering, “who will speak out the complicated truth [?]” (126). Undeniably, attempts at portraying the tide of popular opinion also reveal a contradictory *mêlée* of sentiments.

With multiple actors and motivations at play, this situation is overly embroiled in the surging pulls of the tides of history to be reduced to a simple clash of civilizations between the categories of the East and the West, even though these categories do not cease to have meanings unto themselves. As the celebratory joy of the residents of Kabul show, the Taliban, even though sons of the same Afghan soil, was a regime built on subjugation of its citizens with no respect for their bodily autonomy. The resultant disfavour for the Taliban amongst the Afghan people led them to support the American war and the immediate result of the defeat of the militant government. The people of Pakistan are unable to come to terms with this perceived lack of

support for the Muslim brotherhood, influenced by their own complex history with colonial and neo-colonial powers from the Western world, and their national imagination which was birthed from the idea of a modified global ummah. The “complicated truth” of this situation merits a sustained discussion that will flesh out the many positions occupied here in order to fully comprehend the various transgressions of rights involved.

It may be argued that to the political climate of Pakistan, even more contentious than the subject of Afghanistan, is that of Kashmir. *The Golden Legend* traces the undercurrents of contemporary conditions of life in the Valley through the character of Imran Tarigami, bringing in the important and irreplaceable perspective of another group of people caught in the unenviable position of being “disputed” and claimed by two volatile, highly-armed nations. Imran describes his homeland as “the victim of maps,” conjuring up the (accurate) image of a population made to suffer due to the design of national borders to be imagined and concrete at the same time, consigning communities to the tug-of-war between nation-states heedless of their best interests (Aslam 337).

The history of Imran’s immediate family members—his father, mother, older brother, and uncles—is a catalogue of human rights violations committed by the Indian army towards Kashmiris. His father Naeem had been “*taken away*” for questioning by the army, never to be returned (148, italics added). Naeem’s name joined the long unofficial list of Kashmiri men who had “disappeared”⁶⁵ over the years after coming under the military radar for the flimsiest of reasons, and consequently, simply failing to come back to their homes. Naeem’s detention was completely unwarranted—it was later discovered that a mix-up of names had led to his unofficial

⁶⁵ Ather Zia explains the curious nomenclature of this widely-used military tactic: “The word “disappeared” indicates a disappearance caused by the forces of the Indian government. The word “disappearance” operates as a verb in Kashmir—more specifically, it means “made to disappear” rather than simply to disappear or go missing” (4).

incarceration—and left no evidence for the Tarigamis to follow. The impunity enjoyed the army became clear during the family’s decades-long search for any trace of Naeem in various jails, army camps and government records offices across North India:

The Indian soldiers who had taken him away – Captain Kumar and two others – were the only ones who knew of his fate, and they were protected by others in the hierarchy of the military and civilian government...Tens of thousands of Muslims had been killed, tortured, raped or been made to disappear by Indian soldiers since 1990, and a precedent could not be set of making a soldier answerable for something. (233-234)

Thus, it is clear that Naeem’s disappearance, which was effectively the extraction and subsequent erasure of a living person from the face of the earth with no repercussions, involves the close complicity of the elected democratic government of India with the military that enacts its policies in Kashmir. The abruptness of the rights violation and the clean cuts that the state makes to separate the aggrieved from directly accusing the perpetrators is aided by this culture of impunity. Naeem’s was not the only case of enforced disappearance in Imran’s immediate family: both his uncles were also “picked up for questioning regarding the insurgency”, but, “[n]either of the two men had returned after being *taken away* for questioning, just as Imran’s father hadn’t years ago” (148, italics added). Imran’s mother’s search for her husband and her two brothers continued in vain until her own disappearance at the behest of the Indian military. She was captured for her role in aiding the Kashmiri resistance against the Indian state: “she too was *taken away*, the day in the apple orchard when she dug up the crate with the bullets and discovered that the santoor they had left in it was gone” (234, italics added). Imran and his brother Laal can only measure their parents’ and uncles’ lives from their respective births to the time at which they were each “taken away”. Neither their lives nor deaths can be described in

more concrete terms because their next of kin do not know what happened to them after their disappearance. Likewise, to be “taken away” was instantly equated to a death sentence since the likelihood of a disappeared person making a reappearance was unheard of.

Having lived under military occupation his whole life and lost much of his family to the army’s excesses, Imran was convinced that the only viable option left to him was to join the training camps in Pakistan. However, this decision eventually proved a mistake, and he had to abandon his guerrilla training, “because I didn’t want the Kashmir they wanted... We just come here to learn to resist Indian soldiers. Not turn Kashmir into a desert caliphate” (337). The humanitarian goal of freeing the hostages of a military occupation was discovered to be a mere facade hiding the plot to seize control over the region through the raising of a religion-based militia. Even though the camps purportedly produced fighters for the Kashmiri resistance against the Indian army, Imran realised that, “the Pakistanis financed the training of only Islamists. So much so that the Islamist guerrillas sometimes murdered the irreligious ones, brutally, either here in Pakistan or back home in Kashmir” (130). The Pakistani state’s commitment to helping the Kashmiri people stopped at their practice, or lack thereof, of religion. It was not enough to be a victim of military brutality and illegal occupation, but also a follower of the state’s sanctioned brand of faith, in order to qualify as a human rights subject meriting protection. Ironically, this reveals that the Pakistani state is no better a protector of Kashmiri rights than its Indian counterpart, considering that a representative of the latter had once boastfully proclaimed, “[w]e Indians care about Kashmir’s land, not Kashmir’s people” (181). At the centre of the “dispute” of Kashmir, is therefore the land itself, due to its strategic geographical location and abundance of natural resources. The casualness of the execution of humans, through disappearances and

murder of the irreligious, as practiced by these two nations also prove that the worth of human lives is negligible next to the value of gaining absolute control over the Valley.

After leaving the guerrilla camp, Imran finds himself in the town of Zamana, the primary setting for the novel, where he befriends Nargis and Helen. This gives him the opportunity to closely observe the conditions of the Christians of Badami Bagh, especially in the aftermath of the pogrom against them led by the Muslims of the neighbourhood. Witnessing the massacre cemented his growing hatred towards Pakistan's offer of "protection" to Kashmiris, convincing him that his decision to leave the camp was the right one:

He was experiencing a rising sense of anger. There were times when life seemed little more than a pitiless joke to him. There was an insurgency in Kashmir, a cruel occupation and a guerrilla war, and so frequently he had come across sights like the ones he just saw in Badami Bagh. But this, here, in Pakistan, was meant to be peace. Pakistan claimed that it wished to help Kashmiris in their struggle against Indian injustices, but this was how Pakistan treated Pakistanis. What a joke. What a *behenchod* joke.

And if the Christians were to take up arms, they would be called traitors. The way Kashmiris were called traitors by Indians for refusing to be treated unjustly by India.

(158-159)

Imran's reaction to the destruction of lives in Badami Bagh is visceral; it dredged up the helpless anguish he felt about the impossibility of surviving in occupied Kashmir. He recognises the same emotion in the Christians of the area, meticulously Othered and hunted down in a society which tacitly considered them fundamentally less human than the rest of the population. The similarities between the Kashmiris and the Christians are numerous, including the legitimisation of aggression towards them by the law of the land—as institutionalised by The Armed Forces

(Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990, and various sections on “blasphemy” in the Pakistan Penal Code, respectively. Imran realises that a nation that refused to protect its own citizens, and instead, actively discriminated against them based on a difference in religious identity is incapable of treating his community with the respect they were promised. The kinship Imran feels towards the Christians is forged by their similar positions of having been failed by the Pakistani nation-state, whose inability and inaction towards recognising them as communities jeopardised their very existence. They were also denied the right to protest against their oppression, as both communities were viewed suspiciously by the majorities of both nations. For the Christians of Pakistan, this could be understood to stem from a postcolonial mistrust of the followers of the colonisers’ religion. This has extended to contemporary Pakistan’s relationship with the rest of the world, the Christians of the country were seen as the attackable enemy—their poverty and lower position in the social hierarchy rendering them powerless and effectively stripped of human rights protections, while simultaneously being representatives of the religious Other. Thus, while the anti-West sentiments reached a boiling point in Pakistan—as reflected in the words of this speaker at a protest rally, pontificating “about the duplicitous nature of Christians and Jews, of the Western world, of non-Muslims in general”—it was the Pakistani Christians that bore the brunt of this geopolitical situation far removed from them (202). In short, Imran’s empathy for Helen, Nargis and Lily as victims of a culture of persecution hints at a possible solidarity between Othered groups that holds hope for the struggle towards installing a better culture of rights.

However, in spite of the impression of a strictly divided communal conflict that the massacre in Badami Bagh gives, the situation cannot be simplified in such bipolar terms, as Helen notes:

It felt strange to think this about a place that could be so violent, but most of the time there was a deep desire to avoid confrontation in Pakistan. Ordinary people wished to be left alone, and wished to leave others alone, finding pockets of love and comfort within the strict laws that governed them. They had been owned and abused so often that at the most basic level ownership and abuse meant nothing at all. It did also mean, however, that the loud, belligerent individuals and groups could remain unchallenged. (138)

The “loud, belligerent” groups are represented by Shakeel and his cohorts, a group of young men operating from the local mosque in Badami Bagh to orchestrate violence against the Christians.⁶⁶ Therefore, it is not that case that every Muslim, or even a majority of the Muslims of the country, may harbour hatred towards their Christian compatriots, but, their own relative powerlessness in the large scheme of society and the nation has rendered them in similar conditions of powerlessness. The repercussions of such social and economic exploitation that entraps citizens in such circumstances of subjection, and the contribution of these towards the violation of human rights is discussed in section 3.3.

This complicated truth of a world without clear-cut villains and victims is expressed in *Exit West* through the incorporation of short episodes—which I have referred to earlier as vignettes—that feature an array of human rights subjects from all corners of the world. Two Filipina girls, newly arrived in Shinjuku, Tokyo, find themselves under danger of being attacked by an older man in the wee hours of the morning, reminding the reader of the larger rackets of human trafficking, flesh trade, and the sexual abuse of children that often parallel the journeys of poor migrants (Hamid 28). In another instance, a young Tamil-speaking family of four exits a door in Dubai, bewildered by the opulence on display in that city. While inspecting the

⁶⁶ The anatomy of this massacre has been dissected in Chapter 1.

unfamiliar surroundings, they are under constant surveillance, followed by the eyes behind security cameras that collect data on their behaviour and drones that watch their every move through the city, and by security personnel who use this information to arrest them (86-88). Flitting to Tijuana, Mexico, the novel describes a “House of the Children” which functioned in many ways like an orphanage, even though many of its inhabitants were not technically orphans, but children whose nearest relatives had taken doors to the United States in search of work. The fate of these children while their guardians toiled for a better future hangs undecided, as the latter’s return is unguaranteed and often, unrealised (157). While these tales epitomise the uncertainty that follows the dangerous journeys through the doors, another vignette, featuring an old woman in Palo Alto, California, adds to this web another important result of these migrations: the rise of multicultural communities. The woman, who has lived in the same house since birth, is the perfect witness to any change in the composition of her neighbourhood. Recognising the changing meaning of words like “migrant” and “home”, the woman observes that, “when she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can’t help it,” before concluding: “We are all migrants through time” (209).

The vignettes describe a world of criss-crossed paths and mutual dependency. However, Hamid chooses not to dwell on the resolution of most of the stories that make up the vignettes. They are interspersed throughout the novel, providing peeks into situations such as those mentioned above, cataloguing possibilities of violence. The “incompleteness” of these stories can be read as a reflection of how most cases of rights violation do not result in a satisfactory deliverance of justice. Nevertheless, even the recognition of these episodes as violence is a step towards the restoration of the human rights corpus as one that should be defined by its

multifariousness. The genealogy of violence traced in the pages of *Exit West* is not straightforward, but interconnected and messy, and the human rights subjects it presents are embedded in vastly diverse conditions.

Whereas discussion about the disembedded subject of rights has so far focused on establishing the War on Terror within a longer framework of recorded world history, it is also worth looking at the more “domestic” novels, *Alice Bhatti*, and *This House* to understand how environments of violation are produced within nations and societies that are held together on principles of commonality. The former set of novels portray tensions between Pakistani society in their interactions with the rest of the world, while the latter novels are a rich outlook on social groups within the nation. The stories in these works, depicting characters like Joseph Bhatti, a lower-caste Christian sanitation worker who proudly carries on his indigenous ancestors’ legacy, and the hijra community of Lahore, whose internal divisions and temporary alliances are revealed when faced with outside attack, are ample deterrents to any attempt at homogenising a “Pakistani identity”. Therefore, while the novels studied in this project create, in varying degrees, a subject of rights existing outside the narrative of the War on Terror—thereby decentring 9/11 as well—they also ensure that this subject does not become a careless amalgam of stereotyped Pakistani interests. This approach conveys the disorderliness of experienced history as well as of human rights narratives, showcasing the reality that these are not as perspicuous as commonly presented.

The encounter between the hijra community and an English-speaking “gori” documentary filmmaker named Helen has been discussed in chapter 2 as an example of the Othering gaze of a privileged Westerner upon the destitute transgender women of *This House*’s Lahore. Here, I would like to re-examine this scene through the lens of the human rights discourse, as the

medium of the documentary is one of the most pervasive, and in most cases, persuasive, forms of human rights narratives.⁶⁷ The novel progresses through first-person storytelling from the perspectives of four main characters. Giving the readers a rare insight into the thoughts of the subject of the documentary as he fills the viewfinder, the novel has Bhanggi narrate this incident.

Bhanggi was informed of the documentary team's visit by Rani, another hijra in their guardian Gulabo's clan. Rani tells him,

Gulabo says there's a gori coming to film us. She works with the BBC. There will be a film about us, she says, and you have to talk to her. She doesn't trust the gori, she says. They come, take pictures, record our voices and our complaints and then we never see them again. Nobody cares, but do it anyway. (Mansab 76)

The hijra community, led by Gulabo, is clearly familiar with the process of documentary filmmaking with the camera framing them as victims. They have resigned themselves to the fact that they do not benefit from these efforts, and that once their tales of exploitation are captured, they have no control over how their stories are transmitted. They are aware of the futility of the exercise, but their diminished cultural capital does not allow them to refuse a member of one of the world's foremost news and broadcast organisations, flanked by local supporters. The "gori" interviewer, Helen, brings with her an interpreter to mediate the discussion and work through the language barrier presented by her ignorance of Urdu and Bhanggi's of English. The interpreter also doubles up as an enforcer, beginning the interview with strict commands for Bhanggi: "Memsahib is here to ask you a few questions. Answer properly. Don't talk too much and don't waste her time" (77). While the use of the colonial address of reverence for the white woman establishes the unmistakable power dynamics of the *mise-en-scène*, the interpreter also puts forth

⁶⁷ See Meg McLagan on the politics of conveying human rights stories through a camera.

a code for Bhanggi to follow while formulating his answers: he is to give “proper” ones and talk for precisely as long as they require, as the interviewer’s “time” supersedes Bhanggi’s in importance. Bhanggi is impatient to wrap up this chore that Gulabo redirected to him, as Nida is waiting to talk to him: “These people are robbing me of something precious. Nida might have spoken with me if they hadn’t interrupted” (77). However, he lets neither his face nor words betray this annoyance and the documentary maker is secure enough in her dominance that the value of Bhanggi’s time and acquiescence is taken for granted.

At the time of the interview, which takes place in Daata Sahib’s dargah, Bhanggi is no longer a full-time sex worker but a qalandar who frequents the dargah and has acquired a following among its devotees. It is for this reason that Gulabo chose Bhanggi to be the representative of the group, a motive he understands and is resigned to accept: “Gulabo wants me to talk to [Helen] so I must, yes? She wants to sell the story of the holy hijra” (77). As much as Bhanggi is reluctant to participate in this futile exercise which robs him of his limited opportunities to spend time with Nida, he goes along with it because “the story of the holy hijra” shows their community in a better light to the eyes of an outsider, especially one who has not earned their trust. He is well-versed in presenting this version of the story, as we can surmise from the structured introduction with which he answers the interviewer’s first question: “I live [at the dargah] because it gives me peace.’ I don’t tell [Helen] it’s because I have nowhere else to go. She wants a story. The truth is never interesting enough” (77). Bhanggi’s story has to be one that satisfies both Gulabo and Helen, a formidable objective because what each of them require is so different from the other, both indistinguishable from the uninteresting “truth” of Bhanggi’s life. The raw facts of poverty and discrimination⁶⁸ that snatch away his control over even the

⁶⁸ A detailed analysis of Bhanggi’s living conditions, including his dependence on the administrators of the dargah for housing, is included in section 3.3.

most basic decisions—such as where he lives—are ignored in the chase for a sellable story. As the interview progresses, it becomes clear that neither woman is advocating for Bhanggi's rights, each only concerned with her own agenda. While Gulabo's motives of protecting the image of the hijra community can be attributed to her powerlessness within the larger structure of society, Helen's aggravation towards Bhanggi is an attempt at taking advantage of his experience of human rights violations to be refashioned into a sensational tale, told in a foreign tongue to an audience far removed from him.

When Bhanggi tries to tell Helen about his life as a qalandar, she diverts the conversation to discuss the dargah's semaa, a specific form of Sufi worship. Bhanggi, in answer to her query, describes it as a "spiritual experience". However, she interrupts him, and,

speaks into one of the cameras, 'Orthodox Islamic clerics consider music and dance haram, forbidden, and yet these doubtful religious assemblies are quite common. What these people call a spiritual experience is no more than a congregation of addicts, like this one here, who calls himself Bhanggi, which, my guide tells me, translates to "an addict of marijuana" (78)

Even though she claims to "want the story of the hijra", she dismisses his experiences to interrupt and relay to the viewer—from her superior position as a native-speaker of English and as the creator and editor of the form of the narrative—her version of the events (79). Her exegesis is replete with prejudiced statements that spins a lurid yarn of deviance, abetted by an ungovernable religious sect that condones sexual licentiousness and drug abuse, painting a two-dimensional portrait of Bhanggi as a drug addict partaking in illicit pleasures. This depiction is divorced from Bhanggi's words and circumstances of life, and his presence on camera becomes a mere crutch that validates a story of her creation, translated into another language so that he is

unable to speak back to her or her audience. Simultaneously, the alternate connotations of his name as related to a Dalit caste in South Asia⁶⁹ and its consequent use as a casteist slur are also erased by Helen's commentary.

