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Specters of Antigone: Counterwriting Sophocles in the Twenty-First Century

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Declaration: This submission is my own work. Any quotation from, or description of, the work of others is acknowledged herein by reference to the sources, whether published or unpublished.
Signature

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Abstract

My thesis aims to explore the ways in which two contemporary (re)turnings to Sophocles's *Antigone*, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) and Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* (2012), attempt to translate and recontextualize some of the tragedy's most pertinent ethical dilemmas and internal contradictions into the idiomatic dialect of an irretrievably globalized and increasingly interdependent world. Situating both novels within a comparative framework that consists in nothing more and nothing less than a close, thematically developed reading of both contemporary narratives in syntactical relation to the classical text to which they both return, and drawing on more than one theoretical texts, this project is divided into three sections, each one structured around a main thematic trope that effectively weaves the thread that binds—at times in unity and at times in separation—the two novels both to the classical text and to each other. The first section, which is structured around the trope of light, explores the relay between embodied difference, politics, and vision as it is meticulously carved out across all three texts in question, and reads Antigone's "monstrous" deviation from the social and cultural norm of the Theban polity in relation to the Islamic veil worn by the female protagonists in both *Home Fire* and *The Watch*. The second section, which marks the shift from the trope of light to that of darkness, concentrates not so much on Antigone's difference and dissent, but rather on the sovereign response to her transgression. It reads the girl's consignment to the cave as an act of "binding violence" that both lays and preserves the foundation of sovereign might and exemplarity, an act which both Shamsie and Roy-Bhattacharya reframe within the context of Western exemplarity and its prolonged, ever-augmenting, and proliferating states of exception. Finally, the third and last section of this project, which is structured around the trope of friendships, discusses quite extensively Antigone's burial act as a response to the deceased one, to the rogue citizen or human, the traitor or the terrorist who is deemed unworthy of this rite, and relates it to the questions of death, love, memory and mourning, of politics, hospitality and forgiveness, all of which are pertinent to the classical text and even more so to the two contemporary adaptations of *Antigone* in which the right to burial rites resurfaces in the most timely of manners.

“Humanism... is not a way of consolidating and affirming what ‘we’ have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties, including those contained in the masterpieces herded under the rubric of ‘the classics.’”

Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*

INTRODUCTION

“To write a novel is to take that which is incommensurable in the representation of human existence to the extreme.”

Walter Benjamin, “The Crisis of the Novel”

“We are as much informed of a writer’s genius by what he selects as by what he originates.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Quotation and Originality”

“All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands. By necessity, by proclivity and by delight, we all quote,” writes Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay “Quotation and Originality” (543-4).¹ And we do not quote only “books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs and laws,” he continues; “we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs by imitation” (544).² There is no originality and no pure creation. Citationality, revisionism, mimesis and repetition are the law. These are the qualities that are intrinsic and most proper to the very practice of living itself, structurally embedded in the most humble and most grand of initiatives and undertakings. Every word and every deed, every thought that comes to inhabit the mind; every faith or knowledge that promises to shed its light on the unknown; every story that narrates the present, anticipates the future or contemplates the past is always already a quotation, a reference—encrypted or not—to something or somebody other than itself; a testimony to the fact that life always begins elsewhere. Neither authorship nor authenticity, but only influence, succession, seriality and eternal return can exist in a world so full of history, a world in which “[t]here is imitation, model, and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history,” an axiom from which intellectual capacity and literary creation are by no means exempted (544). For there is no writer that is not haunted by another one; no writer that can bring themselves to the task of writing except for when in the company of other writers—of the ones whose works they read meticulously, discovering in their pages each time anew parts and parcels of their own thoughts sealed within words already coined by minds they never met, spoken by lips other than their own, and formulated into sentences as they were slithering down somebody else’s fingers. All literature, in other words, is at its core citational; both old, like time itself, too old perhaps, and young, as young as it could ever be, at once unborn and antiquated, already

foregone but still yet to-come. It is a dialogue in progress; an endless exchange of words and ideas between the past and the present, the dead and the living, that arrives in the form of referentiality, of quotation, adaptation and appropriation³, of intertextuality. Departing, therefore from Emerson's position, a position that I resolutely share, my aim in the pages that follow consists precisely in the attempt to trace the reverberating effects of two such iterations; of two revisionisms, that is, that conjure the specter, or rather specters in the plural, of a corpse and its keeper, of a brother and sister, a traitor and his most forgiving of defenders, both of which, although arrested in language and locked up in writing hundreds of years ago, were left free to roam the world for centuries and haunt the literary, political and philosophical imagination of the Western world.⁴

The works in question are none other than Kamila Shamsie's recently published *Home Fire* (2017) and Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* (2012), two contemporary, post-9/11 Anglophone novels that return to and revitalize, transculturally adopt and recontextualize the myth of *Antigone* as they glimpse it through the imaginative prism of Sophocles's own adaptation.⁵ After all, the sorrow of a woman who mourns for the losses that were granted to her by a war raged by men, the resilience of a sister who unhesitatingly defies sovereign authority in defense of her own brother's right to a proper burial, and the insistence of sovereignty, in turn, to demean, harass, and strip the ones it brands its enemies of their most fundamental human rights are all stories impervious to the wear and tear of time. Doomed as they are to wake up time and again to the sound of a world that stubbornly refuses to change its lamentable tunes, they themselves refuse to grow old and in the face of their senectitude they somehow manage to retain their youth. Through no fault of their own, they have never ceased to speak for and to the present—every present to this day. Following, thus, the stories themselves and touching upon flesh that, although fictional, ought to have been wrinkled by the passage of time, entrenched by the tempestuous forces of historical change and progress, enervated and fatigued, my thesis explores the ways in which the two novels venturesomely translate some of the tragedy's most pertinent dilemmas and internal contradictions into the idiomatic dialect of an irretrievably globalized, rapidly shrinking as it grows and expands, and increasingly interdependent world. This translation, of course, spatial as much as temporal, and transcultural as much as intergeneric, begins—quite unsurprisingly—in language. The first thing, in other words, that brings the two novels together is nothing more and nothing less than the fact that they are both “born translated,” which is to say—among

other things—written in English yet invariably shifting the focus to “geographies [or cultures] in which English is not the principal tongue,” as Rebecca Walkowitz argues in her book *Born Translated* (22). This, however, is hardly a surprise for two novels that were written in the wake of the third millennium and thus responding to what Peter Boxall identifies as “the predicament in which we find ourselves” in the twenty-first century (7)—stranded in between the old and the new, disenchanted with the “grand historical narratives of western modernity” and completely disoriented in the light of rapid technoscientific advancements that drastically alter the ways in which “global time and space are produced, measured, and mapped” (19). In situating their narratives in the broader literary landscape of the twenty-first century, both Shamsie and Roy-Bhattacharya are required, in a sense, to move their respective work well beyond the limits of adaptation, a requirement which they both try to meet from their very first pages. They both begin their novels in and with quotation marks, declaring, hence, from the very inscriptions that precede their own original pages not only that they are two authors truly enmeshed in the thick network of world literature, but that they are about to purposefully tamper not simply with the classical text and its dynamics, but with the novel as a genre, too; with the novel, namely, as a—primarily Western—work of art and with its “traditional role as an instrument of monolingual collectivity,” generic insularity, national and territorial boundedness and continuity (Walkowitz 46). From the single line extracted from Seamus Heaney’s *Burial at Thebes* to the passage directly quoted from Sophocles’s *Antigone*, the words that preface both narratives betray, if anything at all, that both novelists aspire, first and foremost, to the worlding of their material—source and end text. And it is this very worlding of the classical text and of the novel at large that is of interest here; this “worlding” that transforms the “world” of world literature from “a nominal noun or an expansive adjective” into a “highly repercussive and consequential verb” formulated in between the different sociocultural norms and idioms that inhabit the page and remaining throughout foreign to the reader (Kadir 6); untranslatable and untranslated, yet powerful enough to instigate agential action by contributing to literature’s “extremely slow, infinitesimal politics that clarifies, reinforces, [and] perhaps even occasionally advances perceptions and attitudes” about the self, about the world, and about the other (Said, *Culture* 89).

Influenced by Sophocles, then, and truly dedicated to the novelist’s task as it has been brilliantly summarized by Walter Benjamin, both Shamsie and Roy-Bhattacharya in their novels take indeed “that which is incommensurable in the representation of human existence to the extreme,” and instead of merely speaking of

globality and plurivocity they stage them, as the very structure of their respective works immediately reveals (299). *Home Fire*, to begin with, is a novel set across five very different, remote yet all the more overlapping geographical locales that, although isolated and occupying a chapter each, intersect with one another as the narrative unfolds. In this fragmented manner, giving away one piece of the story at a time, Shamsie's novel narrates the lives of Aneeka, Isma and Parvaiz Pasha, three second-generation British nationals of Pakistani decent, residents of Preston Road, London and children of Adil Pasha, an alleged terrorist who died en route to Guantánamo. The narrative begins with the departure of Isma who, liberated from the responsibility of raising her younger twin siblings in the wake of their mother's death, moves from London to Amherst, Massachusetts, where she goes to pursue her long-deferred dream of obtaining a PhD in sociology. What she leaves behind, though, is not exactly an unruffled household. Her beautiful, headstrong sister Aneeka, who knows "everything about her rights and nothing about the fragility of her place in the world," is prepared to do anything to bring her twin brother Parvaiz back from Syria where, following in the footsteps of the father he never met, he has joined the media unit of Isis (Shamsie 6). Anything, indeed—including taking advantage of her encounter with Eamonn, son of the British-Pakistani Home Secretary Karamat Lone, in whose face she initially sees nothing but her brother's one-way ticket back to Britain. Despite, however, the genuine feelings of love that spring between Aneeka and the young man, Karamat refuses to help Parvaiz return home just a few moments before the latter one drops dead outside the British Consulate in Istanbul by the bullets of the very extremists he was trying to escape. And like a modern Creon, resolute and unforgiving, the Home Secretary takes the story a step further. Stripping Parvaiz of his British citizenship and, by extension, of the right to return "home" even as a dead man, Karamat banishes the corpse to the remoteness of the Pakistani capital, leaving Aneeka battling against the injustice of a law that denies her brother the right to be buried in Britain alongside his long-gone mother. Crossing the border from Pakistan to the adjacent, post-9/11 war-torn state of Afghanistan, and moving on to Roy-Bhattacharya's (re)turn to Sophocles's *Antigone*, *The Watch* unravels—for the most part—outside an isolated American military outpost in Kandahar. The plot consists of eight chapters, each one narrated from a different perspective, and it is set in motion the day a young, disabled Afghan woman, Nizam, propelling herself on a wooden cart all the way from her war-afflicted mountain village, arrives outside the base possessing—contrary to the soldier's beliefs—no agenda whatsoever other than claiming the lifeless body of her brother, Yusuf, an insurgent

leader who was killed during the overnight assault on the outpost carried out in retaliation for a U.S. drone attack that had wiped out dozens of innocent Afghani civilians a couple of nights before. Unlike the girl, nevertheless, the American soldiers in Roy-Bhattacharya's novel do have an agenda of their own. Their plan is not to bury the corpse, but to fly it out to Kabul and televise it so as for the powers that be—which they support—to send a resonant message to the rest of the country's rebels, a possibility which Nizam is determined to avert even at the expense of her own life.

Besides their evident relation to Sophocles's tragedy, however, a relation that becomes evident from this preliminary summary of both plots, as already intimated the two novels in question are bound together in more ways than one. Their post-9/11 setting, for instance, is definitely a point of reference which they both share. Written, that is, in the shadow of the date that marked the shift from the "ideological clash...*between* civilizations," as Samuel Huntington has notoriously argued⁶, to a clash that is rather "*about* civilization" in the singular, about this one, homogeneous, and exemplary ideal outside of whose margins no way of living otherwise can potentially exist, both *Home Fire* and *The Watch* reconstellate⁷ Sophocles's tragedy within an Islamic context (O'Gorman 4). And there is good reason for that. At a time when the West sees its radical enemy in the headscarf that covers the face of this other woman that inhabits, too, the metropolis,⁸ when Muslim majority countries are banned from traveling to and from certain parts of the world,⁹ and when the self retreats back to its cocoon and fortresses itself behind barbed-wire fences and impenetrable borders so as to be protected by the Orient that is literally *ante portas*¹⁰ and epitomized in the face of Islam¹¹, both contemporary writers see in their novels not only the potentiality of narrating stories and passing them on, but also that of reframing the future by displacing and discrediting borderlines the same way borderlines discredit and displace entire populations. They deliberately blur "the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign," the past and the present, the real and the imaginary, the borrowed and the invented in ways that shift the "attention to the element of the other within the self," as well as of "the self within the other" (6). In order, therefore, to begin refining—although only partially—this rather dense and multilayered literary landscape, in what follows, this project situates both novels within a comparative framework that consists in nothing more and nothing less than a close, thematically developed reading of both contemporary narratives in syntactical relation to the classical text to which they both return. Informed, thus, by more than one theoretical perspectives, and divided in three sections, each one structured around a main thematic trope that effectively weaves the

thread that binds—at times in unity and at times in separation—the two novels both to the classical text and to each other, this thesis is concerned not so much with the past, but with the present and, above all, the future of the so-called “classics” as it is envisioned and fleshed out in the two contemporary works being discussed here. The first section, structured around the trope of light, begins with Antigone’s “monstrosity,” with her deviation, that is, from the social and cultural norms of the Theban polity which her dissent renders (hyper)visible, and gradually shifts the focus to another kind of conspicuous difference that pricks the modern eye, that of the Islamic veil worn by the female protagonists in both *Home Fire* and *The Watch* respectively. Addressing the questions raised by the classical text and revisited by the two contemporary novelists in the wake of the ever-growing Islamophobia of the West which the headscarf debate foregrounds, the first part of the thesis attentively explores the relay between embodied difference, politics, and vision as it is meticulously carved out and consolidated in and across all three texts in question. The second section, which marks the transition from the trope of light to that of darkness, concentrates not so much on Antigone’s difference and dissent, but rather on the sovereign response to her transgression. It reads the girl’s consignment to the cave as an act of “binding violence,” at once conservative and institutive, both laying and preserving the foundations of sovereign might and exemplarity, an act which both Shamsie and Roy-Bhattacharya reframe within the context of Western exemplarity and its prolonged, ever-augmenting, and proliferating states of exception. Succeeding this turn towards the question of social and political belonging, the third and last section of the thesis, structured around the trope of friendship, discusses more extensively Antigone’s burial act as a response to the deceased one, to the rogue citizen or human, the traitor or the terrorist who is deemed unworthy of this rite, a response that elusively inhabits an ethically ambiguous terrain where transgression, memory, love, death, and politics overlap and intersect with each other, opening up the questions of hospitality and forgiveness all of which are pertinent to the classical text and even more so to the two contemporary adaptations of *Antigone* in which the stakes are admittedly higher. For, in returning to the origins of the most contentious tradition of all and scavenging their source material from its monumental ruins, both contemporary texts invite the past into the present and, despite their flaws and shortcomings¹², give it the room to speak for and in itself for today—for this day, for this precarious “moment” which, although it cannot possibly “overstate [its] debt to the Past,” has indeed “the supreme claim” (Emerson, “Quotation” 556). And it is this moment that is here and now, present, as present as it could ever be; irretrievably lost

as each letter settles besides its next-door neighbours and yet always recurring, eternally departing upon its arrival and thus, like literature, already foregone but still yet to-come, this moment that the rest of this thesis hopefully addresses.

Notes

¹ For this reading of Emerson's "Quotation and Originality," I am entirely indebted to Professor Eduardo Cadava, who persuaded me to read Emerson's work with the care and patience it deserves, and whose monograph *Emerson and the Climates of History* has taught me, better than any other book so far, what a "close reading" is.

² Besides the version of the essay cited at the end of this dissertation, also see the version uploaded here: <https://www.bartleby.com/90/0806.html>, paragraph 2.

