

## NECROPOLITICS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *HOME FIRE*<sup>1</sup>

### NECROPOLÍTICA E IDENTIDADE NACIONAL EM *HOME FIRE*, DE KAMILA SHAMSIE

Marcela Santos Brigida<sup>2</sup>

Davi Pinho<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** In *Home Fire* (2017), Kamilla Shamsie approaches themes such as the instability of national identity for minorities as well as islamophobia and racism. By adapting Sophocles' *Antigone* to a contemporary setting, she reimagines the contrast between the law laid down by the gods and the law enforced by men to introduce a discussion about the discrepancies between law and justice in twenty-first-century Britain. To discuss how Shamsie presents the tensions between the State and ethnical and religious minorities, this article will analyse her novel under the light of Decolonial studies. Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2003) will support a discussion of how Shamsie's plot illustrates the instability of the rule of law for the colonised, while Boaventura de Sousa Santos's conception of "abyssal thought" (2007) will allow us to investigate the structures that uphold patterns of inequality and institutionalised violence against minorities, one of the novel's main themes.

**Keywords:** Decolonial Theory. British Literature. Necropolitics.

**RESUMO:** Em *Home Fire* (2017), Kamilla Shamsie aborda temas como a instabilidade do conceito de identidade nacional para as minorias, assim como a islamofobia e o racismo. Ao adaptar a *Antígona* de Sófocles em um contexto contemporâneo, a autora reimagina o contraste entre a lei dos deuses e a lei imposta pelos homens para introduzir uma discussão sobre as discrepâncias entre a lei e a justiça no Reino Unido do século XXI. Para discutir como Shamsie apresenta as tensões entre o Estado e minorias étnicas e religiosas, este artigo analisará seu romance à luz dos estudos decoloniais. A *Necropolítica* de Achille Mbembe (2003) dará base a uma discussão sobre como o enredo de Shamsie ilustra a instabilidade do Estado de Direito para o colonizado enquanto o conceito de Boaventura de Sousa Santos de "pensamento abissal" (2007) nos permitirá investigar as estruturas que sustentam padrões da desigualdade e da violência institucionalizada contra minorias, um dos principais temas do romance.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria Decolonial. Literatura Britânica. Necropolítica.

---

<sup>1</sup> Artigo recebido em 16/04/2019 e aceito em 05/06/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Mestranda em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa na UERJ. O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio da (CAPES). [marcela@literaturainglesa.com.br](mailto:marcela@literaturainglesa.com.br) ORCID: 0000-0002-0951-1603

<sup>3</sup> Professor Adjunto de Literatura Inglesa da Universidade do Rio de Janeiro (ILE/UERJ). Doutor em Literatura Comparada (UERJ/University of London)



In *Home Fire* (2017), Kamila Shamsie presents her readers with an adaptation of *Antigone* set in a contemporary context. The plot of Sophocles' classical play sees the unfolding of a clash between the law laid down by the gods and the law enforced by men. This question is raised in the play as the protagonist – Antigone – sets out to bury her brother against the will of the king (Creon, who is also her uncle), in obedience to the law of the gods. Shamsie adapts this conflict into a twenty-first-century setting by establishing a contrast between the laws of the British State and what Aneeka Pasha – Shamsie's reworking of Antigone – recognises as justice. Polyneices appears in *Home Fire* as Aneeka's twin brother Parvaiz, a young man who regrets joining ISIS in Syria and wishes to return home, in England. Shamsie's novel is particularly poignant due to the creative subtlety with which the author reimagines classical preoccupations in a contemporary setting. As a Pakistani-British citizen, Shamsie communicates the sense of displacement second-generation immigrants often feel in twenty-first century England.