Mansab, through this episode, exposes several problems plaguing contemporary human rights discourse. As Bhanggi wonders, "What can I say? How will [Helen] understand something she has never experienced?" (77). How can a reporter or a filmmaker claim to be truth-sayers while failing to situate themselves within the context of the story they are reporting? Helen is condescending in her tone towards Bhanggi, firmly identifying herself as the unbiased voice that carries the "story of the hijra," while asking him intrusive questions that demand answers with details about his personal life, gender and sexuality (79). The empathy that is lacking in her approach is also indicated by her inclination to judge local customs and practices—like the *semaa*—by the cultural norms and standards of her implied Western audience. Nida, who had been observing the "interview" with growing horror at Helen's insensitivity, interjects, "[t]here are so many things we don't understand because we haven't experienced them. We cannot believe that we've been taught to suspect. Faith has no place in today's world. It's boxed together with words like "primitive", "tribal" and "magic"" (78). Nida, "speak[ing] in the gori's language", attempts to situate the plight of the hijras, and by extension, of the devotees of the *dargah*, within a socio-cultural context that questions Western secular values as the antithesis of the faith practised in the *dargah*. This reveals the humanitarian storyteller's assumed ideological superiority and the human rights narrative's intrinsic prejudices when retelling and translating stories from the Global South.

⁶⁹ Rama Sharma attests: "Bhangis (the sweepers) are untouchables and are the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Bhangis have always been marginal to the society socially, economically as well as culturally. The scavenging occupation, socially the lowest of all hereditary occupations in India is associated with Bhangi caste" (28)

Nida's intervention, however, jeopardises Helen's "story" constructed out of poorly researched historical tidbits manipulated into a sordid tale of crime and violence set against a backdrop of religious intolerance. When Nida points out the inaccuracies in her reporting, Helen "gives a faint smile and says, "My version is more interesting, don't you think?" (80). Evidently, any misinterpretation of Bhanggi's story does not result from a mere unfamiliarity with the hijras' lives; the documentarist fully intends to manufacture an "interesting" tale. In the process of embellishing the hijra community's place in South Asian history, Helen describes colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent as "a rich history" and "grand", much to Nida's consternation. Deliberate elision of the excesses and cruelties of the colonial period is signalled by excuses such as, "I mean, of course, there were problems then too, but when are there not?... What if we leave that out for a moment and just appreciate the beauty of that time?" (80). Therefore, while Helen is passionate in her abhorrence of the "transgressions" of the Sufi semaa, she is more than willing to gloss over centuries of imperial transgressions across the globe. As Bhanggi had predicted at the beginning of the interview, "the truth" is uninteresting for Helen, who can simply "leave out" inconvenient aspects of the hijras' past and present, manufacturing for them a subjectivity that ignores much of their socio-political history.

Similar to the Bhanggi's resistance to attempts to erase his subjectivity, Joseph Bhatti, father of the titular Alice in Hanif's novel, is assertive of "the complicated truth" of his identity: "We were here before the Christians came, before the Muslas came. Even before the Hindus came. I am not just the son of this soil. I am the soil. Yes, I am Joseph Bhatti Choohra" (Hanif 49). Though officially classified as a Christian, Joseph's identity is first and foremost intimately tied to the land. He sees himself as inseparable from his indigenous origins, defying categories created by demographic tools such as censuses which slot him according to his religion, and

social stratification such as the caste system. Joseph's definition of a Choohra, as "the soil", shows that he sees himself as beyond contemporary delineations of the community in terms of class, caste and religious affiliations. This avowal of his indigenous heritage also captures one of the underlying factors in discrimination against Choohras, their connection to the land, especially displayed in their rightful claims to property.⁷⁰ While systemic casteism spanning centuries have robbed the Choohra community of their land, dignity, aspirations and opportunity, Joseph reclaims the word—which is also used as a slur—and the identity with pride: "he had always maintained the swagger of a Choohra, an untouchable with attitude, not the demeanour of a washed, devout Sunday Catholic" (50). The contrast he presents from the docile practising Catholic is Joseph's way of announcing his Choohra pride and a refusal to bow down to the evangelical church's seemingly well-intentioned attempts to "civilise" him. He goes on to pinpoint—amidst a rant against Dr. Pereira, a wealthier man of a socio-economic category higher than the Bhattis and the rest of their neighbours in French Colony—his specific social location within the Christian community of Karachi, which is often regarded as a homogeneous unit in itself:

Look at him lecturing us; we are the children of this land, we have lived here for thousands of years and they are just Goan kachra that drifted here on the waves of the Arabian Sea. Now they'll teach us how to be Yassoo's children when they are embarrassed by the fact that we are supposed to be brothers in faith. They'll teach us good manners. (50)

⁷⁰ Muhammad Abraham Zaka and Fasi Zaka explain that, "[u]ltimately, behind much of the violence where [minority religious] communities are involved, the actual reasons for violence are not doctrinal; those are just used as a cover...blasphemy cases against Christians tend to be rooted in the issue of occupation of land" (65).

Once again, he harkens back to his heritage as a native of the land, as opposed to Dr. Pereira and his Goan brethren who migrated to Karachi in the relatively recent past. Joseph's complaint against them is centred on their condescending attitude towards the Choohras, who are always seen as projects of compassion that need to be reformed into model Christians/citizens and not as equals.

This patronising attitude also crosses over to be evidently casteist, a fact that hardly escapes Joseph whenever he works at Dr. Pereira's house: "they fed me in their Choohra dishes and then washed their hands as if I was spreading leprosy. They hovered around me at a distance thinking that if I touched something it would get contaminated" (51). This designation of the Choohra as an "untouchable," the upper-caste rejection of the corporeal equality of a Choohra body with every other human body, can be explained by what Fanon calls the replacement of the "corporeal schema" by a "racial-epidermal" one (Fanon 84). Every single Choohra feels the history of their ancestors, and of the encounters between their ancestors and the ancestors of communities like the Muslims or the Goan Christians. The Choohras, whose conversion to Christianity was a direct bid to escape the clutches of the caste system which relegated them to the lowest strata of the society, had not been readily accepted by the Protestant evangelical missions in the subcontinent either.⁷¹ The Goan Christians, on the other hand, "replaced the European clergy as the Church hierarchy in Pakistan" (Walbridge 64). The just treatment which the Choohras sought in Christianity—as "Yassoo's children" and "brothers in faith"—proved unattainable, and they were instead offered the condescension of their caste superiors. The hypocritical performances of benevolence and piety which underscores the latter's public engagement with the Choohra community shows in great clarity that the experiences of the

⁷¹See Forrester on the evangelical missions' resistance to "outcaste" converts and their inability to stop these mass conversions (67).

members of the “minority” Christian community in Pakistan are not uniform; and reducing them largely to a Muslim/non-Muslim conflict—as most literature on religious minorities in Pakistan is wont to do⁷²—erases the experiences of people like the Bhattis.

The lack of nuanced understanding about the intersection of gender, caste and religious identities is further evident when analysing Alice’s arrest—and subsequent imprisonment—in a case of wrongful death of a patient when she was a nursing student. On the day of her trial, Joseph observes that, “[s]ince the case doesn’t involve any claims of religious discrimination, any acts of blasphemy or disputed church lands, nobody from Lord’s Lawyers or any of the human rights organisations has showed up” (47). With no money and little resources, Joseph is unable to provide his daughter with adequate legal help, leading to Alice being the sole convict of the case while the lead surgeon under whose supervision she had worked was able to pay “half his surgery fees to a famous lawyer and [get] a pre-arrest bail” (47). Thus, Alice’s conviction—despite being a relatively inexperienced and minor actor in this episode—is largely a result of the Bhattis’ lack of understanding of legal proceedings as well as the financial constraints which prevented her from obtaining better counsel. These material deficiencies are a direct consequence of her and her family’s historical oppression. Alice’s sentencing also points out the myopic vision that afflicts human rights activism, which only involves itself in certain kinds of fights, such as a sensational case involving the infamous blasphemy laws or cases of religious discrimination—both of which can be spun into a tale of communal disharmony. In this, “the human rights organisations” that Joseph disparages share something with the documentarist Helen in *This House*: a disregard for narratives that do not fit in neatly with their own

⁷² Fuchs and Fuchs have pointed out the problems with such a monolithic approach, a point which I take into consideration in Chapter 2.

construction of truth. The novel thus reaffirms the complexity and intersectionality of Alice's situation.

3.2. Normalised Violence: The Unfamiliar Experience of Rights

Home Fire is a study of the intertwining fortunes of two London families, the Pashas, featuring third-generation British-Pakistani siblings Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz, and the Lones, the family of Karamat, a second-generation British-Pakistani, his wife Terry who is an Irish-American heiress, and their grown-up children, Eamonn and Emily. While the Pashas have lived for three generations on Preston Road, near Wembley, in a lower-class, immigrant neighbourhood, the Lone family home at Holland Park boasts of gardens and private terraces. However, it can be argued that the biggest gap separating the lives of the Lones and the Pashas is neither the ostensible class difference nor the racial privilege enjoyed by the half-white, secularist Lones in comparison to the brown, Muslim Pashas, but the varying understandings each family has on the rights to which they are entitled.

Isma, the oldest Pasha sibling, advises her impetuous and idealist sister Aneeka at one juncture, to “[accept] the law, even when it’s unjust” (Shamsie 196). This sums up Isma’s quiet resignation with her experience of the British legal set-up as prejudiced and erratic, especially when applied to members of her family. It can safely be assumed that as an academic who worked in the interdiscipline of international law and sociology, Isma was not unaware of the rights that she is entitled to. In spite of her conceptual knowledge of rights, she still falls under the blind spots of the law. Her encounters with the legal system have shown her that rights by the book are not guaranteed to translate into practice, especially for her family. Thus, Isma’s unfamiliarity is not with the notion of human rights, but with its applicability in her case.

Isma's father Adil, missing from their lives for nearly two decades after he left to fight on behalf of the jihadi forces in Afghanistan, had elicited routine visits from British intelligence agencies to their family home throughout Isma's childhood. He was rumoured to have died enroute from Bagram, Afghanistan to the Guantanamo Bay Prison, after having been taken prisoner by American forces during the War on Terror. However, the only indication that he was embroiled in trouble, perhaps even to his mortal peril, was the investigation British intelligence agents seemed to be conducting on him. Isma recounts the confusion of this period to Eamonn years after the event:

MI5 and Special Branch officers came around, asking about him, though they wouldn't say why. We knew something was wrong, and my grandmother said maybe we should try to contact someone—the Red Cross, the government, a lawyer—to find out where he was...[but] my mother said if we tried looking for him we'd be harassed by Special Branch, and by people in the neighbourhood, who would start to suspect our sympathies.

(49)

Even though the family cooperated fully with the British agencies who repeatedly sought more information on Adil and even seized some of their personal belongings, they were kept in the dark about his whereabouts and even if he was dead or alive. His existence, and his possible death, became mysteries that left his kin in the wretched position of not knowing whether or not to grieve him. Their grief was stalled due to lack of transparency from the government. The only information they were able to garner about him came through an “unofficial” source:

[in] 2004, a Pakistani man released from Guantánamo contacted my father's family in Pakistan to say he had been imprisoned at Bagram with my father from early 2002. In June that year both he and my father were among the men put on a plane for transport to

Guantánamo. My father died during takeoff, some sort of seizure. He said other things also, about what happened to my father in Bagram... (49)

The Pashas had, thus, been kept in the dark about Adil's fate for two years, leaving them to their unconfirmed fears. Their government did not consider it important to inform them of their family member's death despite their claim to this information as Adil's next of kin and as British citizens. The actions of the government betray their devaluation of Adil's rights, which ought to have been respected in spite of his status as a prisoner of war, as well as the right of his family to know his fate, which is guaranteed by international humanitarian law. In acting thus, the British government relegated Adil's death as one that does not merit grief, passing a moral judgement on whose lives are grievable and who should be given a chance to grieve. The Pashas, in spite of their opposition to Adil's choices in life and his political inclinations were forced to live through the trauma of having their grief unacknowledged and considered unimportant. Not only was their suffering regarded as inconsequential, they also faced the threat of attracting suspicion from both the authorities and society if they were to display their grief at losing the son, husband and father that Adil was to them.

Similar to Isma's resigned acceptance of the law as a flawed convention that does not guarantee justice, Parvaiz also has his reservations. In the midst of an argument, he demands of Aneeka, the lawyer-in-training, "What does the law count for? How did the law help our father?" (142). His faith in accepted systems of law and justice has been broken by the denial of his family's rights and the knowledge that his father was imprisoned in Bagram, the infamous site of prison abuse that has since been found to be in repeated violation of the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war.⁷³

⁷³ As put forth in the third Geneva Conventions of 1949.

The Pasha family has first-hand experience of the shortcomings of conventional understandings of “normal” rights; they were painfully aware that rights on paper can be easily discarded by powerful actors of the state who are trusted to ensure them. Unlike Isma and Parvaiz, who grew up in conditions that led them to regard the state with distrust, Eamonn, born into a family with the privileges of wealth and political power, is used to the idea of human rights and has faith in the role of the state as its protector and enforcer. When Isma narrates the story of her father’s life up to his rumoured death in captivity, “Eamonn made a face of distaste, clearly offended in a way that told her he saw the state as part of himself, something that had never been possible for anyone in her family” (49). Having lived with the uncertainty of Adil’s fate for nearly two decades, Isma and her family are less inclined to believe in the sanctity and wide acceptance of human rights as the norm even as Eamonn expresses his deep-seated belief in it. Eamonn’s disbelief at cruelty on part of the state is expressed at numerous points in this conversation:

“No one told you he was dead for two years?”

“Who was going to tell us? The Americans? British intelligence? We weren’t told anything. We still haven’t been told anything. They haven’t released records of Bagram from that time period. We don’t even know if anyone bothered to dig a grave.”

“I’m sure they dug a grave,” he said.

“Why? Because they’re so *civilised*?” (50, italics added)

The fact that Isma’s and Eamonn’s respective worlds exist in such close proximity to each other—they were both born and brought up in the same First World capital city and share a part of each other’s racial heritage through their respective Pakistani roots—only makes the gulf in their relationships with the state appear wider. His notion of the normalisation of rights,

borrowed from his experiences as a white-passing, rich son of an MP, is incongruous with that held by the Pasha siblings. Eamonn is “sure [Adil’s captors] dug a grave” for his dead body⁷⁴, even though Isma is largely sceptical that her father might have been the recipient of humane treatment. This is evident in her irritable retort that strikes at the heart of the human rights culture, the concept of “civilisation”.⁷⁵ By using this oft-repeated keyword of the discourse legitimising incursions like that performed under the War on Terror, *Home Fire* critiques one of the most prominent reasons for the failure of the human rights culture to be inclusive: its weaponization by the West as a tool of violence, not as a tool against human violation. Upendra Baxi uses Walter Benjamin’s frequently quoted words: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another” to illuminate the potential use of the rhetoric of human rights as a morally higher way of life to excuse the excesses of particular neo-imperialist tactics (Benjamin 256, as quoted in Baxi xiv). This guise of a liberal humanistic altruism towards less fortunate peoples presents a parallel in the stated aims of European colonialism to “civilise”.⁷⁶ After the fall of the Taliban, helped by the shaky alliance between local warlords and the US Army, Rohan (*The Blind Man’s Garden*) reflects, “[t]he opposite of war is not peace but civilisation, and civilisation is purchased with violence and cold-blooded murder. With war” (Aslam 127). The people of Afghanistan had

⁷⁴ Article 120 of the third Geneva Conventions explicitly dictate that the burial of the bodies of prisoners of war should be ensured (“Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War: Prescriptions regarding the dead, including wills and death certificates”).

⁷⁵ Barbara Harlow argues that the European colonial project of the 19th century has been replaced since the second half of the 20th century by the human rights agendas of the “UN peacekeeping missions” and “US operations” (45).

⁷⁶ The legacy of such condescension was also noted in the discussion on *Alice Bhatti* in the previous section, wherein the poor Choohras are subject to the reformatory treatment of upper-class/caste Christians like Dr. Pereira.

found themselves in the unfortunate situation of having to choose between two regimes, each professing its own brands of “civilisation,” and both of which could be attained only through the sacrificial slaughter of civilians.⁷⁷ Civilisation is the outcome of a war effort, and as benign as it sounds, it can be as barbaric as the past it claims to replace. Consequently, the tenets of civilisation have no place in the battle to establish it, being birthed only after the war has ended. Thus, Isma is justified in assuming that the “civilised” forces whose detainee her father was exercised very little of these beliefs towards him.

Isma’s concern about how her father might have been treated is not unfounded, if the experience of Mikal (*The Blind Man’s Garden*) in an American detention camp in Afghanistan is any indication. Mikal, a Pakistani recruited to fight against the US forces during the War on Terror, is told by his captors in an interrogation session that, “[t]he reason the United States isn’t torturing you... as some countries in the world do, is not that torture doesn’t work. Torture most definitely does work. But we don’t do it because we believe it is wrong and *uncivilised*” (Aslam 186, italics added). However, despite the US Army’s apparently strict adherence to a civilised code of conduct towards prisoners of war, it does not stop them from acts of cruelty such as suspending Mikal from the ceiling or manipulating his sensory perception in darkened rooms. Most often, they employ methods of psychological torture: “[The officers] shout at him without the interpreter translating any of the words, just screaming into Mikal’s face for more than ten minutes” (190, 184). Thus, the hypocrisy behind the officer’s use of the word “uncivilised” while abusing the prisoner using non-physical forms of torture, is precisely what Isma had mocked in her conversation with Eamonn. The definition of “civilised” is at the same time stretched and compressed, bent out of shape in every way so as to allow the Western forces to achieve their

⁷⁷ Marcetic, “For Many Afghans, the US Occupation Was Just as Bad as the Taliban”

objectives while also holding on to the moral high ground afforded by the banners of the War on Terror.

Harking back to the point I made on Isma's and Parvaiz's ambivalent belief in the judicial system, one can see this mirrored in the views of the characters of *Alice Bhatti* as well. Hanif's typical brand of black humour is perfectly suited to lampoon the absurd "law enforcement" practised by Inspector Malangi, a disinterested and corrupt policeman who operates as per a personal interpretation of the law that tends to the side of amorality more often than not. Malangi heads the "Gentlemen's Squad", "a group of like-minded police officers, not really an entity commissioned by any law-enforcing authority," and comprising the likes of "reformed rapists... torturers... [and] sharpshooters..." (13-14). Joining this promising bunch as a part-time member is Alice's eventual husband, Teddy Butt, who helps with "the criminals [the Squad] catches or kills, or more often catches and then kills" (13). The Squad's manner of speaking about human beings as insignificant sources of annoyance is better suited to a discussion on the capture and killing of insects.

