

## **Ambiguous Pakistani-Muslim masculinities in the diaspora: a study of Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers***

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Masculinity, as Bhabha writes in an essay which takes its title from a taunt repeatedly thrown at him by his father ('Are You a Man or a Mouse?'), 'is the "taking up" of an enunciative position, the making up of a psychic complex, the assumption of a social gender, the supplementation of a historic sexuality, the apparatus of a cultural difference' (1995, 58). *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Aslam's 2004 novel, centres on a fictitious lower-class Muslim-Pakistani diasporic community in northern England and the exploration of cultural difference in the text often entails drawing a sharp dividing line between 'Western' values and Islam, where the former is ostensibly equated with individual freedom, personal fulfilment and happiness for both the sexes and the latter, particularly in its fundamentalist manifestations, with repression and tyranny. This contrast becomes especially stark when the narrator catalogues the atrocities carried out in the name of religious orthodoxy by the immigrant community against its female members. In this article, I address Aslam's ambiguous representation of British-Muslim masculinities and aim to tease out the various, sometimes contradictory, strands of his portrayal of male identities, to evaluate the ways in which it not only complicates the Islam–West and orthodoxy–modernity binaries but also problematises the feminist project of the novel. Families being 'the first site in which masculinities are constructed' (Heward 1996, 37), my analysis is particularly attentive to Aslam's depiction of male–female familial relationships and the construction of fatherhood in the text, specifically with respect to the character of Shamas, a 65-year-old married man and father of three.

The eponymous lovers of the novel are Shamas's brother Jugnu and Chanda, a young woman who had previously been forced into three marriages by her parents. At the heart of the narrative is the lovers' brutal murder by Chanda's brothers, Barra and Chotta, for having brought dishonour upon the family by living together 'in sin'.<sup>1</sup> In the narrative, this 'honour crime', one of many, reflects patriarchal values but also a fundamentally different conception of crime within the Muslim community than in the 'West': 'For people in the West, an offence that did no harm to another human being or to the wider society was no offence at all, but to her – to all Muslims – there was always another party involved – Allah' (50–51). The novel abounds in many other examples of violence against women (rape, murder, sexual and physical abuse) and presents a biting critique of the community's tyrannical surveillance of women's sexuality, against a

backdrop of the freedoms that the host culture offers. For instance, Shamas finds nothing more 'beautiful' than the sight of a group of Saturday night revellers, 'young white men and women ... smelling of alcohol, hair and clothing awry, on their way back to their homes from some late night party' (207): a sight that would disgust other members of the community who would perceive it as proof of Western decadence. The narrative also brings to the fore the misogynistic hypocrisy underpinning the community's behaviour, with Chotta seeing 'nothing in common between his secrets nights with a woman he was not married to and Chanda setting up home with Jugnu' (490).

Anne Philips (2010, 3) points out that when women's rights 'figure as a marker of modern liberal societies...this constructs a stereotypical boundary between Western and non-Western values that represents people from ethnocultural minorities as peculiarly resistant to gender equality'. In Aslam's novel, this contrast is arguably embodied in Jugnu's 'Westernized' brother Shamas, an atheist and socialist who, unlike the other men of the community, is particularly sensitive to the sufferings of diasporic women as well as the plight of women in Pakistan. The majority of the male members of the community embody a deeply 'patriarchal masculinity' which, as Hooks (2000, 70) explains 'teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others', making them 'psychologically dependent on the privileges (however relative) that they receive simply for having been born male'. Aslam's exploration of male and female identities does grapple with the tight intersection of racial and class markers with gender, and reflects the marginalisation of male immigrants within the predominantly white host country because of their lower-class, racialized positioning. For instance, after having witnessed a male bus driver of Pakistani heritage being subjected to racist abuse, Chanda's mother worries about him taking out his 'humiliation' at home, 'lashing out at his own children and the wife' (255–256). For the most part, however, the misogynistic behaviour of the diasporic community is depicted as being almost solely rooted in an orthodox Islam which, having been imported from Pakistan, became further distilled in the 'semi-elected' ghettoised isolation of the immigrants who are determined to distance themselves from the white population (Moore 2009, 6).<sup>2</sup>

