

This is a repository copy of *Sound and Fury : Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/132665/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Article:**

Chambers, Claire Gail [orcid.org/0000-0001-8996-4129](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8996-4129) (2018) *Sound and Fury : Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire*. *Massachusetts Review*. 3. pp. 202-219. ISSN 0025-4878

---

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## Sound and Fury: Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

IN 2017 KAMILA SHAMSIE published *Home Fire*, a novel that deals with radicalization from the standpoint of this complex and violent second decade of the twenty-first century. As my title suggests, this article explores the novel's leitmotifs of sound and fury. It also considers whether we need to "listen to"—while simultaneously refusing to condone—jihadists. Tropes of noise and violence pierce Shamsie's *Home Fire* at regular intervals. The Pakistani novelist listens to others, to individuals who are usually unattended to: most notably, radicalized subjects.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is my main influence in adopting this auditory line of inquiry. She famously inquired whether the subaltern could speak, but less well known than her work on speech is her examination of listening. For example, in one interview she tells her interlocutor, Sneja Gunew: "For me, the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?'" (59). Almost two decades later, in the essay "Terror: A Speech After 9/11" (2004), Spivak again frames her argument in acoustic terms, writing about the importance of listening to others even when they have committed acts of terror. In part building on Spivak's research, a substantial "politics of listening" oeuvre is developing. I aim to show that applying sound studies research to literature relates productively to sociological and political matters. Shamsie's novel implicitly focuses on the relationship between the textual and the sonic, asking the urgent question: Can the oppressor listen?

This article argues that the author also sets up a pairing of sound and text, for example by deploying (inter-)textuality to advance the novel's relationship with sound. This relationship between the textual and sonic is foundational. It helps to think about both constituents in relation to listening, communication, speaking, access to representation, and reception—upon which much of my discussion pivots. *Home Fire* is deeply concerned with texts: sacred texts and secular texts, texting, online texts, and the various typographies of texts. Text and sound are twin currents running throughout the novel. My argument about sound and its differ-

ent forms therefore links this theme to literature, as well as to various kinds of torture, violence, and radicalization.

Melissa Dearey argues that “radicalization” is a word that has become central in policy making, but which is insufficiently theorized or understood:

In place of a definition, . . . the assumption appears to be that everyone knows [radicalization] when they see it, and so we are able to proceed with the tasks in hand while awaiting further conceptual clarification. Despite our admitted lack of understanding of radicalization, it has emerged as a concept that has displayed substantial “epistemological creep” into contemporary discourses about freedom, security, identity, crime and deviance. (1)

She argues that radicalization—if such a term is useful—is best characterized as a process through which an individual becomes increasingly convinced that society can only be improved by dramatic and sweeping change. The terms “radicalism” and “radicalization” are not inherently negative, and many different forms of radicalization exist, few of which are violent. Furthermore, radicalization is of course not a uniquely Muslim problem, as was shown in the UK by the far-right murderer of politician Jo Cox shortly before the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and by the Finsbury Park mosque attacker in June 2017. Dearey’s original contribution to the contested category of radicalization research is to examine what she describes as an “‘alternative’ and underestimated data set” (2): the life writings, often produced in prison, by people viewed as radicalized agents. While Dearey provides lucid sociological and criminological data analysis of this life writing, her literary and cultural analysis is limited by inattention to form, and I will supplement her work with my close textual analysis of Shamsie’s *Home Fire*. An attention to texts qua texts is necessary if we are to understand radicalization more fully, and I argue that fiction is uniquely placed to tune in to the radical subject’s wavelength and bandwidth. The novel has a power and a truth that nonfiction does not possess to the same degree; it is a capacious form that exceeds borders and rules. The novel is able to transcend fiction and nonfiction, and to bring together different historical periods, geographical locations, and political contexts, while all the time keeping the emphasis firmly on people.

Prior to Dearey’s intervention, attempts to explain radicalization tended to rest on three approaches: a sociological methodology, which searches for a common social background among jihadists; the psychological attempt to look for a radical personality type; and a communitarian

approach examining group dynamics. The first, sociological explanation was discredited as it emerged that the stereotype of young, brainwashed men from deeply deprived backgrounds in the poorest parts of the “Third World” did not tally with the extensive range of terrorists that exists. While some jihadists are deprived, others have been drawn into a criminal milieu, while still others again are relatively wealthy and have higher than average levels of educational attainment. Few terrorists based in Euro-America attended madrassas or had unusually religious upbringings, and many jihadists are married, often with children, rather than being the loners often identified in sociological explanations.

The psychological approach also has pitfalls, for example because there is little evidence to suggest that jihadists who work in groups (as compared with lone actors) have higher instances of mental illness than the wider population. Fanaticism often denotes not mental disorder, but deeply held belief. Even suicide bombing—the facet of terrorism with the clearest link to mental illness—forms part of this belief system. Nor is there evidence to suggest that a higher than average proportion of jihadists have experienced childhood trauma that, according to a psychoanalytic approach, might have sent them down the route of violence. This article will argue that the Muslim-identified fiction of Kamila Shamsie paradoxically sheds light on the facticity of the violent extremist’s experience, as well as the suffering he or she causes.