Malangi's probe into an attack at a public space in Garden East, Karachi, reveals much about his investigative practices. After the attack, the police obtained custody of a young man, Abu Zar, allegedly the chief conspirator in the bombing. Even after this purported perpetrator of the crime is behind bars, Malangi finds that he lacks the evidence to tie up the multitudes of loose ends in the case:

I have got a criminal but no crime that I can prove right now. Or at least that's what that whatsisname medico-legal Malick thinks... he is telling me I need some evidence, that suspicions of sabotage and intents of mass murder can't be proved in a medical lab. I have got Abu Zar in handcuffs but I can't keep him... For three months we have been

looking for the man responsible for the Garden East attack and I *know* it's him. (12, italics added)

The strongest reason to suspect Abu Zar, or the imprisoned man they assume is Abu Zar, is that Malangi *knows* his guilt to be true. To support this belief, he attempts to influence a doctor through coercion and bribery to fabricate evidence that will help him frame his detainee. Thus, under Malangi's guidance, criminal investigation is more the creation of convenient fictional narratives than arriving at conclusions based on the evidence available. This process may involve, in varying combinations, methods like inhumane physical torture of suspects, falsification of medical reports, bribery, and staged encounters between the police and suspects.

In the face of such a deficient system of law enforcement, it is not surprising that victims of crimes against women are hesitant in reporting it and harbour little hope of attaining justice. Alice survives attempted sexual assault by attacking the perpetrator in self-defence, but she understands that approaching the police to file a complaint could potentially be more harmful than the initial instance of assault was. This is a decision made by many a woman in Alice's situation, and her superior Sister Hina Alvi concurs with the choice, saying, "[i]n our VIP room [where the assault took place] you had to deal with one man. In the police station there will be a room full of them in your face" (77). Sister Alvi implies that the overly masculine space of the police station is a threat better avoided, even though it means that Alice's attacker remains free and the possibility of retribution towards Alice remains high. She understands that despite Sister Alvi's sympathies towards her plight, she would refuse to advocate for the young nurse under her supervision who was attacked while on duty because she cannot, "compromise her official status...Sister Hina Alvi feels powerless but doesn't want to admit to being powerless" (75). Sister Alvi attempts to shield Alice from any repercussions from the well-connected family

whose scion she had maimed by placing her on administrative leave, a plan concocted to make it appear that Alice was being punished for her reaction to the sexual assault. Sister Alvi clearly understands the limits to which she can go to protect her staff while avoiding any interaction with the official protectors of all their rights, the police. Even though Alice is vexed at Sister Alvi's roundabout way of defending her, the pair accept the unfortunate fact of the inefficiency of the justice and law enforcement systems, just as they agree without debate that Alice cannot approach the police to lodge a sexual assault complaint. To her credit, Sister Alvi does not doubt Alice's claim of assault. Having accepted her powerlessness in the situation, she lends Alice a handgun to protect herself, literally handing her the weapons that are ideally held by those seeking to protect her and not her attacker (77). In the absence of that luxury, Alice and Sister Alvi agree that she has to protect herself.

This incident only proved something Alice had known all her life, that there was no protection for women of their station against any attack:

During her house job she worked in Accidents and Emergencies for six months and there was not a single day – not a single day – when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive... [M]ost of life's arguments, it seemed, got settled by doing various things to a woman's body. (96)

Alice had wondered at this horrific ubiquity of violence against women, the frequency of the attacks and the myriad ways in which their bodies were maimed. While the wide prevalence of these crimes was frightening, she was even more startled when she realised that “nobody was surprised; there were no police detectives sitting around matching clues, no parliamentary subcommittees discussing ways of saving this endangered species” (97). With this affirmation that women were expected to combat these attacks on their own and would receive minimal

support from the police or legislative representatives in either using the law or changing the law for the protection of their rights, Alice decides to take matters into her own hands. The threats against her life made by the family of her assaulter hanging over her head, she understands that the most effective protection against a cabal willing to “settle” scores by “doing various things to a woman’s body” would be to put herself into the protective care of another man, a husband.

Alice’s speedy acceptance of Teddy Butt’s romantic overtures is the direct result of the survival instinct that would keep her from being another dead or injured female body in the Accidents and Emergencies section of the hospital (97). However, the novel indicates that no matter how cleverly one manoeuvres to avoid being “one of those women,” there is no escape for such violence that has become a way of life in Karachi, making it tolerated, if not permissive. Alice’s own plans fail to secure her life because the man she entrusted herself to in marriage becomes her murderer. In a fit of possessiveness after a marital spat, Teddy kills Alice by pouring sulphuric acid on her face: “I just want to make sure that if I can’t have her, then nobody should be able to have her” (210). Interestingly, it is Inspector Malangi himself who talks Teddy into disciplining her for defying him—with the punishment of death—and hands him the means to kill her. Thus, Alice’s chances of survival were doomed from the start, since the guardians of the law were the ones charting her demise and upholding the persisting culture of violence, instead of a culture of rights.

This normalisation of violence is also portrayed in *This House*, where the bodies of women, hijras and non-binary individuals like Bhanggi are considered fair game for constant dehumanisation and invisibilisation. Bhanggi’s fluid sexuality, intersex body and the resultant social discrimination by society, and lack of inclusion among his hijra family make him feel like a “pitiful half-creature”, incapable of feeling or receiving love (Mansab 47). Bhanggi is

constantly fed the line that he is less than human, be it from the Auqaaf clerk who assaults him frequently and calls him “an animal... [and a] stain on humanity,” or the unknown Mullah whose hatred scarcely knew any bounds: “You rascal, you profane creature, with your profane habits and profane body. You are filth. This is a sacred place, you dog. You are not even a dog, because a dog has a gender too” (61, 111). His body is constantly referred to as less than human, animalised, and in the Mullah’s case, thought of as worse than even an animal’s, a profanity that should not be allowed to exist.

Collective disgust and hatred for the hijras were so pronounced that it is considered permissible for someone to “mark” Bhanggi as their personal property, to ensure that he cannot break away from this position of servitude. When Nida asks Bhanggi about the hoops he wears as earrings, she does not expect this answer: “They were a present from the clerk to mark me as his, yes?” (97). The Auqaaf clerk, one of the administrators of the dargah where Bhanggi spends his days as a qalandar, takes advantage of Bhanggi’s poverty and social ostracism to essentially enslave him. Bhanggi accepts his fate with resignation, understanding that the shelter of the dargah, as allowed to him by the clerk, saves him from complete destitution. Bhanggi chooses the lesser evil—the clerk’s bondage—even though it comes with the catch of intermittent sexual and physical assault by the clerk himself.

Nida’s and Bhanggi’s unlikely friendship, and eventual love, grows from the knowledge of what it means to be thus trapped without any means of escape. Nida draws much of her identity from her immediate family. She is a wife to Saqib, a politician who is in the business of law-making to amass the fortune, influence, and “contacts” that come with it (3). She is a sister to her two brothers who are primarily engaged in upholding the honour of their family, defined by its generational wealth, old-fashioned ways and political clout. She is an upper-class *begum* to

the rest of the world, untouched by layman sorrows and protected by her wealth and position (94). She is also a frequent visitor at the shrine of Daata Sahib, because, in her words, “[w]hen I escaped to the shrine, to the old city, to all those places that were not mine because they were no one’s, I was free” (60). Suffocating under the expectations of the aforementioned relationships, Nida manages to snatch some respite from spaces that define her by who she is made to be to other people—the supportive wife in a powerful politician’s drawing room, an unsuccessful socialite at a dinner party, the embarrassing daughter of a grand family home—by coming up for air in spaces that are designed to accept everyone. However, even this “temporary freedom” offered by the crowded public space of the dargah and the anonymity of her burka does not endure under the intrusiveness of her husband, as Nida elaborates: “I wanted to jump out of that tiny space that I had found to carry me to temporary freedom, and which was now my prison again as Saqib’s voice pinned me down. I thought an apology might set me free because the truth never did” (4). Saqib’s persistent interrogation, intended to monitor her every move, reaches her through a phone call, conjuring metaphorical prison walls that obstruct her brief escape. It is only by letting him take control of her again, by apologising for her transgression to soothe his ego, that she can evade other forms of punishment. Saqib believed that “[l]ove was the duty of a wife, the right of a husband. He didn’t have to do a thing to claim all that” (24). Saqib’s possessive definition of “love” notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the right to be loved is only for the benefit of the husband, who gets to define what such love entails and gets to enjoy this right. Nida’s attempts at raising concerns about the inequity in their marital relationship are summarily dismissed by him as “feminist crap,” and “Western ideas” (4, 150). The “normal” rights, the ones that do not require a campaign to be claimed, are thus, only those held by husbands like him.

Nida is eloquent on the source of her unhappiness: “[Marriages are] just a crutch for control. Behind closed doors and within the sanctity of marriage, violence is worse because it is unnamed, hidden, mute. Doesn’t mean it isn’t there” (169). This knowledge of what it means to be captive behind invisible, socially-sanctioned bars that are designed to inflict violence on you for the rest of your life helps her empathise with Bhanggi, who also feels trapped due to the cis-heteronormative world that controls his body. Throughout the novel, Nida’s choice of words for her familial relationships and spaces takes the form of the recurring metaphor of a prison: she “escapes” to the dargah in order to enjoy the “temporary freedom” it offers, considers her marriage an “imprisonment” akin to a life-sentence, and her husband, an “incarcerator” torturing her endlessly (60, 24).

The novel frequently reminds the reader that the ubiquity of violence causes much of it to be unremarked on. Nida notices a child beggar on the streets pleading for food and money, whose “voice droned on like a throbbing engine far away—a street chant that had lost all meaning, become a part of the noise pollution” (25). She observes him from the security of her air-conditioned car, noting his presence as part of the landscape of a traffic intersection on a busy Lahori street. His entreaties, touching upon starvation and illness, evoking an ailing mother and sister, fails to shock the listeners who are desensitised to such tragic figures as this young child who claims to have not eaten for three days (25). The claim made by the child for better chances of survival becomes part of their mundane, an annoying aspect of life that is nevertheless easy to tune out like the rumble of traffic for a seasoned traveller.

However, this inaction is not reserved for less spectacular suffering such as that of the child beggar. Even events that may hold shock value to those witnessing it fail to generate sympathetic reaction, such as when Bhanggi is beaten up by the Auqaaf clerk:

People had stopped to watch. They stood in silence. More and more gathered, forming a hesitant circle around the spectacle. No one interfered.

The man continued beating Bhanggi. The silence of the crowd seemed to encourage him.

He became louder, more abusive. (61)

Bhanggi's assault takes place in a crowded public place with witnesses aplenty. The crowd is not repulsed by the violence, they gather to watch in morbid fascination. There is no attempt to stop the assailant, and this silent societal permission fuels the clerk's blows with the promise of impunity. This reaction, or lack thereof, is attributed to Bhanggi's status as an Other—when Nida pleads with a man in the crowd to intercede on Bhanggi's behalf, he retorts, “[w]hy should I interfere for a hijra?” (62). Crimes against the hijras are seen but not felt. This is reinforced by the experience of Chameli, one of the hijras under Gulabo's protection, who was “butchered” by a client, her body stabbed and mutilated. Her murder lives on only as a story the hijras tell to warn each other of the perils of their condition, for, “[t]ragedies like these were witnessed, catalogued and shelved daily. Life went on” (53).

The examples examined thus far in this section have shown how violence has been integrated into what one considers “normal life”. I have demonstrated how this objective has been reached through the dilution of the effectiveness of the judicial process—often at the behest of the nation-state itself—by ensuring that the aggrieved are unable to utilise its services. The resultant disillusionment with the mechanism of delivering justice serves to perpetuate this state of inaction, convincing the victims that they have no hope to seek help, and the general population that such forms of violence are permissible. We have also seen how the masses are desensitised from even recognising such acts as violations of rights, their lack of outrage

emboldening perpetrators to strengthen their assault. Next, I look at a different approach at narrating such circumstances, in Hamid's *Exit West*.

While Saeed and Nadia's city was left untouched by strife at first, it fell to the rule of the militant group without much delay. The conditions of war are thrust on the city-dwellers, becoming "an intimate experience," with its "front lines defined at the level of the street one took to work, the school one's sister attended, the house of one's aunt's best friend, the shop where one bought cigarettes" (65). War intermingled with and eventually commandeered the mundanity of this city, and its inhabitants found they had not the luxury to refer to it as a distant event, separate from their everyday life. This closeness, when combat zones are formed within one's neighbourhood, is in opposition to the proxy wars that are fought by Western powers, especially the US in recent times, in lands far away from their own national borders. It brings to greater relief the reality of conflict as it engulfs places that lack the power to protect itself as cities across the US did in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The siege on Saeed and Nadia's city rewrites the "rhythms of normal life" that both the refugees and the natives were attempting to retain (23).

However, the novel chooses not to dwell only on the disturbances caused by war by foregrounding those aspects of life in the city that highlight the commonplace human existence:

It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class—in this case an evening class on corporate identity and product branding—but that is the way of things, with cities as with life, for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does. (1-2)

The narrator admits that the predictability of scheduled events, like evening classes, existing alongside the uncertainty of the impending insurrection is "odd". This calls attention to the

tendency of characterising war as all-consuming. This later kind of storytelling that, by centring the violence of the battle, loses sight of the human bodies that are trying to survive it, is resolutely avoided in *Exit West*. Hamid's attempt at stressing on the commonplaceness that stubbornly persists in the face of war is also a sign of the survival instinct that is programmed into our most primate selves. As mentioned in the previous section, Hamid's minimal description of the evidently "violent" episodes of war and migration serves to set *Exit West* apart in its commitment to turn the narrative spotlight on the humans of the warzone, not just the actions within it. A prime example of the "transient beginnings and middles" spoken about in the excerpt above is that the novel is essentially the story of the evolution of love between Saeed and Nadia. Beginning with the fiery start of their romantic relationship during the stages preceding the city's takeover by the militants—filled with uninspiring day jobs, aforementioned evening classes, coffee dates and the occasional use of recreational drugs—up to its gradual extinguishing after a long and arduous passage across the world, *Exit West* insists that this mundane story of love, with unremarkable emotions of friendship, affection, lust, and eventual indifference that flood every such story, should not be considered out-of-place in any situation, including the ones of extreme violence as in Saeed and Nadia's case.

The novel also downplays the extraordinariness of such places and situations by frequently pointing out the normalised violence of societies usually considered orderly and law-abiding. When Saeed and Nadia escape their country through a door, they arrive in Mykonos, described thus: "The island was pretty safe, they were told, except when it was not, which made it like most places" (101). Mykonos lets them find accommodation in a refugee camp, where they barter their meagre belongings to acquire the necessities required to set up a tent on the beach, with most of these transactions taking place within the camp (102). Even then, Mykonos

is still safe and unsafe in turns, comparable to any other place in the world, including their city which they chose to flee. At their next stop, in London, they and hundreds of other migrants end up being confined to a heavily militarised warscape: “around this zone were soldiers and armoured vehicles, and above it were drones and helicopters, and inside it were Nadia and Saeed, who had run from war already, and did not know where next to run, and so were waiting, waiting, like so many others” (135). The irony of having escaped one battle zone only to be caught within another one, complete with the various appurtenances of war, hangs heavily on the migrants. They find out, once again, that no place is completely “safe”. While the militants in their city were considered an aberration from what should constitute the normative state of peace and hence clearly understood to be a danger that should be “run from,” the conversion of central London, the seat of the global civilising mission, into a hotspot of military activity and confinement has the migrants bewildered as they discover that the metaphorical door to freedom was at least partly fictitious. Similarly, one of the vignettes—one-shot episodes from across the world featuring different insights into contemporary migrations—is set in Vienna and follows a native of the city as she joins a public protest in support of welcoming refugees who have entreated her country for shelter. On the other side of the protest lines are those who oppose such a tolerant policy, influenced by the recent attacks in Vienna by the same militant group who had advanced into Saeed and Nadia’s city. While setting up this electrified scene of opposing views, the narrator reassures the reader of the resilience of the city in overcoming such turmoil: “the fighting of the previous century, and of the centuries before that, which were of an entirely different and greater magnitude, Vienna being no stranger, in the annals of history, to war...” (104). However, the comforting words serve more as a reminder gently recollecting the time when Europe, where the migrants were being discussed as a “major global crisis,” had itself been

rocked by numerous internal wars that grew into “global” ones and was capable of forbidding acts of violence. Hence, *Exit West* tries to draw parallels between those spaces stereotypically associated with unrest and crime such as refugee camps or cities in the midst of a civil war, with their “civilised” counterparts to show how violence and suffering is everywhere, taking many forms. Thus, violence is established as one of the commonalities of all of humanity, hinting at the concept of vulnerability that will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

3.3. Foregrounding Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mikal, when imprisoned within a torture chamber in Afghanistan by the US Army, reflects on his situation, laughing in derision at “him and his nation where the taps don’t have water, and the shops don’t have sugar or rice or flour, the sick don’t have medicines and the cars don’t have petrol” (Aslam, *The Blind Man’s Garden* 191). Mikal’s delirious condemnation—induced by days of psychological torture—of the pathetic socio-economic conditions in his country also identifies a complicit figure in the form of “the white man [who] continues to laugh with eyes full of hatred and accusation and hilarity and mirth at this citizen of a shameless beggar country,” demanding of this conjured form, “would you agree that your country played a part in ruining mine, however small?” (191, 192). Since Mikal is being interrogated by the American forces for his role opposite them in the battlefields of the War on Terror, the “white man” in question might be assumed to be the caricature of his current tormentors. However, interpreting the scene against Pakistan’s national history and Mikal’s personal one would lead us to the idea of another, older white man, who “continues” to affect the current predicament of both the country and the citizen. Centuries of colonial and decades of neo-imperialist policies are

held responsible, to an extent, for the economic shambles that Mikal's Pakistan finds itself in amidst the white man's latest incursion into South Asia.

In this section, I borrow Parikh's proposition that the professed "humanitarian" aims of the War on Terror is but liberal democratic shorthand for the establishment of an American cultural dominance over the practice of human rights (*Writing Human Rights*, 3). I also seek to adapt Parikh's approach which suggests that the neo-imperialist tendencies of the so-called War on Terror is addressed by literature⁷⁸ that "preserve and re-member forms of Afro-Asian solidarity organized around the right to self-determination and cultural cooperation, as well as the rights to social security and economic development..." (4). Parikh's interest in social and economic rights is shared by Bryan S Turner, who attests that, "the rights that support life, health, and reproduction are crucial to human rights as such" (1). Turner also considers this an important topic of discussion due to the "institutional precariousness" of the structures entrusted with safeguarding these rights, pointing to the "complex interaction between our human frailty, institution building, and political or state power" (1). Drawing from these points, this section traces concerns similar to Mikal's about the lack of availability of necessities such as food, medicine, water and fuel, to establish that the demand for economic, social and cultural rights are prioritised in the novels discussed.

