Materialising Grief: The Reclamation of Loss in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

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Abstract: Over recent decades, Sophocles' *Antigone* has become widely adapted within postcolonial contexts, the tragedy's collapsing of the boundaries between the home, nation, and law positioning it as a useful text for offering counter-discourses to a state's ideas of justice. Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* is one such adaptation that explores the themes of *Antigone* through the experiences of one British Muslim family. Drawing from Judith Butler's scholarship on grievability and Sara Ahmed's work on the politics of emotion, this article examines how Muslim lives are made abject by Britain's post-9/11 Islamophobic politics and media. It then examines how *Home Fire's* characters resist this abjection and use the materiality of mourning to reclaim subjectivity and human dignity for themselves and those they have lost. Finally, this article employs affect theory to examine how the materiality of mourning speaks across difference and reclaims grievability for those precarious lives in conflict with their nation.

Keywords: *Home Fire; Antigone*; post-9/11; grief; materiality; affect

Introduction: *Home Fire, Antigone*, and the grievability of life

In her book *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler (2006) explores the experience of grief in the context of post-9/11 global violence, asking, "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life*?" (20; original emphasis). In asking these questions, Butler prompts us to consider the ways in which not all lives are deemed worthy of possessing value and how this dehumanisation reduces certain lives to a state of abjection. Consequently, in the public eye, the death of an abject life is

unfelt and considered meaningless to mourn, or rather, is ungrievable. This is an issue Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* challenges through its depiction of the lives and deaths of the Pashas, a British-Muslim family living in present-day London. Adil Pasha, the father, was a jihadi who was imprisoned and died while being transferred from Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay, and Adil's son, Parvaiz Pasha, is killed near the end of the novel while trying to escape for home after joining ISIS and becoming horrified by the atrocities he witnesses. Adil's and Parvaiz's involvement in terrorist activities means their deaths are deemed by the British public as unworthy of mourning, and their lives and personhood possess value only to those who loved them. The novel's portrayal of the familial, public, and political reactions to these deaths illustrates the gap that exists between grievable and ungrievable life and how this gap leads to a perpetuation of precarity for those whose lives are deemed abject and ungrievable.

Home Fire draws upon Sophocles' *Antigone*[1] for its inspiration and in doing so reveals how post-9/11 geopolitics echo a timeless violence that continues to erupt between precarious life, "kinship and the state" (Butler 2002, 5). Having long served "as an inspiration for those fighting for freedom in the midst of injustice" (Chanter 2011, 22), *Antigone* has become widely adapted within postcolonial contexts,[2] Antigone herself coming to represent the oppressed in instances ranging from apartheid in South Africa to "political crises" in Argentina (23). Therefore, Shamsie's adaptation of *Antigone* not only draws on Sophocles' tragedy but also on the postcolonial legacy it has built in serving as a discourse aiming to resist the power of a law that refuses to respect all human dignity. In *Home Fire*, Aneeka Pasha (Antigone), the twin sister of Parvaiz (Polynices), and a British Muslim woman living in Wembley, desperately tries to encourage her brother to return home to London after he joins ISIS. When Eamonn

(Haimon), the son of the British Home Secretary, turns up at her doorstep clearly interested in Aneeka after seeing her photo in her sister Isma's (Ismene) room, Aneeka initiates a secret relationship with him in the hope of using Eamonn to find a way for her brother to return to Britain. However, the two end up falling in love, and even when Eamonn learns the truth about Aneeka's plan to help her brother, he still chooses to stay with her and agrees to speak to his father on her behalf, asking him to consider allowing Parvaiz to return home. Eamonn's father, Karamat Lone (Creon), refuses this request, forbidding Eamonn further contact with Aneeka. While trying to return to Britain on his own, Parvaiz is killed in a drive-by shooting just as he is about to turn himself over to the British consulate in Istanbul. Again, Aneeka tries to bring her brother home, this time so that his body can be buried, but Karamat again refuses, arguing that Parvaiz gave up his British citizenship when he chose to leave the country to join ISIS. Outraged and grief-stricken, Aneeka travels to Pakistan where Parvaiz's body is being held, and in front of international news media displays the body in a Karachi park for all to see. She publicly mourns him, refusing to leave his side until his body is permitted to be returned home to Britain. Her efforts – and the novel – end tragically with Aneeka embracing Eamonn who, after travelling to Karachi to join her, has been attacked by two men and strapped into a belt filled with explosives.