³ For the difference between adaptation and appropriation see the first two chapters of Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation*, where she defines both terms and thoroughly analyzes the subtle differences between the two.

⁴ Unless stated otherwise, the term "West" is used throughout this dissertation with reference to the European continent and the United States of America, both of which claim the classical, Greco-Roman cultural, political and philosophical tradition as their originary point of historical departure.

⁵ It is important to remember, after all, that—like all literature—Sophocles's *Antigone* is also a product of adaptation, indirect quotation and appropriation. Like his fellow tragedians, the renowned dramatist did not invent the story in its entirety, but rather adapted it from mythology, meticulously translating, in the process, his rather malleable source material into a play disturbingly contemporary that eventually earned him the first place in the Dionysia, as R.G. Lewis argues in his essay "An Alternative Date for Sophocles's *Antigone*." For more on this symbiotic relationship between the stage and the Greek polis, see Edith Hall's *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun*.

⁶ See Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

⁷ I use the term "reconstellation" as it has been defined by Mina Karavanta and Nina Morgan in their *Introduction to Edward Said and Jacques Derrida: Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid*, where building upon Theodore Adorno's definition of constellation, Karavanta and Morgan conceptualize reconstellation as an "act that does not simply recognize the imperative need for a double engagement with the history of meaning inherent in the concept [in this case, literary work] but wrenches both concept and object from their contexts to

temporarily and persistently disrupt those relations of attachment and affiliation that have regulated their respective meanings and functions” (p. 18).

⁸ See Joan Wallach Scott’s historically contextualized analysis of the Islamic veil in her book *The Politics of the Veil*. Although she focuses on the case of France, a fair amount of her arguments hold true for other (neo)colonial powers, such as Britain and the United States.

⁹ As of 2017, it is quite impossible to raise the question of Islam in the West without a reference to President Donald Trump’s Executive Order 13769, commonly known as the travel or Muslim ban. See Evan Annett’s article “Trump’s Original Immigration Ban” published on February 23, 2017 in *The Globe and Mail*, and Abed Ayoub and Khaled Beydoun’s co-authored essay “Executive Disorder,” in which they give an account not only of the travel ban as such, but of the ways in which activists and members of the Muslim American communities have tried to grapple with it ever since its enactment.

¹⁰ See Matthew Carr’s *Fortress Europe: Inside the War Against Immigration*, where he extensively discusses the immigration and foreign policies of Europe with regard to its Eastern and Southern neighbours.

¹¹ See Edward Said’s *Covering Islam*, a text in which he elaborates on the intimate relation between the systematic misrepresentation of Islam by Western media and Orientalism.

¹² I will not discuss any of the flaws or shortcomings of the two novels, but I will refer the reader to Peter Morey’s *Islamophobia and the Novel*, an insightful critique of the contemporary “Islamic” novel that narrates or attempts to reframe Islam within the margins of Western literary production, perpetuating, at times, the very structures and hierarchies it sets out to reverse and undermine. Most of his arguments are pertinent to both *Home Fire* and *The Watch*. The absence of Pashtun male voices in a novel about post-9/11 Afghanistan in Roy-Bhattacharya’s novel, for example, is definitely a perplexing decision on behalf of an author who has tried indeed to structure his novel in ways that embrace plurivocity and multiplicity.

1. ANTIGONE, UNVEILED: EMBODYING DIFFERENCE¹

“It was like a one-way window. Inside it, she was an observer, buffered from the scrutinizing eyes of strangers.”

Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

“To see! We *want*: to see! Perhaps we have never had any other will than to see?”

Hélène Cixous, “Savoir”

“Yes, I’m against, yes, yes I am. Against those who prescribe the veil and other such things, against those who forbid it too, and who think they can forbid it, imagining that this is good, that it is possible and that it is meaningful.”

Jacques Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own”

Light. Radiating from the sun, scattering as its particles brush against the curves and edges of the Theban homeland, piercing through the brother’s exposed and putrefying corpse, and diminishing as the *korē* descends into her crypt, light and all that it signifies is, to a great extent, what lies at the center of Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Its plot unfolding, that is to say, in the liminal space between concealment and disclosure, perception and invisibility, day and night, light and darkness, public and private spheres, *Antigone* is, perhaps more than any other classical tragedy, a tragedy of sight. “Have you had any knowledge? Have you heard anything? Or have you *failed to notice* [σε λανθάνει] the evils from our enemies as they come against our friends?” Antigone asks her sister, Ismene, upon entering the stage (9-10, my emphasis). Accordingly, in the *parodos* and with reference to the recent events of stasis and civil war, the chorus of men urges the citizens of Thebes “to be forgetful [θέσθαι λησμοσύναν]” (150), employing here the more archaic form of that very same verb: *lanthano*, which means, first and foremost, to remain unheeded, secret or invisible and, as such, to escape one’s attention.² A few lines later and by means of his notorious decree, Creon, on his part, explicitly forbids the citizens to “hide” Polynices’s body “in the tomb [τάφῳ τε κρύψαι],” namely to cover and conceal it (196), though, upon realizing that his interdiction has been called into question and disregarded, he demands that his guards immediately “reveal to [or show] him [φανείτέ μοι]” the doers of this deed (325). Antigone, in turn and along the same lines, as she speaks of her imminent transgression of the law, at the very beginning of the play characteristically exclaims: “Ah, tell them all! I shall hate you far more if you

remain silent, and do not proclaim this to all” (86-7), and only then proceeds with her elected course of action, performing Polynices’s burial not in secrecy and seclusion, but in the broad daylight and under the blazing sun so as for her act to acquire visibility (415-7). As soon as she is “sighted,” though, in the area where the body lies and “taken in the act [ὄρᾶται κάπιληπτος ἡρέθη]” (406), she is immediately brought before Creon, the sovereign authority who—contrary to his initial intention to stone the transgressor to death (36)—decides to immure her; to “hide her,” that is, “still living” in “a rocky cavern [κρύψω πετρώδει ζῶσαν ἐν κατώρυχι],” putting out for her just enough food so as for him to “escape pollution” and the polis to “avoid contagion” (774).

What all these passages reveal, then, is, arguably, a certain preoccupation with sight and visibility; with light and clarity, exposure and concealment, which is to say with the means and mechanisms that either facilitate or impede the work of the eyes, increase or completely diminish one’s field of perception. It is no coincidence, after all, that in her dirge Antigone laments, amongst other things, the fact that she will never again “look” upon the “sacred eye of the shining sun [οὐκέτι μοι τόδε λαμπάδος ἱερὸν ὄμμα θέμις ὄρᾶν ταλαίνα]” (879-80). She loves light—exorbitantly, which is precisely why she is punished with perpetual darkness instead. Her tragedy both commences and concludes with this weakness, with this irremediable love for light that steers her into the realm of (hyper)visibility and locates her at the epicenter of this “complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence” that is “bound up” with “the constitution of subjectivity” as much as with the emergence and orchestration of life in the public sphere, and with whose mechanics Antigone deliberately tampers (Kipnis 158). Not the dead but the living, appearance and not disappearance is what troubles Sophocles’s Thebes. Because, as Hannah Arendt contends in *The Life of the Mind*, in this world “which we enter, appearing from nowhere, and from which we disappear into nowhere, *Being* and *Appearing* coincide” (19). Nothing and nobody exists in concealment and invisibility. The very worldliness of living things consists precisely in their ability to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, to touch and be touched in return, to grasp the world with their senses and to be grasped by it; to appear before others and to be perceived by them, recognized for what they are and identified as beings that are engaged with the world as they inhabit it. Which is why, in both its “appearingness” and “being,” every living thing constantly depends upon and presupposes the contemporaneous presence of “a *spectator*,” of a living entity other than itself which, by means of its very presence, bears witness to and affirms his/her existence in the first place (19). There is no identity or Being without appearance and recognition, in other

words, which might as well mean that there is no identity or Being without a reference to light. For what discloses itself can only appear so long as it is illuminated, touched by the particles of light and thus unveiled and disclosed, at once exposed and voluntarily offered to the eyes and flesh, the ears and touch of another. Besides spectatorship and light, however, this movement of disclosure and appearance both embroils and necessitates the being-there of a certain locality as well; of a *khôra*, a place within which to take place, a world “that solidly appears” and serves as the “location” for Being’s “own appearance” (21). This world, this very site that enables Being’s own unconcealment which she terms the “space of appearance,” in *The Human Condition*—and following Martin Heidegger’s remarks³—Arendt identifies with the communal space of the Greek polis; with this locus which, in being equally shared by and accessible to all its inhabitants, figures as the par excellence space within which the very “reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others” who—in making their appearance explicitly in it as well—are invested with the power to bear witness and respond to each other’s claim to the public sphere either with a disavowal or with an affirmation (198-9). As *Antigone* reveals, though, this shared communal space of the polis which Arendt describes is undeniably a space governed by a rather intricate and perhaps even absurd politics of visibility that begins and ends with bodies and their governmentality. And necessarily so, for to speak of the visible is to speak always already of the bodily and the material, of the skin and the flesh, of the tissues, bloods and cavities that frame and embody existence. Both transgression and dissent, in other words, begin in Sophocles’s tragedy neither with the crypt nor with the burial act, but with the body—with Antigone’s body, which her exorbitant love for light condemns to darkness.

Antigone does not perform transgression. She embodies it. She makes her appearance explicitly in the polis and claims her position in the public sphere as a woman, both a daughter and a sister in mourning who demands her brother receive the burial rites proper, yet what she inserts into the realm of the shared and the communal, what she renders (hyper)visible in the most audacious of manners is a difference dreadful and grotesque that is inscribed, from blood to flesh, across her very own body. Because, very much like communities and polises, “bodies,” too, “are places of existence,” localities that possess a geography of their own and sites whereby and within which Being takes place, materializes and manifests itself, since nothing and nobody really “exists without a place, a *there*, a ‘here,’ a ‘here is,’ for a *this*” (Nancy 15). There is no humanity without corporeality, independently of and outside

materiality. To be human is to be an embodied presence; worldly, finite and, above all, local. In Antigone's case, nevertheless, this inescapable conditions of one's being-in-the-world comes to signify not merely embodied existence but monstrosity, monstrosity unbound, as, by the time of Polynices's death, the news of her perverted line of kinship has already been disseminated to both the center and the peripheries of Thebes, reaching out to regions situated even as remotely as Athens.⁴ This is why in the first *stasimon* of the Greek text, as the guard brings her in, Antigone is being referred to as a "*teras*" (376). What is expressed so uniquely and so economically here by the language of the original extends beyond the limits of characterization. This noun which is etymologically related to the monster as much as it is to the seer whose unearthly powers allow him/her to pry into the future,⁵ the word *teras* serves at this point in the text as an encrypted reference to Antigone's innately transgressive and aberrant origins. By this point her very body, the product of her father's incestuous desire for her mother, is known to bear the traces of both excess and aberration, of singularity and uniqueness, but also of atrocious deviation and imminent social and cultural anarchy, all of which are the result of Oedipus's most heinous violation of "the prohibition of incest" that "grounds" both "kinship and culture" (Robert 7). She is a monster indeed, a woman both physically and conceptually challenging; the transgressor of the sovereign authority of men, but also a royal offspring whose troublesome genealogy and perverted line of kinship destabilizes and even threatens to undo the very foundations upon which the entire communal enterprise relies for the perpetuation of its normative structures, moral codes and social principles and values.⁶ Like "a letter on a page," however, or like "a glyph that seeks a hierophant," as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, the "monstrous body" is "pure culture"; it exists "only to be read" and decoded, interpreted within the particular context within which it is encountered (4). And Antigone is no exception to this rule. In synecdochically representing the violation of both cultural norms and sexual taboos, within the polis's economy of meaning, the girl's *in corpore* presence comes to articulate nothing more and nothing less than an unspeakable "difference made flesh" (6), an embodied eccentricity and deviation from a community of people "dedicated," under Creon's rule, to the task of "becoming homogeneous and monolithic" (8). Her greatest offense, then, strictly speaking, is the one she perpetrates not against Creon's law—although it is this transgression that figures as the enabling occasion that justifies her removal from the realm of the communal—but against the retinas. She inserts her monstrous body into the polis's wider space of appearance with quite a determination and, in the process, renders her presence a little too visible at a

time when the polis is about to begin, after the demise of both Eteocles and Polynices, the difficult work of forgetting the “polluting violence” that ensued from the armed conflict between Oedipus’s two sons (Sophocles 172). She provokingly stands and acts in the light, challenging—from what could be termed a minority position—not only the decision of the sovereign, but also and primarily the symmetric uniformity to which the polis collectively aspires. In an attempt, therefore, to permanently remove this inharmonious presence from the field of visibility, to efface this troublesome note of dissonance from what appears to be not a communal symphony but a concerto for a solo instrument which the rest of the orchestra begrudgingly accompanies⁷, Creon punishes the young woman with immurement. This is the only way for him to deal with Antigone; with this young woman who, unlike her sister Ismene, refuses to stay behind the closed doors of the palace and conduct her life in silence and compliance.⁸ Unable as he is to discipline her, he feels the need to erase her, an end which he can only achieve by robbing her of what she loves and desires the most: light. Besides its evident cruelty, though, this punishment, this very sentence that forces Antigone into her crypt is, at the same time and quite ironically, the one that decrypts and lays bare, naked and exposed, the workings not only of Creon’s rule but of sovereignty at large, since it discloses and undrapes the indissoluble—albeit paradoxical—nexus that binds sovereignty and politics to vision, a nexus that both contemporary novels that rewrite and transculturally adopt the myth of *Antigone* translate by means of the veil. For it is the veil that both conceals and betrays, the veil that renders its wearer both visible and invisible at once, and, as such, the veil that exemplifies the sovereign’s two most fundamental and contradictory desires: the obsessive desire “to see,” as Hélène Cixous writes in her short story “Savoir,” to observe and calculate the singularity that stands at the receiving end of its gaze (16), but also the equally obsessive desire not to see; the desire to hide, that is, whomever and whatever offends the eyes and wounds them merely by being there, by embodying and announcing a difference to which the retinas have not been accustomed.⁹ Put simply, in both contemporary novels, it is the veil that both unveils and epitomizes embodied—although, strictly speaking, not corporeal—difference, that conjures the specter of Antigone and invites one to read both heroines in syntactical relation to their classical counterpart before one even takes into consideration their respective claims.

A cover, a wrap, a drape, a folding screen, a barrier, which is to say a wall quite literally, a diaphragm, in certain contexts, a talisman or an amulet, and even light or a part of the shining sun, in its archaic form: these are some of the definitions of the

Arabic word *hijab*, a word that, framed within the context of Islamic tradition, has come to metonymically stand for both the law and practice of the *purdah*, of the veiling of women, namely, and their seclusion from men to whom they are not related in both the private and public sphere.¹⁰ A garment, hence, that both distances and sets by definition the wearer apart from the rest of the world, the veil is not inadvertently chosen to shroud Aneeka, Shamsie's protagonist in *Home Fire*. Nineteen, "petite," and "beautiful," as she is described, from the very first time she makes her appearance in the novel, Aneeka is presented as a young woman sheathed in the "white hijab that frame[s] her face" (64); in a piece of clothing, that is, whose ethnic, cultural, and religious undertones are more than enough to stigmatize its wearer even within the allegedly "multi-ethnic, multi-religious," and "multitudinous" capital of the United Kingdom, as it is seen through the eyes of the British-Pakistani Home Secretary, Karamat Lone (88). For, despite being a noun etymologically related to the verb *hajaba*, which means not simply to veil, but to shelter and conceal, to screen, hide or obscure, to make something invisible and, as such, to let it vanish or disappear from one's sight and elude one's perception,¹¹ in a Western context, where it is primarily worn by specific religious and cultural minorities, the hijab becomes precisely that which pricks the eyes of the majority and wounds them. Instead of granting the woman privacy and anonymity, worn in the streets of London, the veil puts its wearer on the spotlight. It betrays her eccentricity and exposes her to the scrutinizing gaze of the world, even though it promises to protect and seclude her. Deterritorialized and alienated, in crossing the borderline that separates the presumably secular West from the irredeemably theocratic East, and the affluent North from the impoverished global South, it metamorphoses. And from a "key concept" in "Muslim civilization, just as sin is in the Christian context, or credit is in American capitalist society" (Mernissi 95), in a non-Muslim context the *hijab* is emptied of its meaning. It becomes a part of the long "Western narrative of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam," which begins, as Leila Ahmed remarks, with the tales of "travelers and crusaders, augmented by the deductions of clerics from their readings of poorly understood Arabic texts" (149), and is consequently reduced not simply to a conspicuous religious sign, but rather to a "*focal point*" in the othering of an entire tradition whose customs, religious practices, morality codes and worldviews increasingly trouble its Occidental neighbours (Al-Saji 887). Very much like Antigone's ordeal in Sophocles's tragedy, then, trouble in Shamsie's novel commences with sight and vision. Because, in the modern city's space of appearance and like every other piece of clothing, the veil, too, becomes indeed a

second skin; a flesh that covers the flesh and, in doing so, lays bare a string of politically saturated, as well as socially and culturally nuanced differences, unevennesses and variations that frame subjects always already in advance—stealthily, thoughtlessly, and quite unsympathetically.