In *Home Fire*, Farooq, a London recruiter for the ISIS, while attempting to convince Parvaiz Pasha to join "The Caliphate" relies as much on a carefully culled version of world history charting the political and economic downfall of the "righteous" Muslim as on taking advantage of the latter's unresolved family history involving his father Adil's disappearance

⁷⁸ While Parikh's study focuses on American writers of colour, I believe that this rubric can also benefit the analysis of contemporary Pakistani novelists, given the overlap in themes of globalisation, social justice and international terrorism, to name a few.

during the War on Terror. Farooq's history lessons touched on global events such as, "imperialism, with its racist underpinnings of a "civilising mission," followed by the cruel joke of pretending to "give" independence when really they were merely changing economic models via the creation of client states, their nonsensical boundaries designed to cause instability" (Shamsie 129). Farooq's rhetoric points to the shortcomings of Western interventions such as colonialism and neo-imperialism, which function under faux humanist motivations—claims that have been made and proposed, substantiated and largely accepted by scholars of the mainstream postcolonial and humanistic traditions.⁷⁹ He identifies lapses such as the liberal economic policies imposed on newly postcolonial states within an increasingly globalised market which were rigged to the advantage of the Western capitalist economies, reducing these new nations into mere "client states". Joseph Slaughter discusses this point at length, particularly First World policies that limit the independence of postcolonial states through the operations of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, promoting an aggressive developmental agenda backed by neoliberal market policies and mandating the installation of liberal democratic state systems ("Hijacking Human Rights" 757). Slaughter argues that the results of the hard-fought "independence" movements against imperialism which rode on the wave of unequal distribution of resources between the colonisers and the colonies were invalidated by these economic policies. Stonebridge agrees with this conclusion, noting how, "[d]emands for decolonization, universal education, and political and economic rights [had] surrounded and nourished the post-war human rights movement" (37).

⁷⁹ Gayatri Spivak, for instance, suggests that human rights, in its current form, is as much about the burden of those who "have" rights being responsible for "dispensing" rights to the rightless. However, this responsibility — much like the "white man's burden" of spreading civilisation that legitimised colonisation — becomes an "alibi for economic, military, and political intervention" (Spivak 523-524).

The most singular aspect of Farooq's tirade is that even though it is prefaced by the storied Crusades and the clashes between Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages—"the terror with which Christendom had watched the ascent of Islam, the thousand years of Muslim supremacy,... and then the bloodlust with which the Christians had avenged themselves for their centuries of humiliation..."—is that it is followed by incisive criticism on the contemporary situation of economic exploitation of the Global South by certain countries of the North (Shamsie 129). Despite popular perception about the element of "religious fanaticism" that is expected to be invoked by operatives like Farooq while convincing prospective members to join fundamentalist groups based on religion, his arguments are also rooted in economic and social rightlessness, which affect the lives of young men like Parvaiz.

Evidence of social neglect and state apathy towards the Muslims of *Home Fire* is scattered throughout the text, from rumours on the revocation of welfare schemes like healthcare to deprive families of suspected terrorists (as the elder Pashas were afraid of) to underfunded public utilities in lower-class neighbourhoods. Since his teenage years, Parvaiz had taken an active role in the campaign against the abrupt closure of his neighbourhood's public library, for which the local governing body had decided to slash funding (142). Farooq appreciates his long engagement with the project and agrees with Parvaiz that fighting for state-funded public institutions in disadvantaged localities was a worthy cause:

"The library," Farooq said. "Of course it matters. Same as what they're doing to the NHS, welfare benefits, all the rest of it. You know this country used to be great."

"When was that?"

“Not so long ago. When it understood that a welfare state was something you built up instead of tearing down, when it saw migrants as people to be welcomed not turned away.” (144)

Farooq describes the problems with a neo-liberal state insensitive to the needs of its citizens, and which withheld critical facilities from its most needy. He laments the half-heartedness of welfare policies and the antipathy that British society displayed towards migrants. Farooq’s arguments use details that Parvaiz is intimately acquainted with—the need for universal healthcare, welfare schemes for the working classes and better treatment of migrants—as evidence to show how his nation has failed him and his family. It foregrounds the importance of economic and social rights as fundamental, in contrast to the civil rights debate spearheaded by the British government under Home Secretary Karamat Lone, seeking to devalue the right to claim citizenship (a detailed discussion on the latter aspect was undertaken in Chapter 2). It is this discussion on the social and economic rights of necessitous parties like migrants and working-class citizens that helps Farooq introduce the idea of helping create a “better world” under the banner of ISIS to Parvaiz. He describes it as, “[a] place where migrants coming in to join are treated like kings, given more in benefits than the locals to acknowledge all they’ve given up to reach there. A place where skin colour doesn’t matter. Where schools and hospitals are free, and rich and poor have the same facilities” (144). Hence, Farooq evokes everything that has left Parvaiz disillusioned with the possibility of good governance—racism and anti-migrant sentiments which his family faced despite having been British citizens for three generations, and the economic hardships and lack of educational opportunities due to diminished state investment in these facilities.

Farooq's thoughts in this regard are echoed in *The Golden Legend*, as depicted in the episode in which the offices of a popular Urdu magazine are attacked by a group of armed men retaliating against what they consider to be blasphemous views towards Islam. The leader of the group engages the editorial staff in a terrorising interrogation which reveals both his reactionary ideas based on faith—such as his support for the discriminatory blasphemy laws that are often weaponised against Pakistan's religious minorities (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 116)—as well as his ideas of a just society. He conjures images similar to the “better world” offered by Farooq's “Caliphate”:

Look around you—there is no justice in Pakistan, no food for our people, no clean water, no medicine. Is it Islam's fault? No, it's the fault of the modern world, and the corrupt swine who preside over it, both here and in the West. Under Islam everyone will be fed, everyone will be provided for, everyone will have protection. (118)

Buried under the man's fundamentalist adherence to his personal idea of Islam are concerns pertaining to justice, food security, access to clean water and healthcare. He attributes lapses in these to the values of the “modern world”, which in his eyes have failed where an Islamic social order would have succeeded. Further, he intends for this proposed world to be capable of protecting “everyone,” which presumably includes all who agree to adhere to the laws of this order, a kind of allegiance similar to the one demanded by a “universal” order of human rights that prioritises certain kinds of claims over others and deems rights ensuring social, economic and cultural welfare as being of less importance than those pertaining to civil and political liberties.

Through the attacker's tirade, the novel attempts to re-evaluate the elevated status claimed by the contemporary human rights regime. The premium placed on political and civil

rights as reflected in the contemporary theory and praxis of human rights has been traced back to the conflict of ideologies between the welfarist Soviet Union and the capitalist Western Bloc during the Cold War (Hammond 43). In the initial decades following the promulgation of the UDHR in 1948 when the idea of a universal system of rights was being fleshed out, there was much debate about the kind of rights that needed to be protected. The Eastern Bloc, guided by Communist principles of egalitarianism advocated for social and economic rights which would ensure a better standard of living through increased state control of resources, whereas the Western Bloc preferred to uphold civil and political rights as manifested in the free market, and limited state intervention. After the disintegration of the Soviet in the 1980s, the Western line championing global capitalism and liberal democratic government came to dominate the practice of human rights activism across the globe, making “economic rights... aspirational rather than integral to stability and quality of life” (Hammond 44). Slaughter adds another layer to this historiography of human rights by suggesting that this domination of the West over the human rights discourse “eventuated the Western human rights caricature of the “independent, autonomous in-dividual,” whose “chief value” resides in its difference from others” (“Hijacking Human Rights” 756). This shift effectively erased a significant portion of the human rights movement prior to the UDHR which saw mass revolution against European imperialism centred on principles of collective rights, right to self-determination, right to economic justice through the redistribution of wealth, etc., in many parts of the world (Slaughter “Hijacking Human Rights” 756).

Thus, the Western legacy of human rights and its shaping into a tool of neo-imperialist policies need to be emphasised in any study of violence and justice. Farooq’s use of the discourse of economic rights to show Parvaiz an alternate worldview accentuates a particular

shortcoming of the human rights discourse—the discussion surrounding the rise of outfits like ISIS and its flagrant disregard towards human rights cannot be restricted to a focus on the more spectacular and brutal methods of torture and violence they employ. Instead, it should also reflect on the conditions that made it possible for such groups to flourish. Farooq’s arguments appeal to Parvaiz due their resonance with his lived experiences, not because of religious rhetoric or lofty ideals of humanitarianism.

As Goldberg and Moore explain: “invigorating economic rights discourse is one of the foremost tasks for human rights in the face of accelerating global poverty, increasing inequity between rich and poor, and potentially catastrophic scarcity of basic resources” (5-6). The absurd scale of disparity in wealth between certain sections of the population is apparent in the living conditions Saeed and Nadia find themselves in upon exiting a door that allows them to enter London (*Exit West*). Specifically, the door lets them into an opulent mansion in which they are accompanied by nearly fifty others seeking refuge from various corners of the world. They were joined by such make-shift migrant households across the metropolis, an oxymoronic mishmash of destitute migrants in luxurious dwellings:

...with unoccupied mansions in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit, their absentee owners often discovering the bad news too late to intervene...it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in a minority, and nativeborn ones vanishingly few, with local newspapers referring to the area as the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation. (126)

It should be noted that the mainstream media narrative surrounding the migrants’ trespassing into unoccupied houses label these neighbourhoods with the unflattering sobriquet of “the worst of the black holes” with little heed to the detail that hundreds of people from various parts of the

world were forced to abandon their lives and homes, to descend into strangers' houses to live in cramped conditions. Once again, the thrust of the news story follows the grievances of the local population due to the migrants' presence, foregoing the social and economic contexts responsible for the latter's journeys. Furthermore, the insensitivity of a discussion that paints the owners of "unoccupied mansions" on some of the world's most expensive real estate as victims suffering due to the desperate attempts of penniless foreigners is worth pointing out. The mansions are massive in size and left fully-furnished even when unoccupied, such that fifty occupants are able to share the space between them, and unused to the extent that the owners do not realise that their property is being trespassed on until much later. The violence inflicted by economic systems that resulted in such miniscule sections of the world population possessing a surplus of resources is normalised.

As part of a series of measures to force the migrants out of these houses, the electrical power supply to Saeed and Nadia's neighbourhood is cut, dividing "dark London" from the rest of the cityscape and actualising the "black holes"—quite literally—that were predicted by newspapers much earlier (142). Saeed and Nadia, in particular, are taken back by the incongruity of wealth distribution, and deliberate sustainable and equitable alternatives: "they discussed how houses such as the one they were occupying might be divided into proper apartments..." (134). The enormous aberration that these differences and inequalities signify and the scale at which these are manifest are not matters included in the mainstream discussion focusing on the "fabric of the nation". Rather, the private property rights of individuals privileged enough to be "absentee owners" take precedence over any dialogue on the lack of rights to housing and other amenities that the migrants face.

A solution to the stand-off between the migrants and the authorities seeking to evict them is arrived at, and the migrants are shifted to the “London Halo,” a set of townships encircling the existing metropolis. This divinely-named urban sprawl disguises a dark underbelly of exploitation, as Saeed and Nadia discover—these are “worker camps,”⁸⁰ where, “[i]n exchange for their labour... migrants were promised forty metres and a pipe: a home on forty square metres of land and a connection to all the utilities of modernity” (167). One of the terms of the deal was the levying of a “time-tax”, “such that a portion of the income and toil of those who had recently arrived on the island would go to those who had been there for decades” (168). In order to hasten the process, Saeed “redoubled his work, and took on extra shifts even when he barely had the strength,” but finds that this made no difference because the other migrants were working equally as hard (170). While the logic of the time tax seemed a fair solution towards guaranteeing that the migrants receive their chief priority and demand—adequate housing facilities—it also pits them against each other, rigging the system to make it possible that they were stuck in an unchanging position, in spite of the back-breaking labour they provided. Saeed discovers that his “additional efforts [only] served to *maintain* his and Nadia’s ranking on the list,” failing to accelerate their procurement of the promised housing (170, italics added). This betrays how measures to reinstate rights at times become violations themselves, entrapping the migrants in a scheme designed to extract their labour all the while dangling in front of them the proverbial carrot of a home. The realisation that there was little possibility of beating the system to attain housing leads Saeed and Nadia to abandon months of hard work and take a door out of London (189). Thus, *Exit West* attempts to redirect the discourse on Europe’s “refugee crisis” by

⁸⁰ It is important to bear in mind that his term carries the loaded history of colonial systems of forced labour, including slavery, as well as the horrific memory of concentration camps (which were set up as worker camps) under the Nazi regime.

revealing the superficiality of mainstream opinions on migration and centring the issue of economic rights such as universal access to housing as demanded by collectives of people.

Alongside housing, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also regards access to healthcare as one of the markers of an adequate standard of living that all humans are entitled to: “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” (“International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”). A strong case for improved healthcare is made in *Alice Bhatti*, in which the titular character is a trained nurse who continues pursuing the profession even after being imprisoned while in nursing school and having had to finish her education in a Borstal. Being a former convict as well as a member of the ostracised Choohra community does not enhance her chances of securing employment upon her release, but she is eventually hired at “[a] death hole otherwise known as the Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments,” to use the Alice’s own flavourful language (Hanif 2). Her opinion is shared by the hospital’s clientele: “*Enter at your peril*, someone ha[d] scrawled under [the signboard of the hospital], summing up the customers’ sentiments” (2, italics in original). Even Dr. Pereira, the owner of the hospital and a senior doctor, agrees with Alice:

The Sacred has a severe shortage of doctors, there is no way of telling whether the medicines we use are real or fake, we can’t even get the janitors to turn up for work, but masha’Allah people still have confidence in us, seven thousand patients walk in through that gate every week. (195)

The deplorable state of healthcare in the country’s biggest city—Karachi—is such that thousands of people are forced into a care facility where nothing seems to run efficiently, which every stakeholder, from staff to management to consumers unanimously agree is far from ideal.

However, the overflowing “baby ward toilet,” that “drips a fat, milky water drop at regular intervals,” is partial in befouling only those patients who do not have the weight of generational wealth and accumulated power at their command (32). Such plebeian perils of the halls of the hospital do not bother Alice’s patient Begum “Qaz” Qazalbash, an elderly woman on palliative care: “[t]he double door closes behind Sister Alice with a discreet, expensive VIP click. A blast from the heavy-duty air conditioner hits her in the face and she smells roses...There is the strong smell of coffee cake and green tea” (57). When entering Qaz’s room, Alice is struck by all the details that sets it apart from the usual Sacred Heart experience—the coolness of the air untypical to the Karachi heat and the smell of roses and dainty food items in place of the odour of bathroom leakage. The sensorial experience of overwhelming wealth is evident even in the sound of the closing door; it reminds Alice of the privacy and quality of care that is unavailable to the patient in the general ward. Qaz’s family has made their presence known in every corner of the hospital, taking over not just the best rooms but common spaces and amenities as well: “The outpatient department corridor is cleared of motorbikes, bicycles and anything else with wheels; there are no food trolleys, wheelchairs, stretchers...” so that the family can park their large car (53).

While Qaz rested in comfort, discrepancy in the kind of care provided at Sacred Heart to the less fortunate can be seen in the treatment available to another terminally-ill patient, Zainab. Zainab is the mother of Noor, a seventeen-year-old ward boy who worked his way into the hospital so that his mother gets the medical attention she requires:

[Noor’s] services are acknowledged. Zainab may not be in the best of health, but she has her own bed, adjustable, it goes up and down; it has a pillow, a blanket, sheets that get

changed every few weeks; a curtain separates her from the other miserable wretches on the ward. (25)

Noor cannot afford the luxury of a door that can be shut, but is able to secure bedding in return for his labour at the hospital. This opportunity came to him through Dr. Pereira, who hired Noor to satiate his need to be seen as a good Christian and saviour of the unfortunate— “Noor is Dr Pereira’s ticket to salvation” (22). Zainab’s end-of-life care consists primarily of the fruits of her son’s work that came in the form of a bed in the general ward, medicines and attention contributed by Noor’s friend Sister Alice Bhatti, and Dr. Pereira’s charity. Others are not so lucky, and “[t]here are hundreds of patients who are envious, who are eyeing that bed” (25). While Alice had been ordered by Sister Alvi to give Qaz the best care, her attention towards Zainab arose from her altruism and exceeded the benevolence her superiors extended towards the sick woman. While Sister Alvi was tolerant of Zainab’s continued occupation of the hospital bed, she also considered it a favour, one that may be rescinded as she saw fit. “Now run along, go see if your mother is dead yet. We need that bed,” she tells Noor nonchalantly (164). However, even the doctor’s magnanimity towards the mother and son do not hold up to the test of time and he chastises Alice and Noor for spending time offering Zainab care, ordering them to redirect their efforts to other wards, since “[a]t least there are lives there that are worth saving” (156). While the remainder of Zainab’s life is not regarded as worthwhile and any attempts at helping her as wasteful, Begum Qazalbash is afforded the dignity of a death rich in cold, perfumed air and watched over by the unwavering attentions of the hospital’s finest staff.

The crucial difference between Zainab and Qaz, thus, stems from economic differences: the concrete foundation of family wealth that the latter enjoys and which cannot be replicated for the former. Zainab’s only hope for help comes from individuals like Dr. Pereira and Alice and is

reliant on the vagaries of their kind-heartedness. In the absence of a solid framework of social security measures, those without Noor's resourcefulness and Zainab's good fortune—including the many who eyed her bed with envy—fall through the cracks.

