DISCONNECTION AND CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION IN NADEEM ASLAM'S *MAPS FOR LOST LOVERS* AND *THE WASTED VIGIL*

Master's Thesis

Literary studies: English Literature and Culture

University of Leiden

Ümmü Gülsüm Sürücü

S1408763

14 March 2021

Supervisor: Dr. J. C. Kardux

Second reader: Prof. Dr. P. T. M. G. Liebregts

Table of contents

Introduction 4

Chapter 1: Historical Context and Theoretical Framework .... 10~~9~~

Chapter 2: Disconnection and Self-Estrangement in *Maps for Lost Lovers* .... 18~~17~~

2.1 Kaukab's Relationship with the "Others" .... 19~~18~~

2.2 Haunted by the Past .... 25~~24~~

2.3 Outspoken but Unheard .... 29~~28~~

Chapter 3: *The Wasted Vigil* .... 35~~34~~

3.1 Working through Trauma .... 36~~35~~

3.2 Speaking about the Unspeakable .... 44~~43~~

3.3 The Barbarian vs. The Civilised .... 49~~48~~

Conclusion .... 55~~54~~

Works Cited .... 58~~57~~

A Wingless Bird
I am a Wingless Bird
No one can understand my dread
Sitting all alone, I see other's flights
Over valleys, ocean and mountain height.
Soaring high they all seem to me
Whimsical, comfortable and exultant.
Hardly they bother about the morass
Of those who are left behind like me,
Whose wings have been cut by a brutal force
The urge to fly keeps my inside quivering
My wretched wingless body keeps on shivering.
Why not me?
Who is to reply?

Nighat Parveen

How keen everyone is to make this world their home forgetting its impermanence.

It's like trying to see and name constellations in a fireworks display.

Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, the US government launched the so-called "War on Terror." New legislation was adopted in order to prevent such attacks from happening ever again. Americans felt unsafe and needed a government that would protect them, and the US government listened to their call for "homeland" security. So did the media; they hijacked the public debate about "religious experience" and changed it into a "political category," creating a distinction between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims," rather than differentiating between "terrorists [and] civilians" (Mamdani 766). Most speeches given by President George W. Bush at the time were about reviving the unity of the nation and taking revenge on the terrorists, whose attack had shocked people all over the world. As Elisabeth Anker argues, the news and political debates and speeches were drenched in "melodrama." Anker defines "melodrama" as a "discursive practice that makes truth and justice legible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong," claiming that it can be used as a tool by politicians and media outlets to "moralise all problems and relationships" (Anker 23-23). In melodramatic political discourse, Anker points out, there is a clear distinction between "good" and "evil," the good here being America, "an imagined community unadulterated by immortality or evil" (25). Muslims, on the other hand, are seen as evil because they have been corrupted by the ideology of the extremists. The tendency to think in binary and moral terms about cultural differences between Christians and Muslims intensified after the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in the public transport system in London. These were "the first suicide attacks in modern Western Europe" (Eyerman and Strom 25). After the Second World War, "the attacks were the deadliest [event] in London […] killing 52 people and injuring more than 700 others" (25). The way Muslims have been portrayed in the media and in political discourse since these and other attacks has played a significant role in the way people look at Muslims all over the world.

Nadeem Aslam's novels *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2009), on which this thesis will focus, were partly written in response to the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, and their repercussions in other parts of the world. Aslam, a Pakistani-born writer whose family emigrated to England when he was fourteen, offers a counternarrative to post-9/11 novels that are mainly written from an American perspective and often reproduce Orientalist stereotypes. The reproduction of Orientalist stereotypes changed with the emergence of novels written by authors who, because of their ethnic or other cultural affiliations, in the past often would have been regarded as the "Other" from a Western perspective. As pointed out by Edward Said, who famously theorized the concept of Orientalism, the voices of those whose presence in Western societies have either been ignored or have been used to make them scapegoats for existing social problems are now being heard. As Said writes in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), this is the result of the "globalized process set in motion by modern imperialism," to which non-Western writers who are producing literary texts on the South Asia are also subject (xx). According to Madeline Clements,

> Nadeem Aslam … can be read as part of a post-9/11 attempt to revise modern "knowledge" of the Islamic world, using globally disseminated literature to reframe Muslims' potential to connect with others. It considers how the "world literature" [he] create[s] and shape[s] maps spheres of Islamic affiliation and affinity, questioning where subjects turn in seeking a sense of connection or identification, and why. (2)

Most post-9/11 novels focus only on the traumatising effect the terrorist attacks had on the US, enabling Western readers to relate to and sympathise with the characters in these novels as well as engage in public debates in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The British-Pakistani writer Nadeem Aslam, on the other hand, explores the role the West has played in South Asia in creating the conditions that led to terrorism as well as the traumatic consequences of intervention by the West in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He gives his non-Western characters a voice in contrast to many other 9/11 novels, which tend to pay marginal

attention to the (migrant) Muslim and/or terrorist perspective or leave them out entirely. Michael Rothberg, who was one of the first scholars to call for a more internationally oriented literature, argues that it is necessary for "9/11 novels to create cognitive maps that imagine how citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and others." In order to succeed in this goal, Rothberg argues, one has to turn away from the "black-and-white logic of good and evil that pervades various sides in the struggle against terrorism" (158). In his novels, Aslam creates characters that are more complex than the stereotypical dichotomy of Muslims who are misunderstood or ignored by the West versus Westerners who blame and punish Muslims for the pain the West endured from terrorism.

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Aslam's focus is on the alienation of Muslim immigrants in the UK. To Western readers, Kaukab, the protagonist of the novel, and the Pakistani-British community of conservative Muslims to which she belongs can be seen as the non-European "Other," but for the characters in the novel the West and their values and beliefs are seen as "Other" as well. As Sara Upstone points out, in these novels "the imperial centre becomes the focus itself of the imperial gaze" (107). In *Maps*, Aslam uses the female protagonist Kaukab to show that the relationship the West has with the "Orient" is more complex than it is generally perceived to be. Though the Muslim community in England is described in the novel mostly as submissive, I will argue that Aslam subverts this notion by making the immigrant community take power back and refuse to assimilate into Western society and culture. Kaukab, who is the opposite of submissive and seeks a sense of connection and identification within society, searches for ways to connect with her children, while her children seek a connection with Britain and her husband tries to find a middle ground between Kaukab's and their children's responses to their surroundings.

In Aslam's third novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, the Taliban is considered the "Other" by the American and British characters, while Casa, an Afghan orphan who sympathises with the

Taliban, feels disconnected from everyone in Marcus's house, where he finds refuge. Dunia, a young Afghan teacher, has a different view of Islam than the Taliban and Casa. Even though she plays only a minor role in the novel, she makes Casa realise that in order to practice Islam he does not have to turn to extreme fundamentalist terrorist organisations. Aslam portrays the Afghan characters Casa and Dunia as opposites of each other in terms of the way they interpret their religion; while they face "Othering" and they themselves see the West as the "Other," they turn different ways to seek a sense of connection and identification. This form of Othering in *The Wasted Vigil* differs from that in *Maps of Lost Lovers* in that Casa and Dunia experience in their own country what we might call a "transnational Othering." In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Kaukab experiences Othering in the country she lives in as an immigrant. In *Maps* there is no mediating character such as Dunia; there are only the two extremes on either side of the spectrum. Even though the setting and the stories of the characters in the novels differ from each other, both texts challenge Orientalist stereotyping.

Aslam's critique of othering will be analysed through the representation of his characters and the relationships they develop with each other in the novel. As Clements argues, it is important in the "post 9/11 context" to have (partly) non-Western writers who "can command the English-speaking world's attention without pandering to what it wants to hear" (Clements 66). Nadeem Aslam's novels make clear that Orientalism, even though it is an old concept, still has "contemporary relevance" (Upstone 107). Aslam does portray some of his characters as stereotypically conservative, sometimes fundamentalist, Muslims and thereby risks contributing to the Orientalist view the West has on the Orient. At the same time, he "demystify[ies]" and "rewrite[s]" the "orientalised images," while he also makes the reader "recognise the impact of neo-imperialistic attitude and policies" on the East (Clements 66). Offering a realist depiction of the Afghan characters in *The Wasted Vigil* and the British-Pakistani characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers* as a community, Aslam critiques the way these

communities perceive themselves as the "Other" or see the West as the "Other." In *Maps for Lost Lovers* Aslam shows the process of Othering at work in the way the characters have refused to be integrated in Britain and continue to perceive the West as the Other. In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam explores the role traumatising events have played in Casa's identity formation and in his view of the West as the Other.

Nadeem Aslam's novels can both be characterised as post-9/11 novels, which "[fuse] conventional postcolonial themes [e.g., Orientalism, race, identity] and literary techniques with a distinctly British sensibility" (Upstone 101). Even though *Maps for Lost Lovers* was partly written before the attack on the Twin Towers, it can still be considered to be a post-9/11 novel, because it depicts the impact the attacks have had on immigrant communities. This will be discussed in depth in my analysis of the novel. In both novels the non-Western characters, Kaukab and Casa in particular, struggle with their identity and their place in society. Using Said's theory on Orientalism and more recent scholarship on postcolonial studies, I will offer a close analysis of the two novels, focusing in particular on the characters Kaukab, Casa and Dunia. I will argue that the novels do not only criticize Orientalist Othering in the West, but also show this same process at work within immigrant communities in Britain, leading the Pakistani immigrant characters in London to feel estranged from the dominant society, while the main Afghan character, Casa, feels isolated in his home country because he sees those who do not share his fundamentalist views of Islam as the Other. In my thesis I will analyse, how to overcome their sense of alienation, the characters seek a sense of belonging and identification within their communities, but do not succeed. I argue that Aslam shows the disconnection of the characters from their respective communities; in their search for a sense of cultural identification within their South East Asian communities they fail to connect with the people around them because of the effects of Orientalism such as trauma and sub-alternity.

Chapter 1: Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the political and literary discourse on immigrants in the West after 9/11 one has to understand that their identity is formed by the trauma of colonial oppression and the attempt to find a sense of connection within their communities. In this chapter, I will show how Orientalism enhances the estrangement of Muslim immigrant communities, which makes them not feel at home in the host country. In order to explain the reason behind their estrangement, I will argue that the South Asian diasporic community's experience of Othering in the host country is intensified because of a history of trauma during colonial rule. Furthermore, I will discuss trauma theory in light of Spivak's theoretical concept of subalternity.

The widespread notion of the victimization of the West in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists excluded Muslims. Muslims all over the world suddenly were expected to denounce every act of terror that had been committed in the name of Islam. People who did not look or sound Caucasian were blamed for the attacks. After the attacks of 9/11, there was huge media attention to the "faces," "names" and "stories" of the people who were killed (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). This "public grieving" was mainly meant for US nationals, as "there was considerably less public grieving for non-US nationals" (38). For this phenomenon, Judith Butler coined the term "ungrievability," the notion that "certain forms of grief become nationally recognised and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable" (*Precarious Life* xiv). She argues that "a national melancholia, understood as a disavowed mourning, follows upon the erasure from public representations of the names, images, and narratives of those the US has killed," whereas "the US's own losses are consecrated in public obituaries that constitute so many acts of nation-building" (xiv). The questions that arise from these public mourning rituals are "whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (*Frames of*

War 38). Before answering these questions I will define the term "ungrievable life." Butler terms it as "one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (38). In order for a life to be counted as a life it has to be understood. As we will see, this is also true for the characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Wasted Vigil*. When they are understood, their lives gain value in the eyes of the outside world. When they are not seen or heard, their life is deemed unvaluable and they are not counted as people whose lives are "precarious." Psychologists have argued that "[d]ehumanization, or perceiving another group as less than human, can have devastating consequences for intergroup relations. Evidence suggests that dehumanization is associated with support for aggressive policies and violent actions toward other groups" (Kteily and Bruneau, qtd. in Haji et al. n.p.). Aggressive precautions were taken both in the US and the UK. Measures for mass surveillance were taken by government officials and willingly accepted by the public because of their exposed vulnerability.