Standing “not only for Islam” but “for the putative gender oppression” ascribed to this very religion (880), in a contradictory yet twofold movement, the veil, worn by Aneeka in London, renders its wearer at once “invisible” and “hypervisible” (891). Embodying this contradiction, teetering between visibility and invisibility, the veiled woman in the West is inevitably construed as the one who both withdraws and overexposes herself. She is there, but not entirely; she sees but cannot be seen. She offers herself indeed to the other’s eyes, though only selectively. She chooses, as Aneeka emphatically remarks in the novel in defense of her *hijab*, “which parts of [her]” she “want[s] strangers to look at” and which parts she would rather reserve only for the ones she considers to be her most intimate others (72). Yet, in veiling herself, what the veiled woman unveils and discloses is a rather significant aspect of her self-identity—an identity that bespeaks difference way before her skin, her values and ideas, her dietary restrictions, her language and pronunciation are put on the stand. The “very way people clothe themselves,” after all, “together with the tradition of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society’s uniqueness,” Franz Fanon writes in “Algeria Unveiled,” which is to say “one that is *most immediately perceptible*” to the eyes of the foreigner (35, my emphasis). In offering itself to the eyes quiet explicitly, clothing—along with skin tone, needless to say—constitutes one of the most evident markers of social, ethnic, and cultural difference, a difference that is not corporeal, strictly speaking, but an embodied one, nonetheless. Due to the very proximity of the body as such, of its flesh and tissues to the garments that enfold it, a powerful and enduring association between the skin and the fabric has been forged over the eons, so much so that “clothing tradition,” as Fanon insists, comes not merely to signify and reveal, but even to determine one’s belonging or affiliation to a “given cultural group,” or, in the case of postcolonial Europe, to a certain cultural minority that co-exists side by side with a majority that misleadingly identifies itself as consistent and homogeneous (35). This identification, nevertheless, between the worn and the wearer, as well as the overestimation of the sociocultural significance of dressing can only begin to make sense when read in relation to territoriality and space, both of which the veil unsettles and dislocates. “You are, we are, British,” Eamonn’s father stresses

in *Home Fire*; “Britain accepts this. So do most of you,” he tells the Muslim teenagers he addresses. “But for those of you who are in some doubt about it,” he continues,

let me say this: don’t set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behavior you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently—not because of racism, though that does still exist, but *because you insist on your difference from everyone else* (87-8, my emphasis).

Despite having been himself raised in Islam and implicitly referring to the practice of veiling, Karamat Lone urges, through these words, the young Muslims of England not to deviate from the Anglo-Saxon norms, to renounce their singularity and uniqueness as a minority group and by no means to demonstrate it explicitly in the way they dress and behave in public. He appeals, in other words, for a certain kind of visual uniformity. Holding the brush of authority and power in his hands, he seeks to paint an image of an irrefutably Western England, whose public sphere remains a space culturally pure and aesthetically uncontaminated by the presence of the formerly colonized peoples in it, who now constitute an integral and indispensable part of British (multi)culture. What this address reveals, then, is that both difference and deviation are, above all, performative spatial practices and acts that, in being systematically performed, have profound implications for the overall production of communal space. This process, nevertheless, is, too, a process that begins with vision; with the eyes and their inability to simply register whatever flashes before their sensors.

We learn to see. We learn to see through embodiment and habit.¹² Vision, that is to say, although structurally embedded in the physiology of the human body, does not come naturally. It is, rather, the product of one’s experience of the world, an experience that becomes a possibility only through and by means of the body that anchors the subject to the specific material conditions that enable his/her appearance and being in the world. And space is one such condition, as Henri Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space*; a material presence that “is already in place,” pre-exists and, as such, anticipates the “appearance” of “actors” in it (57). What this pre-existence, this always already being-there of space in anticipation of the subject entails, therefore, is the capacity of the former to “condition” the latter one’s “presence, action and discourse,” his/her “competence and performance,” all of which take place within a

terrain that is always already socially, historically, territorially, culturally, politically and even architecturally circumscribed (57). Despite its precedence over the subject, however, as it is being inhabited space does not remain static. On the contrary, it is conditioned by the living beings that traverse it, by their presences or absences, by their actions and discourses as much as it conditions them. It both produces subjects and is being produced by them; it constitutes and deconstitutes its inhabitants as much as it is being constituted and deconstituted by them, constantly renegotiated and reformulated anew. As a practice, therefore, that is “spatially located” and hence a “phenomenon that is socially meaningful, embodied and contextual,” veiling becomes a means whereby women of Islam that reside in countries identified as Western both “manage and produce space,” as well as a “gender order” that “corresponds to their religious beliefs about morality” (Almila 231-2). In covering, however, themselves while roaming around London, while inhabiting, studying into, pursuing careers and falling in love in between the secular neighbourhoods of the West, as Aneeka’s case demonstrates, veiled women do not simply produce, but rather counterproduce space. Bearing the most conspicuous sign of adherence and devotion to Islam, they insert into the public sphere a difference that restructures and reallocates space, making it responsive to their own, unique and singular needs and desires, yet not without tampering with the balance of its already built environment. It is through the practice of veiling, thus, that Aneeka develops in *Home Fire* her very own, personal way of embodying monstrosity in the present. Her presence in the realm of the communal—like Antigone’s presence in Thebes—escapes the rigidly defined conceptual categories of classification. As the Muslim daughter of an alleged terrorist, she embodies her social, cultural and sexual identity in ways that are registered as contradictory, if not entirely irreconcilable in the collective imaginaries of her British neighbors. She belongs neither to the East nor to the West, but rather stands precariously in between them. She is the monstrous fusion of the two. She covers her head and prays daily, yet this does not preclude her from pursuing a degree in law or consenting to the intimacies, sensual pleasures and temptations of an extramarital romance.¹³ Having been born and raised in Britain, she is indeed set in her Western ways, but also reluctant to repudiate her faith in Islam, which, against all odds and prejudices, she publicly proclaims and defends. It is only under Western eyes that her veil becomes indicative of her inability to adapt, blend into and fully integrate with her surroundings, and thus evocative of her unassimilable, both physically and conceptually challenging difference, no matter how triumphantly her

idiosyncrasy emerges as a sustainable alternative to the Western idealizations of gender equality and universal human rights.

The main protagonist, however, is not the only veiled woman one encounters in *Home Fire*. For, enraged after listening to Karamat Lone's address to the Muslim youth, while protestingly confronting Eamonn, the young woman explicitly refers to yet another veil. "What do you say to your father when he makes a speech like that..." she asks Eamonn. "Do you say, why didn't you mention that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice?" she continues (90-1). Alluding to the novel's opening scene, which is an interrogation scene at Heathrow airport from where her sister, Isma, is flying out to Boston to pursue her postgraduate studies, Aneeka problematizes the allegedly unbiased and democratic principles and values of Karamat's England. Because, as the omniscient narrator betrays in the very first page of the novel, Isma "*had expected* the interrogation, but not the hours of waiting that would precede it" (3, my emphasis). *Had expected*. The very grammatical form of the verb here, the presupposition sealed within the past perfect tense is that apparently the expectation of this violation of one's privacy long preceded the time of Isma's departure. She was prepared to be stopped by the security guards and "have the contents of her suitcase inspected" (3). As a veiled woman—and one who prefers turbans over hijabs, for that matter (45)—Isma seems to be painfully aware of her vulnerability before the law, which apparently recognizes her presence at an international airport as treacherous and alarming, and by no means innocent. There is, however, yet more to the story. As the novel very subtly implies aside from their cultural difference marked by their clothes, like their brother, the two sisters probably depart from the image of the well-renowned pale-British whiteness. Added to their veils and turbans, their skin tone (117) and hair color (68) ultimately invite one to conclude that it is not the veil per se, but rather "who wears the veil that matters" (Hoodfar 439). It is only the "veil of the visible minorities" to which the eyes cannot get accustomed, and which is habitually cited as the evidence to "the outsider and marginal [if not inferior and subhuman] status of the wearer" (439).

This inferiority of the veiled woman, nevertheless, and—by extension—of the man who veils or allows her to veil herself is even better registered in Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's counterwriting¹⁴ of *Antigone* in his novel *The Watch*, in which he, too, like Shamsie, stages a play of light and darkness that unravels in the liminal space

between the visible and the invisible. For the burqa Nizam wears in *The Watch*—like Isma’s turban—is yet another alternative to the *hijab*. It is a veil as well; a screen that covers the woman from head to toe, leaving only her eyes exposed. Framed, however, within the geography of Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, veiling in *The Watch* appears as a practice strictly confined to the territorial borders of the Middle East whose female inhabitants apparently conduct their lives under the Taliban rule from which the American soldiers are allegedly there to save them. What the veil unveils in this context, too, thus, is nothing more and nothing less than fear and prejudice. “There is a woman in the field outside,” the soldiers report to their Captain upon Nizam’s arrival; “or at least we think it’s a woman but we can’t be sure because of her burqa” (132). Wrapped in her veil, at once visible and invisible, Nizam becomes a figure impossible to identify and, to the soldiers’ eyes, becomes a “dilemma” (10). She is there but not quite fully present, a being which, in the absence of a face, remains unidentifiable and unidentified; possibly deformed and feminine, but also mysterious and cryptic. Despite their efforts, while gazing towards her direction, the soldiers see what they cannot see. Their eyes, impatient and inquisitive, are forced into disuse and denied access to whomever and whatever the veil safeguards. Representing, therefore, the fear of the unknown and the invisible, contextualized as such, the burqa in *The Watch* comes to signify not simply difference, but imminent danger and deceit, as the young woman is presumed to be either a “black widow” (14) or a “Trojan horse” (151), a suicide bomber and a threat in disguise that arrives only hours after the militia had been attacked by the insurgents and bears the possibility of yet more casualties to come. What is interesting, however, in Nizam’s case is not the burqa per se but rather the violence it enables in concealing the identity of its wearer. Anxious as they are to determine the foreign presence that has camped outside their base, early in the novel, the American soldiers approach the woman in fear and ask her to remove her burqa so as for them to inspect her for explosives. To this request Nizam protestingly replies: “I can’t do that!” (18). Because to her, the very idea of removing her veil “before an audience of men” equals absolute “humiliation” (18). Despite her firm objection, though, the officers inform her that, if she does not want to be immediately removed from the site, she must consent to the inspection for the purposes of which she “*must* take off [her] burqa” and, later on, “lie down facing the ground with [her] hands on [her] head and [her] legs spread apart” (18-9 my emphasis). Dismayed yet overpowered by the desire to bury her brother and thus unable to refuse, Nizam obeys their orders, her eyes lowered and her “naked face burning with shame” (19). Contrary to Western perceptions and ideas, for this woman

the veil embodies modesty, self-respect, and “dignity,” all of which she is eventually stripped of during the inspection (21). Instead of being a protective shield in this scene the burqa becomes a tool of coercion, both corporeal and psychic violation, though only as soon as it is perceived by the eyes of the American soldiers as such, recognized by them as a potential threat, and then removed and scrutinized by a pair of hands to which it remains foreign. It is not the veil itself, but the speculations, conjectures and presuppositions attached to it by the Americans that engender violence and oppression in *The Watch*. Which is an irony, of course, since the foreign invaders claim to be there to save the Afghans precisely from such acts of arbitrary violence imposed on them by the Taliban. In being erroneously construed, hence, as the irrefutable evidence and concrete manifestation of the disgracefully marginal position of women in the Afghani system of social hierarchy, as well as with their utmost deprivation of liberties and rights, “agency” and power (Abu-Lughod 39), veiling in *The Watch* serves indeed as the ideological justification for the deadly and resource-draining enterprise of the so-called war on terror. Inextricably intertwined with the Islamic notions of gender segregation and seclusion,¹⁵ and, coextensively, with the ethics, values, ritualistic practices and overall philosophy of the entire Islamic tradition itself, the veil becomes the pretext on the basis of which the average American G.I. can justify his presence in a military outpost so remotely located from home and legitimize all the violence he engenders and exerts while being there. For their part, the soldiers are not raging an ideologically groundless and unjustified war. Neither do they merely execute orders, as they repeatedly remark. They fight for, instead, and strive to instill the democratic values of egalitarianism and gender equality into the hearts and minds of the Afghans and Pashtuns, to battle “their bloodlust and misogyny” (Roy-Bhattacharya 252), and in the meantime serve as the benevolent, kindhearted American-raised men who sacrifice their lives to save “brown women from brown men” (Spivak 270).