The Masihs of *The Golden Legend* also owe their relative prosperity to kind benefactors. The novel relays the history of the family in a few brief sentences:

Helen was the daughter of the couple whom Nargis had employed as housekeepers. Lily and Grace were Christian and were both illiterate. And Helen—who was now nineteen years old—too would have grown up to be an uneducated servant in some Muslim household had Massud and Nargis not provided her with an alternative set of opportunities. They had paid for her education at Zamana's finest schools and she had been an assiduous and brilliant student until three years ago when her mother's life had come to a terrible end. There were several witnesses to the crime, but the murderer was a Muslim and this was Pakistan. (10)

Condensing the description of the “terrible end” to Grace Masih's life to a “crime,” the narrative offers little else as detail but that even though it might seem an open-and-shut case under other circumstances, in this instance, the murderer's religion and its significance in Pakistan had brought the judicial proceedings to a halt. The significance of the murderer's faith and the insignificance of the Masihs' is set in contrast to each other, the power imbalance in this relationship explained by the overarching system and its own rules—“this was Pakistan”. The meaning packed into those last words make it sound like an oft-repeated refrain, excuse and reasoning for every event that defies the logic of a well-functioning society. The phrase is weighed down by both the resignation of a people who have come to expect their nation to be unheeding towards their welfare, and by a lack of surprise at the idea of an unambiguous crime

going unpunished. “[T]his was Pakistan” explains not only why Grace’s murder case did not lead to a straightforward resolution befitting the heinous nature of the crime, but also why Grace and Lily were illiterate and why their daughter Helen would have followed the same path as they were forced to, deprived of education, access to a better standard of living and realising her full potential. Fortunately for the family, help came through private means, from their employers Nargis and Massud who stepped in to fulfil the role the state and its allied arms are expected to. While Helen does receive “an alternative set of opportunities,” due to the Muslim couple’s kindness, she becomes beholden to them, regardless of whether they expect her gratitude. Even though she does not become an uneducated domestic worker, she is still indebted to a Muslim household, for, “this was Pakistan,” and benevolent Muslims were her only hope of advancement in the absence of the state as a protector of her rights.

Returning to the tragic ordeal the Masih family endured when Grace was murdered, the text tells us that, “[t]he police were initially reluctant to even register a case [of unnatural death],” budging only when “Nargis and Massud had demanded that the correct legal procedures be followed... [and] had engaged the best lawyer...” (10-11). Without the Muslim couple’s intervention, Grace’s death would have been deemed unworthy of investigation, and Helen and Lily’s grief undeserving of being acknowledged with a lawful trial. The Masih’s list of debts towards Nargis and Massud continued to grow longer with every affront they experienced from institutions of the state, in this case a corrupt department of law enforcement. Moreover, the Masih’s deprivation of their civil rights to legal recourse are brought about not only because they are Christians in a nation that is hostile to non-Muslims, but also due to their impoverished economic and social capital.

The kindness Nargis and Massud had extended to the Masih family seem boundless. They also help Lily purchase a vehicle to earn a livelihood as a rickshaw driver, and lend him money for a small house as well. Lily is particularly thankful for the rickshaw, because, “[t]he vehicle meant no longer having to be a sweeper,” allowing him to leave behind the occupations of manual scavenging or sanitation work that were often the only choices people of his caste were afforded (42).⁸¹ Left to the mercy of the state, Lily’s ascent from the city’s sewers—in which he started work at the age of eight—would have been next to impossible (83). The two-roomed little house he owns is also instrumental in helping Lily remain free from a debt trap—literally and metaphorically. Badami Bagh, the neighbourhood that the Masih family inhabited, had been, in the mid-twentieth century:

owned by a single extended family, [who] decided to build the smallest possible houses and rent them out mostly to Christians, who worked as servants in the houses of Zamana’s Muslims, or cleaned the city’s roads and sewers, and were docile and obedient. By the time the twenty-first century began, Badami Bagh was the poorest neighbourhood in Zamana, a ghetto. (13)

The Christians of Badami Bagh were trapped in low-paying, exploitative jobs that were designed to keep them in permanent debt. Over time, this group of people found that there was little chance of escape from this cycle of poverty that the lack of land ownership and being in permanent rental debt had left them in. While the inflexible practices of an (invisible)⁸² caste system kept them firmly within its prescribed social boundaries, the economic predicament of the

⁸¹ Zia Ur-Rehman and Maria Abi-Habib report that: “While Christians make up only 1.6 percent of Pakistan’s population of some 200 million, according to a 1998 government census, rights groups believe they fill about 80 percent of the sweeper jobs”.

⁸² Taking a cue from Faisal Devji’s work, I have discussed in Chapter 1 the apparently inconspicuous ways in which caste functions in Pakistani society.

debt trap arising from not owning land and having to pay rent monthly left them with practically no opportunities for attaining a better quality of life.⁸³ Over time, Badami Bagh almost exclusively housed Christians, completing their social isolation. The necessity of housing cemented their “docility” and “obedience” and ensured complete economic dependency on the Muslim landlords for whom these properties had become a steady source of revenue. Fast-forward to the time of the novel’s setting in the twenty-first century, the text introduces us to Babur, who claims, “[n]ine out of ten houses in this neighbourhood are mine,” with few exceptions like the tiny house Lily was able to buy for his own. Babur’s strategy as a landowner is the same as those who owned Badami Bagh before him, as, “[t]he houses he owned were rented out to Christians, for whom—men, women and children—he found cleaning jobs in the richer areas of the city. He had sabotaged every attempt to open a government school in the neighbourhood” (47). Babur is thus determined to keep his tenants in the corner that he has backed them into by ensuring that they remain without access to education that they may use to find better employment and superior living conditions. In order to keep his income from renting continue unabated, he finds them jobs as domestic workers that leave little scope for the improvement of their standards of living and a way out of their historical oppression. Babur signifies the constantly evolving nature of caste and class oppression and the dexterous methods by which dominant communities continue to exert power over disadvantaged groups. In this orderly scheme that Babur operates in Badami Bagh, Lily stands as an anomaly, a proverbial thorn in his side. He begrudges Lily his independence of owning a house and being self-employed, taunting him as “Mr Bigshot Rickshaw Driver,” who thinks that he is “better than

⁸³ It is particularly enlightening to read this in the context of Joseph Bhatti’s declaration that he “is the soil,” as discussed in the previous section (Hanif 49). Once again, it is land ownership that proves to be the point of contention between lower-caste Christians and their overlords.

everyone else because Massud can buy [him] a house and a rickshaw” (46-47). Babur’s resentment towards the fact that Lily was able to break out of the entanglements that caught and held his neighbours is clear by the petty jibes he makes: “Sweeping and cleaning is too lowly a job for you... leaving for work in the morning, with the smell of eggs and parathas spilling out of his house” (47). The idea that Lily is able to afford even the humblest breakfast fare, made possible by a job that is not one restricted to his caste, is difficult for Babur to stomach.

The overreach of Badami Bagh’s landowners in ensuring the continued poverty of their tenants clearly shows how it is imperative that the state steps in to safeguard the economic and social rights of its historically disadvantaged citizens without leaving them at the mercy of private individuals. Thus, the Masihs are completely dependent on their Muslim benefactors for every privilege they enjoy, including opportunities to gain education, a dignified means of earning a livelihood, access to housing, and legal advocacy. However, these advantages remain privileges that are *given* depending on the Muslim couple’s charitable sensibilities than rights that they can *claim* as citizens of Pakistan. On this note, the text reminds us, “[i]t was not always the case that surviving a terrible experience strengthened a person’s character. Sometimes a bad thing left you permanently weakened” (45). It is unsustainable to bank on the generosity of people like Massud and Nargis and instead work towards systemic changes that will result in a redistribution of resources through impactful systemic measures that will diminish the possibility of a state of “permanent weakness”.

Therefore, it is not unsurprising that Lily’s dream for his neighbourhood includes the setting up of a neighbourhood school that will derail Babur’s plans in the long run (48). He plans to use his income to “buy another rickshaw, and then another and another. The men [Babur] thinks are only good enough to stand up to their necks in excrement in the sewers will soon be

driving on the roads... [a]nd I want a school” (48). Lily’s ambitions are not merely personal, or restricted to improving the fortunes of his family. He carries a deep understanding of how his own state of affairs improved with the economic independence allowed to him due to the involvement of his benefactors, giving him a taste of the change that a community-wide claim to such rights may bring about. By creating for his fellow lower-caste Christians employment opportunities that will bring them out of filthy sewers and the gaping pits of indentured labour that Babur had created for them, Lily’s plans speak of a collective upliftment of his community. Another salient point to be noted here is his self-reliance in concocting this resistance—Lily is convinced of the state’s lack of regard for him and his ilk, a suspicion that was proven to be correct in every interaction. His lack of faith in any public institution to respect their rights and aid them in claiming these also shows that the Pakistani state, as depicted in the novel, has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of many a citizen.

This resignation about state apathy towards marginalised sections is one of the several features shared by *The Golden Legend* and *Alice Bhatti*, a point which was explored in the previous section. Another obvious similarity shared by the protagonists of these two novels, expanding on the common themes of the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan, is that both Helen and Alice are left motherless due to hate crimes.⁸⁴ Alice’s mother Margaret, a domestic worker,

⁸⁴ It is reasonable to assume that both Aslam and Hanif were influenced by the murder of Shazia Masih, a child domestic worker who was sexually assaulted and murdered by her Muslim employers in January, 2010, while creating female characters of lower-caste Christian background who die at the hands of Muslim men. Shazia’s murder caused widespread uproar across Pakistan against the impunity enjoyed by influential Muslim families (“Shazia laid to rest”).

...died at work. At somebody's house where she worked full time... the whole Bhatti household could fit under [her employer's] travertine marble staircase, which needed to be washed and polished every day. It was on this staircase that she slipped and died...
 ...But it is not very likely that when you slip on that staircase you'll also accidentally scratch yourself on your left breast with such violence that those who wash your body will see four parallel sharp gashes drawn with human nails. It's also unlikely that during that fall on the staircase you'll somehow manage to spill someone's sperm on your thighs. (119)

Hanif manages to capture the absurdity of the situation with his meandering, but insightful prose: even with the presence of highly suspicious, if not damning, evidence that Margaret Bhatti's death was not an accident, it is treated like one. The tangible traces of assault, physical and sexual, are as plain as day, but the Bhattis, like the Masihs of *The Golden Legend*, are too powerless to demand an investigation, or even an autopsy of the body. The opulence of the employers and its contrast to the Bhatti's own living conditions, where a single staircase in the mansion is larger than the entire Bhatti family's quarters conveys as much about their respective access to wealth, and proportional to this, access to rights. It is symbolic that Margaret is said to have "slipped and died"—a passive occurrence which can be attributed to sheer bad luck—on this metaphor of inequality, providing a hint to the real cause of her death. The text implies that as long as one is in possession of a marble staircase, one is free from the scrutiny of law regarding anyone who may have "slipped" on it. With such an immediate encounter with the morally deficient system, it is not surprising that Margaret's daughter places little trust on the due process of law.

The account of Margaret's death also carries the echoes of another discussion that had occupied Pakistani news in the immediate aftermath of Shazia Masih's murder: a look into the safety of workplaces and rights of the domestic worker. This section of the workforce is often rendered invisible from the discourse surrounding labour rights due to their gendered experiences—as most domestic workers are women—and due to their workplaces being almost exclusively private spaces. Thus, the fictional story of Margaret and the very real life and death of Shazia, cannot be discussed solely as instances of gender-based assault, but should also be understood as a need for labour legislation and the protection of labour rights. Upendra Baxi notes how in the ever-changing nature of the languages of human rights, labour rights have been “threatened by extinction,” even as other categories such as women's rights gained in importance (xx). Baxi attributes this to yet another casualty of the alliance between the contemporary human rights regime and the global push for neoliberal capitalism. Reading Margaret's case alongside the horrific working conditions of manual scavenging and public sanitation, which is thrust upon many of the inhabitants of Alice Bhatti's *French Colony* and Helen Masih's *Badami Bagh*, the novels present substantial criticism against the lack of workers' rights to unprejudiced and safe working conditions.

The discriminatory treatment that the hijras of *This House* suffer has been discussed in Chapter 2, and in this chapter, I would like to build on the more material aspects of their misfortunes, such the inhumane living and work conditions that they endured. Bhanggi, who spent all of his life within the folds of the community, describes the expendable place they held in society and the long-term ramifications for it:

Growing up, I'd watched men haggle with the older hijras, over the price of an hour of guilty pleasure. It's the price of a life they squabble over, and it's cheaper than an old

chicken. Few hijras live past the age of forty. We trade our lives for a few rupees, ji, agree to bear the burden of desires, confidences and diseases that no one else will. (5)

The hate that the hijras get for existing outside the cis-gendered heterosexual matrix has snatched from them all opportunities of attaining a livelihood save sex work. Even in that profession, which is built on the principle of commodifying human bodies, the hijras are treated without a modicum of respect for their bodily integrity. However, Bhanggi also notes that at times the hourly rate which the hijras can charge for sexual activity is an unfair exchange, drawing attention to the greater economic vulnerability that the hijras are left in due to their choice, of lack thereof, of profession. They exchange their vitality— “[w]e trade our lives”—for the chance to survive, an ironic transaction that leads them to the certainty of an early grave. The monetary value attached to the health, happiness, standard of living and desires of a hijra is lower than the price one may pay for decaying poultry. They are forced to function as communal cesspits for the discharge of unwanted and untreated “desires, confidences and diseases” that the rest of society wants to dispose of.

Bhanggi himself has no options but to follow the rest of the hijras into sex work. This is partly due to a lack of choice—Gulabo had, as discussed in Chapter 1, used his body as leverage since he was a young boy—and partly to sustain himself. Even after he left behind the life of a sex worker to become a qalandar at the dargah, Bhanggi is allowed to stay there only because the Auqaaf clerk deigned to let him room there. Bhanggi is frequently reminded of the instability of his housing situation, for the clerk holds it over his head at every possible opportunity: “I will throw you out from this sacred place! Where will you go then?” (61). The threat of losing his sanctuary keeps Bhanggi firmly under the clerk’s thumb, the latter forcing him to part with sexual favours as well as undergo routine physical and verbal abuse. A typical threat involves

statements such as, “[w]e allow you to live here, you filth! You will remember your place,” which is designed to impress upon Bhanggi that all other systems have failed, leaving him completely in the clerk’s power (62). Thus, even though the discrimination against hijras is a contributing factor towards their victimisation, it is the lack of the most fundamental economic and social rights, such as access to healthcare and housing that keeps them tied to poverty.

The continuous ill-treatment he suffered since childhood at the hands of both strangers and familial figures like Gulabo had Bhanggi internalise the abuse enough to believe himself deserving of nothing better: “[this] is the only life I am entitled to. There is nothing more, nothing else” (7). The young Bhanggi tailored his aspirations accordingly, restricting them to those suiting an inhabitant of Heera Mandi:

They all said I was pretty too. I would be a Nightingale when it was time, not a pimp beggar. I could hardly wait. The Nightingales are important. They bring in the big bucks, so everyone treats them well. They get the best bits of meat in the curry, and the best clothes.

The Nightingales stand together at the corner, talking, laughing...

... They were happy, I thought. As a child, laughter is all you need as proof of happiness.
(6)

The Nightingales are the most sought after hijras in Gulabo’s brothel. They are considered to be the most attractive by their clientele and the other hijras treat them with deference due to their position as the group’s highest earning members. As such, being elevated to the position of a Nightingale is the highest achievement a hijra can hope to aspire to, and Bhanggi’s ambitions are consistent with this fact. He is as excited by the security this prospect would bring as by the sense of close-knit community—one which “stand[s] together,” “shar[ing] a bidi...[or] a bottle

of home-made liqueur”—that would come with this elevation (6). However, the fervent desire to become a Nightingale, one he “could hardly wait” to be actualised, is indicative of how little improvement Bhanggi expects in his situation. His highest hopes are to be entitled to “the best bits of meat” and the “best clothes” among the meagre provisions available to the hijras, unknowing about any other conveniences that he should be able to claim as his.

These limited ambitions and Bhanggi’s nescience of what constitutes happiness is challenged when he is introduced to some foundational notions on human dignity. As a teenager, Bhanggi stumbles upon an unlikely friend: a kabbadiya who trades in junk and lives in a shack, but is the first person to offer him kindness without expecting anything in return, feeding him and teaching him letters (8). While he is grateful for the kabbadiya’s kindness, he is unsure of whether he could adapt to the possibilities arising from the unfamiliar values his new friend holds:

[the kabbadiya] read stories of prophets and wise men to me. He taught me to read the Holy Book.

I wish that he hadn’t, ji. It hurt me and confused me to learn about ideas of compassion and dignity. Everything around me was so different. After a few months I stopped going to him. I don’t know whether the stories he told me saved me or destroyed me.

Thinking beyond survival is its own burden, ji. (9)

The “ideas of compassion and dignity” that the kabbadiya’s stories highlighted appear fictional to Bhanggi as they seem to be at odds with his lived reality which had persuaded him that his life held no more value than “old chicken”. The young Bhanggi had not considered himself as deprived of a better quality of life since he was convinced that there was “nothing more, nothing else” (7). Therefore, when faced with the kabbadiya’s well-intentioned lessons on the gentler

emotions that human beings bestow on each other, he has trouble accepting them, preferring to let them remain unrealistic “stories,” the existence of which remains unproven. An older Bhanggi accuses the kabaddiya of having “damaged [him] more than [he] was ever before”, because, “[y]ou taught me to think, and you put ideas in my head... You talked of the dignity of the human spirit to a hijra” (45). The introduction of a drastically different value system caused him to question the narrowness of the world he had heretofore been exposed to, but the possibilities of kindness and love as available to him became a burden of its own. His despair at being made aware of what is considered “inherent” dignity or “inalienable” rights points to the deep chasms in our understanding of a universal culture of human rights. For those like him who are forced to live under numerous forces of oppression with little chance of change, the hope of a better life is torturous.

Bhanggi’s observation that “[l]ife teaches more than any book, and not everyone can find solace in ideas” should serve as a reminder to every discussion on human rights, including the current project, that even though theoretical and philosophical discussions undoubtedly provide a foundation for the practice of human rights, it remains toothless if not followed up by lasting social and economic change (45). Acquiring knowledge about the existence of rights has only marginally improved Bhanggi’s chances of claiming them in a world where the odds are clearly stacked against him. The novel, perhaps self-reflexively, also insists, “[b]ooks don’t change the world” (45). This echoes Stonebridge’s suggestion that the interdiscipline of human rights and literature should desist from understanding literature as mere vehicles of generating sympathy for the unfortunate, and move towards advocating the ways in which tangible resources can be redistributed (Stonebridge 24).

By highlighting the economic and social struggles of individuals and groups over the need to give them tokenistic political representation, the writers prepare the field for a discussion on material redistribution of wealth instead of mere symbolic gestures of solidarity. Multiple instances of people being failed by institutions—the state, judiciary, law enforcement, elected representatives, the market, health care, educational systems, religious institutions, etc.,—paint a picture of larger systemic dysfunction that is at the root of these victims’ suffering. This ensures that any discussion of rightlessness does not end with the immediate perpetrator of violence but leads the reader to the indirect perpetrators of these crimes, the institutions that create and sustain environments of suffering.

