GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS:

SUBALTERNITY AND UNGRIEVABILITY IN NADEEM ASLAM'S

THE BLIND MAN'S GARDEN AND KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *BURNT SHADOWS*

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Introduction

In the years following the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, the genre of 9/11 fiction emerged to explore the impact of the attacks on individual Americans and society in general and perhaps also as a way to work through the trauma the attacks caused. Several American authors, such as Don DeLillo, Amy Waldman, and Jonathan Safran Foer, wrote novels about the attacks and their impact on society. Some of the novels written in the aftermath of September 11 considered the global impact of 9/11, but most of these novels were mainly focused on the United States and American characters, and often the events were represented as having occurred in isolation from their geopolitical context. Moreover, the authors of these early 9/11 novels, for example Don DeLillo's *The Falling Man* (2007) or Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) were predominantly white, U.S. authors, whose works, according to Richard Gray, "simply assimilate[d] the unfamiliar into familiar structures." The trauma and impact of 9/11 were only measured by the personal effects on the characters in their novels, and as a result, "[t]he crisis [was], in every sense of the word, domesticated" (Gray 134). These early American novels tended to monopolize the grief and suffering of 9/11 and, as a result, similar experiences of those the West deems the "Other" were simply "unthinkable and ungrievable" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xiv). Because the "Other's" suffering was not considered worthy of grief, it often was not addressed in these novels at all. The experiences of the "Other" were not portrayed, and thus their voices remained unheard.

This lack of representation can be understood in terms of subalternity, a concept theorized by postcolonial scholar and feminist critic Gayatri C. Spivak, who defines subalterns as "every[one who] has limited or no access to the [*sic*] cultural imperialism" (De Kock 45). In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak addresses the question whether subaltern individuals, especially women, are able to speak for themselves in a society in

which they are disenfranchised and ignored. Spivak criticizes the attempts of notable Western theorists such as Foucault to represent the subaltern and "emphasise[s] how the benevolent, radical western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience" (Morton, *Gayatri* 56). Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak has garnered criticism as some critics argue that, throughout history, individuals who were considered subaltern, particularly subaltern women, actively resisted existing power structures in order to challenge the position of women in society. However, according to Spivak, "'the subaltern cannot speak' means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard" (Spivak, *Reader* 292). In other words, she argues that even if subaltern groups are able to speak, their voices remain unheard by the dominant groups of society. The subaltern voices that are heard depend on the recognition and approval of the dominant powers, and often must fit into the narrative of the hegemonic groups.

Often, Muslims and the characters representing them in 9/11 novels were not even considered worthy of mention in the context of trauma caused by the events and the aftermath, especially Muslims who lived in the conflict areas in the Middle East and Central Asia after 9/11. Binary views of East and West were bolstered by Samuel Huntington's controversial theory that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 a "clash of civilizations" was inevitable. After 9/11, the notion of civilizational clashes was revitalized and a narrative of Us versus Them dominated public discourse, in which the Western world is seen as "offer[ing] a defense against [the] Barbarism" of the Orient (Boletsi 23). As a result of this Orientalist civilizational discourse, a person's "grievability", to borrow Judith Butler's term, depends on their nationality, ethnicity, or location of residence. If the losses are felt by the West, "grief become[s] nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xiv).

The hegemonic representation of Muslim characters in early 9/11 novels often consisted of either non-Westerners who have assimilated into a Western mold, or simply as the Other. In some novels, Western authors tried to speak for the subaltern – the disenfranchised non-Westerners affected in the aftermath of the attacks such as the character of Mohammad Khan in *The Submission* (2011) – but most left their perspective and experience out of the story entirely. This changed only when 9/11 novels written by Muslim or Middle Eastern authors began to appear, which provided and continue to provide, in Michael Rothberg's words, "cognitive [maps] that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others" (Rothberg 158). Before, novels such as Don DeLillo's *The Falling Man,* Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006) focused on the impact of the attacks on Americans, specifically white citizens of the U.S., without, in any significant way, considering the experiences of the Other and the wider impact of the attacks on the world outside the West. The important difference between postcolonial novels or novels by postcolonial authors and post-9/11 novels written by Western authors is that the former "[enter] dangerous terrain, the fault-line between the binaries of East and West, aggressor and victim, the formerly colonized and their former colonizers, and [insist] on finding a living, breathing space" (Scanlan 277). They provide an alternative viewpoint and make the East and West interact within these novels. Some go further, "find[ing] a breathing space between two identities that have become fused; the terrorist and the migrant for example, or the Muslim and the fanatic, or even the American and the Bush administration" (277). These novels blur the lines of the common perception of terrorists, heroes, tragedies, and trauma, and provide a more complex reading of the events preceding and following the September 11 attacks.

This thesis will analyze how postcolonial authors Nadeem Aslam and Kamila Shamsie give a voice to the Other that is largely absent from early, U.S.-centered 9/11 fiction and challenge the Other's relegation to a subaltern status. In order to challenge the ungrievability of the Other, these authors create a new mode of portraying Muslim and non-Muslim characters in relation to the terrorist attacks and challenge the existing post-9/11 novels by offering "cognitive maps" that represent those relegated to a position of subalternity absent in most Western novels. In order to provide a clear theoretical framework for my analysis of the two novels, the theoretical concepts central to my analysis will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter. I will first introduce Spivak's theory of subalternity in relation to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which informed her theory, and Butler's concept of grievability. In the other two chapters I will give a close reading of Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) and Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), arguing that some of the characters in these novels are examples of Muslims, or more generally people from the Middle East, who break with the notion of subalternity portrayed in, or simply left out of, many previously written Western novels. Lastly, I will investigate to what extent and in what ways the representation of the characters in each novel challenges the assumptions in U.S.-centric post-9/11 literary works by transnationalizing the consequences of the attacks.

Chapter 1: Subalternity, Orientalism and Ungrievability

As Abdul JanMohamed points out, Gayatri C. Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1983) marked a turning point in the field of postcolonial studies, as it "clear[ed] a theoretical minefield that lay buried beneath certain Eurocentric discourses" (139). In her essay, Spivak asks if subalterns – those possessing "the general attribute of subordination […] whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" – can speak (Guha "Preface" vii). To answer this question, Spivak starts by explaining the widow sacrifice, a Hindu tradition in which a widow commits suicide by climbing onto the pyre of her dead husband. "If I ask myself, How is it possible to want to die by fire to mourn a husband ritually, I am asking the question of the (gendered) subaltern woman as subject" or as the Other who is subjected to a Power – in this case, men (Spivak, "Subaltern" 47). Spivak points out that, from the Hindu perspective, it was traditionally argued that "[t]he women actually wanted to die," since the sacrifice was not obligatory (50). However, a counternarrative from the "brown" women's perspective was never provided: "[o]ne never encounters the testimony of the women's voice consciousness" (50). Even when going through police records of the widow sacrifices, "one cannot put together a 'voice'" of the women who died because of the practice (50). Exploring what this signifies, Spivak argues:

> It must be remembered that the self-immolation of widows was not *invariable* ritual prescription. If, however, the widow does decide thus to exceed the letter of ritual, to turn back is a transgression for which a particular type of penance is prescribed. With the local British police officer supervising the immolation, to be dissuaded after a decision was, by contrast, a mark of real free choice, a choice of freedom. The ambiguity of the position of the indigenous colonial elite is disclosed in the nationalistic romanticization of the purity, strength, and love of these self-sacrificing women. … In the case of widow selfimmolation, ritual is not being redefined as patriarchy but as *crime*. The gravity of *sati* [, widow sacrifice,] was that it was ideologically cathected as "reward," just as the gravity of imperialism was that it was ideologically cathected as "social mission." Between patriarchy and Development, this is the subaltern woman's situation today. (55-56)

Even though Spivak recognizes that the practice of the widow sacrifice is undeniably wrong and most likely born out of patriarchal notions, she also emphasizes that the British colonizers labeling the act as a crime is denying a woman's freedom of choice and, more importantly, fails to address the issue at its root: even though women are technically still given a choice, the male-dominated Hindu society directly and indirectly forces women to choose what they deem to be right. Thus, the problem is the patriarchy as a whole, which causes such practices to exist in the first place.

The example of the widow sacrifice not only provides a relevant background of subalternity, but also gives an insight into the definition, limitations, and misconceptions of the concept. Even though Spivak does not clearly define subalternity in her essay, Green argues that she draws on Gramsci's definition, who first used it to refer to "noncommissioned military troops who are subordinate to the authority of lieutenants, colonels, and generals," but later for people in "positions of subordination or lower status" (Green 1-2). In Notebook 3, Gramsci writes that subalterns are individuals who "are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defense" (qtd. in Green 2). A group of historians forming the Subaltern Studies collective, using Gramsci's definition as a starting point, define subalternity as "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha, Preface 35). Even though Spivak agrees with the historians' definition, she "adds that [the Subaltern Studies collective's] lingering classic Marxist approach to social and historical change effectively privileges the male subaltern subject as the primary agent of change" (Morton, *Spivak* 48). Instead, "Spivak proposes a more nuanced, flexible, post-Marxist definition of the subaltern, informed by deconstruction, which takes women's lives and histories into account" (48). As Spivak herself puts it, "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 41). She makes an important distinction between

minorities and subalterns, however: “Simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not ‘subaltern.’ That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space” (65). Spivak chooses to use this specific term “because it is flexible; it can accommodate social identities and struggles (such as woman and the colonised) that do not fall under the reductive terms of ‘strict class-analysis’” (Morton, *Spivak* 45). The term can be used broadly and is not limited to a certain theory or school of thought. As she explains in an interview, “I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor” (Spivak, *Post-colonial Critic* 141).

Spivak’s theory of subalternity, in which the subaltern is defined by their inability to speak, was controversial but “groundbreaking and widely influential,” according to JanMohamed. He argues that “[t]he hidden assumptions of [postcolonial and minority discourses previously buried beneath Eurocentric discourses], had they remained buried, would have repeatedly detonated and hence derailed many critical projects designed to excavate subaltern consciousnesses” (JanMohamed 139). Spivak’s conclusion that subalterns cannot speak has sparked criticism among postcolonial critics as it “is often taken out of context to mean that subaltern women have no political agency because they cannot be represented” (Morton, *Spivak* 66). However, Spivak argues that “speaking” refers to “a transaction between the speaker and the listener,” and that “[w]e are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is, then, something of a non-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity” (Landry and Maclean 289). In her view, subalterns “receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinate systems of political and economic representation” (Morton, *Spivak* 67). According to Stephen Morton, “Spivak’s refusal to simply represent non-western subjects comes from a profound recognition of how the lives of many disempowered groups have already been damaged by dominant systems of knowledge and representation” (*Spivak* 33).

As David Thurfjell points out, Spivak also criticizes postcolonial studies and its part in affirming the role of the subaltern. She argues that "[p]ostcolonial studies … ironically risks reinscribing colonial imperatives of political domination and cultural exploitation" (157). The attempt to give subalterns a voice "by granting them collective speech … creates a situation where the subaltern depends upon western intellectuals to 'speak for' them. Instead of being allowed to speak for themselves, they are spoken for". Moreover, she argues that subalterns are not seen as individuals by postcolonial scholars, but as representatives of a group "with a collective cultural identity: the identity of being dispossessed." By ignoring the subaltern's identities, postcolonial scholars "in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. Because if they were not subordinate, there would be no need to speak as a collective group or to be spoken for in the first place." Due the subaltern's lack of voice, the subalternity of an individual is lost once they are able to be heard and recognized to have a voice: "[A]s soon as one has gained the platform to speak for the oppressed**,** one does not represent them anymore" (Thurfjell 157). Ultimately, there is no way that the subaltern can speak, or more importantly, be heard, because they cannot speak for themselves but also cannot be spoken for by others.