The narrator of the novel, as Yaqin (2012, 108) points out 'is always concerned with the fate of girls and young women who are shown to be at the forefront of their community's absolutist approach to personal morality', a concern that is often conveyed through Shamas's consciousness. For instance, he warns his lover Suraya that 'Pakistan is not just a wife-beating country, it's a wife murdering one' (325). His character is constructed, along-side his brother

Jugnu's, to represent a 'feminist masculinity' which critiques and challenges 'male domination of the planet, of less powerful men, of women and children' (Hooks 2000, 70). Despite having the financial wherewithal to move away from Dasht-e-Tanhaii<sup>3</sup> (the impoverished northern English town where the community resides and which it has re-named in Urdu), Shamas continues to live there and serve its residents through his work for the Community Relations Council and the Commission for Racial Equality. Shamas's critique of Islam is carried out through a distinctly gender-sensitive lens, as he declares that one of the things that he finds 'repulsive' about the religion is that it allows men to have four wives (325). But he is also shown to temper his criticisms of Islam out of respect for his wife Kaukab who is an ultra-orthodox Muslim. A much emphasised trait of Shamas's feminist character is his interest in the arts, in particular his passion for music and poetry, which are ostensibly meant to echo both his emotional sensitivity and sensuality. It is a sensuality that is thwarted by his wife who constantly rejects his advances. Driven by loneliness and pain of his brother's disappearance, he begins an affair with Suraya, a divorcee who, unbeknownst to him, is looking for a quick second marriage and divorce, as prescribed by Islamic law, so that she can return to her former husband and young son.<sup>4</sup>

### **Pakistani-Muslim masculinities, dangerous masculinities?**

According to Bhattacharyya (2008, 20) the 're-working of a long-running racist myth' in the dominant imaginary has replaced 'the black rapist' with 'a brown man from a backward and misogynistic culture, anti-feminist, sexually frustrated by traditional culture, addicted to honour killings and viewing women as tradable objects'. Moreover, the image of the young Muslim male as an aggressive, anti-social presence in Britain which arguably first emerged with the Rushdie Affair in the late 1980s, became heightened, as Ahmed (2009, 285) points out, following a succession of events such as the 'race riots' in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, the September 11 attacks, the protests against the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2005 bombing in London. The other discourse about Muslim masculinity in Britain which includes young Muslim men in the 'the wider category of young "Asian" men', and emphasises 'effeminacy and academicism' is now distinctly less prevalent (Hopkins 2006, 337–338). Young Muslim men, according to Ahmed (2009, 286), have 'become hyper-masculinized through a discourse that identifies [them] increasingly with disaffection, criminality, violence and terror and leaves little space for alternative subjectivities'. Since 2010, several sex abuse cases, such as the Rochdale grooming scandal where nine Muslim men (eight of whom were of Pakistani heritage) abused and exploited white underage girls, have also spawned a discourse led by far-right organisations, in collusion with tabloids, which seeks to cast Muslim-Asian men and more

specifically Pakistani men as ‘dangerous pedophiles’ (Orr 2014, 192) and ‘violent sexual deviants’ (Tufail 2015, 31).

In Aslam’s novel we encounter numerous examples of fundamentalist and deviant masculinities. For instance, a young man in the community drops out of medical school and takes up ‘radical Islam’ proclaiming that ‘everything from democracy to shaving cream was unIslamic’ (302). Another example is the paedophile who is caught (by Shamas) in the act of sexually abusing a male child. It is surely no accident that the man is a cleric and that the abuse takes place at the neighbourhood mosque, suggesting a possible link between paedophilia and Islamic dogma. In its insistence on charting multiple instances of abuse and violence, the text on occasion echoes the dominant stereotypical discourse about young Muslim-Pakistan men in Britain but it does not extrapolate the fictitious community’s behaviour onto all Muslim men in Britain. Furthermore, if Aslam does not shy away from depicting deleterious masculinities in the community, he also charts the complex layers characterising traditional patriarchal masculinities as well as the forces underpinning them, including the role of women. The structures of male dominance are shown to be perpetuated and nurtured by the mothers, with one mother exhorting her son-in-law to ‘rape’ her daughter if she continues to refuse to consummate the marriage (125). As Ruvani Ranasinha (2009, 305) points out, the mothers in the novel teach their sons that ‘the fraught process of becoming a man means excluding women’ and their expectations contribute to the construction of ‘oppressive racialized masculinities’. To quote another example, in an effort to induce obedience from her female child, a young mother resorts to the following threat:

If you don’t behave, I’ll not only give you away to the whites. I’ll give your brothers away too. They’d make sure he doesn’t learn to drive when he grows up and has to sit in the passenger seat while you drive. Do you want an eunuch for a brother? (317, emphasis in the original)

The Othering at work here relies on racism as well as oppressed femininities and masculinities whereby a brother’s socially constructed deficient masculinity (resulting from an act as simple as being driven by a female) implies also a deficient femininity (rooted in the ‘unfeminine’ ability to drive). Masculinity within this diasporic community then is defined negatively not only in terms of lack of femininity but also in terms of a lack of ‘contamination’ by the surrounding white culture.

The brother–sister relationship lies at the heart of a man’s marginalised positioning with respect to other male members of the Dasht-e-Tanhai community. For instance, Barra and Chotta had tolerated Chanda’s estranged husband’s contemptuous behaviour towards them as

they had been brought up to believe that a man must respect his brother-in-law because he has taken the burden of your sister off your hands, that he is to be feared lest he take offence at anything you've said and abuse or divorce your sister. (493)

Language reflects these hierarchies in masculinity, as the Urdu/Hindi/Punjabi word *sala* for 'brother-in-law' is also a 'term of abuse all over the Subcontinent: to call someone sala was to say...“You can't stop me from trying my manhood on one of your women!”(493). Barra and Chota's sense of masculine self is, in fact, terribly 'fragile' (McCulloch 2012, 85). Chanda's refusal to submit to their demands of ending her relationship with Jugnu was seen as a direct threat to their masculinity: “we are men but she reduced us to eunuchs bystanders by not paying attention to our wishes” (487). This 'lost' male identity then had to be recaptured and restored through violent action.

It is worth noting that despite the marked lack of affinity between Shamas and Kaukab, she strives to maintain traditional masculinities in her own home. Apart from his sensuality, Kaukab despises Shamas for his lack of faith, blaming her father-in-law's Hindu heritage for it. Yet, she attempts to cast Shamas as the 'natural' authority figure in the family and to compel him to play a hegemonic male role, not only with respect to their daughter Mah-Jabin but also their sons, Charag and Ujala. For instance, she chastises Charag for noticing the diminishing faculties of his ageing father. When he asked her once about Shamas's deteriorating hearing, Kaukab denied it and considered 'the inquiry impertinent. A son may not notice his father's inadequacies' (441). In fact, Kaukab is shown to have thrust upon him a particular kind of fatherhood, consequently alienating him from the three children. She compelled Shamas to play:

the role of the head of the family and he had to act accordingly: there were times when he came in to inform the young teenagers that something they had asked from their mother earlier – the permission for an after-hours school disco for example – was an impossibility and it was obvious from the look on his face that he personally had no problem with what the children wanted. (158)

Unwilling to frankly assume the role of the dominant partner and parent, which convention and religion deem unnatural, Kaukab seems to have adopted an 'emphasized femininity' in an attempt to manufacture hegemonic male identities in her home (Connell 1987, 183).

### **Marginalised masculinities**

In Aslam's novel, the construction of social honour or *izzat* within the community bears the hallmark of a patriarchal logic according to which a woman's body and sexuality are a repository of familial and communitarian honour, thereby seriously restricting her autonomy. But as

Coomaraswamy (2005, xi) points out, this notion of honour also underpins and defines ‘the ideal of masculinity’ and is therefore ‘fundamentally connected to policing female behaviour and sexuality’.