The fact that Shamsie chose to write this story as a novel – and not a play – is also a point of interest for this study, as the author uses interior monologue as a key strategy of character construction. In order to address and discuss how Shamsie brings *Antigone's* main themes to a contemporary setting, addressing Western and Muslim values alike and providing commentary on the current state of affairs for Muslim minorities in the United Kingdom, this paper is going to look at *Home Fire* under the light of Decolonial Studies. In order to discuss how Shamsie's plot illustrates the instability of the rule of law when applied to the colonised and how *Home Fire* portrays islamophobia, I am going to turn to Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2003). Boaventura de Sousa Santos's conception of "abyssal thought" in "Para além do pensamento abissal: das linhas globais a uma ecologia de saberes" (2007) is also going to permeate this paper and help me discuss the forces that uphold patterns of inequality and institutionalised violence against minorities. Such patterns contaminate the lives of all the novel's main characters and ultimately seals the tragic conclusion of their lives. I propose here that one can read Shamsie's novel as an exercise to comprehend through fiction Santos's point that the abyssal "cartographical lines that used to demarcate the Old and the New World during colonial times are still alive in the structure of modern occidental



thought and remain constitutive of the political and cultural relations held by the contemporary world system" (2007, p. 71).

*Home Fire's* epigraph, taken from Seamus Heaney's translation of *Antigone*, titled *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), sets the tone for Shamsie's adaptation. "The ones we love . . . are enemies of the state" is a statement that slowly spreads over and applies to all the characters. The novel is divided into nine chapters and is narrated by its five main characters: Isma (Chapters 1 and 2), Eamonn (3 and 4), Parvaiz (5 and 6), Aneeka (7) and Karamat (8 and 9). Through this narrative strategy, Shamsie refrains from the possibility of stigmatising or vilifying any of those characters, eschewing from Manichean categories of good and evil. The first two chapters, which are told from Isma Pasha's perspective, introduce the reader to some of the main questions which are going to be addressed and developed throughout the novel as well as to the woes her family has endured. Isma is Shamsie's reworking of Ismene. However, here she plays the role of the eldest sister who has raised her two younger siblings – Aneeka and Parvaiz – after their mother passed away, when the twins were twelve.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader finds Isma locked inside an interrogation room at Heathrow Airport, London, as she reflects on the likelihood of missing her flight. We learn she is a British national who is travelling to Amherst, Massachusetts to read for a PhD in sociology. Rather than signs of anger or irritation on the account of being held for hours by representatives of her own government, Isma Pasha shows restraint and resignation. From her interior monologue, it also becomes clear that she had expected this to happen and even rehearsed appropriate answers to possible questions with her younger sister. Finally, a man comes to interview her once again and as he checks her browser history, the following exchange takes place before Isma is finally allowed to board a plane to Boston:

"Do you consider yourself British?" the man said.

"I am British."

"But do you consider yourself British?"

"I've lived here all my life." She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive. The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, *The Great British Bake Off*,



the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites. After that early slip regarding her Britishness, she settled into the manner that she'd practiced with Aneeka playing the role of the interrogating officer, Isma responding to her sister as though she were a customer of dubious political opinions whose business Isma didn't want to lose by voicing strenuously opposing views, but to whom she didn't see the need to lie either. (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 10)

The question of national identity or, more precisely, that of what Britishness means, is introduced at this early exchange and permeates the novel to its close. Throughout *Home Fire*, we learn that the reason why Isma Pasha was held at the airport was not exclusively related to her Pakistani-British identity or to the fact she was a Muslim. It was precipitated by her complicated family history. Adil Pasha, her father, was not, like Oedipus, cursed by the gods and doomed to murder his own father and marry his mother. However, he had made matters difficult for his children in his own way. Pasha was described by Isma as a man who “tried his hand at many things in his life — guitarist, salesman, gambler, con man, jihadi”, but who was “most consistent in the role of absentee father” (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 39). After being detained and reportedly tortured in Bagram, he died while being transported to Guantánamo when Aneeka and Parvaiz were toddlers. Nevertheless, the reason the Pasha family rang alarm bells for the British authorities in the beginning of the novel was that Parvaiz Pasha had joined the media arm of ISIS in Syria some time before Isma's journey to America. That is the reason why, it appears, the officer inquired about Isma's perception of her own national identity. The question “Do you consider yourself British?” implies an alternative one that, though not openly stated, can be read between the lines: “or are you a jihadi like the men of your family, Miss Pasha?”. This is an inquiry about her loyalties as much as it is about her perception of national identity. In *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018), Afua Hirsch describes the difficulty that black British people of her generation – the children and grandchildren of immigrants from the former colonies in Asia, Africa and Jamaica – face when dealing with their sense of belonging. Hirsch describes her own issues with identity and belonging as a British woman with Ghanaian heritage on her mother's side and Jewish roots on her father's. Her study shows that here are



identities which are not easily circumscribed, and this is a source of anxiety both in contemporary Britain and in *Home Fire*.