After the attacks on 9/11 and 7/7, many novels were written from the point of view of "white" Westerners, who actively contributed to making the lives of (Muslim) Eastern/Southern people ungrievable and their voices unheard. This changed with the emergence of South Asian fiction from the pen of South Asian authors. As Bidhan Chandra Roy points out, "South Asian diasporic fiction plays a significant role in imagining and, to a certain extent, shaping this new global context [in which, Britain opened her borders for economic purposes] from a British perspective" (Roy 2). Furthermore, Roy argues that "the new globalised context in which South Asian diasporic fiction in Britain is now produced" forces us to rethink the way we "read and understand such fiction" (2). Similarly, Gerrit-Jan Berendse and Mark Williams suggest the need for "'not only repoliticised modes of understanding but also a new grammar of response'" (Berendse and Williams, qtd. in Moore 10). By writing about the Pakistani immigrant community in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Nadeem

Aslam gives voice to "postnational" forms of culture and identities. His novels "exemplify a new literary category that signals the inadequacy of postcolonial models of 'writing back' to a British cent[re] or of cultural imperialism" (Roy 12). Aslam, then, is part of a group of writers who try to break down the hegemonic structures set by society by writing about a community that has been marginalised and silenced.

Even though Aslam started writing the novel before 9/11, it was finished and published after the attack, thus making it relevant for post-9/11 theories as well. He reclaims the power of writing about brown Muslims and turns his novel into a text that is relevant for both non-Muslims and Muslims. It's relevant for Muslims, because it represents an ethnic group that was underrepresented in the English literary field. And it is relevant for non-Muslims because it explains a crucial part of society that has been misunderstood by the host country. Aslam's "new grammar of response" shines through in the way he depicts his characters and the way he retells a story that has actually been present for decades: the story of Muslim immigrants who try to live with the terms and conditions that life in a predominantly non-Muslim country has offered them. Analysing South Asian diasporic fiction, like Aslam's works, broadens the understanding one has about globalisation because it addresses

> the multidimensionality of globalization (cultural, politics land economic), its historical context (from European colonialism to the present), the uneven experiences of globalisation around the world, the erosion and reinvention of traditional ways of life, the emergence of transnational and post national identities as the spread of (Western) capitalism, modernity, and liberalism. Roy 3

It is through globalisation that these novels have attracted the attention of readers worldwide. Globalisation is also a valuable context for analysing the changes cultural identity has undergone in "the contemporary period," because it focuses on the "new relationships among power, cultural identities, and narrative[s] that differ from many postcolonial models" (Roy

11). Reading these texts enables the reader to understand the structures of "the new relationships among geography, identities, and culture that such fiction represents" (12). Thus, reading Nadeem Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* gives the reader an idea of the impact globalisation has had on immigrant communities.

Globalisation also lies at the source of the deterritorialization of the people in Afghanistan and Pakistan because it has led people in South Asian countries to seek a safer life in Western countries, partly because of Western interference in their native countries. Western powers such as Great Britain and United States and the Soviet Union all have long had economic and political interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan. As historian Elisabeth Leake points out, in the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands "ethnic, religious, and political networks intersected, creating a site both moulded by events in faraway metropoles and capable of impacting decision making across the globe" (Leake 3). Each actor valued a different aspect of the borderlands; whether "its strategic location for the West, geographical and ideological significance within South Asia, or its local autonomy movements," there was something of significance for each country to interfere in Pakistan and or Afghanistan (4). This resulted in numerous casualties in these countries. The interference of Great Britain was particularly large in Pakistan as the country had been part of the British Empire. The first prime minister of India, the nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru, exemplifies some of the changes made by the colonizers in public spheres: "there existed exclusively English clubs who [sic] did not allow any Indian (even if he was a prince) except in the capacity of a servant. Railway carriages, benches in parks, etc., had signs of 'For Europeans Only' posted on them" (Nehru, qtd. in Saleem and Rizvi 402). What the US had done to African Americans through segregation, the UK had done to people in India. According to Nehru, being forced to tolerate such conditions "in one's own land is a humiliating and exasperating reminder of one's enslaved condition" (402). This enslaved condition motivated many people in Pakistan,

after its independence from India in 1948, to move to England to search for a better life. However, the life they found themselves in was not so different from the one they hade been in.

The colonial experience Pakistanis have gone through influences the way they live in the country they migrated to. The underlying cause of trauma are the memories human beings form and link to certain experiences. Mieke Bal suggests that "cultural memorization" is "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future." Therefore, "cultural memory" connects the experiences in the past with the present and the future (Bal vii). Bal distinguishes "narrative memory," which is based on emotion and therefore "memorable," from "traumatic recall," which is "the painful resurfacing of events of a traumatic nature" (viii). It would be inaccurate to use the term "memory" instead of "recall," because the person who has experienced trauma is not able to simply remember and narrate these traumatising events but is unwillingly confronted by them. The subject is not in control of the events but is haunted by them. This same process is at work not only within one person but sometimes also within a larger group of people that have something in common. When the latter happens, Neal J. Smelser suggests it can be called "cultural trauma" (Smelser, qtd. in Manimangai and Jabarouti 158). He argues that in order for cultural trauma to be worked through, the society in which it occurs needs to be "vulnerable and prepared for the establishment of cultural trauma" (158). He adds that this happens when a community fears that the stability of their "collective life" is in danger. This is the case for Pakistani people, who have a bloody history of war and colonialism and thus already have a basis for cultural trauma. Because Britain had imposed its culture, language and rules on Pakistanis when they were still part of the colonial empire, the latter had little to no space to voice their opinion and concerns about their culture and develop their society's rules and values. Thus, according to Manimangai and Jabarouti, "collective trauma, collective

memory and collective identity" can be discussed in relation with each other (158). Finally, Smelser proposes that "cultural trauma" can formally be defined as

> a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect[,] b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. (158)

It is important to realise that the Pakistani community in Britain went through a traumatising period before coming to the West. Furthermore, one has to also keep in mind the difference between the first- and second-generation immigrants, the second generation having inherited the trauma of their parents and having dealt with it in their own manner. *Maps of Lost Lovers* can also be analysed in light of the trauma immigrants have experienced and inherited, as Kaukab and her husband Shamas are first-generation immigrants and their children are second-generation immigrants.

The trauma of the characters in the novels, especially Kaukab's, is made worse by the fact that they are not heard by the Western powers. They express their trauma by clinging even more to their own habits and rituals than they did in Pakistan. This makes them feel more estranged from the dominant society. They are afraid to have connections with others than their own familiar community. The fact that there are almost no British characters goes to show that they are living in a closed-off community with little to no interaction with the outside world. The Pakistani community is stuck in the past and in their longing for their "home country," while they despise British culture. Spivak terms the status of being unheard and having no voice in the dominant culture as "unspeakability" and the person as a "subaltern." She chooses the term "subaltern," "because [it] encompass[es] a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses" (Morton 45). Before continuing to Spivak's theory of subalternity, one has to bear in mind that Spivak argues that it can be non-ethical for a privileged entity to argue on behalf of

oppressed women from a minority, because their voices and struggles can be silenced by the terminology of "western critical theory" (qtd. in Morton 7). While writing about women from "Third-World" countries who have immigrated to the West, as a scholar one has to realise that they cannot speak in any way for these women. For this reason, the position I take is that of a student who will analyse the respective novels in light of the theories presented by Spivak.

Spivak has criticised many scholars because of the way they have written about people from "Third-World" countries, especially women. She argues that classic Western theories cannot be implemented to describe or analyse concepts in India because of its complex social history (52). In order for the scholar to speak about the systematic oppression of women in India, it is crucial to explain what it means to be subaltern. Spivak explains that in the long history of decolonisation the struggle and resistance of the "lower-class" subaltern groups were not recognised or they were "subordinated to the larger nationalist project of decolonisation" (50). Spivak's theory of subalternity encompasses a broad spectrum of colonial history and actors who may have been in a subaltern position. In this thesis the focus will be on the "disempowered subaltern women [and men] in the 'Third-World'" (58). Spivak explains that "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, [but] the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (59). Spivak, on her part, takes into account the "experiences and histories" of Indian women (69). Stephen Morten argues that Spivak is capable of differentiating between "her own role as postcolonial intellectual and the concrete, material lives of the subaltern" and thus can hear and respond to "the voices and unwritten stories of subaltern women" without silencing them (69). Aslam also voices the struggles of subaltern women and, in the case of Casa, subaltern men. Even though Aslam is a man who may have a subordinate status in relation to other men in England, he has a higher status in relation to the immigrant women whom he writes about in *Maps*, as a result of which he is "heard" better than these women or can even contribute to

their silencing. However, by writing about their histories and struggles he does not silence them but gives South-Asian characters who may not have been heard otherwise a voice.

The South-Asian community in *Maps* is depicted as backwards and unwilling to integrate into British culture, not unlike the British who didn't integrate into the societies they colonised either when they were the colonial rulers. This shows that the British, like most people, want to preserve their own norms and values. Therefore, blaming the South-Asian community for their lack of adaptation into the dominant culture disregards their autonomy to choose for their own. The South-Asian community has endured many traumatic events when living under colonial rule. The misunderstanding created due to a lack of communication between the two groups causes the minority group to feel unsafe, unheard, and not as a part of the country they live in. This in turn leads to a strong connection with the old home and a longing to the old ways in their native country. I will argue that in *Maps for Lost Lovers* Aslam, as a postcolonial writer, explores the moving landscape of globalism, trauma and unspeakability in the South-Asian immigrant community in England. Aslam is committed to delving into the traumatic histories that are an integral part of the global processes which take place within local communities that have a history of violence and conflict.

Chapter 2: Disconnection and Self-Estrangement in *Maps for Lost Lovers*

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Nadeem Aslam writes about an isolated Pakistani immigrant community in a fictional city in England they call Dashte-e-Tanhaii. The town is in shock after the disappearance of the beloved Jugnu and his lover Chanda, who were living together outside marriage, which is frowned upon within the Muslim community. After the disappearance of the two lovers, Chanda's brothers are arrested for murder. The novel tells the story of the next twelve months. The story is narrated by an omniscient narrator who tells Kaukab and her husband Shamas's story and the relationship they have with their children. Kaukab is a devout Muslim and a mother of three, who dearly loves her children even though initially this may not seem like it. Shamas does not believe in God or any kind of religion, and consequently has closer ties with his children, who have also strayed away from the Muslim faith and culture. Their children, Charag, Mah-Jabin and Ujala, turn against Kaukab because their mother's way of thinking is not in line with theirs. Kaukab and Shamas's children are born and raised in Britain and go to university there. Their lives are different from those of their parents. The disappearance of their beloved uncle Jugnu, Shamas's younger brother, deeply affects them and makes feelings towards their mother that had once been repressed resurface because they blame his murder on what they see as her backward religion.