*Maps for Lost Lovers* reveals in considerable detail how patriarchy in combination with religious orthodoxy can lead to marginalised masculinities which contrast sharply with idealised dominant masculinities. As Hooks (2000, 65) warns us, patriarchy strips not only women, but also ‘men of certain rights, imposing on them a sexist masculine identity’. The novel depicts the phenomenon of son preference within the community: during his wife’s multiple pregnancies, Barra has the foetus destroyed at the neighbourhood fertility clinic if it is found to be female. But if son preference generally results in ‘greater freedoms and preferential treatment for young men’ (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2012, 608), Aslam charts also the myriad of ways in which young men are trapped within the community, mainly through his portrayal of Shamas and Kaubab’s sons and their adolescence. Aslam captures, for instance, the tremendous pressure on the young Charag to secure admission in medical school. He is made to feel by both the parents (and not just Kaukab) that, as the eldest son, not only his sister’s marital future but also the realisation of his parents’ dream to return to Pakistan depended on his success:

He was the elder son, and throughout his boyhood, was always accompanied by the sense that the family’s betterment lay on his shoulders ... this expectation had been inhaled by him with each breath he had taken in those early years. His parents wanted him to return to Pakistan: he would become a doctor and go back with them – this was understood by him ... He was troubled by the guilt of truancy every time he did something he enjoyed, every time he picked up his drawing pad. (176)

Aslam sheds light on the adverse consequences of mythical constructions by first-generation immigrants of their country of origin as a fixed ‘home’ to which a return is seen as necessary or at the very least, desirable. His parents’ unremitting focus on returning to Pakistan, and the role that he is expected to play in improving his sister’s chances of finding a husband, compel Charag to enrol in an undergraduate degree in chemistry which would lead to a more conventional career. It is only upon leaving his parents’ house that he is able to return to art.

In addition to the career choices available to them, Charag and Ujala’s sexuality is also closely monitored. The community’s culture, which seriously discourages any form of fraternisation between the sexes, leaves its men ill-equipped in their interactions with women and creates a sense of alienation. For example, when Charag meets Suraya for the first time, he is ill-at-ease: ‘it’s always been his understanding – the result of his upbringing – that reserve and aloofness is the best way to behave towards’ the women of the community (188). As a teenager, Charag feels

that 'the magnifying glass through which he was kept in sight was burning him' (184). The metaphor of the magnifying glass and the intensity of the familial gaze powerfully capture Charag's sense of being imprisoned within his own home. We can recall that 'a fear had breathed itself into the house once when a girl from school had telephoned Charag about homework' (183). Kaukab even enlists Mah-Jabin to spy on her brothers, sending her to their room to 'search for condoms, and addresses, phone numbers of white girls' (169). The control of teenage male sexuality takes even more tangible and sinister forms in the text. When Kaukab seeks the advice of a neighbourhood cleric on how to manage a rebellious teenage Ujala, he gives her some 'sacred salt', which is actually a bromide, to mix in the boy's food, so as to lower his libido and render him more malleable (432). The exponents of religious orthodoxy are thus shown to create 'docile' male bodies which may be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' to restore parental, and by extension communitarian order (Foucault 1977, 136).

The adult Charag sees the circumcision that he was subjected to as a baby as a ritualised act of violence demanded by religion and perpetrated against the male body without prior consent. His self-portrait with an uncircumcised penis is his attempt to redress this violence by challenging the logic underlying it:

What I am trying to say is that it was the first act of violence done to me in the name of a religious or social system. And I wonder if anyone has the right to do it. We should all question such acts. (457)

Perhaps also Charag is aware that the 'bodily modification of circumcision' can serve as an indication of 'belonging and unbelonging' in dominant discourses within both the host and diasporic cultures and can lead to exclusionary politics which rely on the 'construction of mythologies of sexual depravity and sexual dysfunction' (Bhattacharyya 2008, 88). But the engagement with the cultural or gendered significance of circumcision is cursory in the novel as Charag also admits that he had his own son circumcised, though it was not done out of a sense of religious duty but because the practice is 'probably healthier' (457). This contradiction suggests that more than the circumcision itself, he sees the blind following of religious dicta that may compel a parent to cause physical pain to his or her son as the ultimate act of violence. During one of his rare visits home, Charag also announces to the horror of his mother, that he has had a vasectomy. In her eyes, her son's chosen inability to spawn more children has 'unmanned' him (81). Furthermore, she sees the vasectomy as a breach of religious duty ('it was against Allah and everything that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had said'); for Kaukab then, masculinity is intimately tied in with male fertility and is primarily imagined within the narrow

confines of orthodox religion (81). By extension, not behaving the way practising Muslim men are supposed to behave almost becomes equivalent to not being a man at all.