Either in the East or in the West, therefore, as an obstacle that defers, encumbers and delays the immediate encounter between the wearer’s shape and the impatient eyes of the beholder, the veil is ultimately robbed of its innocence. Not because it disguises and conceals, but because it exposes and betrays. It becomes indeed a second skin, a flesh that covers the flesh and, in being immediately perceptible, bespeaks the a priori heterogeneity and difference—if not inferiority—of the other always already in advance, which is to say, way before the retinas are granted access to the warm and vibrant surface of the epithelium. Due to this very precedence, then, of the veil over the flesh, maybe it is the former and not the latter one that functions as the par excellence

“racializing assemblage” translated into visual terms (Weheliye 6). Maybe it is the veil that constitutes, in the post-9/11 era, the multilayered and convoluted origins of racialization as the “conglomerate of sociopolitical relations” that politicize not only biological but also cultural differences only to instrumentalize them for the purposes of “discipline[ing] humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (3). As Nizam characteristically confides to her readers, after all, upon her arrival to the outpost, she could feel the American soldiers staring at her as if she were “some kind of *animal*, potentially interesting, yet dangerous enough to maintain a guarded distance” (18, my emphasis). Its implication being that in the eyes of the soldiers the veiled woman registers either as subhuman or nonhuman at all, this sentence reveals how the burqa comes so signify—besides oppression—the Islamic society’s raw and unrefined ways, which are very much in need of the violent, though humanitarian and civilizing American intervention. To even assume, however, that “the mere practice of veiling,” either in the East or in the West, is indicative of “the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation” or of the overall inferiority of their culture is not only “analytically reductive,” as Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, but also profoundly deceptive and devastatingly groundless (67). Particularly since in certain Islamic societies veiling is not only considered to be a sovereign act, but also an act that carries within it a series of emancipatory possibilities, such as the right of women to “define” with a simple gesture “who may or may not be considered” their “kin,” or the ability to insult men “in situations of conflict” simply by dropping their veils in their presence and thus insinuating “that they do not consider the contestee to be a man” (Hoodfar 425). The speculative claim, thus, that Islamic law and tradition are innately oppressive and promote, by means of the *purdah*, the inequality between the two sexes merits detailed contextualization and historicization of each and every case individually.¹⁶ It is worth noting, after all, even in passing, that contrary to the Biblical God, in one of the most exquisitely beautiful passages of *The Qur’an*, the Islamic Book of books upon which the entire social and legal enterprise of Islam relies for guidance, Allah never intended to begin the creation of humankind with the male person.¹⁷ Rather, beginning with *nafs*, a word that is grammatically feminine yet conceptually neutral and meaning “soul” or “psyche,” Allah created both men and women from that same common essence, so as for his beloved creations “to dwell with their mates in love” and find “comfort” in each other’s presence (7:189).¹⁸ There is no reference, no concrete textual evidence within the text, or rather, texts that found Islamic law and tradition suggesting that veiled women are inferior to their male counterparts, deprived of the right to

educate themselves, to both marry and divorce their husbands at will, to serve as credible witnesses to legal cases, to work, to actively participate in and enrich with their presence the realm of the communal, and to even veil themselves in the first place.¹⁹

No more of a “material prison,” then, perpetually “limiting and immobilizing” (Al-Saji 891), than of a “mobile home” (Abu-Lughod 36), or a one-way window” buffering the wearer from the “scrutinizing eyes of strangers,” the veil itself, at the end of the day, means nothing and everything at once. Yet it remains. Be it a cover, a wrap, a drape, an ostensibly conspicuous religious sign, a barrier that separates, a garment, elaborate or plain that bespeaks cultural or sexual difference, a piece of fine material or simply a modest shroud, it remains. And it violates. In all of its movements, veilings or unveilings, the veil, as it seems, always arrives in the form of a violation—either past or pending, already enacted or promised. For, like the monstrous body, it, too, is pure culture, a construct and a projection, a discursive formation which, in all of its manifold, diverse and inexhaustible maneuvers and significations, eventually “exhausts” and “fatigues,” as Jacques Derrida resentfully admits in his essay “A Silkworm of One’s Own” (40-1). Taking up on “what is beginning to get a bit much” with the veil, or rather veils “of all sorts” in the plural, in this rich, quasi-autobiographical and intertextually dense piece of writing, Derrida embarks upon one of the most sustained and meticulous readings of the veil; of the texts and contexts that punctuate its twists and folds, circumscribe and frame it in language and tradition, always making it into something more than what it is (41). “I’m not exhausted,” he insists; “I am only tired of the veil, it is the veil that is exhausted for me, *in my place*. It has stolen my name from me,” he protests (41). Speaking, here, of the tallith he inherited from his grandfather, of this other veil whose distant predecessor Yahweh once bequeathed to Moses, and although disinclined to “write on the veil... right on the veil or on the subject of the veil, around it or in its folds, under its authority or its law,” Derrida effectively decides to write against it (39). Not against the veil per se, but against its writing; he writes against the writing of the veil, against its capacity, that is to say, to name, or rather, to name *before* the name, to envelope, purloin, consume and even erase the proper name so as to take its place. Because, framed within language, overdetermined and burdened with the connotative surplus invested in it by what Derrida identifies as the “graeco-judeo-paulino-islamo-freudo-heideggeriano-lacanian” phallogocentrism, the veil never simply veils (85). It rather “holds” and “touches, pulls, like a lead, it affects and sometimes tears the skin,” it “wounds” and “penetrates under” the epidermis (34-5). Which is precisely why, a little further down, the philosopher adds: “Yes, I’m against,

yes, yes I am. Against those who prescribe the veil and other such things, against those who forbid it too, and who think they can forbid it, imagining that this is good, that it is possible and that it is meaningful” (77). Either drawn or removed, inherited or bequeathed, imposed on oneself or forbidden, resisted or endorsed, from Hellenism to Judaism and Christianity, and from Islam to Psychoanalysis and Metaphysics, the veil has never ceased to scar and to violate the flesh; and the female flesh in particular, as if the “fate of humanity, of so-called humanity” were “going to depend on whoever holds power over women about the veil” (41).

Patently stitching, thus, his points of view on the other side not of the veil, but of veils in the plural, using nothing but the tips of his words, exhausted and fatigued indeed by all the inexhaustible movements, renditions and translations of the veil, in the very last few pages of the essay, Derrida turns to sericulture. In confiding, however, his own personal experience with silkworms, he offers to the reader his most sustained, perhaps, meditation on the veil, although in disguise; a meditation that begins and ends with the silkworm and everything that it is. But also, with everything that it is not. For what is unique about the silkworm is precisely the fact that it is; it lives on and nourishes itself in secretion and invisibility, in this state of almost pre-discursive indeterminacy and seclusion that promises nothing but possibility. Infinite possibility. Veiled in its cocoon and laboriously working to produce its outside from the inside, this “little innocent member, so foreign yet so close in its ineluctable distance,” that grows, day by day, without disclosing itself, never announces its presence (89). It exists in concealment—a living being whose being-in-the-world remains invisible to the naked eye and thus impervious to its obsessive desire to see; to measure and evaluate; to classify and circumscribe whatever flashes before its sensors. And it is not solely its invisibility that renders this “miniscule living spontaneity” unique, but its resistance to classification, too (89). As a living thing whose sex, very much like the rest of its presence, is quite “impossible to discern” and identify, the silkworm effectively embodies the “impossible” (88). It is neither nature nor culture, but rather “absolute nature and culture” at once, since sericulture is by definition “the culture of the silkworm *qua* silkworm” (89). There is no engine, no prosthesis or machinery involved—just innocence combined with the desire to live, to cultivate oneself and persevere. A room, therefore, in which there is no room for intruders, like the body or the polis, the silkworm becomes a site as well; a *khôra* within which something or someone takes place, a locality that gives precedence to and makes room for the other—

the wholly other and all the incalculable (im)possibilities he/she/it embodies. If there is anything to learn, then, from this innocent and finite being which remains forever ignorant of death, of what exists beyond the veil both literally and metaphorically, then this lesson arrives in the form of a question: what if? What if the veil, or rather, veils in the plural could also return to such a stage of quasi-pre-discursive indeterminacy? What if they were relieved from the burdens of both language and signification? And what if their wearers were granted the opportunity to simply be in seclusion and seclusion? What if they were afforded not a room, but a silkworm of one's own from which to quietly work so as to produce their outside from the inside by and for themselves? What if veils were also granted the benefit of sealing within them nothing but infinite possibility? What if they were inhabited solely by the promise of a yet to-come that remains undetermined; ambiguous, unsexed, unnamed, and singular? What if?

Notes

¹ This first section of my thesis is inspired and entirely informed by Eduardo Cadava's extraordinary work in *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*, as well as by all the texts we read together in his most inspiring seminar *Genealogies of Memory and Perception: Literature and Photography*, which I was granted the privilege of attending.

² For the reading of this particular word (*lanthano*) I am indebted to Ioannis Stamatakos's thorough indexing in his *Greek dictionary of the Ancient Greek Language* (in Greek), but also to Martin Heidegger's remarks in *Parmenides*, pp. 24-5.

³ See Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where he defines the polis as "the name for the site (*Stätte*), the Here, within which and as which Being-here is historically," as the "site of history, the Here, *in* which, *out* of which and *for* which history happens" (162-3).

⁴ See Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* (whose plot precedes that of *Antigone*), lines 512-550. The chorus of men is already aware of Oedipus's notorious fame even before he begins recounting his past deeds.

⁵ One of the nouns etymologically related to the word *teras* in the Greek language is the word *teratoskopos*, a compound of the noun *teras* and the verb *skopeo-o* which is used to name the prophet or the seer, the one who observes the signs and omens, attempting as he/she is to predict the future. Although not pursued here, therefore, a reading of *Antigone* in syntactical relation to the blind seer Tiresias (the character who advises Creon not to immure her) would, perhaps, be more than interesting.

⁶ See the third chapter of Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (pp. 57-82), where the critic argues in favor of the explicitly political undertones of *Antigone's* dissent and presence in the public sphere, a thesis which she substantiates precisely by accounting for the perverted line of kinship *Antigone* descends from.

⁷ See *Antigone*, lines 683-765, where Haemon effectively tells his father that the entire polis disagrees with his decision to bury *Antigone* alive.

⁸ Although, in Part II of *Antigone Interrupted* (pp. 85-189), Bonnie Honig makes a very powerful case in defense of Ismene's perhaps less evident, but nonetheless radical actions and decisions in the play.

⁹ A pertinent reference here would be the tragedy whose plot precedes that of *Antigone*, since it is Oedipus himself, in *Oedipus the King*, who, although obsessed with his unknown origins, blinds himself the moment he “sees” the truth. He responds to his tragic fate by rendering his eyes impervious to light and to the possibility of bearing witness to such horrendous “sights” it entails.

¹⁰ For all the definitions of Arabic words, I have relied on Hans Wehr’s *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*.

¹¹ Also see Fatima Mernissi’s remarks in her book *The Veil and the Male Elite*, where she offers yet more definitions of the verb *hajaba*, including the meanings “to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold,” and to “belong to the realm of the forbidden” (p. 93-96).

¹² For this reading of the relation between body, experience and vision I draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s remarks in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, and particularly on the Preface (pp. vii-xxiv) and Part I of his analysis (pp. 77-233), but also on Linda Martín Alcoff’s analysis of his work in her essay “Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment.”

¹³ It is true that in the Islamic tradition the only permissible consummated relationship between a man and a woman is through marriage, which is why marriage is—both in the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith*—preferred to celibacy. With the secularization of Muslim societies, nevertheless, the way both men and women of Islam relate to one another and conduct their personal lives has radically transformed.

¹⁴ I borrow this term from Mina Karavanta, who coined it in her essay “The Injunctions of the Specter of Slavery: Affective Memory and the Counterwriting of Community” to speak of discourses and languages, accounts and narratives whose “origins... lie in dispersal,” and which “systematically deconstruct the structures of ‘the overrepresentation of Man’” (p. 44).

¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that veiling is a practice erroneously associated strictly with the Islamic tradition. As Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones demonstrates in his book *Aphrodite’s Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece*, veiling was a practice already present in the ancient Greek world, while, in *The Position of Women in Islam: A Progressive View*, Mohammad Ali Syed argues that “the present *purdah* system owes its origin to reactionary Muslim rulers in various countries” who “were

undoubtedly influenced” by their Iranian, Byzantine, and Indian neighbors (pp. 103-5).

¹⁶ See, for example, the last part of Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s essay (pp. 66-7), where she discusses the radically different signification of veiling when practiced by women even within the territorial limits of the same geographical region, the Iranian state, that is to say, although as a response to two very different sociohistorical occasions whose complexity altered, each time, and re-signified anew the practice of veiling.

¹⁷ For this analysis of the Qur’anic account of creation I am entirely indebted to Amina Wadud’s exemplary reading of the Qur’an in *Qur’an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (pp. 15-28), as well as to the third chapter of Mohammad Ali Syed’s book cited earlier, where he discusses the origins of both men and women according to the *Qur’an* (pp. 17-19). Their meticulous reading and thorough contextualization of the text is more than enough to persuade the most reluctant of readers that—like every other written work—the *Qur’an*, too, is capable of yielding possibilities both novel and unimagined, timely as much as they are secular, if only one approaches the text with the right set of hermeneutical tools.

¹⁸ Aside from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem’s relatively recent translation of the *Qur’an* published in the Oxford World’s Classics series, I have heavily relied on Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s most poetic—though older—translation of the text available online at quran.com.

¹⁹ See Hoodfar’s essay, pp. 422-3.

2. CAVES, PAST AND PRESENT: UNLIVABLE LIVES UNLIVED

“It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.”

Toni Morrison, *Sula*

“...perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.”

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

“Has the day every been the measure of all things, as one pretends to believe?”

Jacques Derrida, “Call it a Day for Democracy”

But there is darkness, too. From appearance to disappearance, from visibility, unveiling and exposure back to imperceptibility, concealment and enclosure, and from community and amity to solitude and isolation: this is the movement Sophocles stages in *Antigone*; the future he images and lovingly creates for his rebellious protagonist whose trials begin in the dazzle of the light only to end in its absence. Longing for the sun yet perennially stranded in the dead of night, the girl perishes in darkness; and in the darkness of the cave, the “rocky cavern” to which the sovereign consigns her (774). Consigns, indeed, and not entombs or imprisons; for it is this verb, this verb alone and not another one that registers, as Derrida has brilliantly argued with reference to the archive, not solely the act of “assigning residence to,” of setting apart and putting in reserve, at once entrusting and entrapping something or someone to and within the margins of a specific locale, but also and primarily that of “*consigning*” through the “*gathering together*” or forcing apart of “*signs*”—in the name of ideality, of “synchrony” and continuity, of perfect unity and exemplarity (AF 3). And it is this exemplarity, which is always already of the day, of light and of the sovereign, that is at issue for the most part in the tragedy; this exemplarity which, in a twofold movement, universalizes the particular as much as it delineates and particularizes the universal by inscribing it “in the proper body of a singularity, of an idiom or a culture” that, although not representative of the whole, becomes the measure for it, the average value in the face of whose calculative force every other singularity is required to lay bare and sacrifice its own incalculability (Derrida, “Other Heading” 72). This is what Creon is going after the moment he decides to force Antigone outside the margins of the polis and into the crypt; into this place that is external to the rest of the community and

circumscribed, situated well beyond Thebes's semantic and territorial borders. He sentences the girl to darkness as deliberately as he forbids Polynices's burial. As he ascends to the Theban throne at a time of social instability and political reconstruction, as he assumes power and becomes the new sovereign, the *archon* of the polis, the citizen of citizens invested with the power to write, call on and represent, impose and even suspend the law *sine die*, he calculates his steps—meticulously. Like a collector or an archivist madly in love with his craft, he grounds his rule on solid ground indeed; he begins, that is to say, by assembling and dispersing traces, by selectively embracing and rejecting signs and narratives, memories, events and temporalities, cosmologies and subjectivities—the bits and pieces, in short, of what will eventually constitute the post-civil war archive of the polis.¹ Neither treason nor dissent, no evidence of disloyalty and insubordination can be a part of this constellation. Which is precisely why Antigone's transgression, like Polynices's death, cannot be monumentalized, inserted into the archival economy of retrievability and reproducibility, and thus acknowledged as an essential, indispensable part of the community's own bloody history. She has to be removed, since it is only by erasing such unruly marks that, like misplaced commas, make their appearance inside a narrative determined to communicate its meaning uninterruptedly will Creon finally be able to create a history of his own. Untainted by excess and conflict, attached to the past, but not too much, coherent and systematic and, above all, unassailable. To rid, nevertheless, a constellation of its constituents without setting the entire sky on fire is no easy task, as he quickly discovers. In their remote vicinity, the fiery engravings that punctuate nocturnal darkness obey no law other than their own. No king and no governor, no minister, no state, no president and no Home Secretary can extinguish them; they can only wait for them to be extinguished, burnt by the force of their own incandescence. This is why Antigone's removal begins with consignation, with this noun that accounts for the kind of "binding violence" to which she is subjected (Fradinger 16), a violence that is "neither inclusive nor sacrificial," at once conservative and institutive, archival indeed, and "constitutive of political membership" (13). Violence, to put it simply, does not simply violate in Sophocles's *Antigone*. Rather, it both "ruptures" and "cements," and "break[s] language" as much as it "re-creates it" (13). It binds as it unties and effectively "seals off the boundaries" of a political community in crisis, boundaries that are "otherwise opened infinitely to the demands of equality" (14). Antigone's expulsion, in other words, seeks to not merely cast the offender to the margin, but to set, at the same time, an example and articulate in the most economic of ways the citizen

proper. To be a member of Creon's polity, one simply has to be what she is not: a spiritless, submissive, thoughtless and unsympathetic human being.