Instead of looking for a common social background or pathology, experts have come to view group dynamics as the primary driver of radicalization. In this regard, a contrasting theorist, Marc Sageman, is useful. Sageman’s influential book *Understanding Terror Networks*, stages the argument that friendship, kinship, and discipleship bonds play a more central role in radicalization than sociological or psychological factors. He draws on his own experience as a CIA operations officer, but also has expertise as a forensic psychiatrist. Trying to identify a personality type that might be ripe for radicalization is problematic, and Sageman instead lifts a term coined by Canadian federal authorities, who were shadowing a group plotting the unsuccessful 2000 bombing of Los Angeles International Airport. These operatives, Sageman reports, referred to the Algerian Canadian group as BOG, or “bunch of guys,” seeing them as “more pathetic than dangerous—unemployed, no girlfriends, living on welfare or thievery, and crammed into an apartment reeking of cigarette smoke” (101). He turns the BOG nickname into a theory, arguing that one cannot identify terrorists with particular personality types. Rather,

the circumstances and social bonds individuals find themselves embroiled in—especially an intense male bonding based on a shared view of religion and politics, and a desire for adventure—are what lead people to seek out jihad. Sageman concludes: “It may be more accurate to blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in-group love than out-group hate” (135). He writes cogently about the group dynamics involved in radicalization, and I will show that such interpersonal interactions exert a strong influence on the radicalization of the jihadist character in Shamsie’s novel. Sageman’s research into al-Qaeda-affiliated cells has, however, been superseded by the rise of Islamic State or Daesh. He is also hamstrung by his positivism, tendency to play down religious and political beliefs, and inability to explain why some people choose to “self-recruit” outside of groups (he only briefly discusses homesickness and cultural alienation as factors).

In a recent interview with the *Observer’s* Vanessa Thorpe, Kamila Shamsie talks of being influenced by the research of Charlie Winter, a fellow at King’s College London’s International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. Winter brings radicalization research into the age of Daesh, arguing in his 2016 report *Media Jihad* that in the 2010s, jihadists recruit through a three-pronged strategy. The first tactic, to create a “positive narrative” for Daesh (15), revolves around offering recruits a sense of group belonging and solidarity, and projecting an image of a thriving, beneficent state grounded on Sharia law and Islamic values. The second line of attack is “counterspeech” (16). Through a close reading of one Daesh publication, Winter argues that its authors “construct an existential crisis . . . that can only be resolved through the hard work of Islamic State media operatives” (16). This “existential crisis” is portrayed as the consequence of a relentless and demeaning war against the Ummah, or global population of Muslims, by Western “Crusaders” (17). For the sake of boosting morale and encouraging conscription, the document’s authors hail brave, hardworking Daesh media operatives as the only people who can thwart the Crusaders’ overthrow of the righteous. According to Winter, Daesh’s third strategy is to “deliberately weaponise . . . media coverage” (6). By this he means that the jihadists view the media as one of the most powerful missiles in their arsenal, so they use various channels to inform the public about their graphic violence against enemies and their warped version of Islam.

In another article from 2016, Winter identifies that conventional media weapons are at least as useful to Daesh as emerging, online media, especially when—as now—the Islamic State is under concerted attack

and in retreat. Winter contends that offline technologies such as radio are proving more durable than vulnerable online social media and streaming channels. “Night and day,” he observes, “the *al-Bayan Radio* station broadcasts its programs on FM frequencies from central Libya to eastern Iraq, with programs ranging from news bulletins and ‘history lessons’ to on-air *fatwas* and call-in medical clinics” (n.p.). One is reminded of Frantz Fanon’s essay “This Is the Voice of Algeria,” in which the Martinican psychiatrist described the colonizers’ radio station as “*Frenchmen speaking to Frenchmen*” (74), while characterizing Algerian freedom fighters’ radio as a “voice of the combatants” (88, 90). Along with *al-Bayan* and Algerian freedom fighters’ radio, the *génocidaires* advocating the killing of Tutsis by Hutus on Radio Rwanda and Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines come to mind. Let this brief discussion of radio propaganda serve as a promissory note for this article’s close attention to sound and voice, as we now turn to the literature.