Moreover, Kaukab is shown to be deeply uncomfortable with modern approaches to fathering which emphasise the importance of ‘father-child interaction’ in ‘successful child development’, instead of the traditional model which defines the father’s primary duty as attending to ‘family’s material and moral well-being’ (Mandell 2002, 32). She is dismayed to learn that Charag has to mind his own son and sees this as further robbing him of his male identity: ‘Looking after the children is the woman’s job ... if that white girl had done what a woman is supposed to do her son would still be a man’ (81–82). In charting the conflict between Charag and his orthodox mother, the narrative simplistically conflates traditional fathering, corporal punishment and Islam. When Charag shares with her his feelings of guilt about having struck his son once, quickly dismissing his remorse Kaukab reminds him that ‘parents are supposed to hit children, discipline them’ and then citing one of the Prophet’s sayings, she concludes that ‘too much freedom isn’t good for anyone or anything’ (82). As I discuss in the closing section of the essay, Aslam’s portrayal of a ‘modern’ father in the form of Shamas further problematises the conception of a benign, Western paternal masculinity in the text.

### **Feminism and masculinity**

I evoked earlier the construction of Shamas’s feminist masculinity and sensibility, which are aligned with Western, secular values. Jugnu, who was also a non-believer and who contested conventional logic according to which being born into a Muslim household ‘automatically’ made him a Muslim, is also presented as an example of benign masculinity (52). He was a ‘gentle’ and caring uncle to all three of Shamas’s children, his erudition filling their ‘nights and days’ with ‘unexpected wonder’ (15). McCulloch (2012, 84), even argues that Jugnu presents an ‘androgynous character’, whose gentleness was perceived by his mother as ‘Allah’s way of compensating her for the daughter she had always wished for’ (37). Aslam’s trenchant critique of the exercise and abuse of male power within the community needs to be considered in conjunction with his portrayal of the ‘Westernized’ Shamas’s feminist masculinity, which is not without its contradictions and problematic politics. For one thing, it indirectly downplays the power of patriarchy in modern Western cultures and to a certain extent echoes dominant discourses in the West not only about patriarchy and Islam but also about patriarchy and the West itself. ‘Modern subjects’, as Inderpal Grewal (2013, 2–3) argues, ‘are being made by disavowing the existence of patriarchy’ and the notion of patriarchy is effectively ‘outsourced from the USA and Europe to do its messy work elsewhere’; this process of outsourcing requires



the belief that ‘patriarchy no longer exists, or that if it does, it is limited to zones that are believed to be anachronistic to the rest of the country’ (such as the Dasht-e-Tanhaii community in the novel). We do find one instance in the narrative where Shamas observes crime figures in Britain as a whole and reflects on what they reveal about the position of women in society in general, and not just within the Pakistani-Muslim community: ‘According to the Home Office statistics 116 men were convicted of murder as opposed to just 11 women. Women are usually at the receiving end’ (198). But this observation is not contextualised with respect to wider ‘cultural’ realities and the focus quickly returns to the patriarchal atrocities within the Muslim community. If the narrative deploys Shamas’s consciousness to highlight Muslim women’s suffering in Pakistan and in the diaspora, it does not adequately address the power and workings of patriarchy across national, racial, ethnic and class boundaries. Shamas notes that ‘according to the statistics, in one Pakistani province alone, a woman is murdered every thirty-hours solely because her virtue is in doubt’ (195–196). But his character does not evoke the many forms of structured gender inequality and gendered violence that persist in the West which are nurtured by ‘right-wing conservatism, homophobic and racist projects and corporate capital’ as well as by ‘religious groups’ that have no affiliation with Islam (Grewal 2013, 7).

The construction of Shamas’s relationship with Suraya sheds further light on his ambiguous masculinity. In commencing a clandestine affair with her, he deceives his wife and effectively becomes an ‘adulterer’ (Upstone 2010, 105). But his adulterous impulse appears to stem primarily from Kaukab’s longstanding disdain for carnal relations with him. As a daughter of a cleric, Kaukab frowns upon intimacy even within the ‘sanctity’ of marriage and equates it with ‘rutting like animals’ (79). Shamas is aware of the disgust she feels towards him, particularly following his consumption of ‘the glass of whisky he allows himself a few times a month’, which she sees as an affront to her religious beliefs (276). Therefore, sexual intimacy is not the only element missing from the marriage; they have completely different worldviews which exclude the possibility of genuine companionship for which he longs desperately.

