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## A Diasporic Reading of Radicalization, Citizenship, and Surveillance in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire

**Afshan Naseem \***

Independent Researcher

[afshannaseem296@gmail.com](mailto:afshannaseem296@gmail.com)

**Shaina Iqbal**

PST

[iqbal.shaina7@gmail.com](mailto:iqbal.shaina7@gmail.com)

**Sumiya Rashid Komal**

Independent Researcher

[sumiyarashid125@gmail.com](mailto:sumiyarashid125@gmail.com)

**Tanzila Shabbir**

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Narowal, Narowal

[Orian.honey@gmail.com](mailto:Orian.honey@gmail.com)

**\* Corresponding Author**

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### ABSTRACT

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), a contemporary reworking of Sophocles *Antigone*, is most often read within British political, feminist, and postcolonial frameworks. However, this article argues that the novel also offers a subtle but powerful critique of American national identity as constructed through post-9/11 security discourse, global surveillance regimes, and transnational counterterrorism ideologies. Although the narrative is geographically situated in the United Kingdom, its ideological terrain is unmistakably shaped by U.S. led "War on Terror" paradigms that extend beyond national borders. Drawing on Transnational American Studies, diaspora theory, and surveillance studies, this article examines how *Home Fire* exposes the global reach of American security logic and its effects on Muslim diasporic identities. By reading the novel through an American-inflected lens, this study expands the scope of American Studies beyond territorial boundaries and demonstrates how U.S. political imaginaries shape contemporary global fiction.

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This expanded reading positions *Home Fire* as part of a growing body of transnational post-9/11 literature in which American power operates not through direct representation, but through diffuse ideological influence. The novel illustrates how American security discourse has become a global epistemology one that determines who is considered grievable, governable, and disposable. In doing so, *Home Fire* offers a critique not only of state violence but of the moral architecture underpinning contemporary liberal democracies shaped by U.S. hegemonic norms.

**Keywords:** American identity, diaspora, surveillance, post-9/11 literature, Kamila Shamsie, transnational studies

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## INTRODUCTION

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a decisive shift in global political, cultural, and literary discourse. While the attacks occurred on American soil, the consequences of the U.S.-led “War on Terror” reverberated far beyond national borders, reshaping immigration policies, surveillance infrastructures, and public perceptions of Muslim identities worldwide. Literature emerging in the post-9/11 era increasingly reflects these globalized anxieties, often interrogating how American power operates transnationally.

Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* (2017) occupies a critical position within this literary landscape. A modern retelling of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the novel explores themes of loyalty, state authority, family, and moral resistance. Although the narrative is primarily set in Britain, its engagement with issues of radicalization, citizenship revocation, and surveillance reflects ideological frameworks strongly influenced by American counterterror discourse.

This article argues that *Home Fire* functions as a diasporic critique of American identity, revealing how U.S. security ideologies shape global governance and the lived experiences of Muslim diasporas. By examining the novel through a transnational American Studies lens, this study challenges nation-bound approaches to American identity and highlights the global circulation of U.S. political power.

Importantly, this article does not claim that *Home Fire* represents the United States directly. Rather, it argues that American identity in the post-9/11 era is best understood as a mobile ideological system, reproduced through allied states, legal harmonization, and shared counterterror vocabularies. The United Kingdom’s policies on citizenship deprivation, border policing, and counter-extremism function as localized expressions of a broader American-origin security paradigm. Literature such as *Home Fire* thus becomes a critical site for examining how American national imaginaries are translated into global norms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITICAL CONTEXT

Scholarly engagement with *Home Fire* has largely focused on three primary areas: feminist reinterpretations of classical tragedy, Muslim identity in Britain, and postcolonial resistance to state power. Critics have praised Shamsie’s nuanced

portrayal of British Muslim life and her interrogation of gendered and racialized citizenship.

