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Deer crossing. Moose crossing. Old people crossing. Children crossing: Reading Islamophobia through a vegan lens in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

Emelia Quinn
Oxford University, UK

Abstract

This article uses close textual analysis of Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* in order to reevaluate contemporary theorizations of Islamophobia in relation to global speciesism. By addressing the lacuna in current work engaging with Islamophobia of an understanding of speciesism as a form of discriminatory oppression engrained within the hierarchical divisions of categories of human identity, the article seeks to establish a radically new vegan mode of reading with which to approach literary texts. Exploring the concept of a vegan lens as a mode of reading that seeks to expose the power of language and metaphor in maintaining the absent referent of nonhuman animals, and to challenge the way we understand the construction of human and nonhuman animal identity in relation to Islamophobia, it suggests the variety of ways in which speciesism has been foundational to the assertion of an "us" versus "them" dichotomy. Shamsie's novel is thus read in order to complicate and multiply the human/nonhuman animal divide apparent within current discussions of postcolonial identity.

Keywords

Islamophobia, vegan, Kamila Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*, speciesism

Introduction

On 13 September 2001, two days after the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, a group of British men desecrated a mosque in Exeter, England by dumping pigs' heads outside and smearing blood on the walls (Woolcock, 2002: n.p.). Despite minimal news

Corresponding author:
Emelia Quinn, Wolfson College, Oxford University, Linton Road, Oxford, OX2 6UD, UK.
Email: emelia.quinn@wolfson.ox.ac.uk

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coverage, this deliberately provocative act has been appropriated by several scholars as indicative of a new wave of post-9/11 Islamophobia that subsequently emerged in contemporary Britain (Allen, 2010: 104; Spencer, 2014: 280). However, amongst both the limited media exposure and disproportionately large scholarly response to the evocative images conjured by such an event, one must recognize a refusal to see the pigs' heads as anything more than a symbol of hostility toward British Muslim communities.

From the perspective of the perpetrators, including those enacting a multitude of similar attacks involving pigs' heads that came in its wake, the irony of using dismembered animal bodies to intimidate a community stereotypically perceived as inherently violent and barbaric seemed lost. Criticism of halal slaughter methods as cruel to animals has become increasingly systemic in the West, reinforcing such irony. However, the clumsiness of reporting across both scholarly and journalistic works condemning these actions, presents an uncomfortably similar inability to acknowledge the underlying violence against nonhuman animals necessary to carry out such a crime. For example, the BBC reported that 10 heads were left (2001: n.p.) before lowering this to eight when reporting the conviction of the perpetrators in 2002 (2002: n.p.). The *Telegraph*'s 2002 report still stated 10 heads had been dumped in the car park (Woolcock, 2002: n.p.), whilst Chris Allen reports, from uncited sources, that seven were left impaled on spikes (2010: 104). In these accounts, no mention is made as to where the pigs' heads were sourced from. The proliferation of various statistics expresses that the death of any number of pigs was inconsequential in comparison with their symbolic relationship to Islamophobic hostility. In failing to recognize the live pigs behind the dismembered heads, such reports normalize the abuse of nonhuman animals in their attempts to condemn violent actions against Muslims. This striking blind spot in media and scholarly responses limits the potential of contemporary critical engagement with Islamophobia and is symptomatic of a global complicity in violence against nonhuman animals. The death of nonhuman animals and graphic display of their mutilated bodies is viewed across these reports as neither shocking, nor relevant, to a critical evaluation of Islamophobia.

This article uses close textual analysis of Kamila Shamsie's critically acclaimed novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) to address the limitations of existing theorizations of Islamophobia within contemporary Western culture by evaluating the role of speciesism as a foundational structure underlying human identity discourses. Speciesism is defined here as discrimination based solely on species membership, bound to the assertion of human exceptionalism at the expense of nonhuman animals.

My central thesis is that the process of reading animals within cultural texts must be positioned within a definitive vegan framework, a term that the field of animal studies has appeared reluctant to critically engage with to date. Veganism, in its most basic sense, is the rejection of global speciesism and an attempt to live as far as possible without relying on the abuse and exploitation of nonhuman animals. Rather than simply a negotiation with the goods and services of the capitalist marketplace, it represents a commitment to a continual renegotiation of the way one lives in relation to others. This is aptly summarized by Anat Pick, in relation to veganism as the expression of a "creaturely sensibility", as "a worldly mode of engagement that acknowledges the realities of violence" (2012: 69). Pick's focus on the "realities of violence", rather than the specificity

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of speciesism or the nonhuman, establishes veganism as an identity that "exceeds the discrete notions of moral status and animal rights" (Pick, 2012: 78).