Speaking about racism in the United Kingdom, Hirsch states in *Brit(ish)* that the real problem lies in the “muting of the conversation – the fact that we cannot in Britain today cope with exploring and accommodating these identities in a healthy way” (HIRSCH, 2018, p. 26). To the author, this silencing is also a failure that can turn a complex heritage that is a “rich and complex asset” into an “identity crisis of epic proportions” (p. 26). Although Hirsch focuses on the issue of racism against British people of African descent, her addressing of the country’s problem with white supremacy – one that is remnant from the Empire – also applies to questions Shamsie develops throughout her novel. Hirsch invokes Trump’s white-supremacist voters to illustrate her point that “recent years have shown us that threatened identities don’t fade away quietly; they become defensive, and fight back with new confidence, pride and desperation” (p. 26). However, she points out that this statement can just as easily be illustrated by the members of oppressed minorities, such as the Muslim community from Preston Road portrayed in *Home Fire*.

The Pasha siblings exemplify the different ways in which people can react to islamophobia. Isma tries to be as compliant as possible to the demands the State makes of her: from her calm and collected answers during the interrogation, to the fact she immediately denounced Parvaiz when she learnt that he had joined ISIS, she is an almost perfect embodiment of what *Home Fire*’s Creon, the Home Secretary Karamat Lone instructs British-Muslims to do: assimilate and settle. Aneeka’s reaction to islamophobia shifts throughout the novel. At the beginning of the story, she is a brilliant Law student with a scholarship at the LSE. Aneeka is alert to the peculiarities of what she calls “GWM” (Googling While Muslim)<sup>4</sup> and holds Karamat Lone’s rhetoric of assimilation in contempt. Later, when she dissociates British law from her perception of justice, she resigns from adhering to it. On his turn, Parvaiz internalises his anger at being oppressed on a daily basis. His feelings of loneliness and destitution grow stronger as

---

<sup>4</sup> That is, a Muslim person should be careful about the topics he or she searches on the internet, avoiding anything authorities might find dangerous or threatening.



Isma prepares to leave for America and Aneeka becomes increasingly consumed by the new world the LSE offers her. After being groomed by men connected to ISIS, Parvaiz becomes radicalised.

There is a foil, however, to the Pasha family, which is provided by the Lone household. Karamat Lone, a Member of Parliament who becomes Home Secretary at the beginning of the novel, is married to Terry Lone, a white, English interior designer from a wealthy family. They have two children; Emily, an investment banker based in Manhattan, and Eamonn, Shamsie's version of *Antigone's* Haemon. Both were raised with Western values, away from Islam and the Pakistani culture that Karamat sought to distance himself from as he became a powerful politician in the Conservative Party. From his position, Karamat is the propeller of most of the racial and religious tensions related to national identity and belonging in the novel. He also personifies the power the State represents and yields in *Home Fire*. There is an incident, during the chapters told from Eamonn's point of view, where Aneeka arrives at his flat upset because a man had told her to "go back to the place where she came from" and proceeded to spit at her in the subway. This took place soon after the Home Secretary delivered the following speech at a predominantly Muslim secondary school which "counted among its alumni Karamat Lone himself and two twenty-year olds who had been killed by American airstrikes in Syria earlier in the year" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 65):

There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve—Olympic medals, captaincy of the cricket team, pop stardom, reality TV crowns. And if none of that works out, you can settle for being home secretary. You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: Don't set yourself apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour 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 in this multi-ethnic, multireligious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it. (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 65)



Karamat's words take us back to Afua Hirsch's point about a strain of white supremacy that she classifies as being "ever-present" in Britain. To the author, the British Empire as well as the concept of a Western Civilisation were built upon a system where several generations were conditioned to believe in the inferiority of non-whites, non-Christians and non-Europeans. To Hirsch, for society to move past those constructs, they must be articulated, recognised and discussed. Until that is achieved, she says, attempts at becoming a "post-racial society" are pointless as those have failed to comprehend "racialised identities" (2018, p. 29):