Shamsie's novel updates *Antigone's* themes of grief, family, citizenship, and bloodshed. Like *Antigone*, Aneeka's story embodies a transitional moment "between conflicting historical, ideological, and identificatory forces" (Chanter 2011, 17), but instead of ancient Thebes, her experiences offer a critique of post-9/11 Britain where over a decade after the bombing of the Twin Towers, anti-Muslim rhetoric continues to fuel stereotypes that deny Muslim peoples their own subjectivity. Scholars Claire Chambers (2018), Lorna Burns (2019), and Rehana Ahmed (2020) have explored these

connections between *Home Fire* and *Antigone*, analysing *Home Fire's* preoccupation with the visual and aural and how these have shaped the function and reception of the text. Chambers examines how sound operates as an "embodied experience in the novel" (2018, 217), raising the question: "Can the oppressor listen?" (202). Her work focuses on this question of listening across difference, while Ahmed's article is similarly occupied with whether *Home Fire* allows for an "ethical reading" across difference (2020, 1146) in terms of representing British Muslim lives to an assumed white readership. Burns is also interested in the question of "what we as readers and critics can do with a text" (2019, 8); however, in her work, she shifts her attention from what *Home Fire* reveals about difference to, more specifically, what it reveals about inequality and how it therefore functions as a work of dissent and resistance. The work of these three scholars establishes *Home Fire* as a dynamic text designed to produce a fraught encounter with the reader. In this article, I seek to expound upon this notion as well as employ Chambers's, Ahmed's, and Burns's analyses of the novel's emphasis on themes of visibility, silencing, and performance to examine what it reveals and affectively communicates regarding the experience of grieving for someone a nation has deemed ungrievable.

Drawing upon Butler's scholarship on mourning and grief and Sara Ahmed's work on emotion and affect theory, I argue that in *Home Fire,* Parvaiz and Aneeka seek to reclaim their familial loss by materialising their grief through bodily performances. In doing so, their mourning practices disrupt the divide between grievable and ungrievable life. While this affect generated by Parvaiz and Aneeka's grieving circulates between the characters, it also moves beyond the novel, becoming appropriate for what Elizabeth Anker (2012) refers to as an "embodied politics of reading"; that is, it holds the potential to "reincarnate that subject with a vital porosity and (in Merleau-Ponty's

lexicon) ‘fleshiness’” (9), a practice crucial to disrupting the stereotypes of the Muslim figure that continue to pervade the post-9/11 British imaginary. This article begins by examining the ways in which Muslim bodies are stigmatised and vilified through their representation in post-9/11 British politics and media. The second half then builds upon Burns’s analysis of the novel’s potential as a work of dissent and looks at the ways in which *Home Fire* portrays resistance to the abjection of Muslim lives. Ultimately, this article examines how Parvaiz and Aneeka seek to reclaim subjectivity through their material practices of mourning, thus resisting their country’s attempt to cast aside the lives of their lost family members and urging the novel’s characters and readers alike to acknowledge and experience their demands for dignity.

Abject lives and the emotional politics of Islamophobia

The difference between grievable and ungrievable life stems from how certain lives are deemed more valuable and thus more worthy of protection than others. As Butler (2006) explains, there is an inequality in the “radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected […]. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable’” (32). This unequal distribution of vulnerability thus renders certain bodies more disposable than others, positioning them in a constant state of precarity. *Home Fire* depicts this precarity through the Islamophobic politics, media, and rhetoric directed towards the Pasha siblings that represent the post-9/11 disconnection between Muslim lives and the abstract Muslim figure as perceived in Britain. Through the work of politicians and the media, the Muslim face and body have become conflated with terrorism and oppression so as “to effect a dehumanization” (Butler 2006, 141) of Muslim peoples. This becomes most explicit through the policies of Britain’s home secretary Karamat Lone that largely lead to the policing and surveillance of Muslim