Derrida, in his seminal work within animal studies, critiques the term "animal" as a nonsensical limit that singularizes the figure of the animal as "the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond" (2008: 32). Rather than seeking to efface the limit that distinguishes the human from this singular notion of "the animal", his work consists "in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" (Derrida, 2008: 29). Veganism can function to complicate and thicken the singularity of the term "animal" by recognizing a subjectivity that is not reliant on a human/animal binary. This has the power to challenge our understanding of gender, sexuality, race, and other restrictive categories of human identity by actively choosing, and self-identifying, that one will not participate in the speciesist foundations which underlie such subject positions. It is in this sense that I refer to the queerness of veganism, as a disturbance of human identity suggestive of the possibility of cross-species relations, desire, and affinity.

The emphasis on the queerness of veganism takes much from Lee Edelman's (2004) polemical embrace of queer as a disruption to a social order affirmed through reproductive futurism. Edelman argues that the idealization of the Child, as the "fantasmatic beneficiary" (2004: 3) of political change, functions "not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness" (2004: 60). The queer, in contrast, is called forth to figure a Child-averse, future-negating death drive "opposed to every form of social viability" (Edelman, 2004: 9). I argue that this disruption to the reproduction of the social order elucidates the persistent link made between veganism and LGBT identity in contemporary culture. For example, as Laura Wright explores, veganism is posited as a corporeal threat to the health of the Child through a cultural discourse that controls women's bodies by blaming non-normative diets for "the murder of innocent children at the hands of their uninformed (at best) or sadistic (at worst) vegan mothers" (2015: 90). Furthermore, the figure of the vegan figuratively threatens a future in which the ways in which we understand "the human" are fundamentally changed. While Edelman embraces the *inhuman* as a way of exposing "the human itself as always misrecognized catachresis" (2004: 152), it is the incorporation of the *nonhuman* within fluid notions of subjectivity and response that disrupts "identification with the future of the social order" (2004: 26). As a mode of being in, and responding to, the world, veganism should not be viewed as a utopic vision of the future, but as a lateral growth that expands ways of negotiating subjectivity.

The post-9/11 climate of Islamophobia in the Western world provides a key starting point for the ambition of a vegan lens, where fervent anxieties around the perceived spread of Islamic culture centre around suggested threats to the reproduction of a distinct social order. Veganism, in this context, explores alternative modes of relating and responding to the Other that embrace this threat.

I must first address the recurring anxiety in current scholarship within this area, that despite a plenitude of work focusing on the word "Islamophobia", it lacks a definitive delineation. Allen seeks to redress this problem with the following definition:

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> Islamophobia is an ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting in similar ways to that which it has historically, although not necessarily as a continuum, subsequently pertaining, influencing and impacting upon social action, interaction, response and so on, shaping and determining understanding, perceptions and attitudes in the social consensus — the shared languages and conceptual maps — that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other. (2010: 190)

If one ignores the clumsy writing style of this otherwise ambitious and comprehensive definition, we can appreciate that the notion of Muslims and Islam as "Other" is significant and ties into Sayyid's tentative definition of Islamophobia as "the disciplining of Muslims by reference to an antagonistic Western horizon" (2010: 15).

Islamophobia differs from historical racist discourses that posit the ethnic Other as bodily, emotional, and thus animalistic, because it targets a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous out-group whose Otherness is defined principally in relation to that which diverts from normative Western values. The notion of a distinct Islamic identity is grounded firmly within the contemporary period, where various ethnic communities can be seen to have "regrouped and partly reinvented [themselves] as a 'new' Muslim diaspora with activist agendas in a post-9/11 climate" (Yaqin, 2011: 103–4). This article seeks to show that the signs, meanings and values of Islamophobia that reproduce the dominance of white, male power remain invested within a speciesist frame.