Within the field of postcolonialism, Spivak is considered to be part of the "Holy Trinity" of postcolonial critics, together with Edward Said and Homi Bhabha (Morton, *Spivak* 136). Both Spivak and Bhabha were inspired by Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and used his work to develop their own critical theories. Spivak has described it as "the source book in our discipline" (Spivak, *Outside* 56). As Said explains, Orientalism is a way of thinking in cultural binaries: "On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things" (Said 57). In the 1990s, Orientalist discourse reemerged in the work of political scientist Samuel Huntington. Predicting a new world order, Huntington argued in a controversial but

influential article in *Foreign Affairs* that "[t]he great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" rather than ideological as they were during the Cold War, and that the conflict will be between "the West and the Rest" (Huntington 22, 41). In what Huntington calls the "clash of civilizations," the Western civilized world is seen as "offer[ing] a defense against [the] Barbarism" of the Orient (Boletsi 23). As Said similarly argues in *Orientalism*, the Orient is perceived as "aberrant, undeveloped, inferior … [,]at bottom something either to be feared or to be controlled," and the only ones who can control and civilize the barbarians are those in the West (Said 301).

Though Said's theory is essential in understanding colonial discourse, it has been criticized for its shortcomings in recognizing the complications of viewing the West and the East as entities, and not communities of people. Bhabha and Spivak "each [respond] to the relative lack of attention paid to the colonized subject in *Orientalism*" (Moore-Gilbert, "Spivak and Bhabha" 452). Moreover, as Morton argues, "it did not offer an effective account of political resistance, or the 'real', material histories of anti-colonial resistance that were masked by this dominant system of western representation" (Morton 112-113). In addition to the lack of accurate representation of resistance, Moore-Gilbert argues that Said tends to portray a homogenous idea of Orientalism in the West, while Spivak gives a more accurate representation of the complexities of Western power (*Post-colonial Theory* 75, 76). Furthermore, in contrast with Spivak, Said fails to address the role that gender plays in colonial discourse in any detail (Moore-Gilbert, "Spivak and Bhabha" 454). According to Moore-Gilbert, Spivak provides a more cognitive and realistic view on the issue of colonization and Western dominating powers by focusing on both the colonized subject and the issue of gender within colonial and postcolonial discourse. However, Spivak's work still closely corresponds with Said's theory as both "[conceive] of the subordinate as the 'silent interlocutor' of the dominant order" (454). Both Said's work in conceptualizing Orientalism

and Spivak's theory on subalternity are key to understanding the construction of the Other in postcolonial literature in general and in the two novels to be discussed in this thesis.

The West's tendency to think in binary terms such as non-civilized versus civilized societies, criticized by Said, also manifests itself in terms of what Judith Butler calls "grievability" in the context of the U.S.' response to 9/11. Butler contends that the extent to which of a person's death or a group's suffering is deemed "grievable" depends on whether they come from the "civilized" West or the "non-civilized" East. In the case of Western victims of the terrorist attacks, "grief become[s] nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable." The "Other" from the East, however, is not grieved in the West – they are deemed ungrievable. Butler argues that "the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xiv). The Other's humanity is not perceived to be equal to the humanity of the Westerner, which results in the grievability of the so-called civilized, and the ungrievability of the so-called uncivilized Other. When the humanity of the Other is questioned, and their "life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note" (Butler, "Violence" 23). Butler's argument makes the mentality behind the U.S.'s retaliation after the September 11 attacks and its justification more clear: "Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark" (24). The "mark" is "no mark" because the victims are not only the Other, but they are also subaltern. The Other's suffering and trauma is left unspoken or unheard. The Westerner is unable to mourn Arab and Muslim lives because their lives are not considered to be as valuable as Western lives (Butler, *Precarious Life* 12). Taking these lives becomes insignificant when the lives taken are not considered to be human lives worth grieving, or when they are subaltern

lives. The deaths caused by the terrorist attacks in the U.S. thus are deemed more valuable and more grievable than those caused by the United States in their military response to the attacks. Moreover, the distinction between who is and is not grievable is made "from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others" (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). Whether or not a life is grievable is decided by the powerful West, which perceives its own losses to be more significant than, and a justification for, the losses it causes. To counter this Western mentality, Butler calls attention to the role that Western countries played in creating the conditions which led to the terrorist attacks, or, rather, to the positive role they might play in creating better conditions: "[T]he acts of terror were unequivocally wrong, [but] … the United States might also be able … to produce conditions in which this response to US imperialism becomes less likely. This is not the same as holding the United States exclusively responsible for the violence done within its borders" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 14). Butler, then, criticizes the response to and the justification of the 9/11 attacks because they only lead to a continuation of the vicious cycle of violence.

Elizabeth Anker argues that the U.S. justified its violent response by "produc[ing] a specific American collective identity through a melodramatic plotline" (22). She defines melodrama as both "a mode of popular culture narrative that employs emotionality to provide an unambiguous distinction between good and evil through clear designations of victimization, heroism, and villainy" and "a pervasive cultural mode that structures the presentation of political discourse and national identity in contemporary America" (Anker 23). In her criticism of U.S. retaliation, she argues that "by first identifying America with the victim, and subsequently with the hero who elicits reparation in order to institute righteousness in a place of prior wrongdoing, the melodramatic narrative offers the state justification to exercise military and economic power" (Anker 26). The portrayal of the U.S.

as the victim starts with President George W. Bush's first speech on the evening of the attacks, "Statement by the President in Address to the Nation". Bush explains to the people of the United States what he believes happened on that day: "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts" (Bush, "Statement"). Furthermore, he says that "America was targeted for attack because [they]'re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining" ("Statement"). By using words such as "under attack" and "targeted," Bush identifies the U.S. with the victim. However, when he contrasts the U.S. with the attackers, "the very worst of human nature," and promises "to find those responsible and bring them to justice" in order to win the so-called War on Terror, he changes the U.S.'s role from being a victim to being a hero. The American military in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries after September 11 were not only portrayed as heroes bringing civilization to a barbaric society, but also as those who sought justice for the lives that were lost. However, as Slavoj Zizek warns, "the only way to ensure that it will not happen [in the U.S.] again is to prevent it going on [anywhere else]" (389). Instead of responding to violence with more violence, Butler asks if "finding the individuals responsible for the attacks on the United States will constitute having gotten to the root," and if, "[the U.S. is not], ethically speaking, obligated to stop its further dissemination, to consider [its] role in instigating [this violence]?" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 8).

In the decade after the September 11 attacks, the novels inspired by 9/11 were mostly focused on the Western perspective and dealt with the trauma caused by the attacks within the United States. In response to these novels, Richard Gray argues that "[n]ew events generate new forms of consciousness requiring new structures of ideology and the imagination to assimilate and express them" (Gray 133). Using Gray's article as a point of departure, Michael Rothberg argues that "we need a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial

citizenship" (153). He "propose[s] a complementary centrifugal mapping that charts the outward movement of American power. The most difficult thing for citizens of the US empire to grasp is not the internal difference of their motley multiculture, but the prosthetic reach of that empire into other worlds" (153). By portraying the West's Other, the literature Rothberg envisions will enable American citizens to understand the trauma and suffering outside of the United States. Instead of novels only focusing on the aftermath in the U.S., we need "cognitive maps that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others" (158). By portraying subaltern lives that are deemed barbaric and ungrievable, Nadeem Aslam and Kamila Shamsie give voice to the subaltern Other that is largely absent from early 9/11 fiction, not by talking for them but by imagining their experiences as subalterns. Yet, in portraying their inability to speak or be heard by those in power, they paradoxically also enable them to be heard.

Chapter 2: Learning Things from Books in *The Blind Man's Garden*

Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* deals with love, religion, injustice, and war within post-9/11 Pakistani society. In the novel, Aslam tells the story of a family living in the small town of Heer in Pakistan around the time of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as part of the so-called War on Terror. Jeo and Mikal, Rohan's son and adoptive son respectively, set off for neighboring Afghanistan to help the wounded civilians caught in the post-9/11 crossfire between the Taliban and U.S. soldiers. Shortly after his marriage to Naheed, Jeo, a trainee doctor, feels he needs to fulfill his duty as a good Muslim and help civilians. Mikal, who had also been in love with Naheed and was in a relationship with her before her marriage with Jeo, accompanies Jeo to protect him and sacrifice himself if need be. They leave their family under the pretense of going to Peshawar to volunteer at a hospital, and with the promise to return. Despite their good intentions, the brothers soon learn that they have been recruited to be sold by a vindictive ex-military officer and are forced to fight the U.S. soldiers together with the Taliban. Throughout the novel, the story is narrated from the shifting perspectives of the brothers, their family members, and others who are involved in their lives through an omniscient narrator. However, the most important characters through which the novel is focalized are Jeo, Mikal, Naheed and Rohan. By portraying, and moving between, the brothers' journey to Afghanistan, the pain and suffering of their loved ones back home left clueless about their well-being, and the Pakistani's experiences with the Western military presences in the two countries, Aslam provides the reader with the "fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship" Rothberg calls for (153). As a result of the presence of both American and Pakistani/Afghani voices in the story, the novel serves as "a dialectic reflecting the dual responses to 9/11" (Larson). Aslam makes an attempt at providing both the point of view of the Western soldiers and their motives, and that of the people suffering as a result. In doing so, Aslam aims to portray his characters with varying abilities to speak based

on their position in society, whether they are subaltern and/or oppressed or in a position of power or superiority.

Due to these different perspectives provided in the novel and the varying degrees to which the characters are able to speak or be heard, Aslam's novel lends itself to a reading in light of Spivak's theory regarding subalternity, Said's theoretical concept of the Other, and the related concept of ungrievability introduced in the previous chapter. The most notable subaltern characters in the novel are the women, the character of the fakir and the remaining Pakistani or Afghani characters. In this chapter, I will analyze the representation of subalternity in the characters in detail. I will argue that the omniscient narrator serves to mediate in order to enable these 'Others', whose subaltern status is highlighted, to be heard. Thus, Aslam creates a new mode of portraying Muslim characters in relation to the terrorist attacks to provide "cognitive maps" which "are read almost inevitably in opposition to post-9/11 writings by celebrated British and American writers such as Martin Amis, Don DeLillo, and John Updike" (Itakura 356), who deploy stereotypical tropes of "[d]eranged fanatics and traumatized victims" (Nash 94). Furthermore, I will also examine how Aslam's representation of women and the fakir show their ungrievability both in relation to the West and within their own world, which is ultimately caused by their social status in the societies that are represented in the novel. Lastly, I will investigate to what extent and in what ways the representation of the Eastern characters in the novel transnationalizes the representation of consequences of the attacks.