However, this emphasis on the British context has resulted in a critical gap. While the novel is undeniably rooted in UK politics, it also reflects broader geopolitical structures, particularly those shaped by American dominance in global security governance. Scholars such as Claire Chambers and Aamir Mufti have noted the transnational dimensions of contemporary Anglophone fiction, yet few studies explicitly situate *Home Fire* within American Studies.

Post-9/11 literary scholarship, including works by Richard Gray and Kristiaan Versluys, demonstrates how American trauma narratives have influenced global literature. At the same time, surveillance theorists such as Michel Foucault and David Lyon emphasize that modern surveillance operates through transnational networks rather than isolated nation states. *Home Fire* intersects these discourses, portraying Muslim diasporic subjects caught within security regimes that are American in origin but global in execution.

This article addresses this gap by repositioning *Home Fire* as a text that critiques American identity indirectly through its globalized manifestations.

This article builds upon and extends existing criticism by arguing that the absence of an explicit American Studies framework in *Home Fire* scholarship reflects a broader disciplinary hesitation to decenter the nation-state. By reading *Home Fire* as an American Studies text, this study contributes to recent calls within the field to move beyond U.S. exceptionalism and toward analyses of American power as relational, networked, and deterritorialized.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Transnational American Studies**

Transnational American Studies challenges the idea of American identity as territorially confined. Instead, it conceptualizes “America” as a set of circulating ideas, policies, and cultural logics that operate globally. Scholars such as Shelley Fisher Fishkin argue that American Studies must examine how U.S. power is produced and contested beyond its borders.

Applying this framework allows *Home Fire* to be read as an American text without being an American novel. The U.S. appears not as a physical location, but as an ideological force shaping global security narratives.

This approach aligns with contemporary scholarship that understands empire not as formal territorial control but as ideological governance. American identity, in this sense, is reproduced through discourses of freedom, security, and democracy that justify exceptional violence. *Home Fire* exposes the contradictions embedded within these discourses, particularly when they are applied to racialized and religious minorities.

#### **Diaspora Theory**

Diaspora theory emphasizes displacement, hybridity, and the negotiation of belonging. Stuart Hall and Avtar Brah argue that diasporic identities are shaped not only by host nations but also by global power structures. In *Home Fire*, Muslim

diasporic youth experience identity formation under constant suspicion, a condition intensified by post-9/11 American security paradigms.

Diaspora in *Home Fire* is not merely a condition of migration but a state of permanent conditionality. Belonging is always provisional, subject to revocation by legal and ideological mechanisms rooted in transnational security logic. This reflects what scholars describe as the racialization of citizenship in the post-9/11 world.

### **Surveillance Theory**

Surveillance theorists such as Foucault and Lyon describe surveillance as a mechanism of power that disciplines subjects through visibility and fear. In the post-9/11 world, surveillance has become racialized, disproportionately targeting Muslim bodies. *Home Fire* dramatizes this reality through depictions of interrogations, data monitoring, and state control over citizenship.

The novel illustrates how surveillance operates effectively as well as institutionally. Fear, self-censorship, and internalized suspicion shape the characters' everyday lives, revealing surveillance as a psychological as well as political technology.

### **Necropolitics and the Racialization of Security**

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding the logic of power operating in *Home Fire*. Necropolitics extends Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics by emphasizing the sovereign power to decide who may live and who must die, particularly under conditions of war, occupation, and racialized governance. In the post-9/11 global order, necropolitical power is exercised through counterterror regimes that authorize pre-emptive violence, legal exclusion, and the suspension of rights.

In *Home Fire*, necropolitics manifests through the state's control over Muslim bodies both in life and in death. Parvaiz's trajectory from surveillance to radicalization to symbolic erasure illustrates how the Muslim subject is positioned as a potentially killable body, even without direct violence. His exclusion from national mourning, legal recognition, and burial rights demonstrates what Mbembe describes as the creation of "death worlds," spaces where certain populations exist in a state of social death.