Consignation, therefore, and not immurement is the word that sets the plot in motion, a word that conceptually tethers, by its very etymology, captivity to language and violence to the force and power of *consignatio*; of the written proof and the sealed document, the document that bears the seal—and the regal seal, for that matter, the seal or signature of the sovereign, the sovereign himself. It is this noun that traces Antigone's end all the way back to the beginning of her dissent, an end which like the archive begins with synthesis and unification, but also with excision and separation, with the wound that is inflicted upon decontextualization—and the decontextualization of sorrow in particular. "[W]e saw the girl," reports the guard who narrates the events of Antigone's arrest; "she cried out bitterly, with a sound like the piercing note of a bird [*κἀνακωκῦει πικρᾶς ὄρνιθος ὁξὺν φθόγγον*]" when she sees her nest robbed of her young" he continues, employing a very specific lexical utterance that reduces the cry the girl issues upon seeing her brother's corpse to noise (Sophocles 423- 5). *Phthongos* is the Greek word Sophocles uses here, a word that, as opposed to *phonē*, pertains to sounds not blurred or indeterminate, but rather clear and distinct, effortlessly recognizable and classifiable, unambiguous in terms of both origin and signification. Language itself leaves no room for vagueness or uncertainty here. Perceived outside the history that frames it, the history, namely, of a young woman, a sister and a daughter who has lost, by the time of Polynices's death, her entire family with the sole exception of her sister, Ismene, and who had little or no chance whatsoever to properly mourn for those deaths, Antigone's grief loses its humanity. It ceases to be a cry "loud and long," to borrow the words of a novelist, with "no bottom" and "no top, just circles and circles of sorrow," and is relegated to a bird's caw instead (Morrison 174). Decontextualized and ripped out of the worldly conditions that precipitate it, to the hearer's ears it registers not as a genuine lament, but as a sound distinctly animal. This word, nevertheless, this "theriomorphism" that takes place in language, ascribing to Antigone "the characteristics of an animal" indeed, does not accidentally appear at this particular moment of the text (Champlin 1190). Complementing the chorus's earlier reference to Antigone's monstrosity and strategically pronounced by a man who speaks the idiolect of sovereignty as fluently as Creon himself, this reference is the one that enables, paves the way to and justifies Antigone's expulsion. For, by means of its subtle force, it both strips Antigone of her humanity, and "aligns" her with the very beings that "highlight and broadcast a threat to the brother" ever since the beginning of the tragedy; with the

ravenous crows, that is, that voraciously feast on Polynices's corpse, dispersing the traces of his flesh as it decomposes and contaminating the Theban polity in its entirety (1190). The guard and not the king is the one who ostracizes Antigone from the polis; the guard who morphs her lament into an auditory "frame of recognition," in a mechanism which he uses to determine the degree to which her life can or cannot be apprehended (Butler, *Frames* 3-5). Moving his language beyond the limits of description, he is the one who names the girl and defines her, denying her—throughout his report—access to "language" and "speech," to "meaning as such," to "reason" and "logos" (Derrida, *Beast* 167) as the two faculties that are most proper to the "mouth of man," and reducing her grief to "voracity and vociferation" (65). Only after this reference, after Antigone's arrest not in the field but in language is Creon granted the opportunity to consign the girl to her tomb with impunity. There is no way he could have forced a citizen—let alone a royal offspring—face such a remarkably cruel sentence, had she not been animalized first; utterly dehumanized and construed into a written proof herself, a document that documents the exception to the rule and supplements, as such, the orality of his decree—a decree transgressed, as of this moment, by a nonhuman beast and not a thinking subject.

Marooned in a position not simply marginal, but diametrically opposed to that of sovereignty, Antigone is, from this point onwards, exiled not from home, but from the conceptual category of the human at large. She has ceased to be the embodiment of excess and aberration, of monstrous singularity and erratic subjectivity, and has already been relegated to a life more or less "ungrievable," whose loss counts as no loss and whose situation well past the frontiers of "livability" serves as the ultimate justification to the sovereign decision to let it—or rather, make it—remain unlived (Butler, *Frames* 22-4). Prefacing, therefore, the "crucial shift" from "deportation" to "deportability" introduced by the sovereign verdict that immediately succeeds it (Gsoels-Lorensen 134), this instance is the prologue to Antigone's imminent "juridico-political delegitimization that fashions her into a removable life to be forcibly expelled" (112) not only from, but most importantly "to" a somewhere else (141). To a place in which she can perish in silence and invisibility, while granting sovereignty the comfort of zero accountability. Even from such a place though, from within the darkness of the crypt to which she is consigned so as for Creon's unblemished narrative construct to emerge, the girl still manages to unsettle and disrupt the ideality of such a project, the very exemplarity of the example the sovereign aspires to set and universalize. Instead of dying the death Creon imagines for her, she dies the death of her own choice. And

although burnt indeed by the force of her own light, she creates not an archive but a black hole of her own, whose strong gravitational effects bear witness to the presence of caves past and present; to the ruses of sovereignty and language that accredit and certify as much as they outlaw and delegitimize, and to the encamped spaces and frames within which lives continue to be apprehended, reckoned unlivable and left unlived. To this particular region of literary spacetime that has never ceased to engross and capitalized upon itself, to accumulate ad infinitum and proleptically anticipate the yet-to-come, both contemporary novelists return—patiently excavating and navigating themselves through its bottomless darkness.

As the two most fundamental conditions that transhistorically frame communal life within sovereign political regimes from antiquity to colonial modernity and all the way into the present, unlivability and expellability are the two main thematic cores around which the plot of *Home Fire* revolves—the very infrastructure that supports Shamsie’s narrative enterprise in its entirety. It is no coincidence that the book begins with Isma’s questioning at the airport, with her detention and cross-examination inside the enclosed space of the interrogation room. A synopsis of each and every character’s daily routine, this very first scene of the novel serves as the prelude to the pages that follow whose plot, although unravelling across the spectrum of five different and very uneven localities, progresses, for the most part, within a shifting yet essentially unchanging geography. From London to Pakistan and from Boston to Syria and Istanbul, all the events that transpire over the course of Shamsie’s latest literary work unfold within frontiers fixed and rigidly defined; into the interior of spaces which, despite their apparent exteriority, remain stiflingly walled and circumscribed, restraining and uninhabitable yet all the more populated by subjects who nonetheless try to inhabit them. And this is, perhaps, one of the most interesting ways in which the novel departs from the classical text it is adapted from, allowing its difference to become more pronounced in the absence of an element whose structural necessity in the context of an irretrievably globalized and ever-globalizing world is deemed redundant. There is no crypt, to put it simply, in Shamsie’s adaptation of *Antigone*, no place specifically reserved for expulsion, imprisonment or consignment. Her characters, as opposed to Sophocles’s, need not be thrust into caves; they are always already dwelling inside them, traversing their hollow interiors and occasionally losing their hope in the face of their luminous darkness.

“This isn’t yours,” the interrogator says as she goes through Isma’s personal belongings at the airport, her tone suggesting not “*because it’s at least a size too large*”

but rather “*because it’s too nice for someone like you*” (3). Read in syntactical relation to the name printed on her identification documents, to the darker skin that houses her body and to the turban that proudly rests on her head, the designer’s bag Isma carries on her way to Amherst—like the rest of her personal items—burdens her with a weight not only concrete and physical, but also semantic and immaterial which speaks volumes of the detainee way before she is herself allowed the privilege to do so. In the hands of the officer, the object becomes a supplement to her already ambiguous presence; it metamorphoses into a document itself, a form of identification that precedes identification, a “frame of recognizability” really that bespeaks the “general conditions that prepare or shape [the] subject for recognition” (Butler, *Frames* 5). The only possible explanation capable of accounting for the incongruity between Isma’s second-generation immigrant, and most probably underprivileged social status, and the overall sumptuousness of her belongings is, the officer suspects, theft. This presupposition—socially, culturally, racially, politically and economically saturated—that *a priori* conditions and delineates the boundaries within which Isma’s identity can disclose itself and take place is, quite ingeniously, morphed by the novelist into a portable cave, a construct bound—like Aneeka’s *hijab*—to forever distance and set her apart from her mostly white and non-Muslim Western neighbours in both London and the States. Isma, however, is not the most pertinent example here. And neither is her sister, Aneeka. It is rather Parvaiz, their nineteen-year old brother, who becomes, over the course of the novel, the character through which Shamsie explores the grievous consequences of both unlivability and framing. Young, dreamy and in pursuit of a professional career as a “sound designer” (Shamsie 161), Parvaiz Pasha spends most of his free time on the house roof with “his second-hand shotgun mic” and “his phone and headphones” on, recording the sounds of Preston Road Station as their waves sequentially break, one after another, into the vicinity of their garden shed (131). In the meantime, as we learn, he works as a “grocer’s assistant,” earning minimal wages—which are insufficient to cover alone the household’s monthly expenses, as Isma reminds him—and growing accustomed to a life that each day “allows” a little less “for dreaming” than the previous one (119). Until, of course, the moment he meets Farooq, an extremist recruiter who promises to rescue him from “the inevitability of everything” (123) at home and grant him a one-way ticket to the presumably utopian “land of order and beauty and life and youth” that awaits him, if only he migrates to the Caliphate and joins the media unit of his prospective brothers in arms (147). What merits critical attention here, nevertheless, is not Parvaiz’s road to Raqqa, Syria. There is nothing interesting about the conscious

decision of an individual to fight on the side of those who fight against life—legitimately or illegitimately. Neither personal nor family drama, in other words, is what demands to be addressed in the chapter that covers Parvaiz’s story, but rather the dense and multilayered actuality of seamless British inegalitarianism which the character’s encounter with his recruiter symptomatically reveals and brings to the forefront.

Vulnerability—and not intrinsic malevolence—is what exposes Aneeka’s twin brother to the detrimental side effects of Farooq’s remedy to the “wrongness” of his life at the heart of the oldest, perhaps, cosmopolis of the West. As the son of an alleged terrorist who died en route to Guantánamo, which is to say, as a minority *within* the minority, a subject that figures as a potential threat way before he becomes one and is perceived as such even by those with whom he shares the same sociocultural background, Parvaiz has always occupied a precarious position inside the very society and culture he considers to be his own as much as anyone else’s. His “home,” as his words gradually reveal in the wake of Farooq’s teaching, has always been, for him, a prison; a cave or a labyrinth which, despite its staunch adherence to light, to him delivers nothing but darkness. Like his two sisters, Parvaiz, too, finds himself trapped within frames out of which he is desperately trying to break. In his daily encounters with both his fellow citizens and the sovereign authorities, for instance, encounters which, as Sara Ahmed astutely remarks, are “ontologically prior to the question of ontology” and, as such, both constitutive and perpetually *re*constitutive of subjectivity and selfhood (7), he is time and again “produced” as “a ‘stranger,’” a body alien and foreign, far “more dangerous” compared to other—domestic or fully integrated—bodies (3-4). As a “*dark-skinned*” man of Pakistani origins (Shamsie 117), he is familiar—as he himself admits—with the experience of being “stopped and searched” by the police for no reason whatsoever, and painfully aware of his fragility; of his defencelessness before the law and its public servants who can potentially demean, harass and abuse him, hold him a suspect, detain and interrogate him and even annihilate him with impunity in the name of national security and civil protection (132). The very flesh he owns which, unlike the veil, cannot be shed, the very skin that covers his body from whose cells the pigment he cannot force out becomes for him the frame of frames; the most primary means and mechanism of recognition that—like Antigone’s cry—marginalizes and alienates him, stripping him of his humanity one piece at a time by quotidianly granting him a greater share in both “precarity”² and unlivability (Butler, *Frames* 25). It is Parvaiz’s own body that situates him, simply put,

outside the framework of the presumably ideal and homogeneous configuration of the majority culture and exposes him to the coalescing tendencies of the “existing norms” that dutifully “allocate” the right to social and political recognition “differentially” (6). His own corporeality is what effectively dispossesses him of the potentialities that ensue from “home,” from the full exercise of one’s right to citizenship and belonging. Quite ironically, however, it is not resentment that propels him to join the extremists, but the possibility of community and friendship. In the absence of strong affective bonds with anyone besides his family, Parvaiz falls prey not to Farooq’s hatred and disdain, but to his benevolence. For it is only his recruiter who immediately sees and recognizes him for what he truly is: the son not of a terrorist, but of a father who spent his entire life fighting for what he believed. Very quickly Farooq becomes Parvaiz’s “yaar,” a friend in Urdu and not English, since the colonial language falls short to the occasion, lacking as it is the words—the nouns and adjectives, that is—in which to speak of a “jigari dost—a friendship so deep” that was “lodged within you” and “could not be cut out without leaving a profound, perhaps fatal, wound” behind (Shamsie 134). It is for the sake of this bond, of this profound sense of community and recognition, that Aneeka’s twin leaves for Raqqa; that he joins a cause he quickly wishes to abandon and casts himself to the position of the beast, of the rogue citizen from which sovereignty is in dire need to protect itself. And it is for the sake of this bond, too, that he pays for his choice dearly, dropping dead by the hands of the very extremists he is trying to escape and being condemned—even as a dead man—to perpetual exile from “home” by the second most interesting character of *Home Fire*, Home Secretary Karamat Lone.

If Parvaiz is the character who exemplifies framing and unlivability, who is the bearer of a monstrosity inscribed across his own skin and tantamount to that of his two sisters’, then Karamat is the character who, following in the footsteps of his classical counterpart, has raised himself into the example against which everything and everyone has to be measured. Vehemently opposed to and marching against all forms of racial discrimination as a young man, but also eager and ambitious to prove himself the worthy son of his immigrant parents, as the novel states, Karamat Lone quickly “swapped his leather jacket for a banker’s suit” as soon as he graduated from college and embarked upon his long journey to the top of Britain’s social and political elite (102). Despite his power, nevertheless, as it becomes apparent, Karamat is no less of a prisoner than any other character of *Home Fire*. He, too, walled inside his luxurious office, finds himself stranded, perhaps more than any other character, in the heart of darkness that pulsates at the very center of a world so full of light. For, although raised

in one of Europe's oldest, seemingly egalitarian and profoundly secular capitals, Karamat is the character who had to sacrifice not only his time and energy to become Home Secretary, but also and primarily his origins; his cultural identity and singularity and, of course, his religious beliefs and values. As his son, Eammon mentions while debating with Aneeka, early on in his political career, Karamat had to try harder and "be more careful than any other MP" (51), to "boldly" renounce his contentious background (33-5), and forsake the words of "Ayat al-Kursi"³ which he used to recite "as a kind of reflex" at moments of stress (107). Unlike his predecessors, he had to scratch and claw every inch into his Office; to openly declare his "*enlightened* preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque," and ultimately prove himself capable of modernization and secularization, of Westernization, in short (Shamsie 59; my emphasis). He had to somehow escape the primitiveness of his condition and endorse Britishness; not as a geographical location or a cultural identity like any other, but Britishness as "an advanced point of *exemplarity*," cultural superiority and exceptionality, a point always already identical to and overlapping with "the *idea of the European idea*" (Derrida, "Other Heading" 24), namely, the idea of this very uneven yet somehow continuous and unified inheritance, of this particularity that nonetheless presents itself "as the irreplaceable *inscription* of the universal in the singular, the *unique testimony* to the human essence and to what is proper to man" (73). The repudiation of his pervasive faith which, instead of decisively retreating itself from the sphere of the political like Christianity, overarchingly embraces all aspects of life,⁴ was a desideratum for Karamat ever since the day he decided to become a politician. Only by means of persuading his British constituencies that he possessed indeed the rare ability of critically evaluating and willingly abandoning his intractably theocratic, pre- if not anti-modern ethics and ideals, would he ever be granted the privilege of actively engaging in liberal Western politics. Like an aperture that bursts open upon the shutter's release to let light in, before being granted the opportunity to climb the stairway to sovereignty, the son of two Oriental immigrant parents had to open himself up to the systemic and unifying "architectonic vocation of [Western] reason," to the revolutionary values of religious secularism⁵ and political liberalism⁶, of fraternity, equality and freedom—to the photoengravings, in short, of an inheritance both sovereign and ipsocentric⁷, whose truths and axioms he had to countersign and fully internalize (Derrida, *Rogues* 120).