Kamila Shamsie was born in Karachi. She lived in Pakistan, the United States, and Britain during the 1990s and 2000s, but has now chosen London as her place of residence. *Home Fire* is a literary thriller that partly unfolds in England. Yet it is impossible to contain such multilingual, well-read, and politically astute fiction within solely British locales. Shamsie is concerned with Muslims who leave their homes in Britain to join Daesh. *Home Fire* is accordingly set in five locations: London, Amherst in Massachusetts, Istanbul, Raqqa in Syria, and Karachi. Similarly, the novel’s structure echoes the five acts over which much Western drama unfolds. Accordingly, each substantial chapter is told through free indirect discourse from the perspective of one of the five major characters: a devoted sibling in her late twenties called Isma Pasha; the man she has a crush on, Pakistani-Irish-American Londoner Eamonn or Ayman; Isma’s wayward younger brother, Parvaiz; her sister and Parvaiz’s twin, Aneeka; and Eamonn’s politician father, Karamat. Despite its global sweep, this is easily Shamsie’s most “British” novel to date, with most of its action taking place on and around Preston Road in Alperton, near Wembley. Here Parvaiz experiences a crisis of masculinity precipitated in part by a fellow British Pakistani Farooq’s charming machinations that recruit him to Daesh, combined with his sisters’ decision to sell the family house against his will. The final trigger to depart for the Islamic State comes when his twin, Aneeka, does not comply with his text message begging “Please come home” (139), after he has been physically tortured in Farooq’s tawdry flat.

Readers hear a susurrus of homoeroticism between the two men and later, after Parvaiz's death, Isma says that she and Aneeka had thought his radicalization "was some kind of secret affair, his first time in love. And in a way, it was. What else explains a person being turned inside out in the space of just a few weeks?" (238). First in Britain and then in Syria, Farooq repeatedly bestows the affectionate nickname "warrior" on Parvaiz (140, 144, 158). But readers witness love's illusions falling away in Raqqa, as Parvaiz observes Farooq posturing with his chest out, in a manner that he used to find "impressive" and now thinks "ridiculous" (178). When Parvaiz escapes from Daesh's media wing and before he tries to gain entry to the British High Commission in Islamabad, Farooq sends him a text message imbuing his term of endearment with new menace: "You're a dead man, my little warrior" (166). Months earlier, in Farooq's hypermasculine apartment above a London fried chicken shop, Parvaiz had encountered both pain and redemption amid the video-game violence and simplistic Islamist slogans blaring out. His transformation from a bookish, family-oriented young man into a jihadist is a narrative arc wherein the topoi of sound and fury need to be highlighted, because he finds an attentive "listener" in the fold of Farooq's friendship instead of among his sisters. The rest of the novel traces Aneeka's increasingly desperate, even crazed, attempts to get her brother to come back to "London. Home" (179). Aneeka is blocked at every turn by Home Secretary Karamat Lone, who believes that those who "set [them]selves apart" from British society deserve to be "treated differently" (87, 88) and denied a homeland.

The novel presents an unusual jihadist, set askew from the simplistic portrayals of some psychological studies and many sections of the mainstream media that recycle clichéd portraits of terrorists as young, death-obsessed men with temperaments suited for engineering. In contrast, Shamsie's Parvaiz is a Muslim who becomes radicalized due to a combination of personal and political circumstances. He has been stopped and searched twice for purely Islamophobic reasons by British police officers, and is regularly treated with suspicion as a young Muslim man in Britain. However, the extremist ideology Parvaiz encounters is shown to be deeply misguided and wrong. He proves susceptible to it due to feelings of camaraderie with his new friend Farooq—despite, or in part because of, the latter's violence—and a concomitant sense of emasculation around his sisters. I should also briefly mention Parvaiz's search for a connection with the father that he never knew. This is something that Farooq knows about and plays upon, telling the son about his father's

bravery under torture at Bagram air base. Here and elsewhere Shamsie makes it clear that racism and the “Islamophobia industry” contribute significantly to such characters’ actions.

Shamsie opens *Home Fire* with Isma missing a flight because of extensive and Islamophobic questioning at the airport, and the novel progresses from ostensibly light-hearted microaggressions against Muslims among Eamonn’s smart friendship group to one of the siblings’ cousins explaining how restricted and anxious people with Pakistani passports are when it comes to overseas travel. Yet the novel also includes white Britons who make a genuine effort to understand Muslim characters’ religious worldview, such as Eamonn’s mother and Karamat’s wife, Terry, with her Irish American heritage, radical politics, and artistic temperament. The author refuses to make sweeping statements, as Daesh does, about the West in general and the UK in particular. Shamsie condemns Britain’s rising xenophobia and ideas about British purity, but also trumpets London’s convivial diversity, replete as her fictionalization of the city is with Iranian neighbors, Scottish political assistants, and Latin American bodyguards. Despite her focus on acts of terror, this is a quiet, reflective novel, preoccupied by sound yet out of it creating lyricism rather than fury.