When Shamas first meets Suraya, he appears to be in search of no more than ‘friendship’ and a spiritual connection (221). However, the relationship quickly becomes a sexual one and the repeated references to his fear of mortality and his desire for Suraya’s youthful body risk rendering the affair almost banal and driven by lust: ‘He must stop thinking about death. He needs to touch Suraya, her youth, the life in her, feel her living breath on his face’ (278). The affair can certainly be read as an act of male selfishness: a man seeking to ‘fulfill his sexual desire and enjoy his lover’s youth’ (Lemke 2008, 180). Indeed, when he discovers Suraya’s real reasons for pursuing him, and refuses to take her as his second wife, she accuses him of using her to

‘satisfy his lusts’ (326). Shamas admits that his interest in Suraya includes her beautiful body but also her ‘company’ (328). He displays considerable self-reflexivity with respect to the relationship. Even though Suraya deceived him, he exhorts himself to ‘stop thinking about consequences of her departure on his spirit and inner life’, reminding himself that ‘what matters is Suraya and her predicament’ (329). Behaving with remarkable unselfishness, he offers to help her to begin custody proceedings for her son and is ready to do ‘all he can, write to MPs, find the best lawyers’ (345). Moreover, despite his anger Shamas is able to recognise that Suraya was compelled to have recourse to subterfuge because her religion left her with ‘no other way’ to reunite with her son, robbing her of all dignity (339). Though the narrative does allow Suraya moments of doubt when she questions Islamic law (in particular the requirement to remarry before being able to return to her first husband), both she and Kaukab are portrayed to be essentially brainwashed by puritanical dogma. Shamas’s wife and mistress speak the same language and ultimately, the affair does little to quell his sense of intense loneliness.

The one instance when Shamas behaves in an overtly violent manner towards Kaukab and the events following it are also relevant to our understanding of the construction of a male feminist sensibility in the novel. Early in his marriage, Shamas reacted violently when he realises that during the month of Ramadan his wife was making the baby Ujala fast by depriving him of milk and medicine. Moreover, she refused to pay heed to Shamas’s repeated exhortations to feed the baby:

She had resisted and he had dragged her across the floor, her breast bloody from his finger- nail. In the next room her lifted the baby in its sail-white blanket and placed it in her lap where she sat on the floor, milk beading bluishly at the tip of the chocolate-coloured nipple. Inert and apparently insensible, she hadn’t moved to connect the baby to the breast and he slapped her face ... (203)

Following this episode, Shamas leaves the marital home to move to the other side of town and lives in ‘squalid conditions’ for almost three years, posting most of his wages to Kaukab (204). He pleads for her forgiveness, which she eventually grants him. His departure from the house is clearly constructed a form of penance, and his continuing guilt over this isolated episode distinguishes him from the other violent males in the text: ‘Hadn’t he himself slapped Kaukab one day all those years ago? He had torn her shirt with both hands and dragged her across the room with all his strength, one of his breasts exposed and bloody from his fingernail’ (199). Early in the novel, when Kaukab slaps Mah-Jabin for criticising Pakistan, she retaliates by telling her mother: “‘Your husband beats you and you beat your children in return’” (165). This

suggests that her father's isolated act of violence against Kaukab has complicated Mah-Jabin's relationship with him and she does not perceive him as an entirely benign male. However, this comment made by Mah-Jabin contrasts jarringly with the fact that otherwise in the text, it is very much Kaukab, and not Shamas who is perceived as being a deficient parent. While her mother is hostile to her plan to travel to the United States, Mah-Jabin 'knows' that Shamas would not begrudge her her freedom and 'wouldn't object to her visiting America' (158). Later in the text, Ujala criticises his mother for curbing his father's freedom of speech within the house: 'She is the reason why father won't openly condemn the idiocies of Islam. He thought it would hurt her' (429, emphasis in the original). Indeed, as Ranasinha (2009, 305) points out, the fathers in the text are not 'pathologized as monstrous' the way the mothers are.