Through *Maps*, Aslam subverts the idea that the cultural conflicts in Britain are caused by immigrant communities. By representing the trauma brown people have experienced, due to the otherness they have felt through their subaltern position in British society, Aslam criticises Orientalist stereotypes and racial prejudice. In his novel he gives Pakistani immigrants a voice. It can be argued that Aslam, in telling Kaukab's story, stays true to the issues experienced by the community such as othering, trauma and the conflicts within the immigrant community about values and beliefs. In order to understand the repercussions colonialism has had on certain groups of people, in my close analysis of the novel I will

examine the representation of trauma in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Furthermore, I will explore the status of subalternity and how this leads to the ungrievability of brown people's lives. Because of the subaltern status of Pakistani immigrants, westerners do not hear them. I will argue that because the former are subaltern, the latter ignore their grief. Aslam makes it clear for the Western reader that immigrants' cultural trauma leads them to feel unsafe and not at home in the host country. This in turn leads to a reversed form of Orientalism: the Othering of the native-born Britons by the South-Asian immigrant community. Aslam confirms the idea that the establishment of an identity and a sense of belonging within South Asian immigrant communities is set for failure because of the experienced trauma of immigrants, their subaltern position and the feeling of hostility felt by both the immigrant community and the host country.

2.1 Kaukab's Relationship with the "Others"

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the female protagonist Kaukab, a Pakistani immigrant living in London, steadfastly rejects English culture and manners and tries to teach her children Pakistani values. She uses what she sees as Islam's rules as the strict path no one should deviate from; otherwise they will be rejected by the community. She sees non-Muslim native-born Britons as the Other. Kaukab's husband Shamas, however, "is not a believer" (*Maps* 20). Shamas's brother Jugnu, who is a central character in the novel, does not adhere to the laws of Islam either. He and his Pakistani girlfriend Chanda decide to live together before marrying, which is not allowed in Islam. Kaukab's children also do not live according to Islamic law, which makes Kaukab sad and angry. When her oldest son, Charag, comes home from London with the, to her devastating, news that his "girlfriend is not only white but also pregnant," she directs her anger onto Shamas and Jugnu (34). She blames both men for transmitting their own ideas regarding religion to her children: "Jugnu only finished the job Shamas started

years ago" (34). She refers to Jugnu living with his girlfriend and Shamas's "Godless ideas," which also take hold of their children (34). Kaukab feels alone in her struggle in, as Rehana Ahmed puts it, a "strange land, away from their home, their customs and traditions," where her only "constant companion [is her] loneliness and the pain of separation from [her] loved ones" (Ahmed 105). Throughout the novel Aslam focuses on Kaukab's lonely struggle in a country where she is seen as the Other, while she herself sees the people in the host country as the Other. Significantly, the name they give to the city they live in, "Dasht-e-Tanhaii," according to the omniscient narrator translates into "The Wilderness of Solitude" and "The Desert of Loneliness" (*Maps* 29).

Her loneliness, due to her feeling Other, is increased when Jugnu is coming over for dinner with his white girlfriend. Kaukab is in the house preparing the food; "[she] was alone in the house, alone in the house just as she was alone in the world, alone to let out a noisy sob whenever she felt the need […] (35). She feels as if the people around her are strangers to her and she is a stranger to them. The constant Othering of each other leads to a gap between her and her husband and children, a gap which is not easy to overcome. According to her, nothing is the same as in her hometown in Pakistan. The language barrier between Kaukab and Jugnu's white girlfriend, the only white person she has direct interaction with, causes Kaukab to feel more as the Other. She feels as if she is not worthy to talk to because she does not know the English language. Even though she despises white people, she goes out of her way to look and smell good for her white guest. She misses her daughter when getting ready and needs to refrain herself from crying:

> […] she had also to practise her English in the mirror. And it too was hopeless: what was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did back in Pakistan? In England the heart said "boom boom" instead of *dhak dhak;* a gun said "bang!" instead of *thah!;* things fell with a "thud," not a *dharam;* small bells said "jingle" instead of *chaanchaan;* the trains said "choo choo" instead of *chuk chuk* (35-36).

At one point she had tried to learn the language through children's programmes she watched on TV with her children, but failed when all three of her children moved out "leaving her and her rudimentary grasp of English behind" (33). Despite her efforts to look good and presentable towards white women, she does not accept whites as people that she should look up to. In another scene in which Kaukab seems to feel inferior to whites, she unknots the cord of a present her son Charag has brought her with his girlfriend Stella. She remembers the "first time she had made a knot in something in Stella's presence: she had suddenly gone numb, wondering if there was a *Western* way of tying a knot — more sophisticated, *better*. Perhaps the way she tied knots was an *ignorant* way of tying a knot?" (*Maps* 318). The constant battle between wanting to be accepted and not wanting to give up her own values and morals makes Kaukab confused about her place in society. The idea that Pakistanis are superior to Westerners is central to her sense of identity. If, in a to her dystopian world, she was to accept the rules of the British, her entire identity would crumble and she wouldn't know what to fall back on. She feels safest when she is with people from her own community who think the same way as she does, just like the neighbour mentioned before with whom she shares the same fate of having to live in a country she despises. She even mentions the difference between her and the others when she talks about a shop she doesn't often visit, because "white people's houses start soon after that street, and even the Pakistanis there are not from our part of Pakistan" (42). Not only does she feel estranged from mainstream British society, she also differentiates between Pakistanis she can relate to, the working-class immigrants, and those she does not feel a connection with, the upper-class Pakistanis who live in nicer neighbourhoods.

Kaukab's family is the most important thing in her life. She has a deep love for all three of her children and her brother-in-law Jugnu. She shows gratitude for the fact that Jugnu is in her life and in England, because "the move to England had deprived her of the glowing

warmth that people who are born of each other give out, the heat and light of an extended family" (31). Jugnu's role in Kaukab's life is that of "her husband's brother, her children's uncle, her own brother-in-law"; she "daily and deeply, […] loved these words and what they meant" (32). Kaukab loves her family so dearly and deeply because there is no one else for her to feel affection for after her move to England. She does not intermingle with people form other religious groupings or other parts of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. As the omniscient narrator indicates,

> it was as though, when the doors of Pakistan closed on her, her hands had forgotten the art of knocking; she had made friends with some women in the area, but she barely knew what lay beyond the neighbourhood and didn't know how to deal with strangers: full of apprehension concerning the white race and uncomfortable with people of another Subcontinental religion or grouping. (32)

Kaukab has isolated herself from the nation she is living in. She refuses to be integrated into the mainstream society by refuting its values and does not intermingle with those outside her small circle. This also becomes clear when Kaukab talks to her neighbour, who says: "we should never have come to this deplorable country, sister-ji, this nest of devilry from where God has been exiled. No, not exiled – denied and slain" (*Maps* 30). They both curse the day they have decided to move to England, because that day marked the erasure of their single Pakistani identity and the beginning of a more complex form of identity as they try to find a way to live on their own terms within the boundaries of British culture.

Throughout the novel, Kaukab does not show growth in the way she thinks about the West, seeing it as an entity that wants to lead them astray, away from their culture and religion. However, a clash within herself surfaces when she reminisces on a statement she has heard before: "*Hell is other people*." She thinks to herself, "surely no one — no people, no civilization — would think other people were Hell. What else was there but other people?" (32-33). Although momentarily she realises that other people should not be seen as evil, after a while she falls back into the same thoughts as before. When she visits Jugnu after he had to

be hospitalised because he has picked up a SOA, she expresses her hate towards his ex-girlfriend whom she blames for it: "'That diseased woman, this diseased, vice-ridden and lecherous race!'" (44). In her eyes whites cannot do anything right. When it turns out that the girl may have picked up the disease in Tunisia, a Muslim country, Kaukab refuses to believe that that is true: "She must've gone on holiday somewhere else, a country populated by the whites or non-Muslims. She's trying to malign our faith'" (44). She is constructing her own identity by Othering the West; she feels she would lose her sense of identity and belonging if she were to accept the morals and values of the West. It would also feel as a betrayal of her Pakistani identity, because in colonial times the British colonizers kept the Indian people in a subordinate position. For example, "Indians were left out from all high offices both in civil administration and army," which meant they had to submit to the British and Western rules (Saleem 409). As a result, many people in the Pakistani immigrant community refused to put in a lot of effort to fit into mainstream British society.

It could be argued that Aslam reinforces the Orientalist notion that immigrants are uneducated, violent and inhuman by portraying Kaukab as a woman with so-called fundamentalist views. Sijal Sarfraz, for example, argues that Aslam may be right in his critique of the East, but "[t]he problem with Aslam's representation is that it silences liberal Muslim scholars altogether. Such exclusion in *Maps* causes stereotypical representations of Muslim priests [and Kaukab] as iconic fundamentalist *mullahs* [and ignorant wives of brown men]" (Sarfraz 508). Additionally, Upstone argues that Aslam's portrayal of Kaukab actually exacerbates the postcolonial predicament of Islamophobia, "the practice of ingrained prejudices against Muslims rooted in negative stereotypes" (Upstone 107). It can be argued that Aslam, through his representation of Kaukab and the Muslim community as conservative and passive actually encourages Islamophobia. As Sarfraz suggests, the "creation of such characters by a postcolonial writer intensifies Islam's image as a fundamentalist religion"

(Sarfraz 508). Likewise, Upstone suggests that Aslam's way of portraying Kaukab "repeats an Orientalist vision" (Upstone 107). She argues that "Aslam's critique of Kaukab for her fundamentalist views" is little to no different than "the attitudes of European colonialists," who see Muslim women as subordinate and in need of rescue from a "culture and religion in which they had the misfortune to find themselves'" (107). Even though this is a valid argument, by addressing the problematic ideas that Muslim immigrants hold onto in the name of Islam, Aslam convincingly shows that their unwillingness to give them up is a response to the historical trauma of colonial oppression.

Upstone and Sarfraz argue that Aslam sets out to criticise certain fundamentalist views of Islam by telling negative stories about Islam, but I argue that he does this in order to shed light on the destruction and subsequently reconstruction of the immigrant's identity. Aslam shows that the South Asian diasporic community has had to endure a cruel history of colonialism and in order to feel some sense of belonging they turn to their fundamentalist views practised in their native country. Aslam criticises the Western view that you only belong there and are only considered modern if you assimilate into Western culture. He does so by telling the story of Chanda and Jugnu living with each other out of wedlock and Shamas's adultery, Mah-Jabin's starting to wear "Western clothes," Charag's posing naked on the cover of a magazine and Ujala's shunning of his mother's religion. Because Kaukab does not assimilate, she is not accepted by her children or her husband. Although her values and morals create a gap between Kaukab and the world around her, she refuses to give them up. If she assimilated and viewed whites as good people, she could not blame anyone for the troubles in Pakistani society and her losing her children. Rather than devaluing the history of trauma Pakistani people have endured because he criticizes the immigrant community for not letting go of their cultural values, Aslam actually suggests that they try to create a sense of belonging and connection despite their history of trauma.