The progress we have made is, in some ways, part of the problem. We live, the American academic Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has written, in an era of 'racism without racists'. It's an era of 'colour-blind racism', of 'racism with a smiling face'. Compared to what black people in Britain went through up until only two decades ago, being roughed up by the police regularly for no reason, being called 'nigger', and chased down the street by armed Teddy boys, it's 'racism lite'. It makes it so much easier for people to say these days that they 'don't see race', hoping perhaps that if they don't dwell on racial difference, then maybe that difference will go away. The problem is, there is still race, and there is still racism. Denying it does not solve the problem, it creates two further problems. First, it assumes that seeing race is something bad, that perhaps to admit to seeing race is to embark on the slippery slope towards racism. Given that most of the prejudice and othering I've experienced in my life has come courtesy of polite, smiling people who claimed not to see race, I know that this is not true. (HIRSCH, 2018, p. 28)

Public discussions about Britishness permeate Shamsie's novel. The author is successful in illustrating, however, how elusive the notion of national identity is when applied to minorities in the United Kingdom. The State has the power of stripping the British people of their citizenship as easily as it can set up surveillance systems around them, keep them from leaving the country or returning to it. It also has the ultimate power of killing them, as the characters hint at several times when they speak of Adil Pasha. Most of such discussions are ignited by utterances such as the speech transcribed above, which are often delivered by Karamat Lone. At the beginning of the novel, Isma refers to him as a Member of Parliament that



her extended family despised. Elected an MP by a Muslim-majority constituency, Karamat Lone became a rising star in the Conservative Party. He eventually turned away from his community as controversy ensued after a tabloid published a picture that showed him entering a mosque that had garnered media attention for its “hate preacher” (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 30). After that, the politician fully and publicly embraced Western values, issuing a statement that pointed out that “the picture was several years old, he had been there only for his uncle’s funeral prayers and would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space” (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 31). Lone was voted out in the following elections, only to be embraced by a white conservative constituency that led him back into Parliament. By means of that media stunt, Lone became a part of the establishment that often oppressed and stigmatised his original community. Furthermore, as I have showed in this paper, Lone’s rhetoric began to adhere to the construct of a “post-racial society” that Afua Hirsch described. The sense of betrayal Lone left in his community reached new heights as he became Home Secretary: “It’s all going to get worse. He has to prove he’s one of them, not one of us, doesn’t he? As if he hasn’t already. I hate this country.” (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 30), Aneeka wrote to Isma. The pressure to “prove he is one of them” is a challenge that, the reader soon learns, is ever-present in Lone’s mind.

As a politician, Karamat Lone becomes an enforcer of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called “abyssal thought” (2007). Santos describes abyssal thought as a system of “visible and invisible distinctions in which the latter fundament the former”<sup>5</sup> (SANTOS, 2007, p. 71). These invisible distinctions, he argues, are established by “radical lines that divide the social reality into two distinct universes” (p. 71), which Santos presents as “this side of the line” and “the other side of the line”. The lines are radical because what is perceived as pertaining to the other side of it “disappears as a reality”, fading away in the sense that it ceases from existing “under any mode of being relevant or understandable” (p. 71). Thus, all the markers of Pakistani heritage such as the way extended families congregate, their culinary practices, their dress code and, above all else, their religion, is perceived in the Britain presented in *Home Fire* as alien, other, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Translated from the original in Brazilian Portuguese to English by me.





dangerous. When a white man spits at Aneeka inside a train carriage, he does so because he identifies her as belonging to this inexistent reality of the other side of the line. He is enraged by her hijab, the colour of her skin, and the way she holds herself. Those characteristics offer him cues to her non-complacency to the codes imposed by people like Karamat Lone. This random man's hate is somewhat legitimised in the political context of the novel as intolerance against otherness is enforced by a member of the minority that is being targeted. Karamat Lone is the first to instruct Pakistani-British Muslims to conform and not set themselves apart. Confronting Eamonn Lone about his father's speech, Aneeka asks her fiancé:

What do you say to your father when he makes a speech like that? Do you say, "Dad, you're making it okay to stigmatize people for the way they dress"? Do you say, "What kind of idiot stands in front of a group of teenagers and tells them to conform"? 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"? (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 67)

Eamonn is taken aback by her words. As someone shielded by the privilege his father's position and his mother's whiteness, as well as their wealth and social status afforded him, Karamat's son cannot fully grasp the extent of what Aneeka calls British injustice. In the Home Secretary's speech, the consequence of non-compliance to his instructions is to be "treated differently" and to "miss out" on the great opportunities Britain has to offer. As Karamat tries in every possible way to conclude his transition to what Santos has called "this side of the line", he acts as an enforcer of abyssal thought and his rhetoric grows harsher. On the other hand, Aneeka's words introduce us to her vision of Britain as a State where Necropolitics are a reality made possible by Abyssal Thought. Boaventura dos Santos illustrates his concept of the two sides of the line by indicating the colony as the place where the rule of law can be easily withdrawn as the humanity of those who live there is relativized. He states that the "denial of a part of humankind is sacrificial in the sense that it creates the conditions for the



other part of humankind to affirm itself as universal” (SANTOS, 2007, p. 76). Furthermore, we see a return of the colonial:

In this movement, the “colonial” is a metaphor for those who understand that their life experiences take place at the other side of the line and rebel against that. The return of the colonial is the abyssal answer to what is perceived as a threatening intrusion of the colonial in metropolitan societies. This return takes on three main forms: that of the terrorist, that of the undocumented immigrant and that of the refugee. In different ways, each of them brings on the global abyssal line that defines radical exclusion and legal inexistence. The new wave of immigration and antiterror laws, for instance, follows the regulating logic of the “appropriation/violence” paradigm in many of its dispositions. The return of the colonial does not necessarily mean a physical presence in metropolitan societies. It is enough to have a relevant connection with them. In the terrorist’s case, this connection can be established by the secret services. In the case of the undocumented immigrant worker, it is enough for him to be underemployed by metropolitan multinational corporations that operate in the global South. In the refugee’s case, the connection is established through the application for a refugee status in any given metropolitan society. (SANTOS, 2007, p. 78)

The clash of the colonial and the metropole is best exemplified in *Home Fire* by the discussion around national identity introduced early on the novel as Isma and her PhD supervisor, Dr Shah, reminisce about a class discussion they had years before:

Dr Shah, if you look at colonial laws you’ll see plenty of precedent for depriving people of their rights; the only difference is this time it’s applied to British citizens, and even that’s not as much of a change as you might think, because they’re rhetorically being made un-British. *Say more.* The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as “British terrorists.” Even when the word “British” was used, it was always “British of Pakistani descent” or “British Muslim” or, my favourite, “British passport holders,” always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism. (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 33)



Isma's criticism of how discourse about Britishness was presented in the media coverage of terrorist attacks is particularly poignant when one considers Karamat Lone's rhetoric as Home Secretary when addressing issues of citizenship. Pasha is highly critical of the fickle grasp ethnical and religious minorities have on their own identities as British citizens. They can be quickly divorced from their Britishness by the authorities and public opinion if they step out of line. Within this context, I return to the question asked by the officer who interrogated the eldest Pasha sibling at the airport: "Do you consider yourself British?". Government officials evidently wished to gauge Isma's loyalties. Nevertheless, her pledge of allegiance to the Union Jack would count for nothing in case a high-ranking officer or politician decided she was engaged in any activities or liaisons that could be understood as "unbritish". In turn, to present himself as a suitable candidate for the post of Prime Minister, Karamat became a person who was seen by the community he came from as "Mr. British Values. Mr. Strong on Security. Mr. Striding Away from Muslimness" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 42).