Moreover, while the narrative seeks to portray Shamas as a 'progressive husband and father' (Yaqin 2012, 109), his 'feminist' credentials arguably reveal themselves to be less fulsome when we examine his relationship with his children. Shamas is shown to defer to his wife in most matters. In particular, he does not contest the way that she raises the children, which is meant to be testimony to his feminist sensibility. 'Modernity' in Western states such as Britain is characterised by shifts 'in family life and gender relations', notably the 're-emergence of fatherhood as part of the redefinition of masculinity in the last 20 years', with the male being cast no longer as 'the distant wage-earner but a co-carer and parent in the work of raising a child, now emotionally involved with children in ways not previously expected or acknowledged' (Westwood 1996, 25–27). I would argue that Shamas's modern, 'Westernized' identity in the text entails a very traditional conception of fathering and fatherhood, with little emotional involvement with his three children. It can even be contended that his manifest sensitivity towards Kaukab's views conceals a lack of desire to be a committed father. For instance, when discussing his children with Suraya, he reminisces only about their childhood and 'won't be drawn of the subject of them as young adults, or more on what they are doing now' (309). Focusing on them as children arguably precludes perceiving them as individuals and concerning himself with their lives as adults.

Upon leaving home following his attack upon Kaukab, Shamas's almost three-year-long absence from his children's life is not explored in the text, nor the effect it had on them. Moreover, despite his condemnation of the community's dangerous ignorance and its terrible treatment of women, particularly young girls, he did nothing to prevent his 16-year-old daughter from discontinuing her education and being married off to a cousin in Pakistan, even if she expressed a desire to leave England to overcome a broken heart. Like Kaukab, Shamas failed to give her 'the advice she needed, did not tell her openly what she was getting herself into' (427).

He knows nothing of her suffering at the hands of her violent former husband. In a similar vein, he shows no concern for his son Ujala who drops out of school at fifteen nor when he leaves the family home, breaking off all contact with both the parents for seven years: incidents which are clearly a source of much pain for his wife. We must remember also that Shamas contributed to the pressure experienced by Charag as a young boy to pursue a career in medicine so that his professional success would guarantee his parents' return 'home' to Pakistan.

Despite being portrayed as a lover of the arts, Shamas shows no interest in Charag's paintings and had 'never him encouraged him to paint' as a child (454). In the narrative Shamas's indifference is problematically explained (and indeed justified) in terms of the content of Charag's earlier paintings which Shamas deemed 'too personal to the boy to hold any interest' for him (454). In an almost uniformly bleak novel, the post-trial<sup>5</sup> dinner scene carries a note of mitigated happiness in the form of father-son bonding between Charag and Shamas. This happens when Charag shares with his father some old photographs from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s of Indian and Pakistani immigrants, based on which he intends to do 'a series of paintings' (454). Only now when Charag is looking to weave a public narrative into his work does Shamas deem his work worthy of interest. Only now does Shamas appear to feel any pride for his son's art: 'Shamas looks at Charag, a bird in his chest pipping proudly: My son ... my son ... ' (454). Learning of his son's choice of a 'public' subject, that of the history of South Asian immigration in Britain, Shamas 'knows he is maturing as an artist, becoming aware of his responsibility ... Good artists know that society is worth representing too' (454–455, emphasis mine). Indeed, Shamas's approach to Charag's art strongly hints at an acceptance of a patriarchal dichotomy which privileges the public (male) sphere over the private (female) sphere, considering the latter 'comparatively trivial' (454). Shamas appears to see the public 'separated' from the private, the 'political from personal', a view which enforces 'a supposed set of absolute standards' of what constitutes a good artist (Russ 1997, 112). Of course, the privileging of the public/male sphere over the private/female sphere remains a hallmark of most Western, and not just 'traditional', societies.