2.1 Unnamed, Unseen Women

Non-Western women, who are central in Spivak's discussion of subalternity due to their position in (formerly) colonized, patriarchal societies, are represented throughout the novel. While all Pakistani/Afghani and Muslim characters in the novel possess characteristics of

subalternity, the women's subaltern status in these societies and their lack of voice is particularly highlighted and dramatized throughout the novel. The women in the novel constantly try to speak but are not heard by the men. One example of women's subalternity portrayed in the novel is when Tara, Naheed's mother, thinks of what women suffer through in her country:

> During her adult life there has not been a single day when she has not heard of a woman killed with bullet or razor or rope, drowned or strangled with her own veil, buried alive or burned alive, poisoned or suffocated, having her nose cut off or entire face disfigured with acid or the whole body cut to pieces, run over by a car or battered with firewood. Every day there is news that a woman has had these things done to her in the name of honour-and-shame or Allah-and-Muhammad, by her father, her brother, her uncle, her nephew, her cousin, her husband, her husband's father … her son, her son-in-law, her lover, her father's enemy …. (101)

Due to her own experiences in Pakistan, Tara thinks that the women in Afghanistan are wise to keep wearing their burkas while the men are reopening music shops and shaving their beards after Afghanistan is liberated "because more often than not there are no second chances or forgiveness if you are a woman and have made a mistake or have been misunderstood" (101). In addition to the women's subalternity, these examples also show their ungrievability within an already ungrievable society – these women are not only deemed ungrievable by the West, as discussed by Butler, but also by the men within Pakistan and Afghanistan. Women do not have the luxury to make a mistake or be misunderstood, because they do not get the chance to speak or be heard in order to justify the actions the men judge punishable.

Another important example of the women's lack of voice is when Naheed goes missing and the inspector at the police station tells Mikal's brother Basie that the police will not look for her, but that he should bring her to the station once he finds her: "We might have to investigate her for immorality and wantonhood. She must explain to us, as agents of decent society, where she has been all these days. A charge of decadence and wickedness might have

to be brought against her" (Aslam 230). The only exception to the voicelessness of women is when they are expected to account for their "immorality." However, their testimonies are not heard: the women in Pakistan and Afghanistan can physically speak, but they are not heard by those in power – in this case, the male authorities. Paradoxically though, not only the men, but also women reinforce the subaltern status of other women in society. When Tara wants to hang up 'missing' leaflets, she decides against it when she remembers how some women had reacted when Naheed fainted upon learning of Jeo's passing: "[The women] found the truck driver and his assistants taking care of her, her head in the lap of the driver who poured water into her mouth. … 'She fainted in the presence of three men, three strangers?' [Tara] had overheard a woman say to another … 'How could she allow herself to do that?'" (230). Some women in the novel are oppressed simultaneously by the men and their female accomplices in relative power, making the latter complicit in their own oppression. However, there are also women who try to speak out, desperate to be heard. In one instance, Mikal "finds a letter torn in half – written a year ago by a woman in the village below, addressed to the United Nations, saying she's a teacher and is in Hell, *it is my 197th letter over the past five years, please help us…*" (54). The woman speaks of the atrocities in her country which she compares to being in Hell, but she is left unheard. Even though she tries to speak in 197 letters, she does not receive a response or the acknowledgement that her pleas are heard by those who have the power to help her and other women in her country.

The most notable example of a woman challenging her subaltern status is Naheed. She constantly speaks out against the men, women, and Western powers, even if she does not succeed in being heard by those in relative power. She criticizes the focus on men in social discourse and challenges her mother's view on these matters: "'Gentlemen, please listen to the following announcement …' Sometimes on hearing this, Naheed mutters to herself, 'And what about us ladies?' – earning herself a look of admonition from Tara, who is unable to

accept criticism in any matter concerning the mosque" (69). Tara continuously tries to silence Naheed throughout the novel, but Naheed uses her voice to challenge her mother. When her mother wants Naheed to remarry after Jeo's death for Naheed's own safety, Naheed refuses:

> "I have a boy in mind … It's the only way." Naheed smiles tensely, her eyes on the point of igniting. "It's not the only way, Mother. There are thousand other ways. I am tired of being afraid all the time –" "The world is a dangerous place." "Let me finish, Mother. It was wrong of you to frighten me into destroying my child. It was wrong of you to frighten Mikal away. … Caution is one thing, but you filled me with terror. Just leave me alone please. Just take this world of yours and go away with it somewhere and leave us alone. All of you." (187)

By questioning her mother's view of the world and opposing it, Naheed opposes women's oppression in Pakistan. Even though Tara previously acknowledged the hardships of women in a patriarchal society ruled by the Taliban, she does not actively fight against it, either with words or actions. Naheed, however, goes further than just acknowledging social injustice by refusing to be silenced and speaking out against it.

Naheed's criticism does not end there, as she is equally critical of the West as she is of the East. When Mikal asks her if she is angry about Jeo not telling her about leaving for Afghanistan, Naheed says, "I am angry at him for going, and going without telling us. I am angry at you for not telling us about his intentions. I am angry at myself for not having detected it myself. I am angry at the Americans for invading Afghanistan. I am angry at Al-Qaeda and the Taliban for doing what they did. Does it matter?' 'It matters.' 'Does it?'" (274). Even though she expresses her anger towards the U.S., Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban, she also doubts if it even matters that she is angry. She acknowledges that they will not hear her, even if she speaks out and uses her voice – she remains unheard and her voicelessness is only confirmed. At the end of the novel, when she sees Mikal's ghost after his death, she "moves towards him and her eyes are full of a still intensity – as though aware of the unnamed, unseen forces in the world, and attempting in her mind to name and see them" (367). Naheed can see not only his ghost, whether that is a figment of her imagination or real, but also the social

inequities in her country that are rarely discussed, especially by women, and attempts to name them for others who cannot see them. Even if they still deny its existence or simply do not listen to her, Naheed still challenges her subaltern position in society by speaking while also recognizing her subaltern status and the fact that she will never actually be heard.

2.2 The Fakir and the American

The most striking example of subalternity in the novel is that of the fakir. In order to analyze this character, it is important to first understand the meaning of the term "fakir". Fakir is derived from the Arabic word *faqr*, which translates to poverty. Even though the word is of Arabic origin, it has also become a term used by Hindus. According to Meher Baba, *faqiri* is "[t]he life of a [mendicant] dervish … the highest spiritual manifestation" (Baba 286). Fakirs, in their devotion to God, take vows of poverty and thus renounce earthly possessions. Furthermore, the word "refers to man's spiritual need for God, who alone is self-sufficient …. [Fakirs] are generally regarded as holy men who are possessed of miraculous powers, such as the ability to walk on fire" ("Fakir"). A fakir, therefore, is a holy man who denounces worldly possessions and often has supernatural powers.

The Blind Man's Garden contains various events and, like the fakir, characters that are mystical in nature and whose origins remain a mystery. The first time the fakir is mentioned, Mikal remembers that, when he was a child, he "follow[ed] the adder-like trace that a holy man had left in the streets – a fakir, a traveller …. As penitence for a grave transgression in the past, the mendicant wandered around Pakistan with massive lengths of chain wound about his body, dripping in loops from his neck and wrists, and trailing behind him from his ankles" (Aslam 56). A link would be added to one of the fakir's chains by someone with a wish, "[a]nd as he wandered through the land he prayed for the need to be alleviated. When and if it

was, the link disappeared miraculously from about the fakir's person, the chain shortening. To him it was proof that Allah had taken pity on him and somewhat lightened his burden, that he was forgiven a little for his transgression" (58). However, it is believed that "[s]ometimes when Allah does not take pity on him – does not hear his prayers on others' behalf, making the links vanish – the chains continue to grow, so that he has to drag several yards of them behind him" (76). Throughout the novel, it is never explicitly stated whether the added links directly influence the outcome of the wishes, but it is left open to the interpretation of the reader. The fakir's chains symbolize the burden of his sins, and the only way to repent is to take on other people's needs and wishes. If Allah accepts the prayers, his burden is lightened, but if He does not, he is weighed down even more.

The first direct interaction in the novel between the other characters and the fakir occurs just before an explosion at a Christian church. Rohan, his daughter Yasmin and her husband, Mikal's brother Basie, return to Heer after searching for Mikal and Jeo in Peshawar. As they drive back, Basie almost hits the fakir with his car, and moments later, the fakir is found by Rohan after the explosion, still alive: "In all probability he has been saved by the chains, the armour of other people's needs … [H]e stands up in a series of gradual accomplishments – that incredible weight. He begins to walk away, removing bits of brick and stone that the explosion had thrown onto him to be embedded in the links" (76). Here, the long chains – representing other people's wishes and the manifestation of his repentance for his sins – are the reason he is still alive. Perhaps, his efforts to repent are what saved him and were the reason he was spared by Allah. And even though his burden is heavy, he still stands up and continues walking after being knocked down.

There is one instance, relatively early in the novel, in which the fakir speaks. When he does, it is in response to Rohan, who doubts that the world can be explained. The fakir then shares his thoughts:

> The man clears his throat gently and the voice is almost rasp when it comes. "It can be." With great care, as though writing the words instead of uttering them, he begins to speak. "It can be done. *Ahl-e-Dil* and *Ahl-e-Havas*. We all are divided into these two groups. The first are the People of the Heart. The second are the People of Greed, the deal makers and the men of lust and the hucksters. … The first people will not trample anyone to obtain what they desire. The second will. Here lies this world." … [Rohan asks:] "What you said about *Ahl-e-Dil* and *Ahl-e-Havas*, does that explain what is happening in Afghanistan? The armies from the West. The extremes of the Taliban." … [T]he man looks at him. "Whoever has power desires to hold on to power. That is the case both with the Taliban and the West." (77-78)

In the only instance in which the fakir speaks, he expresses the hope that the powerful will listen. In this case, he is heard by Rohan, but remains unheard by the intended audience, the West and the Taliban. The ones who should be listening to the fakir's words and message do not do so; thus, the fakir is essentially left unheard and is not able to speak as there is no "transaction between the speaker and the listener" (Landry and Maclean 289).

However, although his wisdom is unheard within the realm of the novel, the fakir speaks as a kind of prophet in this example by giving his unique insight into global and local power structures. Even though the fakir is not blind, he is similar to the blind prophet seer, who, in Western culture, "is able to discern a truth denied to normal vision" (Jay 12). Since the myth of Tiresias, a blind prophet devoted to Apollo, the blind seer is a recurrent trope in literature and other forms of art. Furthermore, as William R. Paulson points out, "the blind poet or seer, a visionary whose sight, having lost this world's presence, is directed entirely beyond to the spiritual" is an "ancient topos" (14). Edward Larrissy argues that it is "natural … to associate the blind man with abstraction from the material world [and] as prophetic visionary" (16). In the novel, the fakir only focuses on the divine and is blind to worldly matters. His life is dedicated to penitence for his sins and thus seeking forgiveness from Allah. Even though the fakir is not in fact blind, his prophetic vision makes him similar to the blind prophet seer, or perhaps the latter's equivalent in Islamic culture. This might reflect Aslam's attempt to combine or reconcile Eastern and Western cultures. The fakir's position in

society and his purpose to only live for forgiveness grants him a kind of blindness to the world that helps him see what is unseen to most, like the blind seer.