However, even though the emphasis on the deficiencies of systems like healthcare and judiciary is crucial, it is still important to re-examine the underlying causes of problems such as, for instance, the poorer health conditions among certain sections of the population such as Zainab who suffers from “three types of cancer”, or from the fact that the laws being enforced by the failed law enforcement departments against Christians are unjust in themselves (Hanif 151). Baxi considers this compartmentalisation one of the troubles plaguing the contemporary human rights regime, as, “it only universalizes the powers of the dominant in ways that constantly elsewhere reproduce human rightlessness and suffering” (xiv-xv). Thus, Baxi cautions against those forms of resistance that may appear to be radical opponents of human rightlessness, but fall short of making a lasting impact on the conditions of violation due to their inability to break out of the “politics of human rights” (xiv). In order to fully understand the shortcomings of the practice of human rights, the next section will discuss concepts such as Judith Butler’s theses on vulnerability and Adriana Cavarero’s understanding of horrorism. That said, the focus on economic and social rights does make the vital demand for tangible and material ramifications of

global inequality, employing narratives of people suffering due to lack of hospital beds, safe homes, education, and opportunities to make a livelihood, to make the case for a radical redistribution of resources.

3.4. Vulnerable Subjects

In section 3.1., I had discussed how Isma Pasha was subjected to racial and religious profiling followed by a discriminatory interrogation at Heathrow. Aneeka, her sister, had teased Isma for her pliant answers, remarking that Isma should offer more of a resistance to convey her dissatisfaction with the insulting exercise. Isma dismisses this as a symptom of Aneeka's lack of worldly experience, and the resultant unfamiliarity with the "fragility of her place in the world" (Shamsie 6). This invocation of a subject who is more susceptible to injury in comparison to the rest of the population reflects a concept that has emerged in critical thinking about the human condition: vulnerability.

This reading of *Home Fire* concurs with Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds' summarisation of the broad ideas of the scholarship on human vulnerability: "To be vulnerable is to be fragile, to be susceptible to wounding and to suffering; this susceptibility is an ontological condition of our humanity..." (Mackenzie et al. 4). Therefore, humanness is defined by our lack of immunity to injury, both from within our bodies and outside it. Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds identify three sources of vulnerability: "inherent"—vulnerability that arises from deficiencies or injury to the human physical or mental health; "situational"—vulnerability due to discrepancies in "personal, social, political, economic or environmental situations" that impede the quality of one's lived experience; and "pathogenic"—"a subset of situational vulnerabilities," a cumulative situation of a range of vulnerabilities (7-9). This taxonomy betters the understanding of the

various kinds of suffering discussed so far in this chapter. The exercise on re-embedding the subject within a larger context of violence goes a long way in identifying the situational and pathogenic vulnerabilities arising out of the insufficiencies of social and economic systems that inflicted harm at the individual and community levels. Thus, the shared human condition of vulnerability can be seen as an adequate foundational quality to register humanness.

The framework of a human rights culture was formally established through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10th, 1948. UDHR qualifies beings deserving of human rights as possessors of an inherent dignity.⁸⁵ The human rights subject is, in this respect, defined as one who deserves human rights because of their humanness and because they possess the inherent dignity that all humans are born with. Makau Mutua acknowledges the centrality of the concept of dignity towards understanding suffering, but believes that in its current use, it is too “broad” a term to be particularly helpful in mapping rights violations to deliver justice (ix, 9). Upendra Baxi finds the importance given to the idea of dignity in the languages of human rights “problematic,” as it “locates the unity of all human rights to some designated totality of sentiment such as human ‘dignity’, ‘well-being’, and ‘flourishing’...” (10).

UDHR presupposes that “inherent dignity” is possessed by all humans equally, with no one being more dignified than the other. Among those who have expressed concern over the equal protection doctrine implied in such legal frameworks is Martha Albertson Fineman, who has identified serious flaws with the assumption that all individuals are equally liable to face injury and the disregard of any inequity outside of overt manifestations of discrimination (162).

⁸⁵ The Preamble to the UDHR states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...” (“Universal Declaration of Human Rights - English”).

Chief among Fineman's points of dissension is this framework's reliance on the unchanging liberal subject which "idealize[s] notions of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency..." (167). In lieu of an alternative, she suggests a "vulnerable subject," better suited to address the persisting problems of inequity perpetuated by egregious economic and social systems since it is also able to capture the essence of one of the fundamental truths of the human condition, embodiment (166). Vulnerability of the individual is not constant, unlike the fixed ideals assumed to govern the liberal subject, and hence, is more in tune with the astounding range of experiences that impacts the life of every human (168).

Alexandra Schultheis Moore evidently agrees with this line of thinking. She considers the version of human rights as advocated by the UDHR to be "an exclusionary, imperializing form of governmentality that re-produces its own ideal subjects" (3). Moore cites the anchoring of human rights in Western liberalism as leading to the effective erasure of the embodied nature of human beings (13). This system produces not only the ideal subject, but casts the victim of rights violation as an uncomplicated, helpless object, suffering due to an inability to exercise the much-celebrated liberal value of "choice" (7). The lack of convergence between this theoretical human rights subject/victim which is based on legal personhood, and the murky reality of violence as suffered by the embodied human being leads to the need for a "vulnerable subject of rights" (Moore 12, McClennan and Moore 21). Thus, the detractors of the practice of human rights as formalised by the UDHR suggest the inclusion of the vulnerable subject as a parameter to facilitate the better protection of the rights of the disadvantaged.

Arguably, the most popular scholarship in this area has been put forth by Judith Butler. Butler points her attention to the variable nature of vulnerability, as not all humans are equally so and the condition of vulnerability associated with a person does not remain constant (*Precarious*

Life xii). She interrogates how the normative framework of human rights “operate[s] to produce certain subjects as “recognizable” persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize” (*Frames of War* 6). This idea that some lives are more valuable, and hence, more grievable, than others, forms the central thesis of Butler’s work on vulnerability as an existential condition. Butler posits that all humans are interconnected beings in a complex structure that renders them dependent on one another. This dependency, which she terms “precariousness” makes humans mutually vulnerable, with tendencies to both inflict harm on others as well as to be constantly at the risk of being harmed themselves (*Frames of War* 14). However, as Adriana Cavarero clarifies, “to be vulnerable is not to be killable” (Cavarero 32). Butler was prompted by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to examine how lives in parts of the global South, the battlegrounds of the War on Terror, are less grievable, and hence, more precarious, than those in the North. The hegemonic position assumed by the West and the repercussions of this on the lives of the victims of this humanitarian conflict is what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics, which is a power structure that arises out of the sovereignty of certain groups “to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (Mbembe 27). As Cavarero points out, terms like “humanitarian war”, “preventive war” and “war on terror” wilfully forget the rights of the innocent victims caught in the crossfire. The actors behind these interventions are equally culpable of human rights violations as those who they supposedly oppose (Cavarero 2). In this section, I will be taking inspiration from this turn in theorising the human rights subject to examine the primary texts’ depiction of the human body as a vessel of vulnerability and the use of this rubric by populations trapped in nonideal situations of precariousness to fuel resistance to violation.

In a nutshell, Butler's theory of precariousness highlights the unavoidable interdependency between persons, nations and cultures, especially due to our capabilities as potential caregivers and violators of each other: "for violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another" (*Precarious Life* 27). Echoing this sentiment, *The Golden Legend* sustains a leitmotif—in the form of a book asserting the effects of the intermingling of cultures—to convey the deeply entrenched channels of global diplomacy and nationalism that often takes precedence over any attempts at safeguarding human rights. Nargis, whose husband Massud had been the unintended victim of a gunshot, finds herself in the midst of an international relations debacle when it is uncovered that her husband's killer was an American spy. The release of the killer, who is of strategic importance to his government, is demanded by the Americans, and it falls to the lot of the Pakistani establishment to obtain Nargis's "pardon" of the murderer.

Major Burhan, a military-intelligence officer who is trusted to lean on Nargis in order to secure her cooperation, finds her less than amenable to the idea of letting Massud's murderer walk free (Aslam, *The Golden Legend* 29). During one of his visits to intimidate Nargis, he finds her reading a book tracing the intertwined history of various Islamic societies with other populations across time and geography. The huge tome, titled *That They Might Know Each Other*, "outlined and examined how disparate events in the history of the world had influenced each other, the hidden or forgotten contributions that one set of humans had made towards the happiness and knowledge of another" (18). Presumably to send a message to its owner about the fate that awaits her if she did not bend to the command of a corrupt state, Burhan mutilates the book with a knife, stabbing and slicing up its beautifully calligraphed pages preaching the

complicated interrelationships of helping and hurting that led to the development of the cultures we currently enjoy (64).

The book also carries a relevant message for such a stand-off: “the very last section [of the book] was named *The Book of Warning*...It catalogued some of mankind’s disastrous encounters, outlining what happened when a people failed to value others, ignoring their right to dignity. The mistrust. The deceptions. The disregard” (244-245). This passage highlights the culture of human rights that the book professes. The unavoidable certainty of mutual dependency requires each actor on the global stage to cooperate with the other, to treat all as equals, since one cannot disregard another and hope to flourish on one’s own. Our survival is dependent on the other’s decision to not cause harm.

Clearly not playing by the rules of a culture of rights, Burhan asserts his single-minded determination to ensure Nargis’ compliance by following up the assault on the book with an assault on her person: “[He] more or less threw her into the armchair, as though she were already a corpse” (66). He makes the consequences of her refusal clearer by proceeding to douse her in kerosene, and threatening to let the flames from a lamp engulf her body (67). If the manhandling had indicated that he thought her as good as dead already by conveying to her the insignificance of her life in the larger picture his employers banked on him to create, the stunt with the lamp showed how easy it would be for him to overpower her, to reduce the difference between the vulnerable body and the dead corpse to the small distance between the lamp he held and the boundaries of her skin. Thus, by metaphorically mutilating the message of human vulnerability and dependency that the book stood for, and by threatening the limits of her body, Burhan is able to break her resolve of non-cooperation. The novel concedes that Nargis’ embodied vulnerability stood little chance of successfully defying the wishes of the unimaginably potent combination of

the Pakistani military and state, both eager to please the most powerful nation of our times. It is ironic, and particularly fitting, that the narrative ensconced the spirit of the mutual precariousness of cultures, as conveyed by the book, within Burhan's assignment of threatening Nargis in order to smooth out the frequently testy alliance between the USA and Pakistan.

This point is conveyed by one of the vignettes in *Exit West*, set “far away in Australia [where] a pale-skinned woman was sleeping alone” (Hamid 5). It introduces an intrusion into this quiet scene when a man, “with dark skin and dark, woolly hair,” exited a “door” that opened into the woman's house (6). Within the system of logic obeyed by the novel, the “doors” of migration transport migrants into unexpected nooks and corners. The man's journey is not devoid of difficulties; in order to exit the portal opening into the bedroom, “[h]e wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide” (6). The man's passage through the door is a struggle against invisible and immensely powerful forces from the side he wished to leave behind which attempted to pull him back into the “darkness”. The exertions of the man are not consistent with those required for a documented entry—evidence from the rest of the novel, some of which have been explained in this chapter, suggests that the “passage” through the “doors” is relatively easy for a privileged passport-holder.

The larger reference conveyed through this narrativization of an encounter between a white woman from the First World and a Black man who can be presumed to be an illegal immigrant is the much fabled “threat” posed by the latter on the corporeal vulnerability of the former. It also hints at the frequently used colonial themes of the white woman who is preyed on by the savage non-white man. The backstory of the man is covered next:

Growing up in the not infrequently perilous circumstances in which he had grown up, he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade, turn of a car, presence of a microorganism in a handshake, a cough. He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing.

The woman who slept, slept alone. (7)

Clearly, the man checks numerous attributes which the conservative political base of the West commonly lists out to back their anti-migrant policies: dark-skinned, undocumented, raised in “perilous circumstances” which had familiarised him with the range of threats effective against a human body. Against this litany of probable motives for violence, the white woman is completely unarmed, unconscious to the danger that had been dropped straight into her bedroom.

After setting up this scene in the style of a predictable confrontation, and possibly, of a robbery or sexual assault, Hamid quickly dissolves the tension by continuing the words quoted above with: “He who stood above her, stood alone. The bedroom door was shut. The window was open. He chose the window. He was through it in an instant, dropping silkily to the street below” (8). The man left the woman and her property untouched even though all the stereotypical tropes of the encounter had encouraged the reader to expect the worst behaviour from him. Hamid’s defiance against these expectations is not restricted to this simple twist at the end. He charts, through this episode in the initial pages of the novel, a blueprint of the motives of the world depicted in it. The emphasis on the interconnected nature of communities across the world that is conveyed through the motions of constant migration is complimented by this nod to precariousness—the man, who is “aware of the fragility of his body” is also aware of the fragility of the white woman’s body, and the relative power he holds over her in that particular instant.

Simultaneously, he must also be aware of his relative powerlessness in the large context, being an illegal migrant of a race that does not elicit the most sympathetic of responses from legal systems in the First World. In a sense, they both “stood alone”. Therefore, he “chose the window,” picking an alternative that would cause both her and himself least harm. Thus, the novel opens up an alternative to the endless cycle of violence in the world.

Elizabeth S. Anker, in her aptly named book *Fictions of Dignity*, has critiqued the tendency of the liberal human rights discourse to render “a highly truncated, decorporealized vision of the subject [of rights]” (2). Anker resorts to the subjective phenomenological experience as an alternative to the universalised liberal one, imbuing her review of vague concepts such as inherent dignity and “bodily integrity” with the more tangible alternative of corporeal vulnerability. Her primary concern is with “how liberalism’s aversion toward the body historically and presently masks and condones concrete discrimination against raced, gendered, and otherwise disadvantaged populations,” by painting the subject of rights as possessing perfect bodily integrity that was harmed only due to the act of violence inflicted on it (16-17). Using the rubric of vulnerability, Anker argues for greater attention to be paid to the embodied nature of humanness while narrating episodes of rights violations.

The vital role of her body in defining her humanness reveals itself to Nadia (*Exit West*) in an unexpected place—in the shower at an illegally occupied mansion in London. After having spent the preceding months in a tent at a refugee camp in Greece, Nadia is transported via a “door” to an empty house in central London (Hamid 117). Unlike the scant resources at their disposal in Mykonos, Saeed and Nadia are introduced to relative luxury at their new abode, having a bedroom to themselves and access to a shared bathroom. Nadia, who “wanted to take a shower more than anything, more even than she wanted food,” makes a beeline for the bathroom:

she went in and stripped, and observed her own body, leaner than she had ever seen it, and streaked with a grime mostly of her own biological creation, dried sweat and dead skin, and with hair in places from which she had always banished hair, and she thought her body looked like the body of an animal, a savage. (120-121)

Looking at her emaciated body, now unkempt and dirty where it had once been groomed and clean, Nadia is unable to stop from comparing her physique to that of an animal. The precedence that the bath takes in Nadia's list of priorities is indicative of her attempts at humanising herself again, as the unclean, unbathed body that she was forced to inhabit was not one that she identified with. She seeks to banish this body, which was simultaneously intimate—in that it bore the evidence of her hardest struggles, is caked in its own refuse and covered in unwanted hair—and hauntingly unfamiliar—representing a distorted version of something she had understood to be her essence by replacing her familiar body with a repugnant copy—before she attempts anything else. The bath, helped by the heat of the water that soothed her tired muscles, the optimal water pressure that scoured the dirt off her skin, the refreshing scents of luxury soap that got rid of her body odour, and soft towels that cocooned her, makes Nadia feel like she was in “a kind of heaven...that when she at last emerged she felt like a princess...” (121).

Nadia's long bath causes much consternation in Saeed, who chastises her for taking advantage of a home that was not her own. However, Nadia finds that she did not care for his displeasure, since, “[w]hat she was doing, what she had just done, was for her not about frivolity, it was about the essential, about being human, living as a human being, reminding oneself of what one was, and so it mattered, and if necessary was worth a fight” (122). Similar to how nourishment had been ignored in favour of the bath, Nadia is quite willing, if pushed, to defend her need for the bath, even though she understood the roots of Saeed's annoyance. At the end of

a long journey of escape from her native country, and after months of camping out in the open in Greece, “living as a human being” is, for Nadia, defined by the wholeness and cleanliness of her body over any other considerations of superficial “dignity”.

Alice Bhatti experiences a humanising effect similar to Nadia’s in the prospect of wearing clothes that were specially made for her, by the best tailor she could afford. After her impromptu wedding, Alice seeks the services of Dulhousie Tailoring, since, “[e]very married life in French Colony starts with a trip to the tailor’s shop...” (Hanif 91). Alice’s reasons for marrying Teddy Butt have already been discussed, as a means to ensure protection that will only be given to her if she attaches herself in marriage to a Muslim man. Her apparent motives in visiting Mr. Dulhousie’s is to outfit herself in new clothes apt for a young bride, but privately, she understands and seeks the legitimization that a new wardrobe, especially one from the best seamster in the locality, will lend to her unconventional marriage.

The shop’s atmosphere exhibited an aura of fantasy for the poor, socially outcast inhabitants of French Colony: “The shop’s glass doors keep out the stench...The aroma of steaming irons pressing Lawrencepur wool makes the customers feel rich, or at least tricks them into believing that they are not in French Colony any more” (91). This effect was only augmented by the stately proprietor, who treats Alice with the kind of respect that is usually not reserved for a Choohra: “he doesn’t hold his nose, he doesn’t send her off to any of his half-dozen students bent over their Singers, he adjusts his glasses and greets her with a smile so bright it could light up the farther corners of French Colony” (93). Surrounded by the absence of her neighbourhood’s signature stench, granted entry into an establishment that promised to clothe her better than ever before, and warmly attended to by Mr. Dulhousie himself, she could begin to consider that she was not just a Choohra: “This is the first time Alice has been measured, and

every part that Mr Dulhousie takes in with his faded measuring tape becomes more real, human, marriageable” (93). As discussed in Chapter 2, Alice’s body had been routinely objectified, inappropriately touched, prodded, sexualised, and assaulted—most recently, in the VIP room incident, the fallout from which instigated her marriage to Teddy. The vulnerability of a woman’s body, most commonly used to prove a point—“most of life’s arguments, it seemed, got settled by doing various things to a woman’s body”—is something she had always been forced to be intensely aware of (96). Thus, the respect offered by the tailor towards her body and the prospect of being able to dress it in clothes that smelt of luxury, causes Alice to consider her physicality, which had so far been reduced to a tool to dehumanise her, as less of a burden and more of an integral and adequate part of her human self.