Whilst this assertion alone deserves a paper in its own right, I will briefly summarize it in relation to three key examples. First is the fear of what it means to become animal. In a Western context, the term "human" has historically been associated with being white, male, and European and has had to be expanded, over time, to include groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Cathryn Bailey evaluates the associated somatophobia of Western philosophical tradition, defined as a fear and loathing of the body, concluding that this mode of thought judges that "it is better to be rational, intellectual, and spiritual than emotional, bodily and physical" (2007: 41). This reflects on racist discourses which seek to posit the ethnic Other as more bodily and emotional, and thus closer to animals, recapitulating a similar rhetoric around women.

Second, the consumption of meat plays a significant role in the assertion of a virile, white masculinity. Carol J. Adams lays this out in detail, placing meat eating at the centre of a white, colonial history and regarding meat as a potent symbol of patriarchal control, where "[t]he male prerogative to eat meat is an external, observable activity implicitly reflecting a recurring fact: meat is a symbol of male dominance" (1990: 176). Meat consumption can be read as a signifier of traditional gendered roles as well as of religious and national identity, as will be explored below in relation to debates around halal slaughter.

Third, is the valorization of kindness to animals which emerged out of an age of empire. Western civilization appears to rely on a kindness towards animals in order to distinguish itself from an instinctive predatory violence. However, such a discourse is rife with contradiction. Kindness to animals, for example through the forms of pet keeping established at the start of the nineteenth century, has been critiqued as simply

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> another way to hide from ourselves the real violence between humans and animals beneath an image of sensibility, or even a means to deflect us from awareness of the violence between ourselves and others in an age of class conflict and global domination. (Kete, 2011: 15)

Appreciation for pets and their legal protection contrasts sharply with an ambivalence toward the slaughter and consumption of other animals as multiple interlocking discourses of the domestic, the wild, and the edible dictate which theoretical animals become subject to discourses of kindness and civilization.

Thus, if hegemonic white, Western, male dominance relies on a foundation of speciesism to form a singular notion of civilization, then by consequence the creation of an Other, posited as being opposed to its core values, must also be infused with this same speciesism. The denial of an attachment to the body or violence is part of an illusory discourse that shields the West from the reality of its brutality. The binary of the "West vs. the rest" (Nash, 2012: 3) is thus crucial to maintaining "the diffusion of the concept of 'civilization' — in the singular as opposed to the plural" that Immanuel Wallerstein notes as the location of institutionalized racism (2004: 66). By linking the Derridean pluralization of "the animal" to the pluralization of Western notions of civilization, a vegan theory must seek to multiply our modes of relation and avoid simply expanding what can enter into the category "human", risking the reinforcement of violent oppositions to that which cannot.

Whilst any number of the signs and values of Islamophobia could be explored here, the moral panic and media condemnation of halal slaughter is particularly apt. The growth of the halal meat industry across Europe marks the increasing reliance on halal as a marker of religious identity. John Lever and Mara Miele note that until the early 1990s in Britain, "many Muslims considered meat sold in mainstream retails outlets to be produced by people of the Book and therefore suitable for consumption" and argue that the increased demand for halal meat relates to a global climate which questions the legitimacy of Islam (2012: 530). It is the exemption of halal slaughter from EU laws on stunning before slaughter that provides a contentious point for its detractors. However, due to increasing demand for meat, a product no longer seen as an occasional luxury, the Food Standards Agency states that at least 90 per cent of British halal uses pre-stunning (Weaver, 2014: n.p.). Meat eating here reinforces both a nationalist British identity and distinct Muslim identity. In neither case are animals admitted as subjects; their slaughtered, dismembered bodies are instead taken as broader markers of national, cultural, and religious discourses.

Western condemnation of halal slaughter presents a rejection of perceived barbaric cruelty to animals, in opposition to the privileging of kindness to animals associated with civilized discourse. It is connected to criticisms of terrorist action and attitudes towards women that associate Islam and Muslims with archaic values incompatible with Western, liberal norms. However, there is no simultaneous movement alongside the condemnation of halal slaughter that seeks to reform farming or dairy industries. Nor is there a sense that by tackling Muslim slaughter practices, conventional slaughter practices will be liberated from enforced cruelty. Instead, the perception of Muslim mistreatment of animals enables a contrast that legitimates non-Muslim actions. Thus,

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Islamophobia normalizes the mistreatment of animals, as conventional slaughter methods become readily incorporated into the social order.