2.2 Haunted by the Past

Living under British rule in their home country and the partition of India that followed decolonization have traumatised the Pakistani community. In David Waterman's words, "exile further compound[ed] their sentiment of vulnerability on leaving the familiarity of the subcontinent, highlighted early in the novel by their loss of the fifth season, the monsoon" (Waterman 18). Having a history of oppression and living under colonial rule has left the South Asian immigrants vulnerable. Being exposed to racial prejudice and exclusion in England after immigration is another reason for feeling that they are living in a hostile environment. The immigrant and native communities in the novel clash with each other as Aslam engages with concepts such as "traditional and modern which comes to the surface in the wake of rapid social change and the ensuing feeling of cultural vulnerability, especially within a diaspora" (Sarfraz 18). Not only the geographic history of dislocation but also the personal history of oppression in the Pakistani immigrant community and in her own family causes Kaukab to hold on to familiar patterns and rituals, such as cooking, taking care of her children and gossiping about others in the community. In this way Aslam makes Kaukab take charge of her own life, but it leaves her a minor character in the lives of those around her.

While Kaukab is portrayed as a strict Muslim mother who came to live in England, her husband Shamas is represented as a liberal South-Asian man who is tolerant and understanding. He is "the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own, visiting his office in the town centre or bringing the problems to his front door" (*Maps* 15). Thus, he can be perceived as someone who mediates between Western and Eastern culture. However, for Kaukab he is the epitome of evil, because he doesn't believe in God and makes fun of her faith. Shamas deliberately degrades her during the dinner with Jugnu's girlfriend. He drinks wine and talks derisively about Islam and the Prophet, deliberately upsetting Kaukab. Shamas is tolerant of his children's behaviour precisely

because Kaukab disapproves of it. He includes Kaukab in his mockery by inviting her to sit with them and talk to "prove to [their] guest that Pakistanis are the most talkative people on earth," while he knows that she is not so keen on speaking in English (37). He continues to upset Kaukab by mocking the Muslim greeting by saying: "[m]y goodness, we use *seven* syllables just to say hello: *Assalamaulaikum*'" (37). Ironically Shamas is drunk and trying his best to show that he is able to assimilate into the dominant culture, thus exposing himself to ridicule, according to Kaukab. She is embarrassed about his behaviour. A similar incident occurs when Kaukab and Shamas visit the doctor, who asks what Kaukab's birthday is, to which Shamas does not know the answer.

> She scrutinizes Shamas's face. Surely, he is more embarrassed about what the white man is thinking of *him* than upset that he'd forgotten the date, that *she* would be hurt by it. But then she drives the wicked thought away […] Everything is here in this house. Every beloved absence is present here. An oasis — albeit a haunted one — in the middle of the Desert of Loneliness. Out there, there was nothing but humiliation: she's hot with shame at what the white doctor would now think of Pakistanis, of Muslims — they are like animals, not even remembering or celebrating birthdays. Dumb cattle. (65)

While she blames Shamas for trying to ingratiate himself with the doctor, she is also concerned about what the doctor might think – that the Pakistani community is underdeveloped and unaware of cultural practices in the West such as birthdays. She even has a slight obsession with the few interactions she has with white people: "[t]he 'thank you' she murmurs to the flower-deliveryman is her third exchange with a white person this year; there were five last year; none the year before, if she remembers correctly; three the year before that" (69). Her encounters with white people evidently have such a great impact on her that she counts them.

Even though sometimes Kaukab has ideas that go beyond her traditional way of thinking, she quickly dismisses those transgressive thoughts lest they will influence her belief in God, for example when she says to her daughter Mah-Jabin: "I love people who

accomplish great things" (112). This is an observation Mah-Jabin would have never expected to hear from her mother. The narrator suggests that whenever such an insight would come to Kaukab, it would "[…] disappear immediately so that her face was dark once again […] a darkness aflicker with the knowledge that something had happened here recently, some illumination, the brain cells vibrating in the lucid wake of an insight." In response to her mother's unexpected remark, Mah-Jabin remembers that Kaukab once had told her that "she regretted not having been able to have had an education" and that "she had wished to own a bicycle as a girl," but was not allowed to ride one because her mother was afraid she might hurt herself (113). This in turn makes Mah-Jabin question why her mother, if she herself had been so keen on riding a bicycle, had not allowed her daughter to ride one. Kaukab was too afraid that the girl might fall off and break a limb, which would have caused her to be a cripple, ruining her chances in marriage. Kaukab continues in this way of thinking, because she has known no alternative. Staying inside the confines of what is familiar gives Kaukab a sense of security and identity in a country where everything is different. Mah-Jabin, who had an abusive arranged marriage in Pakistan, blames her mother for not protecting her from having a life like her own, claiming Kaukab could have prevented that. However, Kaukab explains that "[n]ot everyone has the freedom to walk away from a way of life" and calls out that "[she] did not have the freedom to give [her] that freedom." Kaukab sees Mah-Jabin as the only person she can confide in and is "pained and broken at the realization that someone as close to you as one of your children can make so many mistaken assumptions when they take it upon themselves to evaluate your life." Kaukab is not able to deal with her trauma because she has no support system around her to work through it. The people closest to her are the ones that judge her the most for the choices she made and continues to make.

The main reason of the strained relationship between Kaukab and her children is her toxic relationship with Shamas. Kaukab's relationship with Shamas is broken to the point that

she cannot even let herself think that he might feel sorry for not remembering her birthday. She thinks of it as “a wicked thought” and falls back into her pit of loneliness. In the novel Aslam highlights the period after Kaukab gave birth to their youngest child, Ujala. The experience of giving birth was probably followed by a postpartum depression, to which Shamas was insensitive. After giving birth, Kaukab started fasting because the month Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from dawn until dusk, started. Because Ujala was born with a unique biological trait that made him special, almost holy within the Muslim community, Kaukab makes herself and her baby fast during the day. Shamas, who discovers this on finding the baby crying and turning blue after coming home, confronts Kaukab and forces her to feed the baby. Kaukab refuses and says: “‘No I won’t come. It’s my milk. He and I will break our fast at sunset. It’s just a matter of changing the routine: I give him everything he needs during the night.’” After she tells Shamas that she has not milk left he rips open her “*kameez*,” a Pakistani garment, and “drag[s] her across the floor, her exposed breast bloody from his fingernail. In the next room he lift[s] the baby in its sail-white blanket and place[s] it in her lap where she sat on the floor.” She sat there, “[i]nert and apparently insensible, she hadn’t moved to connect the baby to the breast and he had slapped her face: ‘Feed him, you *haramzadi*! [meaning, bastard or despicable woman]’” (141). Kaukab is hesitant to feed the baby because she does not want to touch her baby with the hands she had just cleaned hot peppers with while cooking. It also hurts her to feed the baby, which may be another reason she does not want to feed him, but she may also be suffering from postpartum depression. After this encounter, Kaukab and Shamas do not speak to each other for six or seven months. Shamas tries to apologise to her, while also demanding an apology from her, but she refuses to accept his apology and does not want any excuses from him either. Afterwards, Shamas leaves the house for approximately two years, leaving Kaukab as a single mother of three children. These traumatic experiences, as a single mother left in the middle of

a place where she does not know the language and doesn't know anyone who could listen to her make it clear why Kaukab is so attached to her children and why it hurts her so much to see them slip away from her life.

Kaukab's misery when living in Dasht-e-Tanhaii is compounded by the refusal of her children to talk to her (29). Even though she is partly responsible for the way her children think of Pakistani Muslim people, she blames Shamas for their absence in her life. She says that he "had confused the children with his Godless ideas, undermining her authority and devaluing her behaviour as though it was just neurotic and foolish." She holds her "own father responsible for having chosen an irreligious husband for her […]" (34). According to Kaukab, everyone but she has a hand in the irreligious behaviour of her children. She has sought solace by confiding in Mah-Jabin, who only shows affection up to a point, because for her it is also impossible to grasp her mother's views. Even though they are not wrong that their mother's way of thinking is damaging their relationship, her children are unaware of the life-long suffering their mother endured and focus on the trouble Kaukab has caused them. Aslam shows the reader that first-generation female immigrants endure a suffering that no one is aware of. While he criticises their fundamentalist ideas, he also emphasises that they have not been able to work through their traumas in a hostile environment.

2.3 Outspoken but Unheard

Kaukab is unable to work through her trauma because she has a subaltern status in relation to the other characters in the novel. Kaukab constantly criticises the people around her and makes clear that she is not impressed by the modern views of her children and husband. She feels that she is not understood by the people closest to her. She even considers them her enemy and her daughter Mah-Jabin "the most intimate of her enemies" because she is the only one with whom she has somewhat of a relationship (113). Miquel Pomar Amer argues

that Kaukab has an ambivalent position with regards to her subaltern status, because she is subaltern outside the house, but takes up a dominant position within her house (Amer 258). Although there is some truth to this, she still remains unheard within her home as well. With regards to her children she is voiceless, because she does not speak the English language, which is their main language now, and is estranged from her husband, because he speaks the English language and identifies with whites. This is shown after the dinner with Ujala's white girlfriend mentioned above, when Shamas and Kaukab have an argument about his drinking alcohol. Kaukab accuses Shamas of "showing off," to which he responds that he is not a child who needs to show off to anyone and asks her what she wants him to say to her. However, Kaukab doesn't want him to say anything to her, she just wants him to listen to her (*Maps* 40). Because of her subaltern status, Shamas does not hear her, so he cannot take her frustration seriously, as is made clear in the following passage: "'Why won't you let me help you with the food? Go and sit down.' And when she pushed him away, he added: 'Please don't throw a tantrum.' 'Who is the one treating the other as a child now? I am not throwing a tantrum: I am *angry.* Take me seriously'" (40). Aslam points out that Kaukab is not taken seriously by her husband, thus showing her status as a subaltern within the house.

Not speaking the same language as her children also shows that she has a subaltern status within the household. For this reason, Mah-Jabin does not hear her when she criticises the rich Pakistani woman who came to England to visit family and speaks in disgust about the "sister-murdering, nose-blowing, mosque-going, cousin-marrying, veil-wearing inbred imbeciles" whom she blames for the fact that she herself is also seen in that way by the whites who shouted racist remarks at her. Kaukab does not agree that it is their fault and takes a stance against the woman's argument:

> "We are driven out of our countries because of people like her, the rich and the powerful. We leave because we never have any food or dignity because of their selfish behaviour. And now they resent our being *here*

> too. Where are we supposed to go? The poor and the unprivileged, in their desire to keep living, are being disrespectful towards the rich and the privileged: is that it?" (312)

Even though she makes a valid point, she is not heard by her daughter who only makes a remark on the "elegant" appearance of the woman in question, who shows off her wealth. At last, in order to be heard Kaukab "bangs the wooden ladle on the rim of the pan" to "emphasise her disapproval" of the arguments her family made on "new money and old money." Even then she is not able to penetrate the wall that has been built between them, because she says this all in her own language and wished she could have said it in English, so that Stella, Charag's wife, would see that she is intelligent too. What she might not realise is that not only Stella but also the rest of the family fail to acknowledge that she has a voice as well.