After this scene, the only other time the fakir is mentioned is towards the end of the novel. Mikal, who has to deliver some scrap metal, finds out that the metal has been commissioned to transport are the chains that belonged to the fakir, who was killed by al-Qaeda: "[T]he al-Qaeda Arabs became enraged and abused him. Saying how dare he pretend to intercede with Allah on Muslims' behalf. They beat him but people intervened, knowing how pious he was, but the next day the body was discovered" (Aslam 308). Even though the fakir never claimed to interpose on behalf of the ones who added links to his chains, and only meant for those chains to represent the burden of his sins, the al-Qaeda Arabs are angered because they take his good intentions for blasphemous presumptions. Disregarding his defenseless state, they murder the fakir. Mikal comments that the fakir "wouldn't have been able to run" away from his assailants and sees that "[b]ullet cartridges are caught in the links of the chains like little gold fish in a net" (308). Earlier, the chains had saved the fakir during an explosion, but they could not save him from the self-righteous violence of extremists. Even in his death, the fakir's existence remains a mystery, as "[s]ome say he just vanished from inside the chains. They were the only thing that fell to the ground" (308). Mikal's sense of connection to the fakir is indicated by his distressed reaction when he learns of his murder. Mikal recalls that, as a child, he overheard someone saying that the fakir resembles his father – a Communist who was arrested around the time Mikal was born and whom Mikal therefore never knew. His first encounter with the fakir was when he ran away from home: "I followed his trail in the dust but couldn't catch up. … I thought he was my father" (308). Furthermore, just as they did ask the fakir, people asked Mikal to pray for them, as "orphaned children were among those beings whose prayers Allah was said never to ignore" (14). Therefore, Mikal

perhaps not only sees the fakir as a father figure, but also shares with him the ability to pray for others.

Even after his death, the fakir and his chains remain an important motif through another character: the American soldier. Significantly, this soldier is revealed to be the brother of one of the American soldiers Mikal killed earlier in the novel; when Mikal is freed from U.S. custody, he shoots the soldiers who have freed him in a confused and paranoid state of mind. The soldier is not the only one who questions how this could have happened, for the United States Army launches an investigation into "how such a shrewd and astute prisoner, who was clearly a threat to the United States and to peace in this region, was given his freedom" (300). However, the soldier also recognizes that determining someone's true intentions is often not simple. He knows that "[t]he innocent and the guilty both weep in the interrogation rooms, leaving wet spots on the material of the jumpsuits as they wipe large tears on their shoulders. 'I swear to Allah on my heart and limbs…' 'I swear to Allah on my mother's grave…'" (300). His awareness of the questionable interrogation techniques and the prisoners' unreliable responses shows that the soldier is not simply following the expected American exceptionalist line of thinking. He is shown to be critical in his views towards the U.S. Army's methods and does not simply accept that every action taken by the U.S. military is justified and legitimate.

On his way to deliver the chains, Mikal accidentally hits the American soldier with his truck. When Mikal captures him after the collision and uses the fakir's chains to restrain the soldier in the hope of finding out the whereabouts of a missing family, the roles of the subaltern and those in power are reversed. Due to Mikal's inability to communicate with the soldier, they travel to a nearby town to find an English teacher who can serve as interpreter. During their journey, the American soldier rarely talks, and on the few occasions that he does, he is not heard because no one is able to understand him. Thus, Aslam ironically puts the

American soldier, who would normally be in a position of power – the position of U.S. military power – in the subaltern position. He is unable to speak: even when he speaks, he is unheard by those in power in this scenario. The power dynamics and usual roles of the West and the East are reversed in this scene. However, his position is not truly subaltern as he persists assuming a superior role: "The American doesn't look at him, examining the chains and the pipe frame intently. Mikal might as well not be here" (315). Furthermore, unlike the West in encounters with non-Western cultures, Mikal treats the soldier with respect and dignity. Like the soldier's reservations about Mikal as he assumes his brother's killer was a terrorist, Mikal's judgement of the soldier is unusual compared with that of other characters in the novel. One Pakistani boy questions why Mikal does not want to sell the U.S. soldier to them: "'Aunt Fatima said [the Americans] had imprisoned and tortured you.' Mikal looks away. 'You should want to lick his blood. He's your enemy.' 'Not like that, he's not.' 'He'd do the same to you.' 'Then that makes me better than him'" (327). Even though Mikal has unjustly suffered at the hands of U.S. soldiers, he does not generalize all U.S. soldiers and treat the one he captured unfairly. Instead, Mikal remains respectful: "He holds the man's head steady with one hand and begins to trickle water onto him, taking care not to wet the cast, and … wipes the wet hair away from the bruise on the forehead and … cups his hands under the jaw to catch the falling water and pours it back up onto the head to cool him" (333). He is gentle in his interactions with the soldier, dresses his wounds, and takes care of his needs, not letting his negative experiences cloud his judgment.

Not only the American soldier is relegated to a subaltern position in their interactions, but also Mikal, who tries to speak and make himself heard, only to remain unheard and not understood by the American soldier. However, unlike Mikal, who is a defacto subaltern in the power dynamics with the soldier, the American soldier is not a subaltern, and thus regains his voice towards the end of the novel. When Mikal and the soldier are trapped inside a mosque

and surrounded by the men who had taken them hostage, the American uses the megaphone normally designated to the call for prayer to call for help from his fellow countrymen: "[The sound of his voice] seems to put swords in the air. The minaret, meant to invite the faithful to offer prayer and praise to the Almighty, is summoning unbelievers, to arrive and desecrate His house" (356). The sword metaphor indicates that he speaks from a position of military power and is heard by those in the same position. His status as a temporary subaltern disappears when he is heard by his fellow soldiers representing U.S. hegemony. In the end, the soldier escapes the violence due to his position, while Mikal does not, even though he risks his own life trying to save the American soldier. Mikal is killed in the crossfire between the American soldiers and the soldier's hostage takers, while the American soldier is rescued, "the mosque getting smaller and smaller, and then the helicopter swings away from the violence of war and the building disappears completely, nothing but stars shining in the final blackness, each marking a place where a soul and all the mysteries living in it might flourish, perennial with the earth" (358).

The fakir and the American soldier are both important in Mikal's life: the former represents, among other things, his beginnings – his suspicions of the fakir being his father and his connection to him from an early age, which will be discussed later – while the latter stands for his ending: the cause of his ultimate death. Ultimately, however, these two characters are similar in that they are weighed down by the chains and what they represent – the burden of sins. The fakir is not forced to wear the chains but uses them as a physical representation of his repentance for a transgression in his past, while the American is briefly forced into a subaltern position as a prisoner in a country in which he is not understood due to the part his country played in destabilizing the region. The soldier's subalternity, however, is not true subalternity: because of his nationality and as a representative of U.S. military power, his position in Pakistani society is still superior and he is only temporarily subjected to Mikal.

His national status and history, which continue to count, make it possible for him to speak in the end and be heard by those in power – his fellow American soldiers. Even though Aslam draws parallels between the fakir and the American soldier – from their shared chains to their (temporary) status as subalterns – he highlights the inequality of their circumstances: the fakir dies due to his voicelessness in the Taliban's presence, while the American is able to use his voice in order to be saved.

2.3 History as the Third Parent

In Aslam's novel, the representation of not only women, but also more generally of Eastern people and the countries in which they live, focuses on the voicelessness and subalternity of the Other. With her theory of subalternity, Spivak highlights "who is dropped out, when, and why from historical accounts," one of which is the account of the U.S. in creating the conditions that formed a breeding ground for terrorism (Spivak, *Rani* 270). The U.S.'s failure to recognize the complex history and the forces that played a role in creating the circumstances that led to the attack are partly a result of their unwillingness to listen to people like these Eastern characters: even when they speak of their experiences, they are not heard by the West in general and the U.S. in particular. Aslam's characters provide "a 'Third World' perspective on America's global activities" and "an insider's view of how it feels like to belong to a Muslim nation" (Nash 108). As Gen'ichiro Itakura argues, "the novel critiques US military interventions and use of torture as well as the rise of the Taliban, while traversing this now familiar landscape by shedding light on rarely discussed issues such as the role of the Urdu tabloids in radicalizing ordinary citizens in Pakistan" ("Screams" 357). Throughout the novel, we gain insight into some of the characters' development and political ideas through the focalization of past and present traumas. As protagonist, Mikal invites the reader to identify and empathize with him, which counters the one-sided neo-Orientalist narrative that

"the Other" is radically different from them. With the character of Mikal, Aslam provides a transnational perspective of the trauma of September 11 as experienced in the East by using "a strategy of deterritorialization" as proposed by Gray (83); instead of treating the attacks as an isolated event within the United States, Aslam breaks the national boundaries of the causes and effects of 9/11.

Throughout the novel, symbolism, tropes, and myths are used extensively to add another layer of meaning to the story that we read on the surface. Discussing the significance of the novel's symbolic opening, Bruce King writes:

> Its opening sentence is "History is the third parent", warning the reader that the story and the desires of the characters will be shaped by circumstances beyond their will or control. These range from tribal and Islamic customs to the rapid development of religious extremism and the brutality of the militants, especially after the US invasion of Afghanistan due to 9/11 (which the faithful blame on Jews, the Mossad and the CIA, as part of a plan to attack Islam). (488)

Even though some characters in the novel try not to let history be their third parent in their response to the U.S.'s self-proclaimed "War on Terror" and choose their own fate, they still cannot escape the circumstances created by the complicated history of their countries. The characters represent different reactions to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan: characters who justify the 9/11 attacks and condemn the invasion, who respond with violence and fantasies of revenge, and those who are critical of both violent events. Mikal and Jeo belong to the latter category, which is why Jeo decides to go to Afghanistan to help innocent victims of the war, and Mikal accompanies him to keep him safe. They are two of "the book's multiple Pakistani characters [who] are drawn into the quagmire of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan" (Ivanchikova 295). After Jeo's sudden death, Mikal is left as one of the few focalizing characters whose judgments and views of the September 11 attacks and the consequent invasion of Afghanistan are complex.

Mikal's experiences linked with the U.S.'s involvement in Pakistan and his country's Islamic regime begin in early childhood with his father's arrest for being a communist around the time Mikal is born, "never to be seen again," and his mother's death a decade later (Aslam 14). His father is arrested when the Pakistani government "began hunting Communists in 1980 – for criticising it and the USA" (226). The trauma of losing his parents – his father's disappearance in particular – is evident in the novel. When Mikal's brother finds out that Mikal has started renting their family's old apartment years later, he asks: "'What is the meaning of this?' … 'I don't know,' Mikal remembers saying, the eyes stinging suddenly. He had hidden his face and begun to weep in the manner of young children and infants — humans before they have learned language" (34-35). The trauma of losing his parents still haunts Mikal, making him weep like a baby – the stage of life in which he lost his father. The loss of his parents is only the beginning of Mikal's traumatic experiences and sets the tone for the rest of his life. Apart from the trauma he suffers when the woman he loves marries his adoptive brother, Mikal's decision to join Jeo on his quest to help wounded civilians ultimately leads to the most traumatic experiences of his life. Jeo and Mikal are sold off to jihadi warriors and taken to the Taliban headquarters, where Jeo ultimately dies in a U.S. attack on the premises and Mikal is taken captive by a local warlord, who cuts off the trigger fingers on both his hands (110). The latter event is remarkable because "[t]he amputation of his trigger fingers is only mentioned in his reminiscence with the warlord, contained in a subordinate clause ('a warlord, who cut off the trigger fingers on each of his hands') as if it were insignificant" (Itakura, "Screams" 361). Itakura argues that the "horrifying … suggestion of the normality of pain" "attests to the ongoing turmoil on the Pakistan–Afghanistan border where oppression is the norm" ("Screams" 361). Torture, pain, and trauma have become the norm in Afghanistan and Pakistan – either at the hands of local warlords and religious extremists, or at the hands of outsiders from the West.