Karamat Lone defends the right of the State to strip any "British passport holders of their citizenship in cases where they have acted against the vital interests of the UK" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 131). The Home Secretary states that "citizenship is a privilege not a right or birth right." (p. 131), taking the expression Isma criticises, "British passport holders", one step further in his quest to become Prime Minister. Parvaiz Pasha's murder by members of ISIS in Turkey ignites a crisis that ultimately holds up a mirror that reflects both the similarities and discrepancies between *Home Fire's* and *Antigone's* characters. Parvaiz regretted his choice of joining the group and wished to go home. As soon as she became aware of this, Aneeka began trying to find a way to convince the Home Secretary to allow her brother to return. Although it is clear to the reader that Karamat Lone could not possibly agree to that, Parvaiz is shot down before he could do anything to prevent the young man's return. The Home Secretary did, however, prevent Pasha's body from being repatriated to England by stripping him of his British citizenship. Lone refused to refer to Parvaiz as a British citizen and stated that the government would not allow "those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 132). At this point, Isma mirrors Ismene as she refrains from reacting against the law of the State that she had so passionately criticised when



younger. With Aneeka already hurt by the knowledge that Isma was the one who had alerted antiterrorism authorities to the fact that Parvaiz had joined ISIS, the strained relationship between the two sisters hits its final argument. Shamsie provides the reader with a long, unmediated exchange between the sisters that resembles a play format. Aneeka wants to bury her brother by their mother's side, in London. The younger sister asks Isma what she would be willing to do for Parvaiz, to which she replies she can only pray for his soul. Aneeka remains resolved to "bring him home, even in the form of a shell" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 140). To her, it is a matter of honour as much as it is a matter of justice. "Accept the law, even when it's unjust" (p. 140), Isma instructs her sister. Aneeka's final refusal cements the point of rupture where the allegiances are most clearly laid out; Isma will obey the law, Aneeka will seek justice.

Parvaiz's body is repatriated to Pakistan as he loses his dual citizenship. The fact he is stripped of his British passport *post-mortem* highlights the instability of national identity, especially for minorities, and especially in Britain. When narrating her father's story to Eamonn, Isma tells him of how little she and her family knew of what happened to Adil Pasha. The eldest Pasha sibling states that secret service officers went to her home asking questions about her father some time after he left them without stating their reason for doing so. The official procedures that define the government's handling of Adil Pasha's disappearance and death implicate a silencing of the family's questions about his whereabouts and even their grief. The price for remaining a part of their London community was to refrain from questioning the legality of the procedures applied to his case and renounce to keeping his memory altogether. The Pasha family had to forfeit their right to look for answers:

We knew something was wrong, and my grandmother said maybe we should try to contact someone—the Red Cross, the government, a lawyer—to find out where he was. If my grandfather had still been alive that might have happened, but he wasn't, and my mother said if we tried looking for him, we'd be harassed by Special Branch, and by people in the neighbourhood, who would start to suspect our sympathies. My grandmother went to the mosque looking for support, but the Imam sided with my mother—he'd heard too many stories of abuse suffered by the families of British men who'd been



arrested in Afghanistan. One of my grandmother's friends had said the British government would withdraw all the benefits of the welfare state—including state school and the NHS—from any family it suspected of siding with the terrorists. (...) My mother knew that wasn't true, but she allowed my grandmother to believe it. (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 41)

Isma's rhetoric always reiterates the duty of colonised minorities to repeatedly reaffirm their loyalties. Although she speaks of the "British men who'd been arrested in Afghanistan", it appears that by the time Pasha had been killed, he was not thought of as a British citizen anymore. In *Necropolitics* (2003), Achille Mbembe approaches the concept of sovereignty by assuming that it resides "to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 11). Therefore, the discretionary judgment, by the State, of those who must be killed and those can live is inherent to the exercise of its sovereignty: "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (MBEMBE, 2003, p. 12). This is something Adil Pasha's case illustrates. Karamat Lone states that Parvaiz was a "peculiar case" among Pakistani-British boys from Preston Road because he had "terrorism as family trade" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 79). He is thus aligned with his father among the "enemies of Britain" who must be kept away from it. Father and son were both killed, and their family was not allowed to mourn their deaths as they crossed the abyssal line that tossed them into unreachable otherness. The Home Secretary does not see Parvaiz as a British boy who became radicalised; he became the enemy as soon as he left for Syria. To be labelled as a terrorist automatically strips Parvaiz of his humanity in the eyes of Western society. This process of dehumanization addressed by Santos as being made possible by abyssal thought is also approached by Mbembe as a symptom of Necropolitics. Within the logic of a Necropolitical State, the attempt to deny, expatriate and erase the Britishness of citizens who ally themselves with radicalised forces is part of an effort to link them to the archetype of the colonised savage. Mbembe points out that, historically, the "savages" were perceived as disposable or "'natural' human beings who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality" (2003, p. 24). Therefore, in killing them, the colonisers would argue that they had not committed murder at all.