Crucially, this necropolitical logic is not uniquely British. It is deeply rooted in American post-9/11 counterterror doctrine, which normalized drone warfare, extrajudicial killing, and the classification of enemies as ungrievable. *Home Fire* exposes how this logic is exported globally, shaping allied legal systems and redefining citizenship as a revocable status contingent upon racialized loyalty.

By foregrounding necropolitics, the novel critiques the moral foundations of American security ideology, revealing how liberal democratic states reconcile claims of human rights with practices of systematic exclusion. The diasporic Muslim subject becomes the site where these contradictions are most violently enacted.

### **Legal Violence, Citizenship Revocation, and the State of Exception**

Giorgio Agamben's theory of the state of exception offers another critical framework for interpreting *Home Fire*. Agamben argues that modern sovereignty

increasingly operates through the suspension of law, producing spaces where legal norms are selectively applied or withdrawn altogether. In the post-9/11 era, counterterror legislation has normalized the state of exception, particularly in relation to Muslim populations.

Citizenship revocation in *Home Fire* exemplifies this legal violence. The withdrawal of Parvaiz's citizenship is presented not as an extraordinary act but as a bureaucratically justified necessity. This normalization reflects American legal precedents established after 9/11, including indefinite detention, material support laws, and the expansion of executive power under the guise of national security.

The novel demonstrates how the state of exception becomes permanent for racialized subjects. Muslim citizens exist in a condition of conditional legality, where rights can be suspended retroactively based on perceived ideological deviance. This mirrors American practices such as no-fly lists, watchlists, and extraterritorial detention, which operate outside conventional judicial oversight.

Importantly, *Home Fire* reveals that legal violence does not require overt brutality. The quiet administrative act of citizenship stripping functions as a form of sovereign punishment that removes individuals from the political community altogether. By dramatizing this process, Shamsie exposes how American influenced legal regimes transform law itself into an instrument of exclusion rather than protection.

### **Orientalism, Media, and the Production of the “Radicalized” Subject**

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism remains indispensable for understanding the cultural logic underpinning radicalization narratives in *Home Fire*. Orientalism describes how Western knowledge systems construct the East and, particularly, Muslims as irrational, violent, and inherently threatening. In the post-9/11 context, Orientalism has been reactivated through security discourse, media representation, and counterterror expertise.

*Home Fire* illustrates how the figure of the “radicalized Muslim” is produced through overlapping institutional narratives rather than individual pathology. Parvaiz's radicalization is not portrayed as ideological fanaticism but as the outcome of alienation, surveillance, and narrative capture. Media portrayals, intelligence classifications, and political rhetoric converge to fix his identity as a security threat long before his actions fully materialize.

This process reflects American post-9/11 media culture, where Muslim identities are frequently reduced to symbols of danger. News cycles, policy briefings, and popular culture reproduce simplified narratives that erase structural violence and foreground individual culpability. Shamsie's novel resists this logic by restoring interiority, hesitation, and moral ambiguity to characters who would otherwise be flattened into stereotypes.

By engaging Orientalism within a contemporary security framework, *Home Fire* demonstrates how cultural representation functions as a form of surveillance. The novel critiques not only the state's coercive power but also the epistemic violence through which American identity is secured by producing racialized Others.

## **American Identity and the Global War on Terror**

American national identity in the post-9/11 era has been defined through binaries of security versus threat, patriotism versus dissent, and citizenship versus exclusion. These binaries are not confined to U.S. borders; they structure international counterterror practices and influence allied nations' policies.

In *Home Fire*, characters such as Isma and Parvaiz navigate a world where Muslim identity is pre-coded as suspicious. Their experiences reflect what scholars describe as the "American gaze" a security oriented perspective that categorizes individuals based on perceived ideological risk.