Thus, it is my contention that Islamophobia, as an ideology that maintains a distinction between the self and Other, must undergo a Derridean multiplication that complicates binary conceptions of identity and disrupts the assumption that the "self" is always that which is *not* animal (Derrida, 1991: 108). The following sections rely on close textual analysis as a way of evaluating both the ways in which speciesism manifests itself in assertions of identity, and how a vegan mode of reading would function to renegotiate how we relate to the world around us. Unlike the academic work of Philip Armstrong (2008) or Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010), which deals with texts directly engaging with the question of the animal, *Burnt Shadows* has been chosen because its depictions of human–animal relations have to date not been noticed by critics. In reading the novel through a vegan lens, I seek to expose the latent manifestations of speciesism in discourses around Muslim identity. I argue that theorizing Islamophobia will only have value if it seeks to affect changes in discriminatory practices that simultaneously seek to disrupt speciesism by embracing a heterogeneity that complicates the fixity of identity categories.

Burnt Shadows

Burnt Shadows is a novel ambitiously global in scope, in which Kamila Shamsie constructs a web of interconnected oppression across 60 years of real historical events. The Japanese-born protagonist, Hiroko, becomes entangled within this as the narrative follows her experiences during the US bombing of Nagasaki, colonial rule and the partition of India, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, and the American invasion of Afghanistan. Scholars such as Pascal Zinck (2010) have placed the novel within a diasporic tradition which turns against the celebration of hybridity and assimilation to comment on the failure of relocation and the dangers of homogenization.

Exploring the ways in which nonhuman animals feature in *Burnt Shadows* allows for an evaluation of the way in which transcending the confines of human identity categories requires a rupture with dominant speciesist discourses and the hegemony of human exceptionalism. By choosing from a wealth of unexplored nonhuman animal representation within the novel my analysis may invite criticism for appearing to preference larger mammals over, for example, persistent metaphorical descriptions of spiders. However, whilst admitting a certain degree of arbitrariness, given the confines of this paper, I have sought to focus specifically on examples in which the links between identity, speciesism, and vegan disruptions, are shown most clearly. I achieve this by exploring examples of the fear of becoming animal, dogs, the exposition of the absent referent, and meat eating within the novel.

Becoming animal

Nonhuman animals appear as metaphors and symbols of identity throughout the novel. For example, Sajjad, an Indian Muslim, is figured as a pigeon (Shamsie, 2009: 34),[1] a peacock (34), and a sunbird (38), within the first five pages in which he is introduced.

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This binds him to Hiroko, whose memories of the Nagasaki bomb are imprinted on her back as “birdshaped burns” (90). Different breeds of birds appear as symbols of what it means to subvert hegemonic models of Western civilization. For example, James Burton, an English colonist in India, reflects that “[h]e’d thought of [Hiroko] as a wounded bird when she first came to stay, but now he saw something more feral in her” (81) as she realizes the divisions between hers, Sajjad’s, and the Burtons’ worlds. James’s reflection expresses the wounded bird as a symbol of the tamed, subordinate Other. The title of this section, “Veiled Birds”, directly links this idea of Otherness with stereotypical associations that attach to Muslim women. James’s imagining of wounded birds is part of an imperial discourse that posits both Hiroko, and the veiled birds of the title, as separate from the white, male, Western mode of civilization and in need of his care and control. However, the “feral” becomes a metaphor for that which falls outside of the civilized world typified by rigid identity hierarchies.

Animal imagery is turned on the ruling class when the free indirect speech of the third person narration repeatedly grants us access to Elizabeth’s memories of her sex life, with husband James, in the weeks following her brother’s death in Nagasaki. Elizabeth describes how she “reached for James night after night, not mourning her brother but needing some assurance of her own body’s existence — she was flesh, blood, not a shadow” (69). This passage expresses how the presence of atomic bombs, capable of destroying all trace of life, threatens the notion of what it means to be part of human civilization. The sense of trying to regain a physical presence brings Elizabeth down to an animalistic status, where she avers, “[s]o this must be what sex feels like for animals” (35). Her desire to satisfy her sexual urges and regain an attachment to her physical body, subverts the civilized narrative that denies a connection to the bodily in favour of the intellectual and rational. This passage fits into Armstrong’s analysis of the meaning of animals in the fiction of modernity. He writes of the increase in narratives focusing on the “collapse of scientific modernity into feral chaos” (2008: 194) in the wake of events such as the bombing of Nagasaki “that brought into disrepute [modernity’s] promise of endless advancement through technological innovation” (Armstrong, 2008: 187). The return to the bodily and animal in the wake of such crises of modernity allows us to question the hierarchical binary between the bodily and the intellectual. Elizabeth’s experience of embodiment, and her own animality through sexual desire, gives her reassurance of her existence and sees her reclaim this idea of “feral chaos” as a liberation from the alienating and destructive powers of modernity.