In *Home Fire*, Pakistan is seen by Karamat Lone as the motherland of savage behaviour and Sharia law, its enforcer. The Home Secretary becomes enraged when Aneeka Pasha states that she is leaving Britain to go to Karachi in search for justice after Parvaiz is killed and Lone forbids the repatriation of his body to England. To Lone, having renounced any allegiance to his Pakistani heritage, there is no such thing as justice there. He speaks of the Middle East as “a place of crucifixions, beheadings, floggings, heads on spikes, child soldiers, slavery, and rape” (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 179). This echoes Mbembe’s analysis of how the necropolitical metropole looks at the colony:

The colonies are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world. Their armies do not form a distinct entity, and their wars are not wars between regular armies. They do not imply the mobilization of sovereign subjects (citizens) who respect each other as enemies. They do not establish a distinction between combatants and non-combatants, or again between an “enemy” and a “criminal.” It is thus impossible to conclude peace with them. In sum, colonies are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other. As such, the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.” (MBEMBE, 2003, p. 24)

Although these are Karamat Lone’s views, Shamsie is careful not to stigmatise the issue of radicalisation by the way she lets the reader into Parvaiz’s mental restlessness as he leaves Britain and his sisters for Syria. In an interview with Chris McDonough and Stephanie McCarter, the author spoke about the grooming techniques of groups such as ISIS, pointing out that she saw that there was an untold story about how vulnerable young men such as Parvaiz Pasha are usually seduced into joining. Many times, she argues, they are attracted not by an opportunity to fight, but by a “more subtle form of propaganda” that calls out: “come and live here, you’ll have a better life” (MCDONOUGH; MCCARTER, 2017). By allowing the reader to watch Parvaiz’s process of radicalisation through his own eyes, Shamsie restores the character’s humanity as well as the empathy a reader cannot



help but feel when following the unfolding of the events that led to his death.

*Home Fire* exposes the faults and the distortions inherent to the understanding of Britishness that Karamat Lone defended. The same problematic constructs that helped him become powerful also precipitated his downfall. In her final pledge, delivered under the scorching Karachi sun by the side of her brother's unburied body, Aneeka likens Karamat to "wicked tyrants" (SHAMSIE, 2017, p. 163), to the backwardness and violence he allowed himself to attach to the colony. Kamila Shamsie's writing is masterful as she allows her readers to question and reconsider their assessment of how public discourse and political actors handle, instrumentalise and relativize national identity and the construction of otherness, as well the instability of the rule of law, especially for minorities. In this paper, I sought to raise and analyse those questions under the light of Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* and Boaventura de Sousa Santos' concept of abyssal thought. Aneeka Pasha's final appeal as well as her death alongside Eammon blur the lines described by Santos. Although Karamat's son is not automatically labelled a terrorist, he chose Aneeka over his nation, his family and his home, embracing her cause. Death soon comes to encompass all, disgracing Lone in a political and in a personal sense, violently waking him up to the reality that he was never truly an authoritative voice within the establishment he so fiercely defended: he was the other as well.

## WORKS CITED

HIRSCH, A. **British: On Race, Identity and Belonging**. New York: Vintage, 2018.

MBEMBÉ, J.-A.; MEINTJES, L. Necropolitics. **Public culture**, v. 15, n. 1, p. 11-40, 2003.

MCDONOUGH, C.; MCCARTER S. **Reimagining Antigone for the Age of Extremism: A Conversation with Kamila Shamsie**. 11 Dec. 2017. Available at: <https://eidolon.pub/reimagining-antigone-for-the-age-of-extremism-e3d201e75a42>. Access on: 20 Jan. 2019.

SANTOS, B. S. Para além do pensamento abissal: das linhas globais a uma ecologia de saberes. **Revista crítica de ciências sociais**, n. 78, p. 3-46, 2007.

SHAMSIE, K. **Home Fire**. New York: Riverhead Books, 2017.