characters and further conflate Islam with terrorism in the minds of the public and make Muslim peoples more vulnerable to public hate and othering. Notably, because Karamat is the son of Pakistani immigrants, Aneeka recognises that "[h]e has to prove he's one of them", meaning a British citizen, "not one of us", meaning a Pakistani (Shamsie 2017, 35). Rehana Ahmed (2020) examines this predicament, noting that Karamat's "public role places increased pressure on him to perform 'Britishness' or the 'good Muslim' for the public eye" (9), a strategy which leads to the distance he places between himself and Islam in his attempts to mark himself as more British than Muslim – more similar than different. Karamat's attitude towards difference, while complicated, thus does nothing to dismantle the anti-Muslim attitudes of his British constituency but rather only reinforces them.

By promoting policies and rhetoric that continue to alienate British Muslims from their fellow citizens, Karamat undermines Muslim lives, transforming them into representations of the potential enemy and further contributing to his country's Islamophobia. His statements such as, "I hate Muslims who make people hate Muslims" (Shamsie 2017, 243), rhetorically continue to further associations of British Muslims with feelings of hate through a practice that Sara Ahmed (2004) says is "restick[ing] the words together", which then allows for the '"sticking' [of] signs to bodies" (132). Rhetoric like Karamat's accounts for how fear and hate become stuck to Muslim bodies through an affective attachment that marks them as unreconcilably Other and becomes the '"evidence' of the very antagonism it effects" (Ahmed 2014, 52). In other words, the fear and hate that create Islamophobia become justified by the existence of Islamophobia itself, these emotions acting as a self-fulfilling prophecy by transforming Muslim peoples into objects of aversion. Such a transformation compromises bodily integrity and human dignity and reduces Muslim peoples "to no more than bodies,"

making them abject (Anker 2012, 33). In this way, Islamophobia links fear and hate to Muslim bodies, trapping them in an unprotected state of precarity. *Home Fire* captures many of the realities of this state of precarity through its depictions of racism and bodily policing that many of the Muslim characters experience. For example, the Pasha siblings are ever-paranoid that their text messages and Internet searches are being watched; they are at greater risk of harassment and hate crimes within their community; and their travel is heavily monitored, as proven by Isma's hours-long detainment and interrogation by officials at the London airport when she is travelling to America (Shamsie 2017, 3-7). In their research on *Home Fire*, both Chambers and Ahmed recognise this constant surveillance and its violent psychological impact on the Pasha siblings as a major concern. As Chambers points out, Parvaiz "has been stopped and searched twice for purely Islamophobic reasons by British police officers and is regularly treated with suspicion as a young Muslim man in Britain" (2018, 207). Parvaiz is racially profiled because of his stigmatised appearance which marks him as a potentially dangerous body. This recurring experience makes him more susceptible to radicalization, as demonstrated later in the novel when he is promised "A place where skin color doesn't matter" (Shamsie 2017, 147) if he leaves Britain behind for the ISIS Caliphate in Syria, and he becomes enamored with the idea.

Throughout the novel, the discrimination the Pasha siblings experience also becomes progressively clearer to Eamonn. Unlike Parvaiz, Eamonn does not at first appear to experience racial profiling, which may be due either to his acceptable performance of "Britishness" like his father, his status as the son of the Home Secretary, or simply wilful ignorance. Whatever the reason, after he begins a relationship with Aneeka, he begins noticing the ways Muslim bodies are monitored within his country, especially through his encounters with his friends. At one gathering in particular, "[h]e

leaned back in his chair, looked at his friends and tried to imagine walking into this garden with Aneeka – the hijab, the refusal of alcohol, Wembley" – and he realises that they would not accept her and how her self-presentation conveys her Muslim, lower-class identity (Shamsie 2017, 85). Eamonn then recognises the way this judgment extends to him as well, as his British friend Max observes,

> Twenty-something unemployed male from Muslim background exhibits rapidly altered pattern of behavior, cuts himself off from old friends, moves under the radar. Also, are we sure that's an evening shadow rather than an incipient beard? I think we may need to alert the authorities. (84)

Although joking, Max's critique of Eamonn's behaviour and appearance suggests a belief in the racial stereotypes associated with Islamic terrorists. By implying that Eamonn, who is half-Pakistani, is beginning to look like a terrorist, Max is policing Eamonn's physical body and suggesting that the physical and behavioral differences Eamonn is beginning to signal could project suspicion because they already hold the potential for evoking fear and hate.