To emphasise this point even further, during the family gathering, while Kaukab is thrilled that her entire family will be present in her home after a very long time, Ujala is disgusted with the "feast" his mother is preparing as if there is something to be celebrated, for on that same day they discovered that Chotta and Barra had "murdered, chopped up and burnt" their sister Chanda and her lover Jugnu (303). Of the three siblings, Ujala is the one who holds his mother most responsible for their broken family. He believes that "[she] has harmed every one of [his siblings]" and that "[s]he won't allow reason to enter th[eir] house" (302). In the course of the family dinner, Kaukab finds out that she had poisoned Ujala when he was younger by giving him a bromide because she had discovered that he was sexually active at a young age. In order to prevent him from acting upon his desires she had given him a kind of salt, which she acquired from the cleric in the mosque. She was unaware it was poisonous since she had trusted the man because he was a practicing Muslim. Not one of her children has asked their mother why she has acted the way she did in the past and why she has never given up on her traditional faith and ideas when she saw that it caused their family to

fall apart. When Kaukab tries to apologise to Mah-Jabin for the mistakes she has made, she is silenced by her. Mah-Jabin does not listen to her and simply continues to talk about the food they are preparing (311). This scene shows that she is even silenced by her daughter, the person closest to her.

Furthermore, her other children also do not take her into consideration when talking about matters that concern women. She calls them out for this: "[w]hat I don't understand is why when you all spend your time talking about women's rights, don't you ever think about *me.* What about *my* rights, *my* feelings? Am *I* not a woman, am I a eunuch?" (322). Because Kaukab remains unheard when she expresses her trauma or her disagreement on a certain matter, her life becomes ungrievable and her own viewpoint unspeakable. It is impossible to grieve over someone you do not know, hear or listen to. Towards the end of the novel Kaukab becomes more and more outspoken, but this only draws more attention to her voicelessness. Even though no one asked her, she explains to Shamas that she has wanted to live in a better neighbourhood than the one they are living in, because that would have enhanced the chances for her daughter to marry a good person instead of her misogynistic abusive ex-husband. The reason behind her wish may be misconceived as she still holds onto the practice of arranged marriages, but Kaukab does take her children's interest to heart. However, Shamas does not listen to her wishes, because he lives in his own bubble, dreaming of a better world for the generation that comes after him and being unwilling to hear her.

Kaukab's subalternity is intensified when Mah-Jabin is the only child who remembers to send her mother a birthday card: "[t]ears well up in her eyes — someone loves her" (69). She asks herself why the boys hadn't "also remembered her birthday? She wipes her tears: her life is over and yet there is still so much of it left to live" (70). The effect her absence from her children's lives has on her is that she feels utterly lonely; she has no one to confide in. Thus, Kaukab is left alone with her thoughts and questions her identity and the way her

children think of her. "[She] wonder[s] if that's who she is: a mother who feeds poisons to her son, and a mother who jumps to conclusions and holds her daughter responsible for the fact that her marriage ended disastrously?" (308). Aslam points out her position in the family and that "[t]he realizations [that she has poisoned Ujala and has not heard her daughter out when she came back to Britain after getting divorced] are still new and she is not sure what effect they will have on her soul after she has lived with them for an hour, a day, a month. The bitterness of the poison is as yet only testing her tongue and mouth: what will happen when it soaks into the veins?" (308). There is no one in the family who believes in Allah the way Kaukab believes in him, as they are adhering to the rules and laws of the country they live in. Kaukab feels as if everyone and everything is hostile towards her, because she does not experience compassion within her own family or from outsiders. Even with her daughter Mah-Jabin, who is the closest to her she does not have a strong bond. Her family did not accept her way of thinking and the support of the community also was not enough to help her work though her trauma, because they all share the same trauma. She struggles between trying to prove herself to Jugnu's white girlfriend and trying to hold on to her own beliefs. Besides this encounter she does not allow herself to come near anyone who looks remotely non-Muslim, because her traumatic experience overshadows her willingness to belong in Western society.

She feels lonely: "[l]et me talk to myself, she whispers, an old fool talking to an old fool. With her children absent from her life, she feels as bewildered as a child whose dolls have been stolen" (70). This emphasises that a sense of connection and identity depends heavily on her position in her family and society. By blaming the Other, she justifies her own actions. She is not able to break free from the vicious cycle of repeating herself because she relives the same loneliness over and over again. She wishes "[she] could rewrite the past" instead of reliving the day she has come to England, a "country where [she] ha[s] known

nothing but pain" (101). Here she is "away from her children, away from her customs and country, alone and lonely […]." And yet she doesn't know what to do about the fact that she feels utterly empty almost all the time, as though she has outlived herself, as if she has stayed on the train one stop past her destination" (270). Occasionally, she shows that she can think differently on matters such as women's rights, but she does not allow herself, or is disabled by her trauma, to hold on to those thoughts. Even though there are moments in the novel in which she seems to develop new ideas, Aslam does not give her the chance to change. She realises at the end that she has made mistakes and that she has to pay for them, but it is too late to redeem herself. She reflects on her own behaviour and realises that she has damaged her relationships with the people dearest to her. She sees no way out of her troubles and her reflections lead her to try to commit suicide, from which Shamas saves her. By telling her story Aslam gives Kaukab and thereby other postcolonial immigrant women a voice in a world that is yet to learn to hear the voice of the voiceless.

Chapter 3: *The Wasted Vigil*

Nadeem Aslam' third novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, offers an opportunity to rethink the position of political discourse on Muslims in American and British society. While few literary works present the perspective of the Muslim fundamentalist, Aslam's novel opens up more diverse perspectives in post-9/11 fiction. The novel tells the story of the English doctor Marcus Caldwell, who married the Afghan doctor Qatrina and has converted to Islam. They have a daughter called Zameen who flees elsewhere with the Soviet soldier Benedikt who raped her and with whom she has a son called Casa. After Benedikt is captured, Zameen and the CIA-agent David meet and fall in love. David has come to Afghanistan to close deals with the local warlord Gul Rasool in order to exterminate another warlord, Nabi Kahn. Both David and Marcus look for Zameen and her son with whom they have lost contact after the disappearance of the latter two's. As the story unfolds, the Afghan refugee Casa and David meet during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, when David saves Casa's life by bringing him to a hospital after he is injured during a bomb attack on a Western school. The reader soon finds out that Casa has been brought up in terrorist education camps and has since been involved in terrorist activity, including the bomb attack on the American school. Both David and Casa have gone through traumatising events. Towards the end of the novel Casa, who – unbeknownst to himself and the other characters – is Zameen's son, bonds with Dunia, a young Afghan woman who teaches at the local school and develops progressive ideas about matters such as marriage and women's rights. All characters meet in Marcus's home; unfamiliar with each other's history, they try to learn more about the other.

In *The Wasted Vigil*, Nadeem Aslam explores the often overlooked role the United States played in South-Asia in creating the conditions that lead to terrorism and the traumatic consequences of US intervention in Afghanistan for the individual local citizens. As Mahmood Mamdani argues, "equat[ing] terrorists with Muslims, … justifies a punishing war

against an entire country (Afghanistan) and ignores the recent history that shaped both the current Afghan context and the emergence of political Islam" (767). In contrast to other 9/11 novels which leave out the Muslim's and/or terrorist's points of view from their narratives, Aslam gives the relatively unheard voices of both Islamic extremists and ordinary Muslims such as Casa and Dunia a voice. *The Wasted Vigil* adds to the discussion about the Other, giving voice to the Other and criticising US exceptionalism. Drawing on trauma theory and concepts like Orientalism and subalternity, I will analyse how the novel uses Casa and David to explore how both terrorists and American CIA agents have become who they are and how their lives become interlinked. In my analysis of their inner struggles and their revisiting of the past, I argue that there is a need for the reconceptualization of both victims' and perpetrators' identities. Not only does Aslam focus on the identities of the Afghan characters within the borderland of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but he also transnationalises their grief. Through Dunia, Aslam has created a narrative that was absent from his previous novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the narrative of a woman who speaks out to men about their unjust acts and is being heard, thereby subverting her subaltern status.

3.1 Working through Trauma

Throughout the novel Aslam uses flashbacks to tell the various characters' stories. In the case of Casa, we learn that, after his mother's violent death in a refugee camp, he was deprived of the stability, protection, and maternal love from a young age on and was raised in a boarding school and then terrorist training camp. Eventually, he falls into the hands of the warlord Nabi Khan. He has been taught that the Americans are to blame for the destruction of his homeland and that he has to kill them. Afghanistan was used as an arena during the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union; the US secretly supported rebels against Soviet occupation, and thus also provided the arms that could eventually be used against them. After the Soviet

occupation collapsed, the civil war in Afghanistan was intensified by powers from the non-Muslim world, who sought to gain from the country's natural resources such as "opium and heroin poppies," but also from its "geographical location amidst oil-rich states and at a perceived crossroads between East and West" (Frawley 443). Therefore, Frawley argues, we cannot speak of a civil war, because that is "an internal conflict whose origins lie within national boundaries;" rather, the country was in a state of what Hardt and Negri have termed "a global civil war" (qtd. in Frawley 445), as Aslam makes clear in the novel, "represent[ing] the civil war alongside colonial invasion and occupation" of the past (445-447). Casa is aware of the role the Americans play in the war in his country, but because he has been indoctrinated by the teachers in the madrassas he has not been taught the role the Soviet Union and local warlords have played in the war. The terrorist group Casa belongs to is financed by the Soviet Union, its rival terrorist group by the US. By portraying the various factors that play a role in the war in Afghanistan, Aslam challenges the idea that the attacks on the Twin Towers was an unprovoked attack on the American people.

In *Vigil*, Aslam emphasises the concept of "global civil war" through Marcus, one of the focalisers in the novel, who reflects on the country's colonial history: "[t]he entire world it seemed had fought in this country, had made mistakes in this country, but mistakes had consequences and he didn't know who to blame for those consequences. Afghanistan itself, Russia, the United States, Britain, Arabia, Pakistan?" (*Vigil* 29). The retired CIA agent David also recognises that the history of warfare in Afghanistan is felt and seen everywhere: "[e]ven the air of this country has a story to tell about warfare. It is possible here to lift a piece of bread from a plate and, following it back to its origins, collect a dozen stories concerning war" (*Vigil* 43). Casa, unlike Marcus and David, only sees the role the US has played in the war. He is traumatised by his experience of the bombing of the refugee camp by the Soviet Union, which was allowed by the US and killed his mother and numerous others. Afterwards,

he is indoctrinated by the mullahs in the madrassas with an extremist version of Islam that dehumanizes Americans and other infidels. Sarah O'Brien argues that Aslam shows the complexity of the war by linking "the violence underpinning emergent American hegemony during the Cold War and the emergence of extremism in Afghanistan," leading eventually to the post-9/11 US invasion of the country (O'Brien 240). Through Marcus's reflection on the people he has lost, Aslam clearly shows the different factors at work within the war in Afghanistan:

> "[y]ou could say this place took away all I had." … "I could so easily appear to be one of those unfortunate white men you hear about, who thought too lovingly of the other races and civilisations of the world, who left his own country in the West to set up home among them in the East, and was ruined as a result, paying dearly for his foolish mistake. His life smashed to pieces by the barbarians surrounding him." (*Vigil* 64)

In the passage above, Aslam criticises how the West judges life in South-Asia and the prejudices they have. However, Marcus is aware "that the West was [also] involved in the ruining of this place, in the ruining of [his] life." According to him, "[t]here would have been no downfall if this country had been left to itself by those others" (64). Here Aslam highlights the role of Orientalism in the occupation and later the US invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. If there had been no foreign interference in Afghanistan, the political situation would not have escalated to the ruined state the country is in in 2003, the narrative present. As Frawley suggests, the superpowers interfering in Afghanistan fanned the flames of "the smoldering conflicts in post-colonial states" (447). The interventions and the civil war in Afghanistan were beneficial for the local terrorist groups and the foreign forces that played a role in the war, because they "enjoyed a 'Long Peace,'" while "the post-colonial states were plagued by a 'Long Trauma'" (447). Consequently, Casa's narrative in *The Wasted Vigil* demands to be looked at in light of the country's colonial history and both personal and collective trauma.