After he manages to escape the warlord, Mikal is taken captive by American soldiers who presume that he is a jihadi warrior and taken to a prison. Even though he tells the U.S. soldiers that he is just a regular citizen taken captive by a warlord, he is interrogated for hours, kept awake with shackles around his wrists in a sleep deprivation chamber, washed with a hosepipe, and made to confess under pressure to working with Osama bin Laden (Aslam 159-161, 167). The full extent of his torture is only described later in the novel in a flashback:

> From the beginning of January to April. More than three months during which Mikal was administered intravenous fluids and drugs against his will and was forcibly given enemas in order to keep his body functioning well enough for the interrogations to go on. Questionings from the CIA, FBI, MI5, MI6. Restraint on a swivel chair for long periods, loud music and white noise played to prevent him from sleeping, lowering the temperature in the room until it was unbearable and then throwing water in his face, forcing him to pray to Osama bin Laden, asking him whether Mullah Omar had ever sodomised him. Threats of deportation to countries known for torturing prisoners. "After they are done with you, you will never get married you will never have children you will never buy a fucking Toyota." Threats made against his family including female members, strip searches and body searches sometimes ten times a day, forced nudity, including in the presence of female personnel, threatening to desecrate the Koran in front of him, placing him in prolonged stress positions, placing him in tight restraint jackers for many days and nights, and in addition to all this there were times when he was actually beaten for his "threatening behaviour." (193-194)

By describing the traumatic experiences Mikal suffers at the hands of U.S. soldiers in detail, Aslam questions the notion that only Western lives are grievable and gives voice to those previously considered ungrievable. However, his American interrogator, David, denies the severity of their actions and says that "the reason the United States isn't torturing you, hooking you up to electricity or drilling holes in your bones, 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" (164). He wilfully ignores that depriving a prisoner of his sleep is also morally wrong and "uncivilized" because he is the one doing it –

an American. When it is done to a Pakistani man, one whom he wrongly presumes is a jihadi warrior, he does not consider it worthy of the term torture and ultimately not worthy of grief.

In one instance of torture, after Mikal is kept in a dark room for an unknown period, a white man, as Mikal calls him, comes in the room, and starts laughing hysterically. Mikal interprets his laughter as the man mocking him and his country, "a shameless beggar country full of liars, hypocrites, beaters of women and children and animals and the weak, brazen rapists and unpunished murderers, torturers who probably dissolved his father's body in a drum of acid in Lahore Fort" (169). He feels worthless in the eyes of this white man who represents the West's stereotypical view of the East as barbaric, uncivilized, and the inhabitants as unworthy of grief. However, Mikal tries to confront the soldier with the role of the West in creating the very circumstances that the white man finds comical:

> [A]nd even though he makes Mikal relive every shame, indignity, humiliation, dishonour, defeat and disgrace he has ever experienced in his twenty years, Mikal begins to whisper back at him now: "What about you? What about you? what about you what about you …" He struggles against the chain and begins to shout. "What about the part you played in it?" He wishes he knew how to say it in English. *If I agree with you that what you say is true, would you agree that your country played a part in ruining mine, however small?* (169)

Mikal questions the stereotypical dichotomy between the barbaric East and the civilized West because he recognizes that the West played a part in creating the circumstances that have led the East to engage in so-called uncivilized actions. And even though the white man does not say these things – in reality, he only laughs hysterically – Mikal's imagination draws from similar experiences in which he and his country were mocked, ridiculed, and looked down upon by others who did not recognize their part either. As Butler suggests, the terrorist attacks were undoubtedly wrong, but it should be recognized that the U.S. played a role in creating the conditions that led to the attacks (*Precarious Life* 14). However, she also explains that "[t]his is not the same as holding the United States exclusively responsible for the violence

done within its borders, but it does ask the United States to assume a different kind of responsibility for producing more egalitarian global conditions" (14).

In addition to their experiences with Soviet occupation and U.S. interventions, the Pakistani and Afghani characters in the novel express their suffering at the hands of the local or regional terrorist groups formed in conditions that the U.S. helped create. In one instance, Rohan recalls a public lynching of two Taliban soldiers in Afghanistan in which "every rape, … every twelve-year-old boy pressed into battle by them, every ten-year-old girl forcibly married to a mullah eight times her age … – was poured into the two men … and when they finished and dispersed nothing remained of the pair. It was as if they had been eaten" (43). As Saba Pirzadeh points out, "[t]hough its primary focus is the US invasion of Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11, *The Blind Man's Garden* does not attribute the war to the policies of the US forces but provides a nuanced picture of the conflict by referring to other local civilian and military factions participating in the conflict for their vested interests" (Pirzadeh 903). Aslam does not only address the U.S.'s violent interventions in the country, but also its role in the creation of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and warlords: during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the U.S. provided the Taliban and what became Al-Qaeda with the very weapons that later were turned against the local population and the West.

Even though Mikal recognizes the U.S.'s part in ruining his country and is tortured by American soldiers, he does not let this influence his view of all American people. When David asks Mikal how he felt about 9/11 when it happened, Mikal answers: "'It was a disgusting crime.' 'Most of your people didn't think so. They were pleased.' 'Now you know we don't all think alike. … How many of my people have you met anyway?' 'I have met enough of them here.' 'Do you want me to base my opinion of your people on the ones I have met here?'" (Aslam 170). If he were to use his experiences with American soldiers as a guide to form his opinion about the American people, he would think that they were a violent people

who do not value human rights or the truth. The problem, however, is that the American soldiers do base their opinion of his people on those who attacked their country, even though they were Saudis instead of Afghani. Significantly though, despite being tortured and dehumanized, Mikal refuses to fit into either the U.S. soldier's or his own people's narrative: "'You should want to lick [the American soldier's] blood. He's your enemy.' 'Not like that, he's not.' 'He'd do the same to you.' 'Then that makes me better than him'" (327). In contrast to what has been done to him, he continues to see individuals as individuals and not as representatives of an entire group. He wonders if the soldier he captures has a brother, whether he is in love and if he has fireflies in his country too (333, 342). Furthermore, Mikal feels remorse for killing the American soldiers who transported him, one of whom, unbeknownst to him, is the American soldier's brother:

> Looking through the broken window between them he is suddenly overwhelmed, not by any emotion he knows, suddenly feeling himself unequal to so wide a chase, so remorseless a life. He … covers his face with his incomplete hands and weeps loudly, uncontrollably. He reaches out a hand and places it on the man's shoulder and, his mouth full of failed words, tells him about … his incarceration by the Americans and by the warlord who mutilated his hands and sold him to the Americans for $5,000. … "I am sorry I killed your countrymen." … All these things are painful for him to know and he wonders how the man would feel about them if he understood them. And so he stops. Not wanting to hurt him more than he has to. (342)

Here, Mikal is confronted with his own trauma while also expressing his regret in killing the Americans. Significantly, he does not justify killing the Americans because of his own suffering, which is what many others from the two sides, East and West, often do, perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence. Tragically, however, due to the language barrier he is unable to make the U.S. soldier understand his remorse.

Throughout the novel, Mikal does not only show the reader that the trauma of 9/11 is transnational, but also subverts the idea of the ungrievable, barbaric Other. By describing Mikal's past and present traumas – his father's experience with Soviet occupation and U.S.

intervention – Aslam broadens the reader's perception of post-9/11 trauma. Mikal does not allow the history of his country and his ancestors to be his third parent – or does he? The dominant narrative of the U.S. makes it seem as though the history of his country is only one of submission to violence and savagery, even though Pakistan also has a rich cultural history which spans centuries. Perhaps we can read Mikal as a character who truly lets the history of his country be his third parent by being inspired by the good and deterred by the bad. Mikal never compromises his identity as a Pakistani while he simultaneously recognizes that his country is flawed, and he lends the same courtesy to other countries. Though he calls attention to the U.S.'s complicity in the creation of circumstances that motivated the attacks in New York, he does not assume that the U.S. and its citizens are evil by default. He proposes that "[w]e can learn things from books" (350), which is exactly what Aslam aims for – for the reader to learn new things which they may not understand just yet.

Chapter 3: Making Desolation and Calling It Peace in *Burnt Shadows*

In *Burnt Shadows*, Kamila Shamsie tells the story of schoolteacher Hiroko Tanaka through her journey from Nagasaki moments before and after the atomic bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945, to India amid the Partition of 1947, through Karachi in the 1980s, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Cold War, to the aftermath of 9/11 in New York. After the nuclear bomb spares her life but kills her fiancée Konrad, Hiroko travels to India to meet his half-sister, Ilse Weiss, also known as Elizabeth Burton, and her husband, James Burton. She falls in love with Sajjad Ashraf, James's clerk, marries him, and moves to Karachi, Pakistan. There, after her first pregnancy ends in a miscarriage, Hiroko and Sajjad raise their only child, Raza Konrad Ashraf, who is a genius at languages. As a teenager, he uses his talent to accompany his Afghani friend Abdullah to a militant training camp, foolishly thinking of it as an adventure. When Sajjad dies, Raza starts working as a translator with Ilse Weiss's son Harry (previously Henry) Burton, a CIA operative in Pakistan, while Hiroko moves to New York just before 9/11 to live with Ilse, now a divorcee, and Harry's daughter, Kim Burton. Even though the story is mainly told from Hiroko's point of view, the novel later also shifts to other focalizers through an omniscient narrator. Like Nadeem Aslam, Shamsie provides the reader with a fiction that transnationalizes the crisis of 9/11, representing Hiroko's journey and the events that transpire to portray 9/11 as a global and transnational series of events. Instead of monopolizing the grief and suffering of 9/11 and portraying the Other as ungrievable, the novel, Scanlan argues, "find[s] a breathing space between two identities that have become fused; the terrorist and the migrant for example, or the Muslim and the fanatic" (Scanlan 277). In doing so, she gives a voice to the Other – namely, Hiroko, Sajjad, Raza and Abdullah – that is largely absent from early, U.S.-centered 9/11 fiction and challenges the Other's relegation to a subaltern status. By creating a new mode of portraying Eastern and Western characters in relation to the terrorist attacks, Shamsie

challenges the ungrievability of the Other and the existing post-9/11 novels by offering "cognitive maps" (Rothberg 158) that do represent those relegated to a position of the subaltern absent in most Western novels.

As Sachi Nakachi writes, *Burnt Shadows* can be considered "a new type of 9/11 literature because it show[s] the American experience of the terrorist violence in the stream of world history since World War II[: t]he destruction of Nagasaki, the bloody partition of India, … the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iraq War, and 9/11" (139). Due to the different settings and perspectives provided in the novel and the varying degrees of the characters' ability to be heard, Shamsie's novel lends itself to a reading in light of the concepts central to this thesis: subalternity, Said's theoretical concept of the Other, the related concept of ungrievability and American exceptionalism. The characters who are most notable in their subalternity – or, conversely, their resistance to that role – are Hiroko, Sajjad and Ilse. In this chapter, I will discuss in detail the representation of subalternity in these characters and how it breaks with the notion of subalternity in many earlier post-9/11 Western novels. Furthermore, I will investigate to what extent and in what ways the representation of the Eastern and Western characters in the novel challenges American exceptionalist assumptions by transnationalizing the consequences of the attack and renders the previously ungrievable lives grievable.