In addition to conveying how Islamophobic politics have material consequences for Muslim bodies, *Home Fire* also captures the media's role in contributing to the Islamophobia that continues to trap Muslim peoples in states of precarity. In his study *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, Tahir Abbas (2005) acknowledges that "[o]ne of the most significant developments for Muslim communities in post-September 11 Britain has been the role of the media" (109). Abbas's work and other cultural studies texts such as Peter Morey's and Amina Yaqin's (2011) *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* and Tareq Y. Ismael's and Andrew Rippin's (2010) *Islam in the Eyes of the West: Images and Realities in an Age of Terror* explore

the role of the news and mainstream media in perpetuating the image of the terrorist Muslim figure, one that continues to provoke the negative emotions that instigate "attacks against Muslims" (Abbas 2005, 110). As Eamonn comes to realise in *Home Fire*, this image imbues with distrust bodily signifiers such as brown skin and a long beard, but perhaps no material marker of Islam has been given more scrutiny by mainstream media than the Islamic veil, which in Britain and other western nations has come "to emblematize women's oppression" (Anker 2012, 39) and symbolise Islam's attack on women's bodily rights. While repeatedly used to justify Middle Eastern military intervention, the rhetoric regarding Muslim women and the need to protect them not only strips them of agency[3] but also disregards the ongoing domestic persecution of British Muslim women's bodies.

In *Home Fire*, Shamsie spotlights the hypocrisy of Britain's critiques concerning Muslim women's bodily rights through the media's treatment of Aneeka. After Karamat makes public Aneeka's and Eamonn's relationship and reveals that Aneeka aimed to use his son to intercede on behalf of her brother, a tabloid article titled "Ho-Jabi! Pervy Pasha's Twin Sister Engineered Sex Trysts with Home Secretary's Son" is published. It refers to Aneeka as "Knickers" and reports that "[s]he hunted down the Home Secretary's son, Eamonn, 24, and used sex to try and brainwash him into convincing his father to allow her terrorist brother back into England" (Shamsie 2017, 214). Naming Aneeka as "Knickers" dehumanises her and portrays her solely as a sexual object. Furthermore, the "Ho-jabi" in the title pairs the image of the hijab, one version of an Islamic veil that many western nations like Britain commonly stigmatise for being an object of bodily oppression, with the derogatory label of "ho", a western slang term for whore, here used to compare Aneeka to a prostitute. In doing so, the article's title

simultaneously mocks Aneeka for being both sexually oppressed and sexually promiscuous and defames and vilifies her as an accomplice to Parvaiz.

Home Fire recognises the ways in which bodily freedoms and protection are denied to certain bodies that are stigmatised for being potentially dangerous or a deviant Other. It reveals how the increased policing and control of Muslim bodies and the hate and fear projected upon them can strip Muslim peoples of their subjectivity and position them as precarious lives that are more abject than human. However, *Home Fire* ultimately challenges this denial of humanity through the mourning performed by Parvaiz for his father and by Aneeka for Parvaiz.

The materiality of grief in *Home Fire*

After being denied the right to mourn properly for Adil and Parvaiz, the Pasha siblings convey their grief in a material way that emphasises their loss and the importance of acknowledging it, thus reclaiming grievability. This first occurs in the novel when Parvaiz engages with physical pain to grieve for his father, Adil, who died in British custody while being transported to Guantanamo Bay from Bagram Airfield. The Pasha siblings were "forbidden to talk about" (Shamsie 2017, 52) their father or his death by their family, and when a child Parvaiz's photo album of his fatherwas taken away from him by a British Special Branch officer, an act which further "removes […] Adil Pasha from his son's life" (127). When Parvaiz first meets Farooq, the man who will ultimately convince him to join ISIS's media wing, he is asked about his father. Parvaiz admits, "'I never knew my father.' This was what he'd been taught to say, over and over, by his mother and grandmother […]. Horribly, Parvaiz felt tears come to his eyes" (127–128). Because his father was a jihadi, Parvaiz grows up being denied the ability to even acknowledge him, and so he is unable to grieve over his death. This loss of the right to grieve alienates Parvaiz even further from his father until the prompting