*Home Fire* operates as a post-9/11 *Antigone*, and its adaptation element is immediately signaled by the novel’s epigraph from Seamus Heaney’s translation of Sophocles’s play: “*The ones we love . . . are enemies of the state*” (n.p.). This refers to the dramaturgical plotline in which Antigone defies King Creon’s laws and breaks with her sister, Ismene (Isma in the novel), by refusing to leave the dead body of her brother, Polyneices (Shamsie’s Parvaiz), who has been exiled from the king’s city of Thebes for treason. In Heaney’s poetic rendition, the tyrannical Creon (Karamat) goes on to declare that such enemies are “to be considered traitors” and that “Whoever isn’t for us / Is against us” (1, 3). Heaney was writing in 2004, when Sophocles’ lines took on new meanings given George W. Bush’s asseveration: “You’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists” (n.p.). Shamsie adds fresh layers to the classic by reconsidering the issues Sophocles raised against the backdrop of racist immigration laws and radicalization. It is through a speech that Antigone defies Creon in the play, and similarly in *Home Fire* Aneeka uses both language (in an appeal for the Muslim-associated value of justice; 224–25) and extralinguistic noise in her attempts to persuade Karamat to allow her to bury her brother’s body:



For a few moments there was only a howling noise, the wind raging through the park, and then a hand plucked away the white cloth and the howl was the girl, a dust mask on her face, her dark hair a cascade of mud, her fingers interlaced over the face of her brother. A howl deeper than a girl, a howl that came out of the earth and through her and into the office of the Home Secretary, who took a step back. As if that were the only thing the entire spectacle had been designed to achieve, the wind dropped . . . , and the girl stopped her noise, unlaced her fingers. The cameras panned, then zoomed. In the whole apocalyptic mess of the park the only thing that remained unburied was the face of the dead boy.

“Impressive,” said the Home Secretary. (224)

This moment, mediated as it is by the optics of a Pakistani news channel’s cameras and coldly interpreted by Karamat as an “impressive” visual spectacle, is nonetheless highly auricular. Not only does it bring to mind Allen Ginsberg’s beat poem “Howl” (1956) and the horrible scene of the magistrate’s torture in J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for Barbarians* but also, from Urdu poetry, Kishwar Naheed’s collection *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice*. In Shamsie’s arrangement, Aneeka becomes her anguished utterance: a howl that seems to emanate from the earth, aeolian remnants of which soil her face. In pathetic fallacy, the wind howls with her, only abating when her voice drops. Karamat is literally taken aback by Aneeka’s deep-throated, almost animal wail, and it takes him a moment to recover his suave cynicism. Over and above the private stories of young European Muslims going to Syria to join Daesh and being denied citizenship when they try to return, Shamsie removes some of the noise surrounding such public matters as belonging, assimilation, difference, and justice. Despite exposing the flaws of her male characters Karamat and his son Eamonn (Haemon in the play), Shamsie does not idealize Aneeka. Although in Shamsie’s rendition neither Aneeka nor Karamat are jihadists, in their unbending certainty they surprisingly articulate world views closer to that espoused by the violent extremist than does the novel’s conflicted and self-doubting radical Parvaiz.

Readers learn of Parvaiz’s long-term involvement with a campaign to save his local library from closure. Caught up as he is in Farooq’s and the other Islamists’ propaganda offensive about global injustice, Parvaiz feels embarrassed at the prospect of being seen fund-raising for a library. Yet interviewer Vanessa Thorpe tells Shamsie that she interprets the public library in *Home Fire* as functioning as “a signifier of moral good” (n.p.). This interpretation is perceptive, as Farooq reassures Parvaiz that libraries and

all other public services matter and are safeguarded in the Islamic State. His lip service to the importance of literature soon rings hollow when Farooq misses Parvaiz's intertextual joke about Daesh's fabled glory: "Let's follow the Yellow Brick Road, or is it the White Rabbit that takes us there?" Through Farooq's blank look and his rebuke that Parvaiz should think of more "serious" topics (145), Shamsie suggests that the Islamist's view of literature as inconsequential and his failure to understand irony contribute to his ruthlessly simplified cosmology. I have suggested that *Home Fire* evinces a profound interest in various sorts of text, from the sacred book of the Qur'an and ancient Greek classics to contemporary public libraries. In addition, as I will explore later on, her novel probes those increasingly stentoracious texts that are disseminated online.

In the same *Observer* interview, Shamsie shared that, after the EU referendum in June 2016, she started using the pronouns "we" and "us" about the British for the first time. Opposed to the Leave vote as she is, the disaster of Brexit ironically made her feel at home, since it chimed with the political disarray and violence of Pakistan, the nation she grew up in. Indeed, the feeling of being at home is one of the book's major themes. This is indicated by the title, which alludes to the First World War song "Keep the Home Fires Burning." Lena Guilbert Ford's lyrics, set to a melody by Ivor Novello, exhort the women left behind to keep up their houses and their spirits despite justifiable fears for the men away fighting for "honor, freedom, and friends." Shamsie transposes ideas from the First World War (a conflict she explored in relation to Indian soldiers in her 2014 novel *A God in Every Stone*), as well as the classical battles in Thebes evoked by Heaney, onto contemporary themes of jihad and securitization. And, equally, "home fire" suggests the possibility of terrorism and conflagration here at home.