Shamas's focus on his work and his responsibilities towards society, to the detriment of his fatherly duties does not go unnoticed by other members of his family: 'He remembers something Kaukab has often accused him of in the past: that he retreats from the problems around him by thinking about his work' (350). Later in the novel, Ujala accuses his father of being too busy 'daydreaming about the world and the time his grandchildren were to inherit', consequently not addressing 'his responsibilities to the people around [him] here in the present' (461). But his neglect of the children is camouflaged within the text, so that it emerges as far less

harmful than the mother's behaviour. In fact Shamas's conduct is defended in the narrative, in the voice of his other children, who underscore the nobility of his commitment to public affairs: Father did contribute. When he came here he got workers at his factory to join the unions, he also battled with the unions because they weren't accepting foreigners into their ranks', Charag says. 'He's been involved in such works all his life. (462)

For Shamas, public struggles take precedence over private, domestic issues, a hierarchy which is not challenged by the omniscient narrator. Shamas does not respond to Ujala's accusation, not does it cause him to consider his failings as a father. Instead, he reacts by 'avoiding everyone's eyes' because, the narrator informs us, 'he wants this episode to be over quickly and not because he is ashamed of what he once believed – still believes – namely: that a fairer, more just way of organizing the world has to be found' (461). It should also be pointed out that Shamas's deference to Kaukab seems to be limited to familial issues and child rearing. In other matters which involve the 'public'/male arena, he stands his ground. In the past, Shamas dismissed Kaukab's desire to move to a better neighbourhood, one which did not boast of 'a suicide attempt a year, twenty-nine people registered insane' and 'many break-ins' in a single month (65) and where his children would have better examples than 'dole collecting sons of factory workers' who left school at 15 (469). He dismissed also her pleas for him to accept appointment to the Order of the British Empire on the grounds that he neither sought 'honour among men not kingship over them' (468). As these instances illustrate Shamas is quite capable of exercising his male prerogative when he deems it necessary. Even the meanings of their names in Arabic ('Shamas' meaning the sun and 'Kaukab' a star) are significant as they appear to symbolise an implicitly hierarchical relationship.

Therefore, despite its indictment of patriarchy, on occasion the narrative paradoxically subscribes to a patriarchal division of labour, presenting parenting as the mother's jurisdiction (and potential failing). If Shamas's parenting is criticised, either the criticisms are depicted for the most part as distorted, because voiced by an orthodox, intransigent Kaukab or if articulated by one child are overruled by another, so the reader is left with the impression that his relationship with the children is essentially an unproblematic one. The post-verdict dinner scene when the three siblings rightly attack their mother for her destructive orthodoxy, but do not properly confront the father for his neglect, for choosing and privileging public narratives over familial ones, weakens the novel's critique of patriarchy. Effectively, this condemnation of Kaukab's flaws as a mother entails a glossing over of the secular, 'modern' Shamas's shortcomings as a father.

The depiction of diasporic Muslim-Pakistani masculinities in the novel reflects the many facets of gender inequality and patriarchal oppression against both women and men. But the portrayal of masculinities in *Maps for Lost Lovers* is subsumed into its overarching concern about the 'strife' between 'orthodox Islam and modernity' and risks simplifying both categories (Butt 2008, 153). While exploring and condemning the most obvious and brutal examples of patriarchal logic within the immigrant community, the text does not adequately recognise the subtler manifestations of gender inequality and the decisive ways in which it complicates the modernity–orthodoxy binary. *Maps for Lost Lovers* underestimates the persistence of patriarchy in modern societies such as Britain and the portrayal of 'modern' fatherhood in the text reflects the challenges of constructing a nuanced feminist masculinity which does not rely on oppositional cultural dichotomies, whether in a diasporic context or otherwise.

## Notes

1. Aslam ([2004] 2012, 46). Subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.
2. Sunjeev Sahota's recent novel *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) grapples with an almost equally insular British Sikh community whose values are at odds with mainstream British society and which, with its focus on the notion of honour, produces not only marginalised femininities but also oppressive and oppressed masculinities.
3. In the novel the expression 'Dasht-e-Tanhaii' is translated as both 'the wilderness of solitude' and the 'desert of loneliness' (40).
4. Under Islamic law, once divorced, in order to remarry her former husband, a woman must first marry another man and consummate this second marriage. Only after the second marriage is terminated can she remarry her first husband following a waiting period (Joseph and Nagmabadi 2005, 443).
5. Towards the end of the novel, Barra and Chotta are found guilty of murdering Chanda and Jugnu in a British court.

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