of Farooq makes him realise it is a right that he wishes to reclaim. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed theorises that it is often anger and sadness that best evoke empathy for one's pain and allow one "to enter into a relationship with the other […] the pain of others becomes 'ours', an appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralises their pain into our sadness" (2014, 21). Parvaiz exhibits the power of this emotional transfer by choosing to experience his father's pain as his own in order to posthumously reignite their relationship as father and son.

For Parvaiz, pain becomes the bodily, material way through which to express his once prohibited grief; not only does pain allow him to re-experience the loss of his father but also to identify with his father through practices of embodiment. Parvaiz's grief most strikingly manifests itself after Farooq invites him to his flat and has his two cousins shackle Parvaiz in a stress position for hours in order to show him how his father was tortured at Bagram Airfield (Shamsie 2017, 138). After Parvaiz is released from his shackles, Farooq tells him, "They did this to your father for months" (140). After this realisation, Parvaiz researches "Bagram abuse" online and returns to Farooq and asks him to "[t]ie me again. I want to feel my father's pain" (143). Experiencing this pain not only enables him to empathise with his father's suffering but allows him to reclaim his grief over his father's death. Pain for Parvaiz becomes an intersensory experience of embodiment that connects him to his father's corporeality through the torment he feels, the sound of his own screaming, and his inability to see outside Farooq's flat and track the passing of time (139). This experience becomes both an act of reconnection and one of mourning; Parvaiz's grief for his father drives him to unmake those "surfaces and borders" (Ahmed 2014, 25) that separate them. This reconnection, however, comes at the cost of a part of Parvaiz's own self. To employ the words of Butler, Parvaiz becomes "undone" by his grief and desire to regain his father,

(2006, 23), and his resulting identification with his father through pain is ultimately what pushes Parvaiz closer to Farooq and to joining ISIS.

The material manifestation of grief through bodily pain is a private act of mourning for Parvaiz; however, after he is killed in a “drive-by shooting outside the British consulate in Istanbul” (Shamsie 2017, 192), his sister Aneeka turns the materiality of her grief upon the public. When Parvaiz is identified as a member of ISIS after his death, Karamat refuses to allow his body to be returned to Britain for burial, declaring, “We will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death” (193). Having already lost Parvaiz, Aneeka finds that Karamat’s refusal to allow him to be buried in Britain compounds her grief. It also fuels her decision to travel to Pakistan where Parvaiz’s body is being kept in order to display her grief for her brother by publicly mourning over his body in a Karachi park. While deeply personal, Aneeka’s decision to publicly grieve for Parvaiz is also politically driven. Despite Parvaiz’s citizenship being revoked due to his terrorist involvement, Aneeka is determined to convince the British government to permit the return of his body to Britain by forcing an acknowledgement of what she has lost and she refuses to cease her public mourning until this demand is met. According to political theorist David McIvor’s (2016) analyses of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, this moment of public grieving might be described as “a confrontational style of protest” in which Aneeka’s “mourning and mobilization collapse together” to form an “alternative political space” (40). To Aneeka, Parvaiz’s death represents more than the loss of her brother; it extends to her country’s disregard for Muslim life and reluctance to protect Muslim peoples as rights-bearing citizens. When Isma tries persuading her to accept that Parvaiz’s body cannot be returned home and that they “don’t have [the] liberty” to speak out against

such things, Aneeka criticises her, saying, "You don't love either justice or our brother" (Shamsie 2017, 203), emphasising how the fates of both are interconnected.