Early In the novel when Casa talks to Bihzad, a young boy who is getting ready for a suicide bomb mission, they revisit the past and only remember “the hunger, the refugee camps, the deaths one by one of the adults around them due to various causes, the orphanages, the beatings and worse, the earning of daily bread as beggars or labourers in the bazaars” (*Vigil* 49). Their reminiscences can be seen as a form of “cultural memorization,” which, as Mieke Bal explains, “is an activity occurring in the present in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future” (Bal vii). Although, they remember the refugee camps, it may be a symptom of their trauma that “[n]either [of the boys] remember[s] the date or place of his birth, nor had any firm memory of his mother and father” (47). Casa and Bihzad revisit the past in their conversation and then turn back to their present state of being boys who have nothing but their brotherhood. As Bal proposes, “cultural memory […] links the past to the present and future” (Bal vii). That Casa is able to talk about a certain part of his past, even though it is painful, shows that his traumas can be narrativized. As Bal explains, trauma can be transformed into “narrative memory” by talking about it with a second person (viii). He has repressed memories which he only remembers while talking about his childhood. Casa does not remember much of the past, but there is one memory of his mother he can clearly retell. When he was younger, he had “knocked over a basket of silk embroidery threads, probably belonging to [his] mother,” adding: “[t]hat’s the only thing I remember of her. The threads suddenly unspooled along the floor in many brilliant lines and then went out of the open door and down a staircase.’ He fell silent and then said through a sigh, ‘Yes, that’s the only thing I remember’” (*Vigil* 49-50). Later on, in the novel the reader learns that David was at the bottom of the staircase the threads fell down off: he picked up the thread and stood there with at the other end Zameen and “for a few seconds they had remained linked by it, looking at each other” (57). In this passage Aslam suggests that David and Zameen are unknowingly linked to each other through Casa; Zameen is not

with them anymore, but David and Casa are together in the narrative present. Not only are they connected through Zameen but also through Afghanistan's political history of colonization, David representing the United States and Casa Afghanistan. Frawley argues that "[t]he individuals of the novel are … shown to be representatives of global conflicts (Frawley 449). Their role in the civil war brings a responsibility to both of them, of which David slowly becomes aware, though Casa remains in the dark. The reader learns they have both been formed by the "cultural trauma" of colonization and war.

The religious teachers in the madrassas Casa attends teach their students to hate non-Muslims by making them believe that the latter are threatening their faith. As Casa proudly says to Bihzad before bombing the Western school, "[e]very American who dies here, … dies with a look of disbelief on his face, disbelief that this faraway and insignificant place had given rise to a people capable of affecting the destiny of someone from a nation as great as his" (46). Here Casa mocks the way countries like the US falsely think that they are a great nation in control of the world, but turn out to be vulnerable too, as Muslims from Afghanistan are able to destroy American lives as well. Because Casa is a faithful follower of the ideology that he has been taught, he feels belittled when he encounters James Palantine, an American soldier who protects warlord Gul Rasool: "[t]his is his [Casa's] country, but the sense of entitlement he detects in their [James's and another American soldier's] eyes brings home to him the full extent of the peril and challenge faced by Islam" (184). When David arrives by car to come and collect Casa, the latter "feels [r]age and humiliation, a fury many centuries deep" (184). The emotions he experiences are the result not only of what he has gone through in his life, but also the consequence of the brainwashing by the religious extremists and political opportunists. These interactions make him even more furious about the position his country takes in the eyes of non-Muslims. However, he still keeps living in Marcus's home because he feels relatively safe there.

Unlike Kaukab in *Maps*, Casa interacts with people he actually wants to see dead and lives with them for a while. Casa falls into a trap after he has been on a terrorist mission, but David saves him and brings him to a hospital. He recovers in Marcus's house and even realises, partly because he does not want to appear suspicious but also because he is genuinely touched by their kindness, that "he is grateful for the gentleness they are displaying towards him, and feels he should convey his gratitude to them — show them somehow that he too is mindful of their well-being[.] [He says to David] … 'You should be careful about flying'[.] … 'In case the Jews repeat the attacks of 11 September 2001'" (*Vigil* 160). His view of the attacks indicates his indoctrination in the Jihadi camps. Here Aslam shows how Casa struggles with what he has been taught to believe about Westerners and what he actually experiences in Marcus's home. He realises that "[f]or the time being they are his only allies, the only people who would try to act if Nabi Khan were to come through this door right now" (161). Before this he planned to steal their car and run away, "but the fact now is that if he saw someone trying to steal it he would do his best to prevent the theft" (161). He has come to feel affection for the people in the house. At one point, he mentions to them the – in his view false – idea that "along with mere bodies, you can bomb ideas out of existence too" (209). Obviously, this contradicts his own beliefs, because he himself was planning to become a suicide bomber, to eliminate the people who in his eyes were a threat to Islam. In this way he is trying to fit in with the people in the house, but also exposes the contradictions in extremist Islamic ideology.

Like Kaukab in *Maps*, Casa remains, in Smelser's word "ambivalent" in his struggle with the powers from outside (qtd. in ManiMangai and Jabarouti 37). On the one hand, he is certain of the course his life is taking and believes his purpose is to serve Allah by killing as many infidels as he can; on the other hand, he is taken aback by the fact that he is being taken care of by the people of whom he least expected it. He cannot believe that Westerners want to

help him; he calls them “foreigners” and asks himself, “who is protecting them? They are probably attached to a charity or an aid organisation, cogs in a machinery of kindness,” and concludes that it is owing to the kindness of Allah, that it is He who “has planted these compassionate impulses in the hearts of non-believers, for Muslims to exploit and benefit from” (158). He only sees himself worthy of Allah’s protection, and does not believe in the kindness of non-Muslims, especially of those who he thinks want to destroy him and his country. He wants to gain respect and have a sense of belonging and thinks that he can achieve it by eliminating the non-Muslims. Therefore, he is surprised at Marcus’s and David’s compassion towards him, because he only expects respect and compassion from Nabi Khan, the warlord he looks up to and goes on missions for. Casa is not able to connect with Marcus and David, because he does not trust them enough for that, but he does confide in Dunia, through whom he seeks a sense of connection and belonging with people who are Afghan and Muslim like he himself.

Even though he experiences a sense of brotherhood with the students and teachers in the madrassas, where he has been indoctrinated to hate everything that conflicts with the version of Islam he has been taught, he still feels as if he does not belong anywhere. He opens up to Dunia about his thoughts and there we see a different side of Casa and his trauma. As mentioned before, he can talk about certain things in his past, but the emotions he feels at the present moment make him confused. When Dunia approaches him while he is praying, they have an emotionally intimate encounter and Casa becomes confused. Dunia’s soft-heartedness makes him open up to her: “‘I … I wish I didn’t feel alone all the time,’ he says at last, very quietly” when Dunia asks him what he has done, Casa replies by lifting his palms towards her face, which she doesn’t understand,

> [b]ut what he says next makes it clear that he is someone traumatised by the United States invasion: “I hate America.” There is a deliberation before each of his words, which seem carefully chosen as a result. She

> has the feeling that he is searching for the most stable and most direct bridge between his inner self and the world. (235)

Dunia tells him that there is no need for him to feel lonely in his struggle against the Americans, that everyone has the same questions as he has. She tries to make him see that, because "Muslims love Islam," it cannot be destroyed. However, she also tells him that "Muslims hate fundamentalism" and that "[they] have to make sure … that Muslims don't fall in love with the ways of the fundamentalists" (235). This makes him realize that she does not think the same way as he does. Nothing Dunia says can make him doubt his beliefs and cope with his trauma. Her thoughts only make him feel more confused and lonely, because he has never been taught her way of thinking by the mullahs in the madrassas. He has never experienced such compassion and tenderness since losing his mother. It is not even clear he experienced such a relationship with his mother, since they were constantly living in fear and hiding.

In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, there are no such mediating characters as Dunia. The story ends when Kaukab realises towards the end of the novel that she has to correct her mistakes in order to improve her relationship with her family. Although Dunia leads Casa to changing his mind and towards becoming a better human being and overcoming his preconceptions and prejudices, eventually he, like Kaukab, is also prevented by his trauma to change in any meaningful way. He shows this when he reflects on the 9/11 attacks: "two of their buildings fell down and they think they know about the world's darkness, about how unsafe a place it is capable of being!" (278). He realises that his country has endured a lot and his people have suffered for years and are still suffering the consequences of the war. When he is captured by James Palantine, an American soldier, Casa reflects on his choices and worries: "[h]e shouldn't have come here. He is not a good Muslim. He is not a good Muslim" (299). In the concluding chapters Aslam shows that Casa is not able to work through his trauma. His journey ends with him dying in the arms of the person he would have least expected to be

near him, who is trying to convince him not to pull the pin of the bomb that is attached to his body, namely David. Kaukab also wants to end her life towards the end of the novel but is saved by her husband Shamas. The conversations both Kaukab and Casa have with those that they feel close to, Mah-Jabin and Dunia respectively, cannot talk them out of their fundamentalist beliefs and their fixed view of the West. In a way Aslam shows that whether they live with trauma in the diaspora, like Kaukab, or are traumatised by war while also being brainwashed by religious extremists, like Casa, the only solution they see and choose in their struggle to try to find a sense of belonging and identification is death.

3.2 Speaking about the Unspeakable

Casa finds himself in a subaltern position, just like Kaukab, because he cannot speak the English language, which is considered an important part of the sense of identification they seek. Because both characters cannot speak English properly, they are immediately disadvantaged in their position in society. Casa muses on his English-speaking abilities and says that "[h]e had helped put together films at the jihadi camps in that language" and that speaking the English language eventually gave him a ticket into Nabi Khan's circle. But he is not able to follow "these people when they talk amongst themselves," referring to Marcus and David (158). He could have understood them "if they communicated through written notes," but he finds it hard to follow the conversations, which makes him even more silenced than he already is. The result of not knowing the language of the Westerners well enough prevents Casa from interacting with them much, which is also the case for Kaukab as was explained in the previous chapter. Even when Casa interacts with the English-speaking people in the house, his subaltern status makes him feel inferior to the person he is interacting with.