What shapes Karamat, however, into the most interesting character of *Home Fire* is not so much his devotion to the ideals of European Enlightenment that promise

to lift the veils of primitiveness and darkness from the faces of the ones who do not yet possess them, but rather his blindness to the inconsistencies and ambiguities that permeate these exemplary ideals through and through. In one of the most self-contradictory passages of the novel and while addressing a group of young Muslim students, Karamat emphatically proclaims that neither racism nor prejudice is to blame for the differential treatment of Muslim subjects within the metropolitan centers of the West. Eccentricity and deviation, nonconformity to a majority which, although inclusive and egalitarian, privileges identity and sameness over difference: these are the qualities that expose and subject the alien body to discrimination.⁸ The minor detail, though, which the Home Secretary either fails to mention or to notice is that in this Europe of light which claims to be at once universal and particular, “representative of a larger category than itself,” but also an unrivaled “privileged exemplum of the genre,” darkness never ceased to prevail (Weber 13). For, in grounding its political ideas, its structures and institutions on nothing but “secularized theological concepts,” Europe never really made room for the new and the modern; it merely wrapped the past and gifted it as a present, abandoned the church but not the sermon (Derrida in Cherif 52).⁹ To this day, its exemplarity remains, at its core, a theology in disguise, yet a theology which is, nevertheless, by etymology so intimately related to language, to logos as such, to speech and reason, response and responsibility. And it is in the wake of this association, of this clandestine alliance forged between the sovereign and the exemplary that Karamat—very much like his classical counterpart—is, too, enabled to mark his own unique turn towards deportability. When his son enters his office pleading him to forgive Aneeka’s brother for joining the Isis extremists and allow him to quietly return back to London, Karamat does not simply refuse to help Parvaiz, but denationalizes him. Exerting the power invested in him by the state, he strips the young man of his citizenship and denies him the right to return “home” even as a dead man. His decision, nevertheless, like Creon’s, is neither spontaneous nor unwary, but deliberate, meticulously thought-out and calculated—exemplary, in the most European sense of the word. Because it is this very exemplarity which Karamat exemplifies and reinforces simply by being there, the living proof inside the government that the brutes are civilizable indeed and, as such, always allocated equal opportunities in the liberal and democratic centers of the West regardless of the periphery they come from—this very exemplarity and not another that endows the Home Secretary with the sovereign prerogative to articulate both the ‘rogue’ and the ‘beast,’ or rather the rogue as beast, since there is little distance separating the two in the English language.¹⁰ Partaking in

the tradition, simply put, is what allows Karamat to distinguish between the citizen proper and the expellable, disposable, and ultimately ungrievable subject. And, of course, what also gives him the permission to introduce a radical break in the very notion of expellability which arrives in the form of precarious citizenship; of citizenship, that is, which is revocable, contingent on merit not on due, and thus turned from right to privilege. The bill he drafts for parliament, after all, is addressed not only to dual nationals, but even to British single passport holders acting “against the vital interests of the UK” (Shamsie 198).¹¹ There is no certainty and no guarantee, no room for rogues and their proponents in *his* Britain. Through this figure, therefore, through the figure of Karamat Lone, *Home Fire* eventually does nothing more and nothing less than what its title promises. It sets the notion of “home” on fire, echoing, perhaps, James Baldwin’s words, according to which perhaps “home” is indeed “not a place but simply an irrevocable condition” (88).

Taking the notions of both roguishness and expellability to their extreme, Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya’s novel shifts the focus from the citizen to the state and—by extension—to the human at large. Set in the post-9/11 Kandahar province of Afghanistan, one of the first areas that “collapsed into anarchy” after the U.S. invasion “as Afghan factions fought against each other” (Fawn 20), *The Watch* stages the bottomless divide between the par excellence rogue and sovereign, namely, between “the West and the rest,” in Stuart Hall’s apt formulation (276). In narrating the events that precede and follow an assault perpetrated by a group of “sand devils” against an American base in retaliation for a U.S. drone attack that wiped out dozens of Afghani civilians, Roy-Bhattacharya’s novel, too, critically approaches and eventually completely undoes the idea of Western exemplarity and, more specifically, of its transatlantic offspring—American exceptionalism¹² (Roy-Bhattacharya 58). For, as the plot quickly reveals, the soldiers that have conquered for the most part the novel’s pages are the agents not of democracy and “freedom,” as they misleadingly think of themselves, but of death, destruction and unlivability (15). Stranded as they are in this “bleak wasteland” of the East (97), and synecdochically representing Western principles and values, the green berets, these “people of honor,” sent to Afghanistan “to set an example to those looking up to [them]” (248), to civilize the barbarians of the globe and teach them the qualities of “courage, endurance, integrity,” and “judgment,” of “justice, loyalty, discipline [and] knowledge” which they have presumably mastered, end up annihilating, irreparably wounding and eliminating civilians blameless and unarmed (158, my emphasis). They are no better than their rivals, which is to say, they

impose the barbarous atrocities they claim to battle. Herding Afghanistan under the heading of the “rogue state,” namely the “state that respects neither its obligation as a state before the law of the world community nor the requirement of international law,” that “flouts the law and scoffs at the constitutional state or state of law,” the mouthpieces of American foreign policy respond to violence with violence—brutal and undifferentiated, inexorable and unforgiving (Derrida, *Rogues* xiii). What else is there for them to do, after all, in a state that is unworthy of its name? What is there to do in a state so full of rogues where no other language than that of force is spoken? Prone to both “debauchery and perversity, to the subversive disrespect for principles, norms, and good manners, for the rules and laws that govern the circle of decent, self-respecting people, of respectable, right-thinking society,” the Afghanis had it coming, an American G.I. would dutifully reply (20). It is not the citizen vaguely and in the singular that joins the extremists and poses the threat in *The Watch*, but the state in its totality. The shift Roy-Bhattacharya stages in his novel is that from the individual to the population. Not *a* life, but *every* life the American soldiers take in this desert of a home is ungrievable. No loss counts as a loss, but as an achievement; a step closer to law and order, to the eradication of the “unimaginable barbarism” whose contentious inheritance gave rise to extremist forces who have no respect for human life whatsoever (Roy-Bhattacharya 239), and are prepared to execute a human being for the disgraceful act of carrying “un-Islamic books” (254).

From the rogue citizen, then, who acts against the state to the rogue state that acts against the world and from there to the rogue human who enables, condones or tolerates such practices and, as such, is deemed expellable not from the polity but from the conceptual category of the human at large: this is the larger question which Sophocles’s *Antigone* raises when recontextualized in the twenty-first century. Yet, in Roy-Bhattacharya’s hands, the tragedy exceeds itself indeed. In *Home Fire* one encounters individual characters that exemplify confinement, but in the post-9/11 war-torn landscape of *The Watch* the dynamics are even more radically shaken. It is not Nizam, or rather, not only Nizam who—disabled and erroneously misconstrued as a threat—finds herself closed in and asphyxiating, desperately trying to escape the frame that frames her and break free. As one of the Americans himself reveals, merely by being there, outside their base, this haunting and ungrievable presence, “holds and entire U.S. Army base hostage” (222). Not only the beast, whose entire province has been turned into a wasteland, a cave of some sort, but the (global) sovereign appears to be contained in *The Watch*; caged within a cave and thus imprisoned in the double

sense, corporeally as much as intellectually. The militia can neither exit nor inhabit their own outpost in her presence; hostages to both the world and the wild, biased and deeply prejudiced scenarios of their imagination, they are truly at a loss. This very loss, though, this state of absolute uncertainty and disorientation within which the soldiers find themselves is also what exposes, little by little, the roguishness of the (global) sovereign itself. As the soldiers' debate over the matter of how Nizam is to be treated, they begin ruminating on the causes and effects, on the motives and the reasons that led to their enlistment in the first place. As they seriously contemplate the possibility of killing an unarmed civilian in advance just to be on the safe side, they prove, sentence by sentence, that the example always makes an exception or two. Like its enemies, it is ready, too, to cross as many red lines as it sets and plunge an entire world—the other's world—to darkness. As rogue a state as any¹³, by means of its imperialist foreign policy and in the name of “freedom,” the world's most powerful nation—exceptional in this one respect—is the nation that has ultimately robbed a teenage girl of both her family and her ability to walk (15). This minor inconvenience it has caused, nevertheless, is really a small price to pay, all things considered, the Captain of the base would argue. The aim is not and has never been to save the human as the singular individual entity whose right to inhabit the world is as nonnegotiable as anyone's, but to save humanity. Humanity as this abstract notion upon which the veil of barbarism will descend “as inevitably as night follows day” in the wake of the Americans' departure (239). And it is the day, ultimately, that is at stake here; this day in all of its glory, its uniqueness and exemplarity, and even its exceptionalism at times. This day that begins with Creon the moment he consigns Antigone to the crypt, with the sovereign that names the beast and denies it its rightful share to the sun. This day which might not even be “the measure of all things,” after all (Derrida, “Call it a Day” 109); this day and its more or less natural prerogative to live at the expense of the night, oblivious as it is to the fact that its light, too, is and has always been shrouded “under the velvet cover[s]” of the world's most enduring and bottomless “darkness” (Roy-Bhattacharya 281).

Notes

¹ See P.J. Brendese's essay "For Love of the Impossible: Antigone, Memory and the Politics of Possibility," where she extensively discusses disobedience as an "act of radical remembrance" against Creon's sustained endeavor to "control the past" so as to "dictate the future" (p. 112).

² I use the term "precarity" in the double sense as it is defined by Judith Butler in *Frames of War*, namely, both as the "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death," and as the—also politically induced—"condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence" but have no other option but to appeal for justice and protection to the very state from which they need to be protected (24-5).

³ Ayat al-Kursi (The Throne Verse) is sura 2:255 of the *Qur'an*: "God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous."

⁴ This is, effectively, the way Bernard Lewis portrays Islam in his book *Islam and the West*. "For Muslims," he writes, "Islam is not merely a system of belief and worship, a compartment of life, so to speak, distinct from other compartments which are the concern of nonreligious authorities administering nonreligious laws. It is rather the *whole* life, and its rules include civil, criminal, and even what we would call constitutional law," the implication here being that Islam is clearly incompatible with the principles and values of the Christian West, which is far more capable of drawing the line between the religious and the personal on the one hand, and the political and the communal on the other (3-4).

⁵ There is a vast scholarship on secularism, yet Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (particularly pp. 127-201) and Rajeev Bhargava's essay "Is European Secularism Secular Enough?" in *Religion, Secularism, and Constitutional*

Democracy, both of which frame the discussion within a very contemporary European context, are, perhaps, two of the most informative sources.

⁶ In my use of the term “liberalism” I exclude the implicit reference to rampant capitalism, which is, of course, a defining characteristic of most—if not all—Western liberal regimes. Instead, I follow Nicholas Wolterstorff’s argument in his essay “The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues,” and restrict the application of the term to the political position which is of relevance here, namely to the position that wants both citizens and officials to base their decisions concerning political issues on reason and not on their religious convictions (p. 73).

⁷ I borrow this term from Jacques Derrida who coins it in *Rogues* to economically refer to and link with a dash the phallogocentric attributes of both *ipseity*—the possibility of selfhood, the power of the self to declare and represent itself—and sovereignty, which he describes as “at once paternalistic and patriarchal, and thus masculine, in the filiation, father-son-brother” (p. 17).

⁸ See pp. 87-8 of *Home Fire*—this excerpt was more comprehensively discussed in the previous section.

⁹ I can only refer those who wish to further engage with this question to works such as Philip Jenkins’s *God’s Continent*, Bruce Bawer’s *While Europe Slept*, and Christopher Caldwell’s *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, which address, at times moderately and at times more polemically, the specters of “Islamization” and “reverse colonization” that are presently haunting the Old Continent. Regardless of their rhetoric and arguments, what all the aforementioned works attest to is the enduring identification of Europe with Christianity—not in the past, but in the present.

¹⁰ See p. 94 of Derrida’s *Rogues*, where, citing the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the philosopher forges the association between the “rogue” and the “animal,” suggesting that, precisely due to the word’s meaning when extended to the animal kingdom, the English “rogue” was not accidentally chosen to name the so-called “outlaw states” in the wake of post-9/11 global turmoil.

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the novel here is not pure fiction. While serving as UK Home Secretary, in 2014 Theresa May actually drafted a bill—which was enacted by the British parliament and quite recently judged to be lawful by the European Court of Human Rights—to strip British terror suspects of their citizenship

and take away their passports, even if this means leaving them stateless. She was not the first one to come up with such an idea, however, as Mattia Pinto clarifies in his illuminating essay “The Denationalisation of Foreign Fighters: How European States Expel Unwanted Citizens.”

¹² Very much like secularism, the idea of American Exceptionalism—of exemplarity, that is, and of Manifest Destiny, of Westward (and later on global) expansion, of civilization and domination which the wildernesses of the world do not simply welcome, but require—has also received a fair amount of critical attention. Nevertheless, I borrow the term and use it, for the purposes of my argument, as it has been delineated and defined in and across William V. Spanos’s *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*, Donald Pease’s *The New American Exceptionalism*, and Marc Morjé Howard’s most recent *Unusually Cruel: Prisons, Punishment, and the Real American Exceptionalism* (a book in which Howard effectively concludes that the only truly “exceptional” trait of the United States is the cruelty of its punitive system, a cruelty which is indicative—in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville—of a “nation’s civility” (23), and might as well be extrapolated and allowed to speak for a nation’s policies when it comes to dealing with “external” or “international” transgressors of the law).

¹³ See William Blum’s *Rogue State*, in which he uses the term only to critique the foreign policy persistently followed by none other than “the world’s only superpower.”

3. “NEITHER WITH THE LIVING NOR WITH THE DEAD!”: OF FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, DEATH, MEMORY, POLITICS AND MOURNING

“And I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death...”

Walt Whitman, “Proto-Leaf”

“The wound can have (should only have) just one proper name. I recognize that I love—you—by this: that you leave a wound that I do not want to replace.”

Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*

“*Remember me* means, Do not cease to love me.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Memory”

A tragedy of light and darkness, then, is the story to which both contemporary novelists return; a long sequence of words suspended, like photographs, in the darkroom of tradition, waiting without awaiting to be developed. Yet in between the day and the night, in the interspace that spans between the cave and the sun, between concealment and disclosure, veiling and unveiling, transgression and retribution, there is also friendship—a friendship that arrives in the wake of death and in the form of memory and mourning. “I shall lie with him who is my own [φίλη μετ’ αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα]” Antigone exclaims in defense of her cause at the very beginning of the play (73), a decision to which, regardless of her disagreement, her sister, Ismene, replies: “you are truly dear [ὀρθῶς φίλη] to those who are your own [τοῖς φίλοις]” (99). Accordingly, a little further down and while confronting Creon, the girl declares: “I wasn’t born to hate (or to be an enemy) [συνέχθειν], but to love (or to be a friend) [συμφιλεῖν],” a declaration which the sovereign does not leave unanswered: “then love those friends if you must [εἰ φίλητέον, φίλει κείνους],” Creon responds (523-5). And even later, in Antigone’s own dirge, this recourse to that very same word, *philein*, continues: “I shall come dear (or as a friend) to my father [φίλη μὲν ἦξιεν πατρί], dear to you, my mother [προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί, μήτερ], and dear to you, my own brother [φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον ἀδελφόν],” the young girl asserts (898-9), while, towards the end of her monologue and facing her immurement, she laments: “but thus deserted by my friends [ἔρημος πρὸς φίλων] I come living, poor creature, to the caverns of the dead” (919-20). What all these passages have in common is nothing more and nothing less

than a shared etymological origin—an infinitive on which they all depend; a verbal form from which they all depart and to which they all exhaustively return. For it is this one word, this singular verb and its derivatives that most economically condense and articulate the high stakes of Antigone’s transgression. *Philein* [φιλεῖν] is the Greek word employed throughout the tragedy to speak of the burial act. Everything Antigone does, therefore, she does in the name not of endearment, as it is persistently translated in English, but of friendship—of fierce, uncompromising, genuine and unconditional friendship. Which might as well mean that everything Antigone does, she does in the name of love. But in the name of a love that is more than love or of “aimance” in Derrida’s words; a term which he coins to speak for this unique “love *in* friendship” that always already traverses, dwells in and overwhelms the latter one (*Politics* 69-70)—a love delinked from activity as much as from passivity and thus existing in the middle voice, “infinite” and “forgetful of itself” (*Gift* 52), unable to “take place figurelessly” but, at the same time, “cut[ting] across...figures,” escaping all categories, at once placing and displacing itself well “beyond love and friendship following their determined figures...beyond all ages, cultures and traditions of loving” (*Politics* 69-70).