Alice’s acceptance of her body, aided by the experience at Mr. Dulhousie’s shop, is nonetheless short-lived. As much as the humanising experience of buying oneself new clothes revealed the centrality of her body to her lived experience as a human, the conditions of society that had led her to consider her body “a curse” did not change (94). This is proved by her murder at Teddy’s hands, and especially by how he chose to end her life— “by pouring half a litre of sulphuric acid on her angelic face,” in the words of her father Joseph (223). Teddy ensured that Alice’s death was a painful one, exacerbated by the fact that the site of the attack, the Sacred Heart Hospital, did not have an Acid Burns Unit, and she had to be rushed to another hospital (230). He also chose a method that would disfigure her body—especially her face, the most prominent part of her embodied identity—and cause immense and prolonged suffering before she succumbed to death. His intention, therefore, was not only to kill her, but to do it in a way that left her mutilated and erased parts of her selfhood.

Continuing this engagement with the vulnerable body in the primary texts, *This House* is notable for its introduction of another aspect of the embodied human experience: desire. Desire, whether of another's body or made up of loftier ambitions, are typically considered frivolous and seldom factor in discussions of the vulnerable body. Even though the previous section had covered the extreme social and financial deprivation that Bhanggi's gender and sexual identity had forced him into, it would be remiss to advocate for these conditions to be improved while ignoring what he craves for, perhaps even more than social security. "Love is the only redemption in this world, even if it buries itself in your heart, yes, like a tiny shard of glass," he states (Mansab 98). His non-binary intersex body was accepted by the hijras, but even within that community, he was forced to concoct and perform the sexuality of a woman, in spite of how unnatural it felt to him. "Your desires are that of a man but your body, tsk, never will be, my prince," taunts an older hijra, leaving Bhanggi to lament the body that did not seem to fit in anywhere (47). Thus, it is not surprising that Bhanggi, whose "imperfect" new-born body had been unloved and abandoned by his birth parents; whose prepubescent body had been treated as currency by his foster family of hijras; whose "unholy" body was banished from mosques and polite society, considered love as the only way to reform himself from the sin of this body. He understands that love does not come without caveats—especially for someone like him—and is still prepared to welcome its doubtful deliverance. He finds this in Nida, whose unhappy marriage had helped declutter her mind of the romantic illusions of what love ought to be (2). Nida's marriage had taught her that, "[l]ove was the duty of a wife, the right of a husband" (24). She was used to being held in contempt for being unconvincing in her role as the socialite wife: "I wasn't thin, sophisticated or loquacious enough" (35). The final blow of disapproval her body could stand was the constant insinuations that the birth, and subsequent death, of her infant

daughter was a fault of her body: “I’d been pronounced tainted after I’d borne a damaged baby” (114). Faced with the continued rejection of every expression of her body—her love, desires and of the fruit of her womb—Nida too, develops an aversion to it that causes her to wonder: “What use was this body to me?” (185).

The kinship that arose out of these experiences of dysmorphia and a yearning for acceptance, companionship, respect, and possibly, love, bring the pair together. For Nida, Bhanggi’s devotion to her body was a means of reclaiming it from the vicious remarks she had been forced to endure from her family, especially her husband: “It was my choice to give [Bhanggi] the body that hadn’t been mine in years. I was giving him something that didn’t even belong to me. I was giving it to him so that he might, in the process of making it his, claim my body back for me. In having him claim it for me, I claimed him as well” (212). Taking back the identity—of a sexual being, a desirable woman, an “untainted” womb—that had been slowly leeched off her, Nida reinstates her selfhood and regains possession of the body that she had “long abandoned as unimportant and irrelevant” (212). The couple’s long journey of coming to terms with their respective bodies, by acknowledging their desires and making peace with falling outside the rigid norms governing such feelings, shows some of the blind spots of discourses on “basic” human rights which are ill-equipped to handle needs of love and desire. Inclusion of such considerations as love and care while framing the vulnerable subject of rights can go a long way in freeing it from the narrow definition offered by the liberal model.

This distinct awareness of the “humanness” of the body can be identified in *The Blind Man’s Garden* as well. The human cost of war is foreshadowed by the epigraph to the first Part of the novel, “Footnotes to Defeat”: “But a man’s life blood/is dark and mortal./Once it wets the earth/what song can sing it back?” (Aslam 3). These lines, attributed to the Greek playwright

Aeschylus, represents, via that enduring image of injury caused when the boundaries of a human body are attacked to spill blood—this “life blood” is what renders man “mortal,”—the inherent vulnerability of the human body. The irreversible change that can be precipitated by continued attacks on the body— “Once it wets the earth/what song can sing it back?”—is considered more effective than any words, or artful rhythm and language, that may have stopped the harm being caused by incursions into the body. Elevating corporeal vulnerability above more intangible spiritual aspects denoted by the song that remains unsung due to the blood that has been allowed to spill, the novel places a premium on the physical element of human dignity.

Mikal, one of the protagonists of *The Blind Man's Garden*, had joined an independent citizens' group that lent medical aid for victims of the war at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. However, he was captured by the Taliban, and imprisoned until he was “rescued” from these captors by American forces. Upon arrival at the US prison camp, they “bring a circular saw and slice the manacles off his feet...and afterwards they put him in a jumpsuit and lock his ankles in *their own* manacles, shiny and complicated as puzzles, his wrists also in chains” (179, italics added). The dubious nature of this “rescue” is further revealed when he is interrogated on his role in the war:

Mikal refuses to speak and they take him to a bare windowless room, attach a chain to his wrists and, asking him to raise his arms above his head, fasten the chain to a ring on the ceiling. The room is filled with brilliant light. A sleep deprivation cell.

Every time he falls asleep the arms shackled to the ceiling wrench him awake. (182)

Untrusting of his current captors as well as his fellow inmates, Mikal is determined to not divulge any information about himself that might let them trace his family and use the assurance of their safety against him. However, they have plenty of tools at their disposal to force his body

to convince his mind that the physical pain and mental anguish of that moment are the greatest dangers he faces. For this, their creative arsenal of methods involves the altering of Mikal's surroundings to cause deep distress by the manipulation of certain sensory stimuli: the lack of ventilation in the "windowless room," the restrictions on movement and uncomfortable position due to the placement of restraints, or the blinding light that would prevent him from sleep, as essential to the human body as food or water.

While they continue to make the normal state of living difficult for Mikal, the military police also refuse to label their treatment of him as "torture⁸⁶" (186). He is rendered fatigued, sleep-deprived, starved, and inflicted with extreme fear and suspicion towards everything outside his own body: "Though full of fatigue he focuses on everything in an effort to remain awake—fearful that he might talk in his sleep and reveal something" (184). According to Cavarero, the goal of such ill-treatment is not to injure the captive to death, but to diminish his living experience to merely that of a "suffering body, a body reduced to a totally available object, or rather, a thing objectified by the reality of pain..." (Cavarero 31). The signs of torture, whether as visible marks on the corporeal body or as lingering effects of trauma, starvation and psychological abuse, transforms the vulnerability of the tortured body.

Cavarero draws distinctions between the concept of a vulnerable body, constantly embodying the ontological reality of the possibility of injury and eventual death, and a helpless body, made more vulnerable than usual due to its own inability to defend against or cause injury to any probable attacker. She concludes that the tortured body is one whose vulnerability has been exploited to render it a helpless one as well. Thus, the state of vulnerability and the state of

⁸⁶ This was covered in section 3.2 under the discussion on how physical methods of inflicting injury that do not leave marks on the body, along with psychological torture, are loopholes that many a "civilised" nation makes use of to maintain their moral high ground as respectful practitioners of human rights.

death, which leaves the body no more vulnerable, can be occupied by a long period of suffering, depending on the methods used by the perpetrator. Cavarero has coined a term to describe such a prolonged attack on the helpless body of the victim: horrorism (32). By describing bodies like Mikal's—tortured to senselessness, afraid of one's insurmountable inherent vulnerabilities and completely helpless against any further attack—as sites of horrorism, she chooses to highlight the slow, premeditated and malicious harm inflicted on the body of the victim as a feature of contemporary forms of violence (Cavarero 3).

As already discussed, the characters of *Alice Bhatti* are particularly observant of the physical aspect of dehumanisation and suffering, aware as they are of the inherent corporeal vulnerability of the human body and the ways to manipulate this condition to cause physical and psychological harm. Within the world of this novel also exists instances of custodial torture akin to Mikal's. At the behest of Inspector Malangi, the infamous Gentlemen's Squad has in their custody an alleged bomber, who they are convinced is behind a serious act of terror even though they have no evidence to convict him (12). This quandary persists even after Malangi's best tactics to "get him to confess" to the bombing, though the legality of these tactics come under question when it is observed that they left the prisoner "moan[ing] like a dying animal" (14, 12).

In a last-ditch effort to terrify the accused into admitting to the crime or giving up more information, the Squad takes him to an uninhabited area on the outskirts of Karachi in the dark of the night, setting the stage for a potential extra-judicial killing. Teddy Butt is tasked with playing the "good cop"—communicating with the prisoner, earning his trust using his own status as an outsider to the police force and standing guard while he gets the prisoner to drop his metaphorical guard (109). The prisoner is held captive by:

A chunky pair of handcuffs, a nylon string around his ankles; this arrangement is reinforced by a set of iron rods that join his handcuffs to iron rings around his knees. It's unfathomable how this creature can stay in any human position for long; if he sits, his knees are around his shoulders, if he tries to lie down, the iron rods threaten to pierce his loins; he can't even roll himself into a ball and lie on the floor of the Hilux. (110)

The restraints on his person keep him from occupying any stance that comes naturally to a human body, that lets it rest comfortably. This state of dehumanisation is acknowledged when the narrative no longer speaks of him as a man, but as a "creature" who is prevented from acting like a human by a set of enforced restrictions that take advantage of the vulnerability of his body.

However, it can be argued that even in the process of ostensibly resembling an animal, the creatively designed torture apparatus forces out the base humanness of the prisoner by challenging and transgressing the boundaries of his corporeal vulnerability. Anker's steadfast insistence on bringing the body to the centre of the human rights debate is validated by the raw essence of humanness that permeates from the prisoner's body even as he "whimpers like an animal that has been half slaughtered with a blunt knife and is now waiting for its soul to leave its body. He is in that sad state where a swift death seems like a reasonably better option" (110). Despite the text's multiple comparisons of the prisoner to various degrees of animalisation, his humanness due his extreme state of embodied vulnerability is stark. If one of the aims of human rights literature is to jolt the reader into feeling sympathy, if not empathy, for the victim, Hanif's verbal gymnastics of depicting the human body as simultaneously animalistic and painfully human should be considered an effective example of this.

Horrorism, unlike analyses of terrorism, does not base itself off the values of the liberal, autonomous individual who may see events of mass violence as opposite parts of an unbalanced

chemical equation (Cavarero 21). Our understanding of violence should be updated by moving beyond the spectacle of the “wound” and the arithmetic of death tolls on either side, to encompass how such violence does not only include terror—often as a “political instrument” to achieve a particular goal—but also the manufacture of horror, which lacks the logic of terrorism and aims to create suffering with no immediate political gain (21, 41). Thus, Cavarero’s articulation of horrorism also takes into consideration those blameless victims of acts of violence—where there is no apparent political necessity for causing suffering—who are often dismissed as “collateral damage” in military parlance (1). This is part of her efforts to redirect the scholarship on violence away from the big fish to the small fry.

I find this novel perspective immensely helpful in understanding the suffering of non-participating parties at the side-lines of any war-like situation, such as the families of soldiers like Adil Pasha (*Home Fire*). The effects of the secrecy surrounding Adil’s death is borne by his three children, albeit in very different ways. With respect to the plot of the novel, the most significant of these reactions is Parvaiz’s decision to follow in his father’s footsteps by travelling to Syria to aid the activities of the Islamic State. Growing up, ““I never knew my father.” ... was what he’d been taught to say, over and over, by his mother and grandmother” (Shamsie 124). He was not given a chance to understand his father’s death because of the family’s well-founded fears of being socially ostracised if the circumstances of Adil’s death became widely known in the community. In addition to this, Parvaiz also remembers the hostility of the intelligence agents’ visit to their home, which ended with confiscation of an album of photographs his father had sent to him (124). The album was one of the only reminders the young Parvaiz had of the father he never met, and its unceremonious seizure was part of his confusing erasure from their lives. He saw that Adil’s death was surrounded by secrecy and remonstrations, as displayed by the

high-handed state agents as well as his scared family: “The secrecy had lived inside the house too. His mother and Isma both carried an anger toward Adil Pasha too immense for words, and as for Aneeka, her complete lack of feeling or curiosity about their father had been the first definite sign that he and his twin were two, not one” (126).

In the absence of a body to mourn him, a lack of information surrounding his death and the abrupt stripping of his belongings from their family home, Parvaiz was left unsure of his feelings towards his father. He did not share Isma’s anger nor Aneeka’s indifference, and any natural curiosity he had in knowing more about Adil was curtailed by the elder Pashas. When taunted by whispers among his playmates that his father had been a jihadi, Parvaiz parrots the line fed to him by his mother and grandmother, “I never knew my father” (124). His response, however, was not untrue; it underlined the fact that he did not know his father, and that the family could never obtain information on what he did or on how, when, where, or even if, his death had occurred. In fact, the one of the only concrete details he knew about his father was that he was never to speak about him: “[h]e’d grown up knowing that his father was a shameful secret, one that must be kept from the world outside” (126).

Being denied any opportunity to talk about or remember Adil, Parvaiz falls back on the stories about Adil told to him by Farooq, a neighbourhood recruiter for ISIS. Farooq painted a picture of Adil as a brave jihadi who went by the *nom de guerre* “Abu Parvaiz”—father of Parvaiz—whose absence from his life was necessitated by his selfless commitment to a greater cause (128). The incomplete image of Adil that he garnered from his mother’s rants transforms into a vivid one of “the great warrior Abu Parvaiz” (125). Farooq also remedies the sense of abandonment he has always felt due to the disappearance of his father, which was followed in later years by the sudden deaths of his mother and grandmother, and most recently, by Isma’s and

Aneeka's decisions to move out of the family home in order to pursue higher education. During this time, Farooq supplants his kin as Parvaiz's confidante; whenever faced with a difficulty, Parvaiz would "allow the wound to fester so that tomorrow he could tell Farooq about it and receive the antiseptic of his new friend's indignation" (133). The metaphor used here is of Farooq as a healer, a soother of injury, who is indignant on Parvaiz's and Adil's behalf and who gave Parvaiz the space and freedom to talk about his father when the rest of his family refused to. Farooq gave Parvaiz answers in the form of "stories... for which he'd always yearned", providing comfort and closure for a wound that was left open for years. Even that token he most cherished, his father's photo album, is replaced by a photograph of Adil in Farooq's possession, encountering which, "he stood there, memorising his father's image" (135). Ultimately, it is this image that encourages him to join "The Caliphate" Farooq is part of: "There was no living person for whom he'd leave [Aneeka]... But the dead made their own demands, impossible to refuse" (152).

While the death of their father had not affected Aneeka as much as it did Parvaiz, the demands made by the dead clings on to her when Parvaiz is killed in Raqqa and the British government refuses to let the Pashas bury his body at home in Britain. As both Aneeka and Parvaiz are legally British citizens, the British government, led by its British-Pakistani Home Secretary Karamat Lone, invokes an interpretation of citizenship as "a privilege not a right or a birthright" in order to thwart both Aneeka's claim on her brother's remains as well as Parvaiz's claim as a citizen to return to his home state, dead or alive (198). Having been thus disowned by Britain, his lifeless body becomes the lynchpin of a diplomatic debacle between Karamat, who uses this opportunity to convince his conservative vote base of his strict intolerance of Islamic

terror; and the Pakistani High Commission in the UK, who is offended by Karamat's dog whistles that have encouraged Islamophobia among the British (228).

Amidst this, the Pasha sisters find themselves in the familiar place of denied grief for another family member due to the state's overreach. Similar to how her mother and grandmother had to hide Adil's death and school the family to pretend they were unaffected by it, Isma is forced to hide her grief for the brother she had practically raised. In order to save Aneeka and herself from the public furore that had been engineered by Karamat's office to malign Parvaiz and his community, Isma is made to enact the role of a "good Muslim,"⁸⁷ one who condemned the political associations of her brother, dissociated herself and Aneeka from him publicly, and assured the populace that the sisters considered Parvaiz's actions too heinous to even be present for his burial (197). Aneeka, however, is determined not to take things with the docility exhibited by her sister. She travels to Karachi, where Parvaiz's body had been redirected to when Britain refused to let it in, despite censure from the British government and media. To the reporters who asked her, "[w]hy are you going?", she proclaimed, "[f]or justice" (207). Karamat scoffs at her answer, missing the irony of the larger picture—a citizen of his "multiethnic, multireligious, multitudinous" country⁸⁸ being forced to search for justice in a third world country he remembers as "[having] proven itself inadequate to the task of allowing [its citizens] to live with dignity" (215). The implications of his political campaign to arbitrarily strip people of their rights as citizens seem to have resulted in a tunnel vision causing him to miss the contradictory nature of his actions.

⁸⁷ See Mamdani (15)

⁸⁸ This is how Karamat had earlier characterised the fairness and tolerance the UK extends to all its citizens (Shamsie 88).

A singular form of protest is featured as *Home Fire*'s climactic event, the scene of Aneeka's vigil beside her brother's lifeless body, which she kept unburied in protest, at a park near the British High Commission in Karachi (210). The spectacle of her impromptu protest is heightened by the repulsion and fascination caused by the corpse, as evidenced by the community-wide support her act of resistance gathers:

He was in a coffin made of slabs of ice, a prince in a fairy tale. The owner of the city's largest ice factory said he would supply his product free of charge, a truck driver said he would transport it as a religious duty. Everyone who had gathered in the park took turns unloading the ice slabs... Those nearest the corpse wrapped their faces in cloth... [T]he news channels [continued] their live coverage... (228-229)

While the truth of a decaying body does not escape anyone—not the people in the park who had to shield their faces against the smell of the corpse, or the ones who caught it on television—the “scene of martyrdom” that Aneeka, a beautiful young girl who has been rendered helpless by the tragedy of her twin's death, was able to construct is irresistible (222). The contrast between the youthfulness and vitality presented by the girl dressed in a sombre white shalwar-kameez and dupatta, the attire of innocence and mourning, and the quickly decomposing corpse, eerie from the embalming and defaced by the shot that had killed Parvaiz, is stark (223). The “iconography of suffering” is added to by the candles left by well-wishers: “The candles threw their reflections onto the ice coffin. Flames trembled along its length, creating the impression of something stirring inside” (221, 230). The shadows cast by the tapers are an uncanny reminder of the life that had animated this body until recently and the trials it had since been subject to. The responsibility of preserving and protecting this body is taken up by the community—literally, in the case of those who had contributed to the building of the ice coffin.