Home for Isma Pasha is lower-middle-class suburbia near Preston Road station. By contrast, privileged Eamonn was raised in affluent Kensington and Chelsea, by Holland Park—where his father, Karamat, still lives, having put an impoverished upbringing in Bradford far behind him. Drifting between jobs, Eamonn can still afford to live in a flat in trendy Notting Hill, paid for by his powerful parent. Like Karamat before her, Isma tries to escape the poverty of her surroundings. Her life was long ago made difficult by her terrorist father Adil Pasha's abandonment of the family. Her mother's later death from cancer left only the nineteen-year-old Isma to look after her prepubescent twin siblings. Now that the twins are adults, Isma goes to Amherst to write a doctoral thesis in sociology,

ironically missing her planned flight after an aggressive search at Heathrow airport because of her hijab and the father's reputation. Eventually reaching America, Isma welcomes her sense that the studio apartment she rents there is "a home that made almost no demands." Much of the attraction for Isma of her Amherst room lies in its lack of association with home, so she is surprised when Eamonn sees it as "uncluttered" (46), which she reads as a euphemism for bare, ascetic, and unhomelike.

Pakistan is the other, little-known, shadowy home of second-generation British Muslims such as those portrayed in the novel. The "Most Dangerous Country in the World" is barely mentioned in *Home Fire's* first half, although it figures as a stylized, postapocalyptic landscape in the novel's final section. A cousin tells Parvaiz: "I'm a Pakistani and you're a Paki" (150), and his not feeling at home anywhere is one factor that contributes to Parvaiz's radicalization. The more assimilated character Eamonn usually tells people "I've never even been to Pakistan" (98) when they erroneously assume he has insider knowledge about his father's birth nation. Apart from this mention, there are only a few indirect references early in the novel to telling Urdu phrases, such as *bay-takalufi*, or feeling at home with a friend by dropping formalities. Isma's brother Parvaiz finds just such an easy intimacy with his fellow British Pakistani Farooq.

It is now that I want to turn to analysis of the importance of sound in the text. As I indicated at the beginning of this article, in "Terror: A Speech After 9/11," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that we must "listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit" (83)—even when that other is a terrorist. Writing in a similar key, Shamsie meticulously tracks Parvaiz's passionate friendship with Farooq, descent into violent extremism, and subsequent buyer's remorse. Listening to varied points of view is exactly what she does in *Home Fire*. What is more, both Shamsie's characters (particularly the siblings) and her readers listen to, or at least hear, the other's arguments. Although not necessarily punishing or acquitting, the situation asks them to make judgments. At the same time, the novelist decenters dominant listeners, giving a platform for others to speak too. Shamsie records Parvaiz's screams of pain at Farooq's second round of torture, an ordeal that Parvaiz himself instigated so as to share the pain his father went through at Bagram air base. Readers are made privy to Aneeka's complaint that British Muslims experience "rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities" (90–91).

Shamsie also puts the sadomasochistic relationship between Parvaiz and Farooq almost within readers' earshot. Put simply, Farooq purports to teach Parvaiz "how to be a man" (129). One of his methods is to have accomplices inflict pain on the younger man, not only by chaining him in a stress posture, but also by subjecting him to an unendurable hub-bub (stress positions and prolonged exposure to loud noise are both, of course, torture techniques used by the United States):

He [Farooq] heard his voice begging, but the two men didn't even look in his direction. The video-game sound designer hadn't accounted for cheap speakers, and the crackling and distortion were more intolerable than gunfire and death screams. He tried prayer but it did nothing. . . .

Every crackle from the speakers was magnified until it became a physical force attacking his ears. He was screaming in pain, had been screaming in pain, for a very long time.

One of the cousins pressed pause.

The sounds of the everyday rushed to embrace him—rattling windows, traffic, his breath. The two men walked over, unshackled him. (137)

The unpleasant din assails Parvaiz's ears, causing physical pain as well as mental and spiritual dissociation until it is turned off, letting in the ordinary sounds of the city.

Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fear of Barbarians* was written in 2007, but in its English edition, published in 2010, the French Bulgarian critic reflected on the release by Barack Obama in 2009 of secret torture memos written during George W. Bush's administration. These memos revealed the way the United States sought to change the definition of torture after 9/11 to recategorize waterboarding, humiliation, sleep deprivation, and—most relevant for our purposes—being subjected to deafeningly loud music. These examples of cruel and degrading treatment would now be termed "increased pressure" rather than torture. The Bush regime's weasel words notwithstanding, great damage was done to both the psyches and the hearing of detainees played various kinds of music at top volume in American internment camps. Just as 2010s jihadists from Daesh have put their prisoners in orange jumpsuits in a vengeful nod to Guantánamo Bay, so too does Farooq appropriate the West's so-called enhanced interrogation techniques as part of his carrot-and-stick recruitment tactics. The inhuman treatment Parvaiz receives has the effect of making him feel disconnected from his own body, as he hears himself screaming in agony and imploring the men to stop.