Each of the material components of Aneeka's public performance of mourning for her brother becomes integral to reclaiming Parvaiz's grievability. For a location, she chooses "a park lined with banyan trees, their ancient overground roots more enduring than wire rusting in the sea air or guns that jammed with dust or the calculations made today by politicians looking to the next elections" (Shamsie 2017, 222). The comparison of the park to "guns" and "calculations" equates the setting to a strategic display of force or power and emphasises that Aneeka is using it to convert her grief into a political act. She does so by transforming the park into a memorial for her brother. As cultural geographer Avril Maddrell (2013) explains, "the impulse to memorialise the dead can be read alternatively as a stage in marking a death of someone significant as an element of 'closure', or as a […] tangible focus for the expression of continuing bonds" (509). By presenting the body of her brother in a public space, Aneeka ensures that Parvaiz's death will receive recognition and that others will serve as witnesses to her mourning. The stage of the park marks Parvaiz's death with a significance and conveys the enduring bond between sister and brother. In addition to this location in which Aneeka chooses to display Parvaiz's body, the material objects she decorates the space with also serve as a discursive manifestation of her grief. She sits "on a white sheet covered in rose petals" (Shamsie 2017, 231) upon which "[f]ar more men than necessary" place Parvaiz's casket, "the scene of martyrdom now complete" (234). Aneeka uses the colour white to reassert Parvaiz's innocence and counteract the media's rhetoric vilifies him for being a terrorist. Furthermore, the superfluous number of men who carry Parvaiz's casket and the ornamentation of the rose petals suggests that he was someone capable and deserving of love, respect, and

devotion. As sociologist Michael Brennan (2019) points out: "Materiality matters […] because of the capacity of objects to have effects; effects whose power and significance come from the people, places, ideals and relationships that objects come to signify and stand in for" (236). In this way, the material objects she surrounds herself with become markers of Aneeka's love for her brother, creating a script of grief legible to onlookers. The memorial Aneeka builds for Parvaiz, therefore, becomes a testament of her relationship to him, making each of its components necessary and powerful.

Like the objects she employs, Aneeka's body, gestures, and attire also become ways of affectively communicating her love and grief for Parvaiz. She dresses "in the white of mourning" (Shamsie 2017, 231) and becomes visually transformed by her grief when kneeling at the side of her brother's casket: "The dupatta had fallen from her head, long hair whipping across her face as the wind picked up. The casket revealed its flimsy construction, nails ripping out of wood as the girl set to dismantling it with her bare hands" (235). Aneeka first presents herself to viewers as a composed woman dressed in white, but once beside her brother's body, that composure vanishes and is replaced by a desperation to see his face again conveyed by her tearing at hiscasket and disregarding all appearances. This becomes most powerful when a dust storm passes through the park and creates a howling wind. Karamat realises, "the howl was the girl, a dust mask on her face, her dark hair a cascade of mud, her fingers interlaced over the face of her brother" (237). The dust storm creates a clear before and after image of Aneeka that mirrors the way grief overtakes her. As Brennan notes, "Our bodies, as a kind of matter, are also the vehicles through which we experience the pain of grief and loss, through which we communicate it to others" (2019, 236). Aneeka's transformation from clean and calm to mud-covered and howling communicates to the onlooking public the violence and ugliness of grief, forcing them to confront the fact that Parvaiz's

death has not only destroyed him but Aneeka as well. The materiality of her mourning collapses the divide between her environment, body, and emotion, with the sensory experiences of dust, mud, and wind viscerally afflicting Aneeka's body in ways that then resonate within the bodies of those watching. Consequently, the public and performative nature of Aneeka's mourning comes to speak across the lines of difference, attesting to her and her brother's bodily integrity and demanding recognition of their pain and human dignity.

Not only does Aneeka use her own body as a tool to convey her grief, but she also uses Parvaiz's body to reclaim his humanity and underscore his death. Karamat observes, "In the whole apocalyptic mess of the park the only thing that remained unburied was the face of the dead boy" (Shamsie 2017, 237). While the setting, objects, and Aneeka herself become ruined in the turmoil of the dust storm, Parvaiz's body alone remains protected and visible for all to see, ensuring that he is the focal point of attention. In their book *Corpse Encounters: An Aesthetics of Death*, Jacqueline Elam and Chase Pielak (2018) analyse the ways in which corpses assume representational roles when "aesthetically arranged" (xi), concluding that when "corpses speak back […] its [the body's] specter returns in the face of the corpse to remind us of lost futures, irreplaceably singular beings ended and yet remaining" (xii). The televising of Parvaiz's corpse becomes criticised as a radical move by the Pakistani media, with Karamat's assistant James even condemning the lack of "broadcast regulations" (Shamsie 2017, 236). The taboo of broadcasting Parvaiz's corpse lies both in the way it rewrites the script of his death and forces the public into recognising his loss of life. Its materiality transforms death from an abstraction into the loss of an "irreplaceably singular" being. Furthermore, Parvaiz's body becomes a radical statement because of the way dead bodies corporeally "misbehave" as they decompose and become released from those