Through this “trauma-driven performance protest” which “make[s] visible the individual, collective, intergenerational, and even national repercussions of human rights violations over the long term”, Aneeka is able to haul the civil society back to their posts as the custodians of human rights by showing them how the ubiquity of violence had permeated into their cultural memory, causing them to drop their guard (Taylor 1675). The public depiction of a private grief, espousing the un-sugarcoated reminder of one’s vulnerability as a human being, strikes a chord with the international civil society, and kickstarts a conversation about the multiple angles involved in what is known as the global War on Terror. The widely-televised public vigil is able to stir emotions enough to raise questions about the motives of the British state, Karamat in particular (Shamsie 247). From being branded as sexually licentious and a potential terror-threat—the tabloids had nicknamed her “hojabi” and “Knickers”—Aneeka transforms into the “beautiful girl in a dust storm [who] has managed to become Laila and Majnu combined in the nation’s consciousness” (204, 228). However, none of these romantic images can hide the harsh facts: the “prince in a fairy tale” is a putrefying corpse, and the beautiful girl in white is merely “[an] orphaned student, who wants for her brother what she never had for her father: a grave beside which she can sit and weep for the awful, pitiable mess of her family life” (228, 253). The suffering of those left alive is no less than that of those left lifeless. The very mechanism that has been entrusted to secure the human rights of its citizens—the nation-state—is found to be the perpetrator of violence.

The denial of a respectful burial is a common theme in stories of totalitarian violence. *The Golden Legend* tells us that “mass graves of Kashmiris, who had been killed and buried in secret by Indian soldiers, were beginning to be discovered...” (Aslam 236). While the notion of an unmarked grave is itself an injustice to the kin of the dead who are being deprived of a site of

memorialising, the mass grave also signifies a doubly-bound anonymity—not only do they contain the remains of those whose deaths are unconfirmed or even actively denied, they also depersonalise the idea of an individual’s memorial. Trapping the bodies in an eternal wait for recognition, both of their identities and of their violation, and their families in the liminality of hoping for their loved ones’ survival as well as dreading the uncertainty of their disappearance, mass graves are a widely employed tool of ensuring prolonged violence on a subjugated population.

Imran is not a stranger to the prospect of such large-scale pits of death, as the possibility of his various “disappeared” relatives ending up in one was always high. The asperity of this situation is never more evident than in this bit of advice from an elder in the community:

The grandfather began to advise everyone to carry bulbs and seeds in their pockets, and to inform their family and friends what specific plant each was carrying upon their person, in order that they would know what flowers to look for after the Indian soldiers had tortured them to death. (236)

This ingenuous suggestion betrays the complete helplessness felt by the people of Kashmir in dealing with the physical manifestations of state power and its attempts at erasing violence and suffering. The reader is forced to imagine what horrors lie beneath the paradisiacal landscape of Kashmir—are the wildflowers of the valley hiding a pile of unmatched limbs and faces which are half-mourned, one wonders. The juxtaposition offered by this image of relatives hunting for the specific flowers signifying unrecognised death is symptomatic of the politics behind the stalled grief that has paralysed families such as Imran’s. Thus, these examples from *Home Fire* and *The Golden Legend* represent the horrorism of death—the ways in which suffering can be

prolonged even after the body has been rendered lifeless, and the simultaneous horror this prospect presents to the grieving family.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with some of the critiques raised by scholars concerning certain aspects of the theory and praxis of human rights in contemporary times. With these as points of departure, I have traced the essence of such arguments through the primary texts under study to suggest alternatives to the liberal understanding of the subject of rights, the victim of rights violations and the process of recognising instances of violation. My arguments in this chapter discerned episodes of resistance that the novels have implied, some of which germinated on an individual level and went on to spread hope to the community at large. Therefore, I would like to conclude this chapter with a brief review of the impact of these struggles for the recognition of violence.

It is important to record here, self-reflexively, that as much as one may commend the resistances put up in certain corners of these storyworlds, it nevertheless does not translate into what is commonly called a “happy ending” for many of its characters. Thus, irrespective of the fervour with which Lily (*The Golden Legend*) planned to take Massud and Nargis’ fiscal generosity to help not only himself, but his entire community, from a lifetime of deprivation and ill-treatment, he is not successful in doing so. His well-thought-out plans could not be realised, first due to the charges of blasphemy that forced him into hiding, then due to his death by drowning. Similarly, even though Nida and Bhanggi (*This House*) certainly rocked the stable ship of heteronormativity and class difference observed by their respective families—Bhanggi’s adoptive family of the hijras and Nida’s immediate family, especially her husband Saqib—the

worlds they occupied were not unforgiving enough to let their resistance succeed. Bhanggi is ultimately murdered by Saqib's cronies. Nida carries on Bhanggi's legacy by following in his footsteps to become a qalandar, once again gravitating to the anonymity offered by the familiar haven of the Dargah. In the case of *Home Fire*'s Aneeka, even though the end of her life found her standing up for the rights of her family, and as a representative of grieving women across time and space, she still *dies*. In her death, we once again see vestiges of those vicious powers—states that could effectively declare persons as undeserving of even “basic” rights, and fanatical elements that chose to take advantage of a woman's expression of grief to steer it into an international diplomatic conflict⁸⁹—that led her to be in that park in Karachi holding vigil over her brother's bodily remains. What was destroyed by the explosion, however, is the young law student who had once been inspired by the idea of justice, who had worked hard to study and master it, and who might have grown up to help others like her. Similarly, Alice Bhatti did everything possible to survive in a situation which was antagonistic to her very existence—she strived to make an honest living as a nurse, helped friends like Noor with whom she shared an intimate knowledge of mutual poverty, and even married ‘up’ for a Muslim man's protection. Alice's protest against normalised violence was manifested in her determination to survive. However, these efforts were proven to be in vain when she was murdered by the same man she had entrusted her protection to.

⁸⁹ The target of the bomb was not Aneeka herself, but Eamonn, her partner, to whom an active explosive device was forcibly attached by an unidentified person in the crowds gathered at the park in Karachi, presumably to get back at his father Karamat's intolerance of Islam. Karamat was, at this point, serving as the Home Secretary of the UK and the assassination of his son could trigger a range of political reactions at the national and international levels (Shamsie 254). Aneeka had been, in fact, used as bait and died as collateral damage.

Thus, while the novels acknowledge the glimmer of hope that resulted from these expressions of protest, their subsequent annihilation reminds us of the enormous changes that are required before human rights can be deemed truly “universal”.

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Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of literature, it has been argued, is for the reader to be allowed a glimpse into worlds unfamiliar. Separated as we humans are by history, geography and circumstances of privilege, literature becomes a medium that will allow one to step into the shoes of other humans to empathise with their joy and suffering both. In this sense, political fiction has been pitched as a nostrum of sorts, helping the privileged reader to *feel* the constant companionship of terror experienced by people living in warzones and other conditions of volatility. However, as Susan Sontag reasons, this is not nearly enough:

So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent—if not inappropriate—response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth as some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark. (Sontag 89-90)

Theorists of human rights and literature largely agree with Sontag on this: merely sharing an emotional kinship with a character or story, which may disappear as soon as one shuts the book, is useless. However, such a conundrum is not only the fault of the hypothetical reader's lack of discernment. It would behove this genre to celebrate fiction that represents an effort to incorporate the complexities of political and cultural subjectivities of our times, plotting all humans “on the same map” of suffering. James Dawes' comments on the “narrative society” that

we live in, “a society where risk and even compassion are conceived of through stories rather than through statistics, a society that perceives itself not merely through narrative but as narrative” provides a middle ground for the problem of the well-intentioned but “impotent” response Sontag abhors (Dawes 38). This thesis agrees with Sontag on the deficiencies of “sympathetic” responses to media depicting the suffering of others, but also finds truth in Dawes’ argument that narratives can, nevertheless, be a necessity to transform the private experience of suffering into a public acknowledgment of the same. Therefore, I contend that while literature cannot be a panacea that solves far-reaching problems of inequality and prejudice, it does provide a space that allows the dissection of these to suggest alternatives.

Heavily influenced by national and world history, and by current events shaping Pakistani societies, the works studied in this thesis form a fictional response to normalised violence that hinders the claiming of human rights for many. Captured in the striking poetic images painted by Aslam, Shamsie’s heart-wrenching plotlines, the compact and poignant writing of Hamid, the irreverent black humour favoured by Hanif, and Mansab’s effortless articulacy, these works are effective containers of such convoluted concepts. The richness of the writers’ storyworlds, rooted as they are in the idiom of the subcontinent and the history and culture of Pakistan, provides a canvas of possibilities that both influence and entertain the reader. Therefore, this thesis argues that the novels studied are a vital part of a genre of Pakistani anglophone fiction that has risen above superficial notions of engaging with contemporary forms of violence to include multiple possibilities for the improved practice of human rights.

Although the scope of the proposed enquiries could possibly encompass a significant breadth of human experience, I have restricted my miniscule contribution—a proverbial drop in the ocean of literary criticism—to a modest selection of arguments. Broadly, this thesis has been

an attempt to identify the manners in which writers from Pakistan have categorised acts of violence, imagined responses to these and created a template for resistance and protest. In doing this, I highlight the function of the body as a site on which violence is played out and humanness defined, as well as the role of memory-making in processing the resultant trauma. I also argue that the novels have prioritised a demand for tangible changes in the way we understand human rights and justice over any superficial appeals for the reader's impotent "sympathy".

The novels pay attention to the manifestation of difference, particularly in the multiple ways in which the Othering gaze is administered. Through stereotyping, inexpugnable attributes based on physicality—such as the double discrimination faced by a socially-assigned "hijra" who finds himself at odds against both the ones who claim to be his community as well as the social matrix that Others all hijras—are attached to bodies that defy the neat columns of embodiment laid out by the majority. The bodies of women and the sexual Others are exoticized, which appears to be a "privilege" compared to outright discrimination, but proves to be as insidious a form of the same. This sexualising gaze finds its focus through the lens of religion, caste and even, profession, reducing the body to a mysterious artefact to be subjected to further exploration without the consent of the object of the gaze. The postcolonial who encounters the gaze of the coloniser finds themselves under the scrutiny of a historical master who is still withholding judgement on the colonial subject. Further, the gaze is also one of surveillance, often in the form of a public eye that observes and slots the object into pre-designed categories. In response, the Othered characters often employed various kinds of disguise, which were also observed to have a mutinous character and displayed scope for countering the gaze. The most prominent signifier of Oriental and Islamic "backwardness", the veil, is employed as a symbol of asserting a cultural and religious identity that refuses to cower under the scrutiny of Western feminism. However,

the liberatory potential of such self-fashioning is successfully counteracted, most significantly by the state and its arms of governmentality, especially the institutions that benefit from the existing inequitable social order. Despite their stifling, I argue that these struggles, even short-lived, provide hope for sustained resistance in the future.

This thesis contends that as a corollary of the diverse bodies the novels have populated their pages with, they also provide a space for a constellation of ignored narratives. The novels reflect on the ways in which the act of remembering is mediated by power hierarchies, silencing the articulation of individual memories in an effort to obstruct its development into group remembrances, and consolidation into cultural memory. It was also observed that history itself was treated as a tradition that had continued to be informed by memory-making, with historiography and propaganda acting as the state's tools in controlling the concept of the "past". Parallely, the characters of the novels act as historiographers themselves, participating in this dialogue with the past using their own markers of familial and collective memories which may be institutionalised as cultural memory. Thus, the disorienting loss that arises from an event like the Partition can be encapsulated in a name like Raza's, and the lingering logic of centuries of East-West conflict continue to shape recent recollections of the War on Terror. By acting as a conduit for the transmission of the fictional memories of these storyworlds, the texts have exhibited the potential to spark a campaign among real-life survivors and post-generations of traumatic events to revisit the memories that have been denied to them. It can be hoped that this literary historiography will succeed in rekindling the motivations of trauma citizens in reclaiming their past and demanding reparations for historical violence. Judith Butler recognises the importance of "the history of violence" that lead to events of violence, and emphasises the importance of siting these events within this history without exonerating any of the parties

involved in inflicting injury on others (*Precarious Life* 42). I have noted how the novels carry this kind of reflection that Butler recommends through the careful criticism of the epistemic violence represented by gaps in recorded history which restrict the construction of trauma.

The final chapter draws on several fundamental points established in the first two. Continuing the analysis of the emphasis placed on understanding the body as a social phenomenon in Chapter 1, I argue that the texts advocate for greater attention to be paid to the corporeal vulnerability of humans. This is expressed through characters who derive their “humanness” from their physical well-being, conveying the oft-ignored centrality of corporeal integrity in defining the human experience. Further, the portrayal of episodes highlighting the interdependence of human populations across the world, as our mutual capability to both cause harm and refrain from violence is integral in deciding the course of humanity, echoes Judith Butler’s method of contextualising violence within history. Using the concept of precariousness as a point of departure, I argue that the novels are able to firmly ground the victims of rights violations within the scope of both geopolitics and biopolitics. Further, the critique of such panoptic institutions as global capitalism and its role in the erosion of a human rights culture cement the place of these works among literatures of resistance. Thus, narrative suggestions that the novels make towards deconstructing the contemporary practice of human rights are fleshed out to arrive at the conclusion that they provide a viable blueprint to register the role of Pakistani literature as an advocate of human rights.

This project is, by no means, “complete”; it is a small part of the much longer conversation on the role of literature in effecting social change. As such, there are some further enquiries that it could have made, but has not in its present form. A few of these are themes and connections between the texts that were revealed over the course of the study. I have briefly

engaged with the idea of death, as a moment in human existence wherein one's vulnerability ceases to be a factor in one's humanness. I have also touched upon the accompanying theme of grief in the context of the delayed/denied grief faced by the families of the "disappeared". I believe that a more thorough exploration of the politics of death—as a symbol of resistance, a means of exerting biopower, or a metaphor of hope for "life-after-death"—would be an interesting journey to embark on. Another prominent theme which has been occasionally hinted at in this project but not properly fleshed out is the interplay of tradition and modernity as expressed through the practice of religion and secularism. The prospects of the study of these factors, complicated by the rise in fundamentalism across the globe will be immensely rewarding.

Apart from these, I believe that future work in this area would benefit from addressing questions about the place of Pakistani literature as a cultural artefact in itself. Readers, and often even researchers, when caught up in the fictional worlds spun by well-crafted words tend to forget the extensive industry that produces books. The novels under study, regardless of their depiction of the suffering brought on by ruthless capitalist state policy and their critique of the global neoliberal market, are undoubtedly cultural goods in themselves, available for sale in the same market at a monetary price. They are mediated by numerous actors like literary agents, multinational publishing companies with their editing, designing and marketing departments, literary prize juries, reviewers, and social media influencers, in addition to the authors themselves. Graham Huggan has written about the implications of this system, especially with respect to postcolonial literatures which, due to their inherent position outside of the Western, white market, "tend to display and/or interrogate the conflicted material circumstances governing

their own production” (Huggan 412). Therefore, this assembly line of literary production coupled with the recent “boom” in Pakistani literature presents inviting opportunities for research.

While this project has certainly touched upon the human aspect of the works, it has more or less placed the human under sterile conditions divorced from the natural environment surrounding them. Upendra Baxi has pointed out the anthropocentrism of the human rights discourse (11). It is high time that studies of the human rights subject also takes into consideration varied topics such as the precarious lives of those on the frontlines of the climate emergency, as well as the role of global capitalism in pushing the planet to the edge of its capacity to host life. This aspect of the novels has not been studied in this project. The scope of research along these lines is immense, however. The effects of war and war-like conditions on the Afghan landscape are presented as lasting images in both Shamsie’s and Aslam’s works. Even Hamid’s refugees are witnesses to a dystopian shift of global living conditions, veering back-and-forth from urban flats to makeshift tents on Mediterranean beaches, every move complicated by the overarching problem of scarce resources.

This thesis, through both the arguments summarised previously and these suggestions for researchers who want to be part of this developing conversation, concludes that contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction is rapidly consolidating into a veritable treasury of ideas to practise resistance against violence.

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EN802	Research Methods & Dissertation Writing	2.00
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EN812	"Reading Right(s): The Culture of Human Rights	4.00
EN813	"Primary Texts: Readings"	2.00
EN814	Reading Fiction	4.00
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This is to certify that Ms. RUKMA PRINCE (17HEPH03) was enrolled for Ph.D. English, Department of English, School Humanities, University of Hyderabad in the academic year 2017-18 and has completed the following coursework as per the requirement of UGC 2016 Regulations:

S.No.	Course Code	Course Name	Credits
1	EN801	Research Methods & Critical Approaches	6
2	EN824	On Narrative	4
3	EN812	Reading Right(S): The Culture of Human Rights	4
4	EN813	Primary Texts: Readings	2

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Dublin, 28th April 2019

**Letter of Participation at the Third Ireland India Institute Conference
on South Asia, 2019**

This letter confirms that **Rukma Prince** has attended the Third Ireland India Institute Conference on South Asia, 24th - 26th of April, 2019 and presented a paper titled '*Beyond the Secular: Religion in Contemporary Pakistani Novels in English*', held at All Hallows DCU Campus.

The conference was organized by the Ireland India Institute, Dublin City University.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Connolly', with a large, flowing loop at the end.

Professor Eileen Connolly

Director, Ireland India Institute
Dublin City University,
Collins Avenue, Glasnevin, Dublin 9
Phone: +353 (1) 7005536
E-mail: eileen.connolly@dcu.ie

Northeast Modern Language Association
53rd Annual Convention
March 10-13, 2022

Certificate of Attendance and Presentation

Rukma Prince

*for successfully participating in the
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*"Metaphors of (Im)purity: Nation, Caste and the Christian Women in Nadeem
Aslam's The Golden Legend"*

as part of the session

Representations of the Female Body in Pakistani Literature and Film



Carine Mardorossian
Executive Director



3/28/2022

Siting Violence: Bodies, Memories and Rights in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction

by Rukma Prince

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