3.1 Rule-Breaking and Uncommon Sense

Throughout the novel, the notion of subalternity is seen in both male and female non-Western characters in varying degrees of submission or resistance towards the role. Similar to *The Blind Man's Garden*, Shamsie's novel highlights the subalternity of most non-Western characters in the story. While some of the characters show resilience and fight against this

position to which they have been relegated, others are simply voiceless and conform to Spivak's definition of subalternity. Sajjad's sister-in-law, for example, is forced to obey her husband, whether that is by accepting his mistress as his second wife, or by trying to follow him to Pakistan on a journey that ultimately kills her and her children (Shamsie 103-104, 115, 161). This can be compared to the widow sacrifice discussed in chapter 1, and she is one of the subaltern women in the novel. However, characters who "overcome" their subalternity in certain ways are more prevalent in *Burnt Shadows*. Unlike Aslam, Shamsie portrays several female characters who reject their subalternity, and significantly, a Western woman who is temporarily subjugated to a subaltern position. The most notable female characters whose temporary or permanent subalternity and their rejection to be relegated to this position are portrayed are Hiroko and Ilse Weiss, first known as Elizabeth Burton.

From the outset of the novel, it is evident that Hiroko rejects the norms and expectations for her as an Eastern woman in a patriarchal society. When Hiroko tells the Burtons that she traveled alone from Bombay to Delhi, they are shocked:

> "What, alone?" James glanced over at Elizabeth. She's making this all up, his eyes signalled. "Yes. Why? Can't women travel alone in India?" … "Well, there's no law against it if that's what you mean. … But there are rules, and there is common sense. I certainly wouldn't allow Elizabeth . . ." He faltered as Hiroko glanced towards Elizabeth to see her reaction to his choice of verb. (46-47)

At this moment, Elizabeth recognizes that Hiroko is not one of "those demure Japanese women of all the stories she'd heard," but someone who "who would squeeze the sun in her fist if she ever got the chance; yes, and tilt her head back to swallow its liquid light," and starts to question her own complicity in living a "restrained life" with James (46). Even though Ilse is a British-German woman, she is still silenced by her husband, who is "oddly perturbed by … this Japanese woman in trousers" (46). Due to her subordinate position within her marriage, she explains to Hiroko that "[w]omen enter their husbands' lives, Hiroko – all

around the world. It doesn't happen the other way round. We are the ones who adapt. Not them. They don't know how to do it. They don't see why they should do it" (97-98). She views herself and other women as those who are not heard by men, their own husbands, when they speak of what they need or want. However, like the American soldier in *The Blind Man's Garden*, Elizabeth is not subaltern: though she is a woman, she is also a wealthy, Westerner living in India during British rule. Later in the novel, Elizabeth recognizes what she wants when Hiroko tells her about her desires in life: "*Want*. Elizabeth heard the repetition of the word and knew what religious conversion must feel like. … *Want*. At what point had her life become an accumulation of things she didn't want? … She didn't want to make James unhappy through her inability to be the woman he had thought she would turn into, given time and instruction" (100). This moment of insight leads Elizabeth to divorce her husband and move to New York to live with her cousin, taking on the name Ilse Weiss again, her name before her marriage to James. Her divorce and the following events show the privilege that Ilse enjoys without recognizing it: the privilege to be able to divorce her husband, to be heard in this demand and to be able to start a new life in the United States without having to consider beforehand whether she can.

Sajjad, on the other hand, is not as privileged as Ilse. He is an Indian Muslim who had been introduced to the Burtons by Konrad and works for James as a law apprentice. Even though James considers Sajjad to be a companion, perhaps even an equal, Sajjad views it differently: "He knew how important it was to James to enact … moments of camaraderie which undercut the rigidity of the barriers between them. That it was only in James's hands to choose when to undercut and when to affirm the barriers was something Sajjad accepted as inevitable and James never even considered" (39). James does not recognize his position of power in relation to Sajjad, but that does not change the reality: Sajjad is unable to speak his mind or see James as an equal. At the same time, on more than one occasion, Sajjad

recognizes James's arrogant and self-centered behavior regarding his position in India. When he tells James that he will live and die in Dilli – the Indian side of Delhi – and that "[t]he British have made little difference to the life of [his] moholla," Sajjad feels a sense of impatience and disbelief towards James due to his "failure after all this time to understand that all-important Urdu word" which translates to 'neighbourhood' and his "disbelief at the assertion that the departure of the British would be nothing more than an interruption" (40). Instead of vocalizing this, he nods his head and pretends to understand James's point of view: he knows that he is not in a position to speak up, for even if he does, he will not be heard by James.

However, Sajjad decides to speak out and question the Burtons later in the novel: "Why have the English remained so English? Throughout India's history conquerors have come from elsewhere, and all of them … have become Indian. If – when – this Pakistan happens, those Muslims who leave [India] to go there, they will be leaving their homes. But when the English leave, they'll be going home" (82). In response, Elizabeth says:

> "Henry thinks of India as home" …. "Yes." There was a tightening of Sajjad's voice. "He does." And you sent him away because of it, he wanted to say …. He recalled it very well, the day her opposition to the idea of boarding school ended. He had been playing cricket in the garden with Henry when Elizabeth came out and told her son he was "such a young Englishman". Henry had scowled, and backed up towards Sajjad. "I'm Indian," he'd said. The next day James Burton had told Sajjad how relieved he was that his wife had suddenly decided to withdraw all her "sentimental" objections to sending Henry to boarding school.… "Only that I don't suppose he'll continue to think of India that way for much longer." "For the best," Elizabeth said. (83)

James and Elizabeth do not recognize that their presence is not merely a case of immigration: they are the colonizers in this situation. Because the rule of the British Empire on the Indian subcontinent was a case of colonization, the power dynamics between the English, James and partly also Elizabeth, and Sajjad, the Indian, will always be skewed.

However, even though Sajjad speaks up, he is still not heard by those in power. Ironically, while Sajjad explains that Henry will not think of India as home any longer, Elizabeth is "feeling something that was almost sorrow to think the descendants of the English would not come to the churches and monuments of British India seven centuries from now and say this is a reminder of when my family history and India's history entered the same stream irrevocably" (83). She thinks about the colonization of India as if it were inevitable and mourns that later generations will not celebrate the "union" of the two histories. In this passage it is clear that despite Sajjad's efforts to challenge his subalternity, Elizabeth does not listen and can only view the situation from her own, sentimental, point of view. This is also the case with her husband. When James sends Sajjad away after Elizabeth falsely accuses him of attempting to rape Hiroko, Sajjad returns to meet with Hiroko and they eventually get married. Afterwards, James apologizes for the false accusation and explains that Sajjad must know it was a misunderstanding, though he did not communicate this with him. When Sajjad reminds him of this omission, he says:

> "I understood that the English might acknowledge their mistakes in order to maintain the illusion of their fairness and sense of justice, but they will not actually apologise for those mistakes when they are perpetrated on an Indian." James stepped back. "When did you and I become the Englishman and the Indian rather than James and Sajjad?" "You're right. It's not a question of nation. It's one of class. You would have apologised if I'd been to Oxford." (111)

James disregards Sajjad's reasoning and argues that he felt too ashamed to apologize. It can be argued that James thinks of Sajjad as a friend and does not view him as "the Indian" or belonging to "the lower class." However, his refusal to accept Sajjad's view of their relationship, which is formed over a long period of time, and the earlier discussion of his arrogance regarding the position of the British in Sajjad's life demonstrate that his own reasoning only serves to maintain Sajjad in the position of the colonized. He does not acknowledge that Sajjad's feelings and thoughts might have a valid reason: instead, he

justifies not properly apologizing for his mistakes, and more importantly, invalidates Sajjad's opinion, causing him to feel inferior.

Unlike Ilse and Sajjad, Hiroko defies the social role imposed on her as a female Japanese *hibakusha* (a word used for people who survived the nuclear bombs) from the start. For example, she is determined to learn Urdu when she arrives in India, which the English cannot seem to understand. When an Englishwoman asks Hiroko how her Urdu lessons are going, she explains to her that she cannot make a certain sound:

> "It has drenched Sajjad in sorrow, but sorrow is inescapable with Urdu so he's not blaming me." "Sajjad? Oh, James's dogsbody. Is that what he said, 'sorrow is inescapable with Urdu'? They make the oddest claims, don't they?" *Dogsbody?* Hiroko bit into a piece of roast chicken to give her mouth something to do other than retort. She didn't know how to behave around these people – the rich and powerful, a number of whom had asked her about the samurai way of life and thought she was being charmingly self-effacing when she said the closest she had come to the warrior world was her days as a worker at the munitions factory. Two years after the war they could accept an ally of Hitler sooner than they could accept someone of a different class. (64-65)

Here, Hiroko does not only criticize this Western woman and her biased view of Sajjad, but also "these people" in general – the rich, powerful, and most often Western individuals who treat Sajjad and Hiroko as the Other, perpetuating the idea of the Orient and the East as both inferior and exotic. Like Elizabeth, who perceives Japanese women as demure, they assume that Hiroko knows about the samurai way of life because of her Japanese origins. Her response to these shallow, Othering individuals shows agency and her refusal to be voiceless and spoken for by them, even though she might not be heard in any meaningful way.

Furthermore, Hiroko also speaks up against Eastern men and the cultural expectations she is expected to fulfil. After Hiroko converts to Islam and marries Sajjad, they are forced to move to Istanbul in order to escape the violence in Delhi leading up to Partition. However, because this choice later prevents them from returning, they decide to move to Karachi, a city

of refugees in Pakistan, now an independent republic. There, Hiroko defies oppressive cultural norms and refuses to accept her role as a subaltern similar to Naheed in *The Blind Man's Garden*, who also speaks up against subordination of women. When Hiroko "ask[s] her thirteen-year-old son why none of his friends had come to visit in the last few weeks," he tells her he cannot take them home: "With you walking around, showing your legs. Why can't you be more Pakistani?" (130). After this, Hiroko starts wearing shalwar kameezes at home, while "Sajjad said nothing, only [giving] her the slightly wounded look of a man who realises his wife is willing to make concessions for her son which she would never have made for him" (130). However, when Raza later comments that her kameezes are too tight, she returns to wearing dresses. She recognizes that "[t]his is not a world in which young boys see their mother's bare backs," which is why Raza has not seen the scars on her back from the atomic bomb; however, she still rebels in her own way against that world (179). She continues to use her voice and does not let herself be policed on her clothing by her son, even though the larger culture in which he is brought up forces women to accept such scrutiny from any male figure in their lives.

While Hiroko's clothing is criticized by others (first James, later her son) as not conforming to societal expectations, Hiroko criticizes Muslim women for conforming to dress codes. When she is on the beach looking at other women around her, she notices "[s]o many sleeves all the way to wrists instead of just part-way down the upper arm, and covered heads here and there. It made no sense to her. 'Islamisation' was a word everyone recognised as a political tool of a dictator and yet they still allowed their lives to be changed by it" (182). Hiroko refuses to accept the growing "Islamisation" of the country, but, instead of writing this off to the entire religion of Islam as Naheed does in *The Blind Man's Garden*, she criticizes religious extremism and the politicization of Islam to oppress women. Throughout the novel, she does not express criticism towards Islam, but recognizes that the issue is the misuse of the

religion in politics. However, Hiroko assumes that these women allow their lives to be changed, while in fact many of them might not have the option to go against the "Islamisation" she criticizes.