“disciplinary processes” that seek to control the body in life (Elam and Pielak 2018, xvii). His corpse elicits feelings of disgust from onlookers such as Karamat who imagines the body’s “state of decay” and realises that everyone except Aneeka has been pushed “to the periphery” by “the stench of death” (Shamsie 2017, 267). In this way, Parvaiz’s decomposing body begins to stick to the senses of Karamat and other viewers through the “transference of affect” (Ahmed 2014, 91), thus binding them together. Moreover, Aneeka’s presentation of her brother’s body disobeys the natural order by making visible that which is often kept hidden. It is a moment that mirrors Aneeka’s earlier unveiling of herself to Eamonn on the day she initiated a relationship with him in hopes of seducing him into being willing to help her brother. According to Ahmed’s (2020) analysis, she uses Eamonn’s gaze “for her interests […] subverting the relationship of power that connects them” (1149). Similarly, by intentionally turning the gaze of the public upon Parvaiz’s corpse, Aneeka controls the resulting narrative which in turn creates “the possibility of resistance” (1150). While Burns acknowledges that Aneeka’s declaration is ultimately silenced, she too recognises the moment’s potential for resistance because it provides “a glimpse of a possible world in which an equality of difference […] is encouraged” (2019, 194) and acts of dissension will be heard.

Like Aneeka’s performance of grief, Parvaiz’s corpse itself speaks back against the ways in which the media in *Home Fire* have abstracted him into being a faceless terrorist; the narrator describes, “He was in a coffin made of slabs of ice, a prince in a fairy tale” (Shamsie 2017, 241). Preserved with care by Aneeka, Parvaiz’s corpse becomes a counternarrative to the media, re-depicting him as a person worth mourning. In this way, Aneeka, the environment, its objects, and Parvaiz’s corpse form what Burns refers to as an “assemblage […] that demands that Parvaiz’s corpse be seen as a figure of attachment and of love, rather than one obscured by the rhetoric of otherness

attributed to the body of a terrorist" (2019, 193). This assemblage of affect therefore becomes a means of reconstructing perspectives concerning Parvaiz's personhood, as Aneeka's performance of grief transforms Parvaiz from an object of hate and fear into an object of love and, in doing so, forces the public to recognise through his corpse the life that has been lost in his death. By politicising his corpse, Aneeka confronts Karamat and other British leaders over their refusal to repatriate his body even in death. Her presentation of Parvaiz's body becomes an oppositional discourse that suggests that rather than punishing Parvaiz, this policy instead punishes his innocent family who have already lost him through death.

As Elam and Pielak observe, "A politics of aesthetics of the dead is a call to intervene on the side of justice when the face of the other begins to rot" (2018, xiv), and the longer Parvaiz's corpse rots in front of Aneeka, the more it becomes testimony to the reality of his death as well as their shared humanity. Aneeka's appeal through pathos registers with those like Karamat's wife, Terry, who criticises Karamat for the ridiculousness of his standoff with Aneeka and the cruelty of watching "a nineteen-year-old, rotting in the sun while his sister watches, out of her mind with grief. He's dead already; can't you leave him alone?" (Shamsie 2017, 266). Terry's rebuke of Karamat conveys how Aneeka's public suffering and the state of her brother's body call into question the ethics of government policies imposed upon bodies that usually go unseen and unheard.