In a self-flagellating mood, Parvaiz later tries to inflict the same kind of sonic torture on himself that Farooq had inflicted on him by blasting heavy metal through his headphones, but gives up after twenty minutes. It is not easy to torture oneself; a partner is needed. Their torrid friendship contributes to Parvaiz's swift acceptance of Farooq's misinformation about the impressive welfare state Daesh has set up in Raqqa. Farooq claims gender divisions are defined more clearly and well under the Islamic State, and that everyone is looked after amid sanitary, efficient public services. This chimes with Sageman's exploration of "in-group love" as a prime motivation for jihadism (135), and with Winter's analysis of the sophisticated "media *jihad*" or "narrative-led terrorism" propagated by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate (6, 18). Yet, cutting through the persuasive words of Daesh propagandists, Parvaiz will discover that the reality in this north Syrian city is "inequality between the locals and those who ruled over them" (172). Common throughout the novel is its jihadist characters' sweeping assumption that all sections of the Western media peddle in propaganda and that the Islamic State is far from the awful place it has been portrayed as being.

Since early childhood, Parvaiz has had sharp hearing, and, compared to others, he finds "the sound of the world turned up just that little bit" (121). As a consequence, he is "obsess[ed]" by sound, "uncaring of anything except capturing something previously unheard" (25, 12). His "sound projects" (25) include making aural diaries of the noises he hears across London during an average day, and over nearly four years creating a twenty-four-hour track "that his ideal listener would play between midnight of one day and the next" (131). When he departs for the Islamic State, his cover story is a job opportunity sourced by his guitarist cousin to work as a sound engineer for a music television program in Karachi. While Isma does not regard Parvaiz's sound work as a lucrative career, in Raqqa he can put his skills to use, working as a sound man for the kind of propaganda videos that had interpellated him so powerfully in Farooq's company back home.

In the late 2000s and 2010s, creative artists evinced great interest in the jihadist video, particularly its horrifying visual qualities. Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim's short story "The Reality and the Record" is about a man who is kidnapped and forced to act in a range of parts for propaganda videos. Chris Morris's film *Four Lions* is preoccupied with jihadist videos, phone footage, and hand-held camera techniques. Hanif Kureishi's short story "Weddings and Beheadings" is written from the perspective

of a jobbing filmmaker in an unnamed country (probably Iraq) who is coerced into filming and posting on the Internet recordings of executions. At the end of the story, the narrator expresses his desire to make an artistic film, “maybe beginning with a beheading, telling the story that leads up to it” (613). Mohsin Hamid’s story “A Beheading” takes just such a point of departure. Hamid focalizes the victim’s point of view and moves the setting to Pakistan, with references to cricket and the Pashto language. Written in the present tense, the narrative arc follows a writer who is taken from his house by jihadists, driven to a dilapidated house, and murdered. The deeply pessimistic ending describes the man witnessing his own filmed beheading, both aurally and visually: “Then I hear it. I hear the sound of my blood rushing out and I open my eyes to see it on the floor like ink and I watch as I end before I am empty” (195). In a powerful essay, “Unheard-of Things,” Ethiopian American author Maaza Mengiste shares her fellow creative artists’ interest in the jihadist video but balances her discussion of the gaze and listening so that the emphasis on these two senses is equally weighted:

I am talking about our responsibility, our duty, in the face of those unspeakable and unheard-of things. How do we begin to construct a vocabulary if all we can do is stand in numb and silent grief? What is there to really see of those who once stood and then were forced to kneel, if all we do is look away?

What I have begun to think: that before the word comes the image, that before we describe, we must first be willing to look. We must stare, then verbalize, then reclaim. We learn to comprehend what is in front of us by writing, by re-creating in such a way that we urge others not to turn aside. (90)

Accordingly, Shamsie takes up where Hamid and Mengiste leave off, but rather than the visual she concentrates on auditory media’s capacity to affect sensibilities. For Parvaiz, absorbed in his labor, “nothing but getting the sound right mattered.” He becomes obsessed with “the fascination of discovering the different pitch and timbre of a nail through flesh, a blade through flesh” (170). There is a chilling conjunction here of the creativity of sound alongside its witness to torture. As Irish novelist Colum McCann’s blurb indicates—“Shamsie . . . seems as if she has heard, and listened to, the music of what surrounds us” (n.p.)—this book is saturated with noise. Although deliberately left unnamed, the background music includes Indian maestro A. R. Rahman’s “Chaiyya Chaiyya” from the Bollywood film *Dil Se* (1998), which revealingly is a film about violent

insurgency in Kashmir. Also evoked is Pakistani pop group Vital Signs' 1989 song "Gori," whose lyrics extolling the beauty and success of a fair-skinned girl cast into sharp relief Eamonn's privilege as a secular man with one white parent and a Western name (29). *Home Fire* is an "aural map" of a novel (172) that envelops its audience in rich soundscapes. From an eerie music uncannily created by icicles in the chill of a Hampshire County winter to the playlists enjoyed by the young British Muslims while cooking dinner, Shamsie painstakingly minutes her characters' sonic agenda items.