The one instance in which Casa has a conversation with Marcus, he is not heard. Casa tells Marcus that "that only a bad Muslim would remain unconcerned by [the Buddha statue

near Marcus's house]" (170). When Marcus recites some verses from the Koran that prophets also had statues, Casa is pained and asks Marcus not to say such things. He even questions if Marcus is a Muslim and accuses him of "disrespecting the Holy Book" (170). Marcus says that "[he] wasn't aware that [he] was and that "[he] will say nothing more on the subject" (170). When Casa voices his disapproval of the way Marcus thinks, he gives up the conversation because Casa seems too fixed in his own view to be swayed by Marcus. The latter also ends the conversation instead of continuing it and hearing Casa out. In another scene Casa runs into three Western men and an Afghan who asks him who he is, upon which "Casa points towards Marcus's house back there" (183). Then "Casa asks the Afghan … who his companions are but gets no answer. He repeats the question, but it is as though they are incapable of hearing him" (183). Casa's inability to be heard is the result of the Western view that his life is ungrievable and not worthy to be protected or heard. Paradoxically, Aslam shows that Casa's subaltern status is intensified when he interacts with the Westerners in the novel. Because he is not heard, Casa shuts himself off from the outside world and carries on with the mission he has been sent on by Nabi Khan and his followers, that is, killing as many infidels as possible.

Because of his subaltern status and unwillingness to accept Western values Casa is not able to communicate with the people around him. As soon as he realises that the other person does not think the same way he does, he is offended and only becomes more fixed in his own ideas. His questions and thoughts mainly are within his own mind where he is safe from the opinion of the Other. A possible reason that he is fond of the way the people in the house treat him is because he feels safe and does not want that to change. Therefore, he accepts everything they do near him. When David, for example, asks if "he'd mind their drinking [wine]" in his presence "he shakes his head and smiles," while he actually despises the smell and look of alcohol (190). Dunia, on the other hand, voices her critique of the West and their

customs in a respectful manner. Through Dunia, Casa learns that there are alternative ways to approach people and to ask respect for your beliefs. "When [Dunia] told her hosts she would prefer it if they didn't drink wine in her presence," Casa is surprised at the ease with which she expresses herself because he always felt that he needed to hide his feelings from others (246). Casa struggles with his emotions and "[f]eel[s] tired of walking the endless road of his life, of absorbing the body blows as and when they were dealt and staggering on" (246). He feels as if he is non-existent in a world where everyone seems to be certain of the place they take in society. Casa realises that,

> [h]e doesn't even know his own name, doesn't even know how he ended up in the orphanages and madrassas. A nameless child becomes a ghost, he had been told once[.] … It roams the world, making itself visible to the living in order to be addressed in some way … but humans run away from ghosts and won't address them. (246)

He reflects on his position in society and realises that he does not have a place where he is seen or heard. He believes that he has no place in the community, because he has no clue about his past and has no idea what his real name is, feeling as if he has no real identity. The same goes for Kaukab, who is not seen or heard in her own home and does not go outside often, so there is no chance for her to be known to those outside her community either. Thus, both characters find themselves in a vicious circle of wondering what their end will be and if they will ever find a connection and sense of identity while being stuck in their way of thinking. Through Casa and Kaukab, Aslam encourages the problematic notion that the Other is not able to fit into the West, while simultaneously he criticises the Orientalist view the West has of South-Asians by portraying his characters' trauma and telling their story.

Not only does he critique the West for their sense of superiority in relation to the Afghan people, through Dunia he also criticises the Western view that Muslim women have an inferior position in Muslim culture. The introduction of Dunia as a Muslim character who does not deviate from her duties as a practicing Muslim while also voicing her critique of the

political situation and social conditions in her country shows that she rejects her subaltern status. She stands up against her father who "had tried to talk her out of becoming a schoolteacher" because he deemed it too dangerous (213). Even though he was aware that things had to change, he did not want her "to be the one to change them." Dunia clearly makes it known that she disagrees with her father and says: "'[t]he bullet that has hit us Muslims today left the gun centuries ago, when we let the clergy decide that knowledge and education were not important'" (213). Even when she is threatened to be killed if she continues to teach the children in the mosque, she does not give up and stands her ground. By voicing her critical opinion and not letting a man or anyone else speak for her, she subverts her initial subaltern position as an Afghan Muslim woman.

Unlike Casa and Kaukab, she does not refrain from having conversations with the white people in Marcus's house, where she finds refuge from the local Taliban. Even when they voice their opposite opinions, she challenges them to understand her point of view and does not give up in trying to convince them. After asking her hosts not to drink wine in her presence she tells them that "a part of her is glad America was attacked in 2001, because had it not been for that Afghanistan would still be suffering under the Taliban" (246). Although Casa is offended by her comment on what he sees as the "Allah-loving Taliban," he thought that the others would "react with open hostility to the American part of her statement. … But their reaction to her comment was even more unexpected. They seemed to give it serious consideration … and they even seemed to understand her position" (246). Casa is surprised by her outspokenness, because he would never have dared to talk like her out of fear of being rejected. In *Maps*, Kaukab voices her opinion in the house even though she is not heard by any of her family members, but she completely shuts herself off from the non-Muslim world outside her immigrant community. On the other hand, Dunia comes into contact and possibly

seeks contact with non-Muslims precisely to voice her own point of view and engage them in discussion.

The women in *The Wasted Vigil* confront the men with the repercussions of war, whereas in *Maps for Lost Lovers* the immigrant women are looked down upon and not listened to. Kaukab's daughter Mah-Jabin is self-assertive, but can only assert herself by adhering to Western rules and values. In *Vigil* Dunia strictly does not give up on her principles, while still being open-minded towards the Westerners, thus being different than any other Muslim character in the respective novels. It would be mistaken to say that she is practicing a moderate form of Islam, because that would imply that she changes her ways in order to break free form the Orientalist image the West has of South-Asia. When Dunia talks to the young American soldier James Palantine, whose companion asks Dunia who she is because he was not present when she introduced herself to them, she asserts that "[she is] a little tired of having to prove who [she is]" (267). James apologises to Dunia for his and his companion's interrogative behaviour, showing that they hear her and take her seriously. If she were subaltern, they would never have apologised to her, because she would have been unheard by them. She demands to be seen and claims the space that is rightfully hers. When James says that they are there to help the Afghan to "get rid of the Taliban," Dunia knows that this is not the only reason for the Americans to be in her country because "[t]he Taliban regime had been in place for years and no one was particularly bothered about getting rid of it" (277). She urges him to rethink his words by saying: "[y]ou are not here because you wanted to destroy the Taliban for us, you are here because you wanted retribution for what happened to you in 2001. I am glad they are gone but let's not confuse the facts" (277). Once again, Casa is proud and delighted that a local Muslim woman dares to confront the Americans.

Apart from Dunia, the characters in *Vigil* that critically reflect on the position of America in the war in Afghanistan are the Western Marcus and David, which shows that they are also aware of the role of the West in the war. In *Maps* it is also mainly men who comment on how Islam has ruined their country and their family. The only female character who criticises Kaukab's position is her daughter Mah-Jabin, who can speak with her family because she and her brothers and father all adhere to Western ways. When Kaukab tries to argue with her family members, she is pushed back into her position of subalternity by her family because the mistakes she has made in the past cancel out her struggles to be heard. In contrast, Dunia voices her opinion on the war and the relationship between the West and the South-East to David and James and is being heard. Through Dunia, Aslam undermines the idea that Muslim women cannot voice their opinion because of their trauma and their voicelessness. They do have a voice and do have an opinion which should be heard in order for their lives to be recognised as grievable. Moreover, Aslam gives Casa a voice by portraying his life. However, Aslam speaks for the voiceless. This recalls Spivak's argument that an author who is not voiceless has to be careful when speaking about or for the subaltern. Casa is not being heard by the other characters in the novel, nor is his position understood by them. By reading the novel the reader, however, becomes aware of his or her own position in relation to people who have been oppressed for centuries and hear them.

3.3 The Barbarian vs. The Civilised

Both Dunia and Lara, the Russian woman who is searching for her lost brother Benedikt, confront the Americans, David and James, with their position as Americans in the war in Afghanistan. Both men see it as their goal to bring peace to Afghanistan. James Palantine, the young American soldier, does not seem to understand that interference of the US in the South-Asia is problematic. He does not realise that the warlord Gul Rasool is a neo-fundamentalist

product of the financial aid the US provided. When he thinks of the speech President Kennedy was supposed to deliver in which he was to say, “We [are] in this country [the US] … by destiny rather than by choice – the watchmen on the walls of world freedom,” it becomes clear that James thinks America is exceptional in that it believes itself to be the superpower that can bring world peace. The only way he has known Afghanistan is through the tales that have be told to him by his father and David, his father’s friend, when he was younger (240). He believes he knows the Afghan people and their way of living, which he thinks is barbaric, and he despises the fact that “America has had to get involved this closely with people like these” (241). James’s prejudiced thinking comes from his own ignorance about non-Christians. He judges the people who want to go to America to have a better life, because he believes that they “will not adjust to life in the First World” and thinks that it would “be better for them and for the USA if they just stayed where they were,” unaware of the irony that he says this while himself guarding a terrorist warlord in Afghanistan (241). Not realising that the attacks on 9/11 have a prehistory of oppression and warfare waged on Muslims, in Afghanistan he says that “when your beliefs lead you to start planning the mass murder of Americans — of your fellow Americans — you have to be stopped. By all possible means” (242). He believes that the West has to educate the people in the Muslim world; otherwise “they’ll go on being cruel without realising it” (243). As Mahmood Mamdani suggests, political discourse “differentiat[es] ‘good Muslims’ from ‘bad Muslims,’ rather than terrorists from civilians,” because of this James is not able to see Muslims as good people who wish good things for their country, but rather sees all Muslims as potential terrorists (Mamdani 765).

James’s intentions become clear as soon as he interacts with Casa and Dunia. He does not talk much to Casa, perhaps due to the latter’s subaltern position. Dunia, on the other hand, confronts him with his own thoughts and makes him say them out loud. In the previous

section the passage in which Dunia makes herself heard to James can also be analysed in light of US exceptionalism and how Aslam criticises it. Their conversation on the mistakes the US has made in Afghanistan continues with James's assertion that people "can't expect a country to function like a charity," to which Dunia responds: "[t]hen why pretend that it is?" (277). Dunia is "glad [that] it got said" and James immediately regrets his choice of words and retreats to praising "[their] government and thousands of other American organisations [which] do plenty of good work around the planet" (277). James turns a blind eye to the extreme conditions in the country and refuses to recognise that the US had a part in the destruction of the country. He justifies his acts because he believes it keeps his own country safe from Islamic terrorism.

David, on the other hand, comes to realise that the US did not have good intentions when invading Afghanistan. Before he came to Afghanistan he thought like James: "in adulthood he had never felt himself surrounded by forces larger than himself" (128). The first time he was confronted with anyone wishing death upon Americans was in South East Asia. It was also there that he was confronted with the devastating consequences of war when he saw a group of young boys in an alley insert a finger "into [an] overpowered little boy's throat, the vomit emerging and being caught in the hands of the two assailants, who then began to eat the still-undigested food" and realised that "[h]e had helped create all this." Previously he did not want to believe that the US had part in the creation of these circumstances, being convinced that "all this was the Soviet Union's fault because … because … He could not complete the thought. He had before and he would later but not just then" (135). Witnessing the starving boys David can no longer justify the devastating consequences of his presence there. He begins to call into question the mission on which the US has embarked in the "War on Terror." While initially he believed in the US mission to bring peace and justice to the East, he now understands that "they, the Americans, really [don't] know [much] about such parts of

the world, of the layer upon layer of savagery that made them up[.] They had arrived in these places without realising how fragile were the defences that most people had erected against cruelty and degradation here" (134). When Zameen is killed during the bombing of the refugee camp, and David follows "the trail of [Zameen's] murderers," he realises that "he had been stepping on his own footprints" (139). David gradually works through his trauma and comes to terms with his complicity in the ruin of Afghanistan. He realises that collective mourning is not exclusive for Americans, but also occurs in other parts of the world.