Conclusion: *Antigone's* legacy and its productive dissonance

As in *Antigone*, the deaths and mourning the Pasha family experience ask, "when kinship comes to pose a threat to state authority and the state sets itself in a violent struggle against kinship, can these very terms sustain their independence from one another?" (Butler 2002, 5). The novel answers: no. Just as Aneeka's materially driven

performance of grief breaks down the separation between the living and the dead and object and emotion, it similarly breaks down the divide between the private family and public state. In doing so, Aneeka wields her kinship to Parvaiz as a weapon against the British government in retribution for its unwillingness to recognise the value and dignity of her family. As Terry observes to Karamat,

> A few days ago your greatest rival was a man born with a diamond-encrusted spoon in his mouth […] now it's this orphaned student, who wants for her brother what she never had for her father: a grave beside which she can sit and weep. (Shamsie 2017, 267)

Terry's statement conveys a sympathy for Aneeka prompted by her forcing of onlookers to witness her suffering as well as the reality of Parvaiz's death. It demonstrates that by symbolically putting Karamat and her nation on trial for their denial of her family's rights, Aneeka's devotion to her brother becomes a direct challenge to her nation's authority that seeks to emphasise the disconnect between what is lawful and what is right when it comes to the value of a human life. Likewise, *Home Fire*'s clear account of the ways in which individuals are labelled as grievable or ungrievable encourages resistance to such separations, calling for a re-humanisation of those lives society has deemed abject or unworthy of being protected. This perhaps is best discerned in the novel's final scene when Eamonn joins Aneeka in the park where she is mourning Parvaiz, and two men secure a bomb around his waist. As everyone in the park begins to flee for safety, Eamonn shouts at Aneeka to run as well, "[a]nd run she does, crashing right into him […]. She rests her cheek against his, he drops his head to kiss her shoulder. For a moment they are two lovers in a park, under an ancient tree, sun-dappled, beautiful, and at peace" (274). The book then ends with Aneeka and Eamonn

locked in an embrace and frozen in time. Throughout the novel, Aneeka and her family have represented those lives that are ungrievable, while as the son of the British home secretary, Eamonn represents those lives that are worth protecting. Their embrace just before the bomb goes off therefore becomes a collision between grievable and ungrievable lives – a collision that blurs the separation between the two.

Rather than silence Aneeka's and Eamonn's inevitable deaths, the end of the novel only further continues to disrupt the divide between grievable and ungrievable life, Aneeka's sacrifice for Eamonn functioning as the ultimate act of resistance by forcing witnesses to recognise her human dignity and thus subverting the power of those voices that sought to deny it. In her work on *Home Fire*, Ahmed (2020) explains how when Isma confronts Karamat at his house, asking to be allowed to retrieve Aneeka from Pakistan, Karamat is taken "into a space of productive dissonance […] that has the potential to enable an encounter across lines of difference, or beyond the frame" (10). In applying Ahmed's analysis to the final scene of the novel, I argue that Aneeka traps onlooking characters and readers alike in a space of "productive dissonance" as well, leaving them stranded in the tension of the moment between life and death without release. This trap further connects Shamsie's work to the postcolonial legacy of *Antigone* in the way it acts as "as a counter-discursive text" (Van Weyenberg 2013, 35) that seeks to "reinvent the political life of the community" (7) through its critique of law, justice, and the will of the people through familial mourning. The novel's emphasis on the power of material encounters seeks to work across this difference and reveal the attachment that exists between all bodies, with Aneeka's and Eamonn's final embrace becoming symbolic of how these bonds cannot be separated and how continuing to target others only increases one's own precarity. *Home Fire*'*s* story of resistance is one

that asks from beginning to end: who is valued as human and what lives are grievable, while working to broaden and blur the limits of such categories.

Notes

1 More specifically, I am referring to Heaney's 2004 translation. Heaney cites the post-9/11 "political context" (2004, 76) regarding the Middle East as one of his personal justifications for creating a new translation of the tragedy.

2 Contemporary examples of postcolonial adaptations of *Antigone* include but are not limited to those by: Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona (1973), Paulin (1984), Gambaro (1986), Òsófisan (1994), and Saad (2006). See Mee and Foley (2011) for a more exhaustive list.

3 Ahmed explores how Aneeka's hijab becomes an expression of
her agency in the way she uses the exoticization of the veil to create an "interplay of surveillance of subterfuge" (2020, 4) that allows her to manipulate Eamonn for her own interests while remaining elusive to his gaze.

Notes on contributor

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