Love; and love in the middle voice is what propels Antigone out of her silence and into an open clash with her uncle, Creon; love for the light, but for her brother, too—for this other brother, the traitor and the rogue who is not her only brother but, at the same time, the one and only brother; the singular and irreplaceable subject whose life is as grievable as any other and whose corpse, hence, is, too, worthy of a grave. Of a sepulchral monument, namely, that is a “tribute to man as human being,” in William Wordsworth’s exquisitely beautiful phrasing, and a “record to the memory of the dead” (130); of an archivable trace, at once aphoristic and serial¹, “open to the day” and exposed for the “sun to look down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven [to] beat against it” (139), permanently inscribing what is unique into the economy of the reproducible without forsaking or denying its singularity. And it is this very singularity in the name of which Antigone struggles, for it is this singularity that demands to be addressed as it foregrounds sovereignty’s differential allocation of the right not only to burial rites, but to grief and sorrow as well. Exiled at home, yet strangely at home in her exile, belonging “neither with the living, nor with the dead” but a *metoikos* in both worlds, Sophocles’s protagonist, in transgressing the law, lays claim to more than one rights, to put it simply. It is not merely Polynices’s corpse that stands at the receiving end of Creon’s decree, in other words, but Antigone’s own right to mourning as well. To this practice; this work that is a ritualistically as much as politically nuanced praxis

consisting entirely in the attempt “to ontologize remains,” to restore, that is, the privileges of presence to what is already absent both by “identifying the bodily remains” of the deceased one and “by localizing the dead,” instituting sites of memory where there is nothing but ruins (Derrida, *Specters* 9). And this is, perhaps, one of the few things *Antigone* has to teach us, if anything at all: to mourn is, above all, to remember; to claim the dead in both word and deed; to honor their otherness, at once alterity and foreignness, and one’s own attachment to them and to their memory. Against Creon’s unilateral, depoliticizing and exclusionary decree premised on the differential allocation of space not solely in the ground, but in the very “ordering of civic memory” as well (Brendese 120), in grieving for her brother Antigone responds to the sovereign-imposed violence of forgetting with an act of “radical remembrance” indeed (125). She insists on a “politics of memory” that mourns publicly and not in private for the exclusion of the past from the present, of the armed conflict and the war from the polity’s history proper, of her incestuous kinship line from the field of normativity, and of the dead from the world of the living (125). Even the traitor and the rogue, the transgressor and the dissident deserve, according to her, to be remembered. And thus mourned. For there is no mourning without memory and no memory that is detached from mourning—no memory that does not mourn for what it remembers as much as it mourns for itself, and no anamnesis without a reference to *mnēma*. No memory without this parenthesis or annotation that speaks of and to the epitaph; to death and to the place and time of death. To what is unique and singular, both foreign and one’s own, anchored to the necropolis of the past and, as such, always already irretrievably lost yet somehow living on, available as it remains to the memory and recollection of the survivor(s).

Remembrance, therefore, is mourning—infinite mourning and not only for the dead, as *Antigone* showcases, but for the living, too; for the living who are doomed to, day by day, dwell in the abysmal graveyards of the yesterdays that precede them more than they anticipate the todays and tomorrows that are still yet to come. But it is also revival and resurrection. For what is a memory if not the fleeting, miraculous moment that flashes before the retinas at moments of solitude or desperation and allows one to briefly converse with the departed and see faces whose eyes he/she can meet only in dreams? What is a memory if not the most enduring trace of infinite love and absolute responsibility towards the other? The very phrase “*Remember me*” means, after all, as Emerson writes in his essay “Memory,” “Do not cease to love me,” which might as well translate into: do not cease to address me, call on, name, or think of me in my absence; do not cease to attend to and be responsible for this wound that bears—or is about to

bear—my proper name (76). There is an appeal sealed within the imperative, an appeal that solicits attention and binds love to remembrance and, co-extensively, to mourning. If to mourn is to remember and to remember is to love, then there is a third association being forged in between the three: to mourn is to love—inescapably. Because it is in the face of loss and absence that love is tested and pushed to its limits. “The wound,” as Derrida has written elsewhere, “can have (should only have) just one proper name. I recognize that I love—you—by this: that you leave a wound that I do not want to replace” (*Post* 25). And it is this wound, severe and irreparable, occasionally tended to, but intentionally left unhealed that tells love in both the present and the future. The beloved is the one who cannot—and should not—be replaced; the one whose proper name, present in the absence of its bearer, becomes the only source of consolation for the survivor; the name through which he/she can “name, call, invoke, designate” and “think” of the other, when “the unique pole of all these acts, these references will never again answer to it, never himself answer, never again except through what we mysteriously call our memory” (Derrida, *Memoirs* 48). From a politics of friendship, therefore, *Antigone* gradually moves towards a politics—and poetics—of radical remembrance, memory and mourning. But how so, one would wonder? The answer to this question, though, is perhaps to be found once again in the language of the original. *Philein* [φιλεῖν] is the word employed throughout *Antigone* with reference to the burial act, a word which back in the Homeric times, in its most primary semantic form, was strictly employed to register the act of welcoming, of receiving one benevolently and offering him/her one’s hospitality.² It was only later, much later, that the verb’s evolutionary trajectory morphed it into a word whose connotations, by Sophocles’s time, included several different meanings: to treat one tenderly, to offer one’s friendship to another, to love someone, and, finally, to exteriorize and declare this love through the performative act of kissing. None of these connotations, nevertheless, seems to resonate throughout the tragedy as much as the word’s most originary meaning. Hospitality appears to be the noun that frames Sophocles’s play in its entirety, since friendship, burial, memory and mourning are all acts in the classical tragedy that take place in the wake of permanent loss and acquire indeed the shape and form of an unconditional welcome. Is there indeed a noblest form of hospitality than the act of welcoming and receiving the other—and the traitorous other, for that matter³—and offering him a place within which to rest in peace? Is there another word, more worthy of the name, to name this extraordinary love in friendship that perseveres even when all that seems to have been left “is memory, since nothing appears able to come... any

longer, nothing is coming or to come, from the other to the present?" (32-3). Is there a friendship other than the one that owes itself and is forever due to death and to the "knowledge of finitude"? (29). Perhaps yes, and perhaps no. But in the context of *Antigone*, definitely no, for the young woman's politics of friendship is, in its essence, a politics of mourning; of memory and love, of reconciliation, of absolute and unconditional hospitality to the dead and to the threatening outsider, to this other citizen or non-citizen who, like her, is condemned to remain disremembered and unaccounted for in the sovereign archive of uniformity, of perfect synchrony and ideality, of exemplarity, in short, which Creon tries to articulate. In that sense, there is nothing indeed "more beautiful than death" that "can happen" for Sophocles's protagonist (Whitman 45). Not because in a quasi-suicidal turn she craves for death or refuses to live, but precisely because she knows no way of responding to the right to live or live on—even in memory and gravestone—other than with an affirmation. With a yes which, although condemning her to meet her own fate "friendless" (Sophocles 876), "deserted" (847) and "unwept" (919), grants her brother—this other brother—the right her father sought to Colonus. With a yes that defends to death, indeed, the right to death.

Taking the incommensurability of Antigone's burial act to its extreme, Shamsie in *Home Fire* frames the question of the burial within a truly contemporary and global context. The brother in her novel is not merely a citizen who, joining enemy forces like Polynices, declares war on his home nation-state, but a citizen turn rogue who joins the absolute, the one and only enemy not of Britain, but of the West at large. Parvaiz is not simply a traitor, a dissident or indigenous rebel; he is a man who joins the front of Islamic extremism, a second-generation migrant who turns against his home nation and, as such, a man who is presumed to have no rights whatsoever, the right to burial rights included. By the time of his assassination, therefore, his body has already ceased to be a body, while his corpse, at once something more and something less than itself, has, too, ceased to be a corpse. It is rather a material entity traversed by ambiguities, competing histories and rival ideologies, a testimony to both roguishness and exemplarity at once, namely, to both civilization and barbarity, enlightened reason and complete irrationality, instilled radiance and innate darkness—a document that documents the gruesome fusion of all such categories and binary oppositions. The dead body in *Home Fire* becomes the lifeless incarnation of monstrosity—of the monstrosity of this other citizen who roams in the center but dwells in the periphery, inhabits the West corporeally yet drifts in the East spiritually, emotionally as much as intellectually. Both foreign and homegrown, at once indigenous and expatriate, Parvaiz's body is the

threat from which the nation-state needs to protect itself, the infectious agent that does not invade the organism from the outside but parasitically develops and matures inside it, the pathogen against which the sovereign needs to immunize its body politic.⁴ Even dead, simply put, the young man poses a grave danger to Britain—physical as much as conceptual and political. To receive, welcome and entomb the body of a terrorist, and of a homegrown terrorist for that matter, is a process far more complex and politically nuanced compared to any other burial, after all, and a process whose implications undermine the very foundations upon which sovereignty is premised. For, upon joining the extremist cause for which they decide to fight, the extremists themselves insert their bodies into the economy of a transnational network, deterritorialized and phantasmatic, which effectively disengages them from all the social, cultural, familial and territorial affiliations which a national identity presupposes. From the moment of their radicalization, their bodies are attached to no state other than that of the global “*ummah*,” that imagined and universal “community of believers” that is “based on a shared faith and the implementation of its law” which they raise into an integral aspect of their self-identity (Hassan 311-2). To bury these bodies “amounts to re-territorializing them” (Kastoryano 5). Not simply receiving or repatriating them so as to offer them a burial proper, but claiming or re-claiming them as citizens, affirming their belongingness to the nation-state that is willing to host their remains in the first place. The political stakes, therefore, are high. No nation and no sovereign would risk allying themselves with or humanizing this particular enemy. The one whose murderous acts are responsible for hundreds of deaths, notoriously denounced and castigated by the vast majority the citizenry. The terrorist figures neither as warrior nor as a victim, but rather as a nonhuman beast, a threat in dire need of elimination, and a life whose death, corpse and memory are deemed ungrievable, disposable and unworthy of commemoration respectively. Karamat Lone, in that sense, has indeed a point to prove the moment he banishes Parvaiz’s corpse to Pakistan. This corpse that is more than a corpse, a contamination that threatens and compromises the integrity of the state, but also less than a corpse, a disposable set of remains undeserving of the right to rites, of the right to be spared the voracity of predators and crows, that is, solicits a very specific response on the sovereign’s behalf which is very economically summarized in Shamsie’s novel: “Take out the trash. Keep Britain clean” (219). To entomb the extremist is to sully national grounds. It is only by introducing an exception to the law, and by disclaiming the body of the terrorist—and the word jihadi is deliberately avoided throughout here⁵—that the sovereign can reclaim and further accentuate its own

authority which, in the face of the very possibility of a suicide bombing attack carried out by a British national, is not simply contested and impeached on, but utterly disqualified and disbanded. The denationalization of both Parvaiz and Aneeka, who takes his side and unhesitatingly fights for her brother's right to be buried at "home," is the only response Karamat has to offer as he is confronted with the extremity of the situation.

Besides Parvaiz's radicalization, nevertheless, there is yet another interesting aspect introduced to the question of the burial in Shamsie's text, because Parvaiz is not only an extremist, but also and primarily a son as well—and a migrant's son, for that matter. Constituting the most significant way in which *Home Fire* departs from the classical text it rewrites, the transcultural context within which the author situates her narrative radically alters the dimensions of most of the dilemmas reimagined and recontextualized in Shamsie's novel, the question of the burial included. Because, in a community of migrants, death and not life has the supreme claim; death as the force that weaves the thread of existential attachment and belonging to certain places and not others, to territories and cultures, histories and languages inexorably constitutive and re-constitutive of one's sense of subjectivity and selfhood. Burial for the migrant is so much more than simply a ritualistic or spiritual practice, a case that is further consolidated as soon as one shifts the focus from the first- to the second-generation migrants subject in particular, since although merely "endpoints" for the first generation of arrivals, "graves" constitute the very "beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in the land" (Ho 3). Paradoxical as it may sound, in such cases, death binds in separation. For, unlike the migrant him/herself, the epitaph is not in flux. It inherits uncertainty and fluidity, but bequeaths stability and continuity in their place. It inscribes the dead body within a certain economy of fixity and anchors the remains to a specific locality that becomes henceforth a point of reference, a *topos* that is not only a shrine, but a testimony whose evidentiary force is incontestable. Right where migratory flows and processes introduce "spatial discontinuities between the country of birth and death, the act of burial serves as a means to assert belonging, attachment, and perhaps even loyalty to a particular group, nation, or place" (Balkan 121). Which is precisely the reason why sovereignty occupies itself with the question of the burial in the first place; to localize remains amounts to acknowledging and even asserting one's political claim to a specific territory. There is no politics that is not a politics of death, amongst other things, and "no politics without an organization of the time and space of mourning, without a topolitology of the sepulcher," as Derrida contends in

Aporias (61). It is the grave, always the grave; the sepulchral monument that bears witness to the presence of what is absent; of what is in the process of disappearing leaving behind no trace other than a memory and a name—the name that is engraved across the gravestone and which, although unable to adequately stabilize, arrest, speak for and contain one's identity in life—and the migrant's hybrid and mobile identity in particular—promises to do so in death. The burial, therefore, of Parvaiz's body in a British cemetery besides that of his long-lost mother bears within it the potentiality of further reinforcing the entire family's attachment to the British soil they tread, a potentiality which, in turn, will render the debate surrounding the siblings' right to citizenship even more absurd. Karamat has no right to banish Parvaiz to a land which he considers to be "a dumping ground for [his country's] unwanted corpses" (209) or force Aneeka to be British "outside Britain" (230). It is not with strangers or visitors that he is dealing, but with British nationals who are entitled to the same rights he himself enjoys. This is why dispossession necessarily precedes exile in *Home Fire*. Neither Aneeka nor Parvaiz can be denied access to their native soil, their one and only native soil, unless they are stripped of the right that confers upon them rights—their citizenship, that is. Unable, though, as she is at the end of the day to find justice in an otherwise lawful and law-abiding state in whose prestigious institutions she herself pursues a career in law enforcement, Aneeka flies all the way to Karachi, Pakistan to continue her protest. Covering her brother's corpse in flowers, leaving only his face unburied, she sits patiently besides him waiting—in vain—for the world around them to change.