He does not only realise that the US is not innocent because of the destructive impact of the invasion, but also because of Lara's confrontation during their conversation about the role the Soviet Union and the US played in the war in Afghanistan. He becomes aware that he has to live with "the mayhem [he] helped unleash," as he is complicit in the bombing that killed Zameen (81). He realises this on his journey to Afghanistan after his retirement; it is as though "[t]he soles of his shoes are worn the way the edges of erasers become rounded with use. As though he walks around correcting his mistakes" (65). In the concluding chapters Aslam brings James and David together: the American who is too young to realise that he has been carrying the wrath of his ancestors, who became traumatised after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the older CIA agent who shows remorse over his actions. When James has captured Casa and wants to stab him in the eye, David arrives just in time to convince him to stop. James then points out that "'[i]t's not between him and me. It's between them and us.'" Calling to mind Edward Said's theory on Orientalism, he clearly makes a distinction between the US and the Other, meaning the Muslim world (304). David, however, knows that what James is doing is reason enough for "them" – the young Afghans – to become radicalised and that it is not just the result of watching "jihadi DVDs" (304). He shows remorse at an older age when he has seen that a country is destroyed by his own role in it. By interacting with the

local people, David comes to realise the consequences the war has had for innocent people and how the Americans actually cause the locals to radicalise.

Both Americans believe that they have served or are still serving their country, and by extension the entire West, by interfering in Afghanistan, by trying to prevent the terrorists from going to the West. Aslam makes the reader aware that the Americans have no right to believe that they are any different than the Afghans who sacrifice their lives for their country. This idea is conveyed through Casa's reflections on the attacks on 9/11:

> These days they keep saying, *Why do the Muslims become suicide bombers? They must be animals, there are no human explanations for their actions*. But does no one remember what happened on board flight United 93? A group of Americans — 'civilised' people, not 'barbarians' — discovered that their lives, their country, their land, their cities, their traditions, their customs, their religion, their families, their friends, their fellow countrymen, their past, their present, their future, were under attack, and they decided to risk their lives — and eventually gave up their lives — to prevent the other side from succeeding. He is not wrong when he thinks that that is a lot like what the Muslim martyrdom bombers are doing. (185)

In this passage, Aslam clearly criticises the way terrorists are looked at from a Western point of view. As Sarah O'Brien points out, Aslam succeeds in giving space to "trauma not accounted for in western media;" through Casa, "a traumatised orphan driven to extremism – Aslam reveals the devastation in Afghanistan as a result of Western hegemony" (O'Brien 242). Frawley also concludes that "*The Wasted Vigil* forces its readers to spend time in Afghanistan, and to consider not the distant, implied trauma of the numbers of dead that govern media reports, but individualized narratives of trauma" (Frawley 450). Thus, by telling Casa's story, by portraying alternative views through Dunia and by allowing David to recognise his mistakes, Aslam creates a space in which the voice of the Other is heard as well.

In *Maps for Lost Lovers* Aslam does not give voice to the people from the West who harbour Orientalist stereotypes about Pakistan. After reading *The Wasted Vigil*, one realises

that this is a major shortcoming in the novel. However, in *Maps* Aslam shows that Kaukab as a Muslim immigrant woman occupies the space of the subaltern, which could not have been emphasised if she were to engage with the people she sees as Other. In *Vigil* Aslam shows what war can do to people; in a way this could also serve as the backstory to Kaukab's journey, because war is one of the reasons people immigrate to the West. Therefore, Aslam shows how the different characters are connected with each other, emphasising that warfare is a global issue.

Conclusion

In both *Maps for Lost Lovers* and *The Wasted Vigil* Nadeem Aslam breaks with the Orientalist views of South-Asia as barbaric and radically different from the West. Kaukab, Casa, Dunia, and David all share complex histories. In the process of reading Kaukab and Casa's stories the reader finds out that they are formed by their invisibility in their respective communities, their trauma, and their inability to work through their trauma partly because of their subalternity. Despite their struggles to find a way to fit into their environment, both characters fail to do so. The main focus of the respective novels, however, is not whether they fail to change or not, but their struggle in everyday life and making them known to the reader. Both characters are traumatised by war and oppressed by the Western powers in their home countries. Because the West does not see or hear them due to their voicelessness, their lives are deemed ungrievable and they are not mourned after their death. The issue of ungrievability also translates into reality through the politicisation of Muslim lives by the American and British governments through the "War on Terror." By polarising the Muslims and non-Muslims in their country, the Western governments create a hostile environment for the South-Asian immigrant in which they cannot express their opinions and concerns. Not only the polarisation, but also their social and cultural resistance to integration causes them to feel unwelcome in the host country. Aslam offers the Western reader a territory to envision the status, history, and struggle of South-Asians and thereby adds to the discourse about the shortcomings of the West in terms of acceptance and integration.

In *Maps for Lost Lovers* the absence of white characters emphasises Kaukab's isolation from the British community. Her living conditions disable her to work through her trauma. Aslam suggests that Kaukab's problematic behaviour stems from her strict interpretation of the rules of her faith. Even though he thus creates a bigger gap between the Muslim Other and the West, he is able to communicate to the reader that her stubbornness to

hold on to the more cultural than religious teachings is because those are more familiar to her. The reader comes to the understanding that if she gives up her values, she feels that she has betrayed her people and her God. There is no safe space for her in the community to express herself and this causes her to feel more isolated. In *Maps*, Aslam criticises the lack of understanding that is shown to Kaukab through her children's individualistic approach and their demeaning behaviour towards their mother. Aslam makes the reader wonder whether or not Kaukab's connection with her family would be any different if she had been loved by them and treated like an equal. This begs the question if it would have mattered if she had received help from someone who recognizes that her problematic behaviour is a response to her traumatic history. Apart from her daughter and God, Kaukab feels as if no one listens to her, and this feeling of loneliness leads to the desperation that pushes her towards suicide. The only salvation from the terrible life she is leading is in death, of which her husband saves her by coming just in time to prevent her from drinking the water that has been poisoned with copper pennies.

In *The Wasted Vigil*, Casa's inability to communicate his feelings and his toxic upbringing highlight why he distances himself from the people around him. He does not trust David and Marcus because they are from the West and he considers the West evil. He is only connected to the religious extremists who are only out to gain power by using him. There is no one in the novel who genuinely loves him or shows him any affection. The only person who he thinks will understand him is Dunia. He admires her for being able to stand up against David and James, but eventually concludes that because she despises the Taliban, she must be an infidel as well. Through Casa, Aslam shows the harsh truth that war destroys people, their history and their culture. Casa, too, finds his only salvation in going on a suicide mission. The fact that Kaukab and Casa are unable to reconcile with their past and find their only solution in death suggests that working through trauma is almost impossible for those who are

subaltern. Both of them cannot create a meaningful connection with their local communities or family and thus are unable to develop or express their identities. This causes them to feel lost and to feel even more isolated and unable to work through their trauma because they have no one to talk to about it.

The stories of people like Casa and Kaukab who have no connection with the outside world are rarely heard by the West. Aslam uses these unheard stories to initiate a conversation about the problematic discourse the West has produced about the Muslim world, thereby creating a middle ground in which both non-Westerners and Westerners come together. By engaging with concepts such as trauma, subalternity and US exceptionalism in his novels, Aslam convinces the reader that the issue of war is much more complex than it is perceived to be by the West. Both the West and the East play a role within the context of the war that has been going on in South-Asia. Even though he criticises South-Asians for their conservative thinking on some matters, he does explain that the reason they hold onto their beliefs is the trauma they have experienced. He tries to break the hegemonic structures built within society by the politicisation of religion and culture for political and economic profit. His aim is to show that a more loving and understanding environment would enable the characters to develop a deeper connection to their culture and create a sense of identity within their communities. The absence of love and understanding in these stories leads the characters to deem their own lives ungrievable. The unhappy endings in the two novels show us that in order to change the narrative about the Other, we have to accept our differences and realise that we have a shared responsibility towards each other. By creating a safe space in society in which the East and the West can co-exist and more importantly form a deeper connection, Aslam's novels help us envision a world in which there will no longer be ungrievable lives which remain underrepresented.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Rehana. *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*. Routledge, 2012.

Anker, Elizabeth. "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media and September 11." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2005, pp. 22-37.

Aslam, Nadeem. *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Faber and Faber, 2011.

---. *The Wasted Vigil*. Vintage, 2009.

Bal, Mieke. "Memory Acts: Performing Subjectivity." *Performance Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, pp. 102–114.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. 2nd edition. Oxford UP, 2005.

Clements, Madeline, and Margaret M. Manion. *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Frawley, Oona. "Global Civil War and Post-9/11 Discourse in *The Wasted Vigil*." *Textual Practice*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2013, pp. 439–457.

Haji, Reeshma, et al. "(De)humanization and (Dis)trust: Representations of Muslims in the UK Newspapers Following the 7/7 London Bombings." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2020, pp. 1–12.

Ho, Janice. Review of *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* by Rehana Ahmed. *Ariel*, vol. 50, no. 2-3, 2019, pp. 241-244.

Jabarouti, Roya, and ManiMangai Mani. "From a Post-Traumatic Culture toward the Cultural Trauma of Post-9/11." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 157–163.

Kapur, Akash. "*Maps for Lost Lovers*: Little Murders." *The New York Times*, 22 May 2005.

Leake, Elisabeth. *The Defiant Border*. Cambridge UP, 2016.

Lemke, Cordula. “Racism in the Diaspora: Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004).” *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+*, vol. 121, no. 1, 2008, pp. 171-183.

Mamdani, Mahmood. “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism.” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 104, no. 3, 2002, pp. 766–775.

Mehmood, Sadaf, and Fauzia Janjua. “Black Masks, White Skin: Neo Orientalism and Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English.” *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-17.

Morton, Stephen. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge, 2003.

Moore, Lindsey. “British Muslim Identities and Spectres of Terror: Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*.” *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2009, pp. 1-19.

O’ Brien, Sarah. “Shared Graves: Empire and Trauma in Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2019, pp. 240–252.

Pomar Amer, Miquel. “Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, by Nadeem Aslam: Representing and Subverting the Unspeakability of the Subaltern.” *Journal of English Philology*, vol. 33, no. 33, 2012, pp. 253–270.

Rothberg, Michael. “A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray.” *American Literary History*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2009, pp. 152–158.

Roy, Bidhan Chandra. *A Passage to Globalism: Globalization, Identities and South Asian Diasporic Fiction in Britain*. Peter Lang, 2013.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.

---. *Orientalism*. Random House, 1979.

Saleem, Nadia, and Faqiha Rizvi. “The Lingering Impact of Colonization on Pakistan: Negative or Positive?” *South Asian Studies: A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2011, pp. 401-410.

Sarfraz, Sijal. “Representation of Islam: A Postcolonial Reading of Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*.” *Academic Research International*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2013, pp. 502-512.

Upstone, Sara. *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-First-Century Voices*. Manchester UP, 2014.

Waterman, David. “Memory and Cultural Identity: Negotiating Modernity in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*.” *Pakistaniaat*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2010, p. 18–35.