The "American gaze" functions as a form of epistemic authority, determining which lives are intelligible and which are disposable. Through this gaze, Muslim diasporic subjects are rendered permanently legible to the state yet denied full political recognition. *Home Fire* exposes how such categorization erodes the liberal promise of equal citizenship.

The novel exposes how American narratives of national security become global common sense, shaping how states justify extraordinary measures such as citizenship stripping and border exclusions.

### **Surveillance, Citizenship, and the Muslim Diaspora**

One of the most striking aspects of *Home Fire* is its portrayal of surveillance as an everyday reality. Airports, digital records, and intelligence agencies function as extensions of a global monitoring system. These practices echo U.S.-driven counterterror strategies such as no-fly lists and biometric data collection.

Citizenship in the novel is portrayed as conditional rather than inherent. This reflects American post-9/11 policies that redefined citizenship as contingent upon ideological loyalty. Parvaiz's radicalization and subsequent exclusion demonstrate how the state exercises sovereign power over life and death, echoing Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life."

Through these narratives, Shamsie critiques the moral logic underpinning American-influenced security regimes. The withdrawal of citizenship operates as a form of symbolic death, rendering the individual outside the protection of law. *Home Fire* reveals how this practice transforms citizenship from a right into a revocable privilege, exposing the fragility of liberal democratic ideals under security pressure.

### **Reimagining *Antigone* in a Post-9/11 World**

Sophocles' *Antigone* centers on the conflict between state law and moral obligation. *Home Fire* reimagines this conflict within a post-9/11 context, where the state's authority is justified through the language of counterterrorism.

Aneeka's insistence on burying her brother becomes an act of resistance against a state that denies Muslim bodies dignity in death. This mirrors how American security discourse dehumanizes perceived enemies, rendering them ungrievable.

By aligning Aneeka with Antigone, Shamsie reclaims moral resistance as a feminine and diasporic act. This challenges masculinist narratives of security and

war that dominate post-9/11 political discourse, particularly those rooted in American exceptionalism.

By reworking *Antigone*, Shamsie exposes how classical narratives of power and resistance remain relevant in an era dominated by American security ideology.

### **Gender, Grief, and Political Resistance**

Gender plays a crucial role in *Home Fire's* critique of security culture. Women in the novel bear the emotional and ethical consequences of state violence, yet their forms of resistance are often dismissed as irrational or sentimental. Aneeka's grief becomes politicized, exposing how affect is regulated under security regimes.

This gendered dynamic mirrors post-9/11 American discourse, where emotional expression by marginalized subjects is frequently delegitimized, while state violence is rationalized as necessary and objective. Shamsie thus foregrounds the politics of grief as a site of resistance.

### **Implications for American Studies**

Reading *Home Fire* through an American Studies lens expands the field's scope and challenges methodological nationalism. It demonstrates that American identity is produced not only within the U.S. but also through its global influence.

This approach underscores the need for American Studies to engage with non-American texts that critique U.S. power structures. In doing so, it enriches interdisciplinary conversations about literature, politics, and globalization.

This reading supports a reorientation of American Studies toward global accountability. By engaging with texts like *Home Fire*, the field can better address how American power shapes lives far beyond its borders, particularly those of racialized and diasporic communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has argued that Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* must be read not only as a British Muslim narrative or a feminist reworking of Sophocles *Antigone*, but as a transnational critique of American identity as it has been reconstituted through post-9/11 security discourse. While the novel is geographically located in the United Kingdom, its ideological architecture is unmistakably shaped by U.S.-led counterterrorism paradigms that circulate globally through legal, political, and cultural systems. By situating *Home Fire* within Transnational American Studies, this article has demonstrated how American power operates beyond territorial boundaries, shaping lives, identities, and forms of belonging across the diaspora.