Speaking, however, of the world and crossing the border to the other side of the line, in the adjacent state of Afghanistan, there is yet another disrespected corpse that demands to be addressed—that of Nizam's brother. Disabled and in constant pain, yet propelling herself on a wooden cart and ignoring "everything except the fact of [her] being [there]," the young Afghani woman that arrives outside the American military outpost seeks nothing more and nothing less than a proper burial for her brother's dead body, performed "according to the tenets of [her] faith" (6). This reference in *The Watch*—whose implications extend to Shamsie's novel as well—frames the question of the burial within a cultural context that departs from that of classical Greece as much as it distances itself from the Christian and Protestant funerary traditions of the West. And this very context is the only thing, perhaps, that accounts for Nizam's extraordinary actions. For, contrary to the reductive and very uninformed American perception that is dominant amongst the inhabitants of the base, namely that there are indeed certain

Muslim tribes in the Kandahar province that “refuse to go through with a burial until a full week has passed (92) and, despite the regional, ethnic, cultural and sectarian unevennesses and variations that introduce heterogeneity and difference within the Islamic funerary tradition itself, there are certain fundamental practices that consolidate and circumscribe the possibilities of treating a human corpse in the wake of death. The dead body has to undergo a ritual cleansing; to be thoroughly washed and shrouded, buried without a coffin and always facing the Qibla in Mecca. As for the time of the Islamic burial, it is always now; it has to be performed as soon as possible and without delay, as it is believed that the soul of the deceased cannot leave the body and return to Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful according to the *Qur'an*, “until it is put into the soil” (Balkan 125). This explains, of course, why Nizam’s protests when the soldiers inform her that, instead of burying her brother’s body, they intend to fly it out to Kabul and televise it, turn it into a public spectacle and a warning against the rest of the country’s insurgents. “You can’t rob a dead man of his soul. It’s forbidden and I won’t allow it!” she exclaims (17). The prayer to be recited is none other than the one Nizam whispers while burying the rest of the fighters’ bodies she encounters in the field, the Salat al-Janazah which, in being a Salat prayer, is deemed mandatory (6).⁶ Not performing, attending or participating in it is a sin and a sin that befalls not the individual, but the entire community that has collectively refused to offer this last rite to the deceased.⁷ Nobody, however, is obliged to attend an Islamic funeral, provided, at the same time, that *somebody* does—not necessarily a friend or a relative, but simply a human being prepared to offer the dead the respect he/she would offer the living. Burial, to put it simply then, in both novels is not a ritual, but a duty, a duty that goes well beyond duty, exceeds its own name, and arrives in the form of responsibility towards the other—the dead other who is by definition incapable of returning the kind words or gestures of which he/she is the recipient. It is hospitality, in short; an exercise in offering and forgiveness that puts on trial the souls not of the dead, but of the living, and measures the inhumanity of the self and not the other. And an exercise in which the American soldiers and their Captain collectively fail in the last pages of *The Watch* where the relay between hospitality and absolution is firmly established the moment Nizam decides to reciprocate the American Captain’s one and only gesture of kindness. Notwithstanding their initial fear and suspicion, as the narrative unfolds, the American soldiers find it hard to remain impervious to the girl’s presence outside their base, which increasingly begins “affecting” and even moving their hearts and minds (278). As they see her patiently waiting for the Captain to return to her her own brother’s corpse and

as they listen to the melodious sounds wafting out of her rabab, the young soldiers find themselves confronted with their “legal and ethical obligation to give her care” (273). In the face of this face they do not see, they discover themselves all over again. Some of them even begin to ruminate on and critically rethink the terms of their own enlistment, of their own relation to guns and violence. Compassion, therefore, and not disdain, a sense of shared humanity and not of unbridgeable, irreconcilable divide is the force that seems to eventually prevail as one moves towards the end of the novel. Until, of course, the moment Nizam decides to reciprocate the Captain’s one and only gesture of kindness as he approaches her with his interpreter, Masood, to renegotiate the terms of her stay. For, although unyieldingly refusing to return Yusuf’s dead body to her and momentarily succumbing to the temptation of being human, the Captain ensures that she is given some food and water to make it through the night as she waits for his verdict. In exchange for this gift and following her own “traditions of hospitality,” Nizam chooses a lamb from the herd that was looking for pasture nearby and slaughters it as an offering (30-31). Alarmed, nevertheless, by the sudden movement of the knife and faithful to the Captain’s orders, one of the snipers that was watching over from a distance to ensure that the girl was not going to harm the Command pulled his trigger causing a “bright red explosion where [Nizam’s] heart used to be” (309). It is only the interpreter, Masood, who is himself an Afghani that disconsolately asks: “Why did you kill her, Comandan Saab? The lamb was her gift to you. We were to feast on it tonight. It is a part of our culture” (310). What is significant in this scene is not so much the offering that takes the form of a sacrificial slaughter—food and eating, after all, are the two tropes most commonly associated with hospitality as a praxis, and with Islamic hospitality in particular.⁸ Rather, it is the animal itself which Nizam chooses to sacrifice that makes here all the difference. Besides innocence, the unfortunate lamb whose blood Nizam spills right before she herself drops dead is evocative of an entire Islamic tradition whose significations exceed the limits of Roy-Bhattacharya’s novel. Every year, on the eve of Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifices which celebrates Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God’s command, Muslims traditionally sacrifice lambs in a ritual devoted to the dead and to their memory.⁹ It is a sacrifice that is more than a sacrifice, an act of remembrance and commemoration during which, on the eve of the second most celebrated Islamic holiday, the dead are embraced by the living. As if forgiving the unforgivable and seeking pardon not only for her dead brother, but for the American soldiers too, through this gesture of Pashtun hospitality Nizam seems to be willing to

absolve her own brother's killers—gesturing here to yet another aspect of Islamic juridico-political history and tradition. Taking a life amounts, according to the *Qur'an*, to murder, a crime for which the perpetrator is tried according to the law, running the risk of being sentenced to capital punishment. It is not the court, though, that passes the verdict, but the immediate family members and relatives of the victim, who have the last word and the power to absolve the defendant. To forgive, that is, the perpetrator, let him/her live with a burdened consciousness and be judged by no other than Allah, willingly escaping thus a rather vicious circle of violence and bloodbath.

Hospitality and forgiveness, therefore, on the one hand, death and murder on the other: this is how *The Watch* ends—with a profound unsettling of established categories, fixed notions and ideas, unchallenged truths and uncontroversial values. The beast and not the sovereign approximates humanity in the novel; the girl and not the servicemen possesses the grace it takes for her to remain true to her ethics and show the American soldiers the respect she demands for both herself and her brother's corpse. As Berala at some point says to his fellow soldiers: "She's a real insurgente, man... I mean, she ain't like the other squinters... She give the place a face" (292). The true rebel is not the one who raises hell, then, who kills and rapes, wounds and destroys, picks up a gun and devotes him/herself to the arduous task of creating lifelong enemies, but the one who "gives the place a face." A face that humanizes what is alien and foreign to oneself, that returns the gaze of the beholder and gives the commandment "thou shalt not kill" (Levinas 87). And it is this face that is at stake in both contemporary novels and the classical text, perhaps; this face from which "we have been turned away," as Judith Butler remarks—following Emmanuel Levinas—in the final pages of *Precarious Life* (150). This face that makes its advances and solicits a response—a response that, when responsibly given, always awakens the self to "what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself" as it carves its calculations across the incalculable lines and creases that map the complexion of the Other—of every other (132).

Notes

¹ Derrida's *Athens, Still Remains* is definitely the text which, although not directly referred to, informs this reading of the grave in its entirety (see particularly Stills I-III).

² See *Odyssey*, Book 1, lines 123-4, "παρ' ἅμμι φιλήσεται."

³ Since the tragedy was initially staged in classical Athens, though, it is worth mentioning that to the average Athenian Creon was not entirely wrong. In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides clearly mentions that "it [was] against the law to bury in Attica the bones of one who has been exiled for treason" (1.138.6), while Xenophon in his *Hellenica* further attests to this thorn of the ideal Athenian democracy: "if anyone shall be traitor to the state," he writes, "...he shall not be buried in Attica, and his property shall be confiscated" (1.7.22).

⁴ See Roberto Esposito's *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* where he extensively discusses the alliance between biology and sovereignty, and investigates the relay between the body physical and the body politic, both of which are in dire need of sovereign protection.

⁵ Although the word "jihad" and its derivatives have extensively suffered the wounds of decontextualization in Western media ever since al-Qaeda adopted the term and shamelessly transformed it into a justification for the killing of innocents, I deliberately avoid this term here. I side with scholars like Sayed Amin instead, who, in his book *Reclaiming Jihad*, meticulously reads the word within the complexity of its Qur'anic context, offering one of the most rigorous and informed critiques of terrorism I have read to this day.

⁶ See Leor Halevi's comprehensive account on Islamic funerary tradition and burial rites in *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*.

⁷ See Sheikh Ramzy's *Complete Guide to Islamic Prayer*, p. 288.

⁸ See Mona Siddiqui's *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God's Name*.

⁹ I cannot overstate my debt for these remarks to Imam Serif Damadoglou Sioukri, who had the kindness to discuss and think with me the ending of this novel. My reading of the final scene is entirely informed by his valuable insights and vast erudition.

CONCLUSION

“All minds quote,” they quote indeed. As if determined to reaffirm the validity of Emerson’s contention, this is, perhaps, what both contemporary novels have to teach us. By necessity, by proclivity and by delight, we all quote. Yet to borrow the words and thoughts of another is no easy task. Quotation and appropriation are as difficult as invention itself. Which is precisely why a “writer’s genius,” as Emerson remarks in his essay on “Quotation and Originality,” is bound to always declare itself at the margin; at the very juncture, that is, between what one “selects” and what one “originates,” at the border that stands, thin and porous, in between what a writer composes and what he/she is him/herself composed of, the form and language he/she inherits and the one he/she bequeaths (551). And this thesis holds, by all means, true for both contemporary novelists discussed above. Their decision to return to the classics and to Sophocles’s *Antigone* in particular bespeaks their ingenuity. For it is neither fortuitous nor unintentional. Both Shamsie and Roy- Bhattacharya deliberately resort to the storehouse of tradition—and of the Western canonical tradition—for that matter, which begins, for better or for worse, with the Greeks. And it is the Greeks that matter to them, after all, as they matter to numerous other novelists and artists who are willing to put on trial and contest the origins of Europe that stretch back to this tradition, which, in all of its monumentality and glory, differentiated itself by its barbarian others “in self-privileging ways that forged what has proved to be the template for a primal scene of identity politics and cultural essentialism” (Kadir 4). Excavating the past for the sake of the future, both contemporary novelists conjure the specter, or rather specters of *Antigone* in the plural, and invite the pre-digital and pre-technoscientific world of the polis into the global space of the ever-expanding, but increasingly shrinking world of the twenty-first century on purpose. Through their rewriting, or rather, counterwriting¹ of *Antigone*, they shift the focus to other peoples, languages and cultures, to experiences by definition excluded from the formation of the so-called literary canon. They revisit the origins only to queer them, and to suggest, perhaps, that there is no here without a there, no home without an away, no day without the night, no civilization without barbarity, and no belonging to either a nation-state or humanity at large without the foreigner and the disadvantaged, the migrant and the refugee, the exile, the displaced and the dispossessed whose claim to the very “right to have rights” within a territory that is not his/her own is disrespected and dismissively rebuffed (Arden, *Origins* 296). In creating, nevertheless, throughout their works, not simply adaptations, but two rather

intricate narrative pastiches composed of quotations, articles and poems, personal accounts and diary notes, different forms of writing that are all used to pass (hi)stories on, both Shamsie and Roy- Bhattacharya queer not only the origins of the Eurocentric tradition of the classics, but the very genre of the novel as well. They create novels that are anything but novels. Defying the “classificatory” and “genealogical-taxonomic” law of the genre (Derrida, “Law” 61), they refuse to “respect [the] norm” or to abstain from crossing “the line of demarcation” that separates one genre from another, and unhesitatingly risk “impurity, anomaly,” and “monstrosity” (57). A monstrosity which—like Antigone’s—reveals nothing more and nothing less than the fact that there is “lodged within the heart of the law itself,” of the law as law and of the law of the genre in particular, a certain “principle of contamination,” of perversity and adulteration that overwhelms language and breaks out of the margins of the page (57). And it is this principle; this very principle and not another that is worth keeping from both novels; this principle that promises, word by word, to do justice to both the traitor and the girl, to the corpse and its defender, and by extension to the genre itself. But to the genre not as text, but as human—a genre deeply flawed and heterogeneous, worldly and finite, but, at the same time, dedicated to itself and its generic principles, always already exposed and vulnerable to the risk of infinite (im)possibility, but also—and like Sophocles’s protagonist herself—truly, madly, and infinitely “in love with the (im)possible” (Sophocles 90).

Notes

¹ See footnote 14 in the first section of this dissertation “Antigone, Unveiled.”

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Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία μελετά τους τρόπους μέσα από τους οποίους δυο σύγχρονα μυθιστορήματα, το *Home Fire* της Kamila Shamsie (2017) και το *The Watch* του Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya (2012), επιστρέφουν στην *Αντιγόνη* του Σοφοκλή σε μία προσπάθεια να μεταφράσουν ορισμένα από τα ηθικά διλήμματα και τις εσωτερικές αντιφάσεις της τραγωδίας στην ιδιωματική διάλεκτο ενός ανεπίστρεπτα παγκοσμιοποιημένου και αλληλεξαρτώμενου κόσμου. Θέτοντας τα δυο μυθιστορήματα μέσα σε ένα συγκριτικό πλαίσιο το οποίο περιστρέφεται γύρω από μια θεματικά αναπτυγμένη ανάγνωση των δυο σύγχρονων αφηγημάτων σε σχέση με το κλασσικό κείμενο, και βασιζόμενη σε παραπάνω από μια θεωρίες, αυτή η εργασία είναι χωρισμένη σε τρία μέρη. Κάθε μέρος είναι δομημένο γύρω από μια θεματική η οποία συνδέει τα δυο μυθιστορήματα τόσο με το κείμενο του Σοφοκλή όσο και μεταξύ τους. Το πρώτο μέρος, διαρθρωμένο γύρω από τη θεματική του φωτός, μελετά τη σύνδεση ανάμεσα στην ενσώματη διαφορά, την πολιτική και την όραση όπως αυτή εδραιώνεται στα τρία κείμενα που εξετάζονται εδώ, και προτείνει μια ανάγνωση της «τερατώδους» απόκλισης της *Αντιγόνης* από τις κοινωνικές και πολιτισμικές νόρμες της Θηβαϊκής πολιτείας σε σχέση με το Ισλαμικό πέπλο που φορούν οι σύγχρονες πρωταγωνίστριες και στο *Home Fire* και στο *The Watch*. Το δεύτερο μέρος, που καθιστά το θεματικό πέρασμα από το φως στο σκοτάδι, επικεντρώνεται όχι τόσο στη διαφορά και αντιγνωμία της *Αντιγόνης*, αλλά στην αντίδραση του βασιλιά Κρέοντα και στον τρόπο που εκείνος διαχειρίζεται την παράβαση του νόμου από την ανιψιά του. Προτείνοντας μια ανάγνωση της φυλάκισης της *Αντιγόνης* ως μιας πράξης «ενωτικής βίας» η οποία και θέτει αλλά και προστατεύει τα θεμέλια της κυρίαρχης εξουσίας, ανάγοντας την τελευταία σε παράδειγμα προς μίμηση, το δεύτερο μέρος μελετά πως οι δυο σύγχρονοι συγγραφείς θίγουν, μέσα από το αρχαίο κείμενο, το ζήτημα της επικράτησης της Δύσης ως το κατεξοχήν «παράδειγμα» το οποίο κάθε άλλη εθνική, πολιτισμική, γλωσσική, ή θρησκευτική μειονότητα οφείλει να ακολουθήσει. Τέλος, το τρίτο και τελευταίο μέρος, δομημένο γύρω από τη θεματική της φιλίας, επικεντρώνεται κυρίως στο ζήτημα της ταφής, το οποίο και συσχετίζει με τα ερωτήματα της αγάπης, της μνήμης, του θανάτου, της πολιτικής, της συγχώρεσης και της φιλοξενίας, ερωτήματα που, αν και μείζονος σημασίας στο κλασσικό κείμενο, αποκτούν νέες διαστάσεις στις δύο σύγχρονες μετεγγραφές της *Αντιγόνης*.