However, this reclamation is limited as a queer challenge to civilized discourse when enacted as a comfort and security within the safety of a heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Furthermore, when Elizabeth, in conversation with husband James, compares her desires to those of animals, it results in him being “unable to meet her eye in daylight for the rest of the week” (35). The fear of what it means to become animal is conspicuous in its association with dominant narratives of white, Western civilization. James’s shame in being reduced to the status of a nonhuman animal is tied to his status as British colonizer, whereby a reliance on bodily and physical pleasure is an attribute associated with racist visions of the Indians that live in a separate world from his protected estate. Elizabeth’s uninhibited sexuality also challenges his masculinity, which relies on the binary of the sexually submissive female. James avoids eye contact with Elizabeth because of the

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shame that his white, male, upper-class subjectivity is under threat from what it means to be animal.

The assumption that to be animal is to be Other, and to lose the status of whiteness and civility, can also be seen by Elizabeth's immediate false accusation that Sajjad is a "rapist" (105) upon witnessing an intimate moment between him and Hiroko. Elizabeth's gaze is compulsively directed at Sajjad's erection under his trousers (92), and this underlines that, as a foreign Other, he is seen purely in relation to his sexual organ(s). Similarly, earlier in the novel she gazes at his lips, dismissing them as "so embarrassingly pink and fleshy" (34). Here the connotations of "fleshy" suggest anxiety about the animality of the body and its potential to become meat. When Hiroko tries to defend his innocence to the Burtons, it is significant that she asserts that he is not "an 'animal', [not] a 'rapist'" (105). Hiroko's conflation of "rapist" with "animal" reproduces a sexual coding that reinforces the Burtons' binary conception of civilization and barbarism as rooted within speciesism. Elizabeth's focus on Sajjad's animality means that she is unable to recognize his subjectivity outside that of "rapist". Thus, the fear of what it means to become animal is embedded within racist discourses and represents the fragile, speciesist components of white, Western identity.

Sajjad and Hiroko's consummation of their marriage is also marked by a focus on animals. A silver fox appears before them in order "to investigate the sounds" (199) of their sexual encounter. Whilst Sajjad mistakes it for "a burst of starlight" (120), at the moment of his orgasm, the narrative stresses that Hiroko had seen the fox "for what it really was" (120). However, Hiroko follows up this acknowledgement of the fox by thinking about its associations with Japanese myth, of the nine-tailed Kyubi, in which it represents a "guide and guardian" (120). It subsequently becomes an emblem of their love, immortalized by the painting on the wall of their marital home of two foxes nestled together (131). In this passage, Hiroko and Sajjad epitomize the Derridean notion that humans have denied animals the ability to respond to or meaningfully address the human through the power of the gaze. Sajjad transposes the reality of the fox facing them into a generic idea of "nature", as a product of the elements, whilst Hiroko translates the fox's response to their sexual encounter into national myth-making. While the couple's sexual experience, as described in relation to Elizabeth above, has the potential to embrace animality, the association of the fox with marriage, nation, and myth functions to disavow the real animal and complicate the ways in which the novel can be said to engage with the liberatory potential of animality.

This idea of the queer potential of animality has also been described as an experience of "shared embodiedness" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: 181) between human and nonhuman animals. A literal shared embodiedness can be read explicitly in the novel through its depiction of a shared history of imperialism. For example, Raza's experience as an immigrant, without legal documentation, escaping Afghanistan to get to Canada sees him board a plane full of caged animals (339). He must hide himself within the body of a disembowelled gorilla that has been fashioned for such a purpose. It is initially unclear as to whether this passage is a hallucination, with Raza reflecting that "his mind had definitely broken apart" (339). As a hallucination, Raza can be seen to invent the presence of these animals in order to distance himself from the denial of humanity characteristic of his refugee experience.