3.2 Defeating the Abstract Noun

Shamsie's portrayal of the characters in *Burnt Shadows* break with the stereotypical discourse of the "Other" as perceived by the West. However, the Eastern characters in the novel are still not deemed worthy of grief by the Western characters, many of whom deny or try to minimize the losses and trauma suffered by "Them". Throughout the novel, Shamsie shows the traumatic impact of U.S. long-term policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, giving voice to those who the West generally perceived as ungrievable. Like Aslam, she provides a transnational perspective of September 11 and challenges the narrative of the "Other" as barbaric, violent, and thus ungrievable. In addition to questioning their ungrievability, Shamsie invites those who are responsible to investigate the roles their countries played in creating the conditions that led to 9/11 and uses Harry's character to criticize American exceptionalism, that is, as Donald Pease defines it, the idea "that America is 'distinctive' …, or 'unique'…, or 'exemplary' (meaning a model for other nations to follow), or that it is 'exempt' from the laws of historical progress (meaning that it is an 'exception' to the laws and rules governing the development of other nations" (Pease 9).

Shamsie uses Ilse's son Harry, formerly known as Henry, to critique American exceptionalism. After moving to the U.S. from England and seeing the ethnic diversity of the U.S., he becomes a patriotic American and changes his name to the more Americanized version Harry. When he applies for a job with the CIA, Harry explains that his motivation for joining them is to crush Communism "so that the US could be the world's only superpower

…: a single democratic country in power, whose citizens were connected to every nation in the world" (Shamsie 172). Like David in *The Blind Man's Garden,* Harry fails to accept the U.S.'s shortcomings, and instead of recognizing the harm done by the U.S., he initially has a romanticized view of the U.S. as a just and fair ruler of the world, though he later also is disabused of this notion. Moreover, Harry confirms the neo-Orientalist view of the Other when he is critical of foreign Muslim bands for doing the things that the U.S. has done for decades:

> He had always been uneasy about the introduction of "foreign fighter" 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. (279)

Ironically, Harry fails to realize that he himself is a foreign fighter fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Instead of recognizing this, he condemns other Muslims arriving in Afghanistan to fight against Westerners, who themselves are interfering in a country in which they have no right to be.

In addition to Harry's inability to understand that the U.S. soldiers fighting Communists are also foreign men and women, he approves of the U.S.'s deterritorialized strategy of fighting the war by involving other nations: "In Harry's mind, there was a map of the world with countries appearing as mere outlines, waiting to be shaded in with stripes of red, white and blue as they were drawn into the strictly territorial battle of the Afghans versus the Soviets in which no one else claimed a part" (203). Harry's unwillingness to see the U.S. as an instigator of violence while using Afghani territories and the help of other countries to fight their Cold War illustrates that he only views his country as the hero in this narrative. Furthermore, "Harry couldn't help enjoying the idea of Pakistan, India and Israel working

together in America's war. Here was internationalism, powered by capitalism. Different worlds moving from their separate spheres into a new kind of geometry" (204). The "new kind of geometry" has become a battleground of Western powers backed by other, less significant players. As Frawley points out, "[c]ivil war in Afghanistan [i]s thus not a simple matter of one group pitted against the state, but a complex meshing of centuries' worth of global and local expectations and desires" (Frawley 443). British colonialism, "[the] Russian invasion of Afghanistan, American policy to establish Taliban to disintegrate Russia, … political wars of warlords, and finally American post 9/11 war on terror" were all causes of the instability of the country for centuries (Kiran 258). The U.S.'s desire to defeat communism by any means necessary ultimately resulted in the creation of the very terrorist groups which redirected their hatred and violence to the U.S. after communism was eradicated and attacked them later. They are simply "reaping the seeds of extremism that they sowed raising Taliban on the doctrine of hatred," and if it does not stop, it will end in a vicious circle of violence (Kiran 261). Later in the novel, Harry comes to recognize that: "We make a desolation and call it peace" (279). After experiencing the war first-hand, he finally understands that "We" – the U.S., the West – are a major cause of the destruction and suffering in Afghanistan while claiming to be fighting for peace in both Afghanistan and in the West.

Due to its various settings and staging of historical events, *Burnt Shadows* deals with trauma and suffering in multiple places. The novel first deals with the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki and the impact it has on Hiroko's life. After the bomb leaves her with permanent bird-shaped scars on her back caused by the kimono she was wearing when the bomb was dropped, and the memories of seeing her father crawl in the streets with scales covering her body moments after, she becomes "a figure out of myth. The character who loses everything and is born anew in blood" (Shamsie 48). She decides to travel to Tokyo to work as a

translator for the Americans, but immediately resigns when one of the Americans she works with says that "the bomb was a terrible thing, but it had to be done to save American lives" (62). The American does not value the Japanese lives lost due to the bomb as much as American lives; as Judith Butler puts it, when it is the West that suffers losses, "grief become[s] nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable" (*Precarious Life* xiv). The American lives that were saved by dropping the bomb are significantly more grievable and valuable than the lives of those who are not American, so when the lives that are taken are not considered as worthy, grievable lives, killing and bombing become irrelevant. Furthermore, Butler argues: "We can see the division into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others" (*Frames of War* 38). Those who determine which lives are deemed worthy of grief are those who hold more power and are in fact responsible for the trauma and grief, which only ends in a cycle of endless violence. Therefore, when Hiroko asks, "[w]hy did they have to do it? Why a second bomb? Even the first is beyond anything I can . . . but a second. You do that, and see what you've done, and then you do it again. How is that . . .?" the answer is simple: the first nuclear bomb in Hiroshima killed and devastated thousands of people whose lives were not considered actual lives; therefore, it did not make a difference to the United States. Dropping the second bomb was insignificant as the consequences – thousands of deaths, destruction, nuclear waste, generations of deformities and illnesses, including Hiroko's burns, her miscarriage, and her son being labelled as deformed – were considered ungrievable.

Not only does the novel condemn the ungrievability of Nagasaki, but it also subverts Western Orientalist attitudes towards the Pakistani and Afghani characters, thus making their suffering grievable. Throughout the novel, Shamsie's portrayal of Muslim characters breaks with the Western perception of the Other. Sajjad, for example, is seen as a man who respects

strong, independent women instead of someone who is threatened by them, which is partly owing to his mother, who raises him with stories of strong womanhood (Shamsie 52). When his mother tells Sajjad about a potential marriage candidate for him who, if she had the chance, would "emulate the thirteen-year-old Fatima Sughra who had pulled down the Union Jack from the Punjab Secretariat building and replaced it with a green Muslim League flag, which she had stitched from her own dupatta," Sajjad falls in love with the idea of marrying her (52). He dreams of naming his daughter Razia after Razia Sultana, "an amazing woman – a brilliant administrator, a glorious fighter" who "led troops and sat in council with men" (81, 52). In fact, he later does name his son after her, only altering the name slightly to Raza. He is a kind, attentive husband who loves his wife because she is a free spirit, not in spite of it. Like many other Muslim men, contrary to mainstream Western views, Sajjad does not believe that women should be oppressed or that violence in the name of his religion is justified. By portraying Sajjad as a man with an open mind, Shamsie rejects the idea that the Other is barbaric, violent and ungrievable. He is like Mikal in *The Blind Man's Garden* in the portrayal of their loss, trauma, and refusal to fit into the stereotypical Orientalist Other. Sajjad loses his homeland and his dream career because he cannot return to Delhi, with the Partition of India being a direct cause of British imperialism and colonialism. More importantly, he eventually loses his life in search for his son, who accidentally accompanies his friend to a mujahideen training camp in Afghanistan, a camp that might not have been there if the U.S. had not supported the mujahideen during the Soviet War. However, Mikal experiences violence and loss by the U.S. more directly, which will be discussed later in the analysis of Raza.

In both *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Burnt Shadows*, violence and its lasting repercussions are a central theme. During the Partition riots in Delhi, Sajjad recognizes that violence "is the most contagious of all the madnesses. [He] do[es]n't want to know which of

[his] childhood friends have become murderers in the time [they]'ve been away. [He] do[es]n't want to know what Iqbal might have done in all his frustrated passion" (125). Here, instead of portraying the Other as inherently violent and barbaric, Shamsie argues that violence produces violence and that it can influence individuals to commit acts which they never would have considered previously. Later in the novel, in the context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Raza meets a fourteen-year-old Afghan boy named Abdullah and convinces him that he is an Afghan Hazara boy named Raza Hazara to fit into the group. When he is with the Afghans in their neighborhood, Sahrab Goth, he misses "a world free of guns and war and occupied homelands," the life that Abdullah is forced to live every day (207). After he foolishly persuades Abdullah to go to the mujahideen training camp, Raza sees the border of Afghanistan for the first time: "Tents. A city of refugees. 'It doubles in size every time I come back,' Abdullah said, his voice quieter, more grave than Raza had ever heard it before" (215). The refugee camps remind Abdullah that there is no other option for him but to join the mujahideen, for "if [the refugee camp] is the better option that must mean our homeland now is the doorway to hell" (216). Abdullah sees no other choice but to follow in his brothers' footsteps by becoming a mujahideen, even if he is only fourteen years old. He grows up in the world of guns and war and occupied homelands, a world that Raza wants to escape once he learns about it, but unlike Raza, Abdullah does not feel he has the option to escape. Instead of portraying Abdullah as the stereotypical terrorist whose only motivation is to kill the infidels, Shamsie provides the reader with an understanding of the conditions in which he is brought up and continues to live in, thus making his traumatic experiences more grievable for the reader and his turn to the path of becoming a mujahideen more understandable.

Years after Raza gets out of the mujahideen training camp due to Abdullah starting the rumor that he works with the CIA, he feels guilty for leaving Abdullah alone and wonders

what happened to him: “What if he’s become one of them – the black-turbanned men who banned everything of joy, blasted ancient prophets out of mountain-faces” (261). Through his connections he has made while working for a private military company, he finds out that Abdullah is in fact in New York as an illegal immigrant worker and is on the run from the FBI after they come looking for him. Even though he is innocent, Abdullah is still terrified due to the social and political climate in the U.S. shortly after 9/11, which is why he decides to return to Afghanistan. The attacks of September 11 form the background of the last section of the novel and are experienced from the perspective of Hiroko and Harry’s daughter Kim. For the former, they feel familiar due to her memories from Nagasaki – the posters everywhere of missing people, the anger, the hopelessness – while it is entirely unfamiliar to Kim. Thus, “Shamsie … brings together two catastrophes and thereby desacralizes [9/11]” (Nayar 98). When Hiroko asks Kim what is going on in the world, Kim responds: “‘The last fire has almost burnt out.’ Kim pointed in the direction of the looming emptiness outside before coming to sit down on the sofa. ‘That’s not the world, it’s just the neighbourhood,’ … [Ilse] tapped a finger on her granddaughter’s knee. ‘Don’t tell her about fires burning out as though that’s the world’s most significant event” (Shamsie 250-51). For Kim, the terrorist attacks are an unprecedented act of violence and evil, leading to the heightened grievability of American lives lost. As Hiroko herself points out, they are “‘American lives.’ It was a talisman, that phrase, the second part of it given weight by the first part” (289). Even though Hiroko feels solidarity and sorrow after the attacks, she recognizes that they are not unique: there is hurt and suffering everywhere in the world, and one victim is not more grievable than the other. As Butler ponders, “[w]hy, in particular, has there been within the US a righteous response to certain forms of violence inflicted at the same time that violence suffered by the US is either loudly mourned (the iconography of the dead from 9/11) or considered inassimilable [*sic*] (the assertion of masculine impermeability within state rhetoric)?” (*Frames of War* 24). As Itakura

points out, "[Hiroko] discovers the same structure of feelings in the American myth of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and in the popular narrative of the War on Terror: Japanese or Muslim lives are not conceived of as lives in the 'big picture' that always puts US citizens at the centre" ("Re-imagining" 42).