I also wish to explore the relationship between sound and text, bringing together the discussion of (inter-)textuality with the sonic. In relation to nonlinguistic, embodied sonic communication, a bidirectional flow of sound is present from the twins' prespeech babyhood onward, when "there was no sound except their breath in unison, the universe still around them" (27). Their prelinguistic communication continues into adulthood too, each of the twins secure in the knowledge that next to their own heart is another beating organ "experiencing every moment of fear, every second of wonder alongside it" (139). After the rupture from his twin caused by going to the Islamic State, Parvaiz finds himself unable to phone Aneeka and can only communicate through text messages, since "conversation had become unimaginable" (170). His experiences there are unspeakable and would be unintelligible to civilians back home, even to his sister.

Regarding linguistic textual communication, individuals who lack the somatic twin bond need to shout to get heard. I use the term "heard" here in a metaphorical sense, given that communication is transformed into textual rather than oral communication at one particular moment in the novel. In an undergraduate class in sociology, quiet, turban-wearing Isma bursts into a tirade about how the British media manipulatively portray the 2005 London bombers as "unBritish." Only then does her lecturer notice her, exclaiming: "*You have quite a voice when you decide to use it*" (38). This lecturer decides to champion that hitherto silent voice by encouraging Isma to start an academic career by writing about the post-9/11 securitization of Muslims. In this way, textuality offers something that oral communication does not: an opportunity to challenge the dominant public discourse through sustained research and argumentation.

It is important to distinguish the imposition of sound or silence (such as Farooq's sonic torture) from the sounds that the characters are naturally drawn to (as in Parvaiz's sound projects). Sound as a weapon is very dif-

ferent from sound as expression, and Daesh uses the former to stifle the latter. This is especially relevant considering that jihadists oppose music, target concert halls such as Paris's Le Bataclan or the Manchester Arena, make bonfires out of DVDs, and so on. In the introduction I considered sound as a form of communication, discussing the vital importance that voices from below are heard in public discourse. Early on in this article, the inference was therefore that sound is a positive thing, as Spivak posits through her repeated contention that listening and conversing are ethical moves. However, in the torture scenes in Shamsie's text, we encounter sound as a form of violence, and silence as a relief.

The present post-Brexit referendum, Trumpian world of Internet feedback loops, Facebook echo chambers, and fake news is symptomatic of a voluble rather than a listening culture. Shamsie trains a sharp ear to this social media cacophony, representing SMS and WhatsApp messages, Twitter commentary, and newspaper articles. Fragments of text from these are provided in the novel, their difference from the main narrative signaled by various fonts, and occasionally by deviations such as columns in the page layout. Shamsie details the bubbling Skype ringtone, online news articles shared, FaceTime trysts, and WhatsApp chatter. She recognizes the unreliability of electronic communication, showing, for example, that line identification makes it easy for recipients to ignore calls, as Isma does when she sees Parvaiz on Skype after he has betrayed her by joining the Islamic State. And Shamsie is alert to cyberspace's violence, in the form of racism, Islamophobia, and sexism. Crudeness is even signified through the typography, given that a traditional serif font is used for the main body text and for newspaper reports, while a sparse, contemporary sans serif typeface usually denotes electronic communication in the novel. In terms of content, after Karamat gives a trenchant statement that Parvaiz's body will be sent to Pakistan rather than brought home, a hashtag that starts trending on Twitter is unequivocally racist: "#GOBACK WHEREYOU CAME FROM" (190). And the siblings' aging neighbor Gladys is trolled for speaking out in Parvaiz's defense on television, with a false account holder Tweeting coarsely in her name: "I can do things those 72 virgins don't know about" (192).

Despite her alertness to the worst of the new media's excrescences, Shamsie's is no nostalgic elegy for the days of letter writing. In her evocation of the digital environment, there is chutzpah and celebration as well as the notes of caution explored above. The novel's fourth section, "Aneeka," is particularly experimental and decentered, including in its



pages text messages, a transcript of a television interview, a list of trending hashtags, Tweets, broadsheet and tabloid journalism, and even a poem that appears to have been penned by grieving Aneeka. In her third novel, *Kartography* (2002), Shamsie addressed the legacy of the 1971 War in Pakistan but also imagined an interactive Internet map of Karachi where people could upload their writing, pictures, and sound files, anticipating the creation of Google Earth in 2005. While this novel was authored, published, and read in the conventional way, her creation of this online interactive map suggests connections between new narrative forms, new technologies, and a new understanding of “home” and “away.” Despite giving a platform for reactionary political aggression, online writing, as Shamsie shows in both *Kartography* and *Home Fire*, can positively disrupt supposedly static boundaries between nations.