Drawing on diaspora theory, the analysis has shown that Muslim identity in *Home Fire* is structured by permanent conditionality. Belonging is never secure but continuously negotiated under the pressure of racialized suspicion. Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz inhabit a world in which citizenship is not an inherent right but a fragile status contingent upon ideological conformity. This condition reflects the broader post-9/11 transformation of citizenship within American political discourse, where loyalty is securitized and dissent real or imagined becomes grounds for

exclusion. Shamsie's portrayal of diasporic life thus exposes how American national identity is reproduced globally through mechanisms that destabilize minority belonging while reaffirming state authority.

Surveillance theory further illuminates how power functions in the novel not merely through coercion but through visibility, anticipation, and self-discipline. Airports, intelligence agencies, databases, and media narratives operate as nodes within a transnational surveillance apparatus that mirrors American security infrastructures developed after 9/11. Surveillance in *Home Fire* is not episodic; it is ambient, shaping the characters' affective states and everyday decisions. This normalization of surveillance reflects the internalization of American security logic, whereby Muslim subjects are compelled to monitor themselves in anticipation of state scrutiny. The novel thus critiques the psychological and ethical costs of a world governed by perpetual suspicion.

The incorporation of necropolitical theory deepens this critique by revealing how sovereignty in the post-9/11 order is exercised through the management of death rather than life. Parvaiz's exclusion from legal recognition and burial rights exemplifies what Achille Mbembe identifies as the production of "death worlds," spaces where certain populations are rendered socially dead even before physical death occurs. This necropolitical logic, rooted in American counterterror practices such as drone warfare and extrajudicial killing, is shown to extend into civilian life through symbolic erasure and legal abandonment. *Home Fire* exposes how liberal democracies reconcile claims of human rights with practices that systematically dehumanize racialized subjects.

Similarly, Agamben's concept of the state of exception clarifies how legal violence operates in the novel. Citizenship revocation functions as a normalized instrument of governance rather than an extraordinary measure, reflecting American post-9/11 legal precedents that expand executive power under the guise of security. In *Home Fire*, the law does not protect the Muslim citizen; it actively produces vulnerability by suspending rights selectively. This transformation of law into an instrument of exclusion underscores the erosion of democratic norms within American-influenced security regimes and reveals the fragility of legal protections in times of crisis.

Orientalism provides the final critical lens through which the novel's engagement with radicalization and media representation can be understood. Shamsie resists dominant post-9/11 narratives that frame Muslim subjects as inherently violent or ideologically predisposed to extremism. Instead, *Home Fire* reveals radicalization as a discursively produced condition, shaped by alienation, surveillance, and epistemic violence. Media narratives and security expertise function as cultural technologies that fix Muslim identity within a narrow framework of threat. By restoring interiority and moral complexity to her characters, Shamsie challenges the Orientalist foundations of American security discourse and exposes how cultural representation itself becomes a form of surveillance.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives reveal *Home Fire* as a powerful

indictment of American identity in its globalized form. The novel demonstrates that American power today is not exercised primarily through territorial dominance but through ideological saturation the widespread adoption of security logics that normalize exclusion, legal exceptionalism, and racialized governance. By tracing how these logics shape diasporic lives in Britain, *Home Fire* makes visible the global consequences of American political imaginaries.

This reading carries significant implications for American Studies as a discipline. It challenges methodological nationalism and calls for an expanded field attentive to the transnational circulation of American power. Non-American texts like *Home Fire* are not peripheral to American Studies; they are essential to understanding how American identity is constructed, contested, and lived worldwide. Literature becomes a critical archive through which the ethical and human costs of security driven governance can be examined.

Ultimately, *Home Fire* offers a counter narrative to post-9/11 American exceptionalism. Through its diasporic perspective, feminist ethics, and reworking of classical tragedy, the novel insists on the primacy of moral obligation over state violence. It reminds readers that security, when detached from justice, produces not safety but disposability. In exposing the contradictions at the heart of American led global governance, *Home Fire* affirms the enduring power of literature to challenge dominant political imaginaries and to reimagine more ethical forms of belonging in an age of permanent war.

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