Later in the novel, in order to help Abdullah get to his first stop in Canada, Raza contacts Harry's daughter Kim, who refuses to help Abdullah due to her irrational fears shortly after 9/11. After Raza himself is accused of killing Harry, he escapes from Afghanistan and sets off on an extremely traumatic journey to help Abdullah in New York. However, Kim eventually decides to help Abdullah to stop Hiroko from smuggling him herself. During the trip, Abdullah tells her that during a trip with his friends, they saw a pile of stuffed animals, and that the cars in front of them swerved to avoid driving over the pile. When she asks if Kemal also swerved, Abdullah does not answer, and she assumes that he had driven over the stuffed animals. However, Abdullah wonders if he can "say he had asked Kemal to drive as close to the toys as possible and each of the men inside had taken armloads of rabbits and bears – their fur softer than anything the men had touched in years. … Abdullah's son now slept with the soft blue bunny the father he'd never met had sent to him via a cabbie from Peshawar" (343). He does not want her to think of him as a thief, so he does not mention this, which causes Kim to think of him as a bad person without any actual reason. Furthermore, she feels attacked when Abdullah mentions that "countries like yours they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. The disease always happens somewhere else. It's why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better" (344). The novel validates his assessment of the situation by showing that the Other's trauma is entirely invisible to the West; the U.S. does not understand the consequences of war and the destruction that follows within their own borders, which makes the suffering in other countries even more ungrievable than it already is.

The two instances mentioned above cause Kim's suspicions of Abdullah to grow, which results in her questioning him on his beliefs. When she accusingly asks him, "If an Afghan dies in the act of killing infidels in his country does he go straight to heaven?" he responds, "If the people he kills come as invaders or occupiers, yes. He is shaheed. Martyr" (346). Due to her emotional fragility as she has just lost her father, this is enough reason for her to report him to the police after she drops him off at the restaurant where he is going to be picked up. She sees Abdullah as the Other whose guilt she cannot prove and chooses to report him while knowing the consequences it will have. She can be compared with the U.S. soldiers who imprisoned and tortured Mikal in *The Blind Man's Garden* without evidence of a crime. Abdullah's life is not grievable for her, so the decision to have him arrested is an easy one. As Adriana Kiczkowski argues,

> Clearly influenced by the propaganda and ideological position of the United States government, with the insistent criminalization of the "other" and the characterization of terrorism as something distant and radically different, Kim adopts a position that makes no distinction between Muslim and terrorist. … In the end, it is the *others* who are potential terrorists in an explicit war, directly or indirectly, against our civilization. (133)

However, she does not realize that Raza is inside the restaurant and ends up sacrificing himself to save Abdullah. When she finds out, she questions her decision: "In one moment she saw Abdullah as the innocent. What had he said after all to warrant sending the law after an illegal Afghan? … That those who defended their nation against attack were heroes? In the next moment he was a threat, … conferring martyrdom on those who attacked Americans" (Shamsie 358). However, she immediately rationalizes her decision by "allow[ing] the experts – those involved with threat assessment of a kind that was not part of her experience – to speak to him, to make the decision she wasn't competent to make. … The policemen [would] merely conclude that the American woman was paranoid, seeing a threat in every Muslim"

(358-59). Here, she sees America as the country of justice, morality, and reason, while she demonstrates the opposite by reporting an innocent man for being an Afghan.

When Hiroko finds out what happened, Kim rationalizes her motives towards her: "'If I did look at him and see the man who killed my father, isn't that understandable? I'm not saying it's OK, but you have to say you understand. 'Should I look at you and see Harry Truman?'" (361-362). Hiroko does not accept Kim's reasoning, which is prejudiced and discriminatory. Even though Kim's loss of her father in the weeks before does not justify her reporting an innocent man to the police because he is an Afghan, like her father's killer. Hiroko's response shows that she does not and will not see all Americans as guilty, even though the U.S. bombed her home and killed her loved ones. In this, Mikal in *The Blind Man's Garden* and Hiroko are similar: Mikal refuses to associate all U.S. soldiers with those who tortured him and the entire country with the destruction of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, Kim thinks of how "her own family had lost one of its own in Nagasaki," and while this is true, the comparison of losing one distant family member with having your city destroyed and impacted for decades by a nuclear bomb seems insensitive, as Hiroko makes clear:

> When Konrad first heard of the concentration camps he said you have to deny people their humanity in order to decimate them. You don't. … You just have to put them in a little corner of the big picture. In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb.' The silence that followed was the silence of intimates who find themselves strangers. The dark birds were between them, their burnt feathers everywhere. (362)

Here, Hiroko critically reflects on the ungrievability of the Other as she describes one nuclear bomb killing thousands and one Afghan life lost to Guantanamo Bay, both losses not even

considered lives, thus not considered grievable. The dark birds, which represent not only Hiroko's scars from the trauma of Nagasaki but also the ungrievable Other, now cast a shadow on Kim and Hiroko's relationship. As Itakura argues, "The bird-shaped burns on her back used to act as a mere reminder of her past trauma; but they now function as a guarantor of difference – the difference between those who can understand other people's suffering and mourn their lives and those who cannot" ("Re-imagining" 42). Hiroko's questioning of the Other's ungrievability is comparable to Mikal's critique of the stereotypical dichotomy between the barbaric East and the civilized West because both recognize that the West played a part in creating the circumstances that have led to the so-called uncivilized actions of terrorists.

Like Mikal, Raza is taken into custody by Americans on the basis of false accusations; however, his experiences inside of the prison are not portrayed. Though we learn Mikal's fate, the reader is left to imagine Raza's fate in one of the most notorious prisons in the world: Guantanamo Bay. Even though Raza ends up in prison for a crime he did not commit, he represents the novel's break with the Orientalist notion of the Other, dismantling the Western perception of Muslims as barbaric terrorists by choosing to sacrifice himself to save Abdullah. At the end of the novel, the novel's prologue becomes clear: Raza is the man in the orange jumpsuit who wonders, "*How did it come to this?"* (Shamsie 1). By retracing history through different countries in different times, Shamsie emphasizes deterritorialized trauma and a history of suffering. As Aslam writes of Mikal, history became Raza's third parent: his father, a displaced Indian Muslim; his mother, a nuclear bomb survivor; and the complex interweaving histories of India, Britain, Pakistan, Japan, the U.S., and Afghanistan. In an interview, Shamsie says: "It may seem just a semantic difference – but to talk about a 'War on Terror' novel is to really talk about the consequences of the decisions made by various governments (including those of the US and Pakistan), rather than to place the terrorists of

9/11 at the centre of the narrative" (Filgate). The War on Terror, or "the [defeat of the] abstract noun," as Kim puts it (Aslam 271), is inherently different from traditional wars as it was fought by foreign forces in the deterritorialized space of Afghanistan. Shamsie not only deterritorializes the trauma and suffering of 9/11 by including experiences of the Other, such as Hiroko, Abdullah, and Raza, but also portrays how they break with their prescribed role as subaltern and make their trauma grievable.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the portrayal of subalternity and subsequent ungrievability in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*. My close analysis of the novels has shown how both the subaltern characters and the characters in positions of power break with hegemonic Western constructions of Us and Them to challenge the perceived grievability – or lack of it – such constructions entail. In doing so, Aslam and Shamsie have created new modes of portraying subaltern, Muslim, and Other characters in relation to the attacks on the Twin Towers and challenge the existing post-9/11 novel by offering "cognitive maps" which provide complex representations of the non-Western Other previously absent in most Western novels.

The main female subaltern characters in *The Blind Man's Garden* are portrayed as subalterns who are voiceless and not heard by the West or others in positions of power. Having been raised by a conservative woman like Tara, Naheed not only learns to be critical of the politicization of Islam but goes even further to also criticize Islam in general for the position of women in Pakistan. While she suffers through loss and the stigma against widowed women, she remains adamant in attempting to use her voice against those who are responsible, even if she ultimately remains unheard. The fakir symbolizes the epitome of true subalternity. Even though he speaks prophetically, similar to the blind prophet seer, he too is unheard by the powerful in the West and the East. The link between the fakir and the American soldier perfectly contrasts their roles in society: even though the American soldier is taken hostage in a foreign country, unable to speak or be understood, he ultimately returns to his position of privilege and power, while the fakir's abject status is permanent. Lastly, while Mikal is similar to the women and the fakir in terms of his subalternity, he also greatly complicates the Western perceptions of the Other by questioning U.S. intervention in Muslim

countries. Aslam makes the previously ungrievable Other a grievable person by portraying Mikal's traumatic experiences and his unwillingness to let history be his third parent.

In contrast to *The Blind Man's Garden*, *Burnt Shadows* offers characters who break with their subaltern positions, but the question if their voices are heard by others in positions of power remains. Ilse, who is like the American soldier, is temporarily subjugated to a subordinate position by her husband James, but her divorce and relocation place her back into a position of relative privilege. While Sajjad's attempts to speak develop throughout the novel, he is never truly heard by James. Furthermore, Hiroko's rejection of her subalternity starts early in the novel, but her voice arguably remains unheard by James, Ilse, Harry, and Kim, representing the unwillingness of the West to hear the Other's voice. Their voicelessness helps render their traumatic experiences ungrievable by the West, forcing them into a vicious cycle of Otherness: their subalternity contributes to their ungrievability, and their ungrievability contributes to their subalternity. Combined with the ideology of American exceptionalism, the American tragedy of 9/11 is deemed incomparable to other historical tragedies caused by the War or Terror and the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki. However, as Shamsie argues, after 9/11 "it was impossible not to be aware of how different histories were colliding and what suspicions were arising" (Ramzan). This heightened sense of trauma and melancholy amid the melodramatic narrative of 9/11 is ultimately why Kim condemns Raza to spending an unknown period in one of the most notorious prisons in the world, Guantanamo Bay. Both Raza and Mikal in *The Blind Man's Garden* share the misfortune of having their lives ruined by the West, thus causing the reader to question the role that the West played in ruining the lives of hundreds of thousands of Others like them throughout the world.

In a public discussion at the South Asian Literature Festival, Nadeem Aslam said: "If something terrible is happening in the world, I want to know about it …. I will see what the

problem is. I will see who the villain is. And I will bring him to trial by writing the book" (qtd. in Clements 123). Both Aslam and Shamsie symbolically bring to trial those who are responsible for helping create the circumstances in which the terrorist attacks of 9/11 could be carried out, in the process calling out those who failed to offer representations of complex Eastern individuals with a backstory that revolves around more than their stereotypical views of the West. Instead of pointing the finger at one responsible party, both Aslam and Shamsie make the reader question whose side they should be on, which ultimately leads to a larger question: is there a right or wrong side to be on? Like Rohan, who "dreams of an American soldier and a jihadi warrior digging the same grave" (Aslam 73). Nadeem Aslam and Kamila Shamsie complicate the idea of Good vs. Bad, the East vs. the West, the Civilized vs. the Barbaric, and Us vs. Them. By including and giving voice to subaltern characters in their novels, the authors show that these novels are needed to understand different perspectives and voices of the other side, which otherwise would remain unseen and unheard. In answer to the question of how she forms perceptions about things she does not know much about, Shamsie has said: "You read, you watch, you think, you write. And when you enter the minds of characters who think unlike you, you discover the most about perception and how limited it can be" (Ramzan). Both Aslam and Shamsie try to change their readers' perceptions about things, or people, they do not know much about. After all, it is the stories of pain, suffering, but also humanity, happiness and love that connect human beings and call into question the justification of a war with an abstract noun in countries far away from home.

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