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Nonhuman animals are used as a potent metaphor for Raza's journey as a refugee to Canada, in relation to the modern state of exception, explored by Stephen Morton (2011: 28), in which figures such as the refugee and the terrorist are made exempt from so-called universal declarations of human rights. Raza's human protest is literally silenced by his embodiment of a gorilla carcass, a metaphorical comment on the reduction of refugees to animal status. However, as the cargo is unloaded later in the novel, the narrative makes clear that the animals are not a hallucination: "Raza heard the animals and birds chattering and shrieking and squawking as the cage was lifted out; but there were no sounds of human protest" (348). The emphasis on the variety of noises the animals emit encourages recognition of their presence as live subjects and their dual exemption from rights discourses. Indeed, the lack of audible "human protest" reflects not simply on Raza's silence within the body of the gorilla but the lack of protest against the imperial violence enacted against the nonhuman.

The fact that this journey is focused on Canada mirrors the logic of fugitive slave narratives. Canada represents safety for Raza from the threat of imprisonment and torture posed by the CIA. In contrast, the journey for the animals with which he shares the trip is one towards their continued imprisonment. This provides a foreshadowing effect, as Raza's dream of freedom in Canada is prevented by his arrest and imprisonment on arrival. By placing Raza inside the body of the gorilla, he physically embodies this nonhuman animal, disrupting the assumed hierarchy of human over nonhuman animal experience. Raza looks out through the eyes of the gorilla and the "steadily moving chest of the beast" (348) becomes an ambiguous combination of his respiratory system and the inbuilt "machinery that surged its chest" (348). Just as the historical is accentuated at the start of the novel when Shamsie relates the allusion to Raza's incarceration in Guantánamo Bay to 60 years of imperial history, asking "*How did it come to this*" (1), the notion of exotic animals on board a plane, transported according to the "whims" (348) of a private employer, can be read in relation to its own imperial history. As numerous scholars have already convincingly argued, zoos have an implicit relationship to imperialism: "[d]isplaying captured exotic animals side by side with those indigenous to a given land was meant to give visitors an impression of the national glory and vastness of empire" (Brantz, 2011: 90). Raza's journey places an Islamophobic discrimination against that which is not deemed to fit within the norms of late-capitalist modernity, alongside a speciesist discrimination against that which is not human, as part of a shared colonial history, through a process of shared embodiedness. Thus, animality, as a mode of identification between the human and nonhuman that distinguishes vegan theory from broader ecocritical debates, can be read throughout the novel as a site of anxiety that questions notions of agency and subjectivity.

Dogs

The relationship between humans and dogs also features throughout the novel. Dogs form a significant focus for the theorization of Islamophobia because several Islamic hadiths, or sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, declare them "ritually unclean" (Foltz, 2006: 130), and even today having dogs as pets, in Muslim cultures, remains uncommon.

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In contrast, the nineteenth-century revolution in modes of Western pet keeping sees such domestic companions lauded as part of civilized behaviour.

A key passage for this analysis is one in which Kim, the granddaughter of Elizabeth and James, and her father, CIA agent Harry Burton, walk through New York discussing the aftermath of 9/11:

> "I suppose this is all very mundane to you," she said. "Death and destruction. Good for business and entirely unsurprising." She knelt down by a lamp post and buried her hands in the thick fur of the collie leashed to it, furious at how much she had wanted his understanding. […] Harry held his hand out and the collie, who had accepted Kim's attention with the air of an aristocrat receiving nothing more than what's due, nuzzled at his palm. (270–1)

The idea of "[d]eath and destruction" being "good for business and entirely unsurprising" suggests a tying together of the multifarious evils of modernity that promote only the instrumental value of living beings. Significantly, this indictment is followed by the spontaneous act of noticing and granting affection to a dog. The fact that the passage refers specifically to the collie breed allows one to connect it to Western images of the iconic Lassie of novel, film, and television series fame. Meisha Rosenberg (2011) has argued that "portrayals of dogs work out [anxieties around racial difference] through the category of breed, tapping into assumptions about pedigree, heredity and race" (2011: 116). The specification of breed indicates that this dog on the sidewalk can be associated with American nationality. This ties the collie to narratives of civilization; Susan McHugh notes that Lassie affirms a human family structure in which "middle-class, heterosexual, white and Anglo-American ideals are reproduced" (2004: 106).