To conclude, in *Home Fire* reception fails on multiple levels. At the level of kinship, Parvaiz is not listened to by his own sisters, and instead Farooq lends a sympathetic ear outside the family. More broadly, those seeking to return home from the Islamic State are not given a second chance, nor are their families granted an empathetic hearing. The misalignment between who should speak and who should listen more carefully leads to a fury that fans the flames of hatred and violence that we witness in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Careful attention to the sonic landscapes of these texts allows readers to correct Islamophobic mishearing, and to redefine what is meant by harmony and dissonance.

Sound appears as both a metaphorical conceit and as a material or embodied experience in the novel. That is, there are textual moments when voice and sound are positioned as a way of “being heard” that is literal, but also metaphoric of access to representation and a recognition (or, more accurately, reception) that might be political, social, or *literary*. At other points, the author is thinking about sound as a material and embodied experience (a phenomenological issue)—in, for example, the torture scenes. Where sound (or indeed silence) is metaphorical, it seems for the most part productive and to have ethical value, as when we are urged by Spivak to listen to the other. In Shamsie’s portrayal of torture, sound is a violent weapon. Through her delineations of both positive and negative sound, the novelist seems to heed calls to “*decipher a sound form of knowledge*” (Attali 4). Visualism, or the privileging of looking, has led to a long neglect of the aural in academia. Yet the novel also holds within it pleasurable aural effects.

Let us end by revisiting some of this article's starting points. I opened the discussion by suggesting that literary texts can supplement sociological, psychological, and criminological analyses of radicalization. What literary fiction brings to the table are its sensual qualities of visual and aural texture. I would argue that Shamsie's account of contemporary society not only deserves a hearing; it should be played on repeat in Britain's Houses of Parliament. Earlier Muslim novels—including others by Shamsie—rightly challenged stereotypes of Muslims and fictionalized everyday realities. But terror, both state-sponsored and the work of violent extremists, exists and has to be confronted. Shamsie's *Home Fire* is one of the most plangent and multitonal novels that has yet been written about such violence. We need to be careful about wishful thinking around literature's prospect of saving the world. Yet literary fiction is contributing to global debate differently from social-science-based interventions. Novels add to that body of work, holding the potential to transform our understanding of radicalization by showing the confusion of both jihadists and those who oppose them. Fiction delves beneath words to shadow forth why individuals have spoken them, and what symbolic bearing they have on our age.

## WORKS CITED

- Blasim, Hassan. "The Reality and the Record." In *The Madman of Freedom Square*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. Manchester: Comma, 2009, 1–11.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. New York: Penguin, 1980 [1978].
- Dearey, Melissa. *Radicalization: The Life Writings of Political Prisoners*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.
- Fanon, Frantz. "This is the Voice of Algeria." In *A Dying Colonialism*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. Intro. Adolfo Gilly. New York: Grove, 1965, 69–97.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: And Other Poems*. Intro. William Carlos Williams. San Francisco: City Lights, 1956.
- Hamid, Mohsin. "A Beheading." In *Granta 112*. Ed. John Freeman. London: Granta, 2010, 193–95.
- Heaney, Seamus. *The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles' Antigone*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004.
- Kureishi, Hanif. "Weddings and Beheadings." In *Collected Stories*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010, 611–13.
- Mengiste, Maaza. "Unheard-of Things." *Massachusetts Review* 57, no. 1 (2016): 88–90.
- Morris, Chris. Dir. *Four Lions*. Actors: Riz Ahmed, Kayvan Novak, Adeel Akhtar. Sheffield: Warp, 2010.
- Naheed, Kishwar. *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selection of Poems of Kishwar Naheed*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991.

- Sageman, Marc. *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Shamsie, Kamila. *Kartography*. London: Bloomsbury, 2002.
- . *A God in Every Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- . *Home Fire*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Questions of Multi-culturalism.” Interview with Sneja Gunew. In *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990. 59–66.
- . “Terror: A Speech After 9/11.” *boundary*. 2 31.2 (Summer 2004): 81–111.
- Thorpe, Vanessa. “Kamila Shamsie: ‘Being a UK Citizen Makes Me Feel More Able to Take Part in the Conversation.’” *Observer*, 27 August 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/27/kamila-shamsie-home-fire-man-booker-longlisted-author-interview>.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*. Trans. Andrew Brown. London: Polity, 2010 [2008].
- Winter, Charlie. “ISIS’ Offline Propaganda Strategy.” *Brookings Institution*, 31 March 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/03/31/isis-offline-propaganda-strategy/>.
- . *Media Jihad: The Islamic State’s Doctrine for Information Warfare*. London: ICSR, 2017. <http://icsr.info/2017/02/icsr-report-media-jihad-islamic-states-doctrine-information-warfare/>.