The description of this collie also marks a transition in the novel. Dogs are repeatedly associated with racist depictions of barbarism; for instance, the caged "African wild dogs bar[ing] their teeth" (339), Raza in his disembowelled gorilla, and the "wild dogs" (78) running amongst the ruins in Delhi, which, along with "native" strangers, are seen as a threat to the English Elizabeth. In contrast to this wildness, the passage in New York presents animals as embedded within hierarchies of human identity. The aristocratic air with which the collie accepts Kim's affection cements it within this narrative. Thus, the presence of a collie within a discourse of what it means to be civilized, in a Western context, confronts the contradictory nature of how nonhuman animals feature within discussions of empire.

There is a level of subjectivity granted to the collie in this passage that is not commonly found outside of self-consciously anthropomorphic narratives. In accepting Kim's attention, "receiving nothing more than what's due" (271), the collie embodies the Western valorization of domestic companion animals as worthy of access to rights discourses and links to the conception of breed dogs as "aristocrat[s] with strong ties to family and home" (McHugh, 2004: 130). The collie has a sense of agency in expecting such a response. This contrasts the inability of Raza, read as Muslim and a terror threat by the CIA, or Abdullah, considered a threat by the FBI, to expect automatic entry into rights discourses simply based on their humanness. Dogs as described in Delhi are dangerous, foreign threats to European sensibilities, whilst dogs in America are seen as expectant recipients of affection and respect. This contrast emphasizes the heterogeneity

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of responses to dogs and mirrors the responses through which Raza and Abdullah may be classed as “human”, but both fall outside of a Western notion of what can be classed as part of confused notions of humanity.

The absent referent

The novel can also be read in relation to the rejection of the consumer absent referents that enable wilful ignorance on behalf of the mass public. Here I am using Adams’ (1990) term “absent referent”, that she introduces to establish the three key ways in which nonhuman animals are made absent: through meat eating, “[animals] are literally absent because they are dead”; through definitions, the notion of “meat” and associated terms means we are no longer thinking about the slaughtered animal; and through metaphors, “the meaning of the absent referent derives from its application or reference to something else” (40–2).

As Kim idealizes the peace and tranquility of a holiday in the Adirondacks, she describes her delight that “disputes over ownership of a moose carcass could push almost everything else off the front page of the newspaper” (327). There is an irony here, where the ownership of a carcass is viewed in relation to disputes over dead Afghan civilians in the national news that Kim seeks to avoid. This irony is underscored by the fact that, upon his death, Kim’s father Harry is described as a “piece of rotting meat” (303). This description draws attention to a key anxiety inherent in the fear of becoming animal: being seen as consumable, *becoming* meat. The connection between Harry becoming meat through his murder at an American military base in Afghanistan, the moose as a dead object over which one can debate ownership, and the images of dead Afghan citizens which Kim seeks to avoid present a web of violence in which control, ownership, and a denial of subjectivity connect the human to the nonhuman. Kim’s inability to recognize the violence underlying the positioning of a “carcass” on the front-page newspaper mirrors her naïveté that provokes Hiroko’s anger — “[t]hat’s why Nagasaki was such a monstrous crime? Because it happened to me?” (294) — suggesting that Kim only confronts the horrors of modernity if she is personally acquainted with its victims, rather than having an inherent aversion to violence.

Keeping in mind the connection between slaughtered human and slaughtered nonhuman bodies, we can explore the various ways in which *Burnt Shadows* enables a focus on the dual reduction of human and nonhuman animal life to instrumental value. This can be seen as Abdullah, driving across the US border with Kim, expresses incredulity at the excess of road signs in America, warning: “DEER CROSSING. MOOSE CROSSING. OLD PEOPLE CROSSING. CHILDREN CROSSING” (341). He goes on to reflect “what a thing it is, to live in a country where every possible happening is announced in bright glow-in-the-dark letters. We wondered what would happen if something unexpected happened in a country like this, without any warning” (342). The events of 9/11 are positioned by Abdullah as counteracting America’s complacency as to its control of world events. This is expressed through the metaphor of road signs, which highlights Kim’s blindness to the realities of American violence toward other cultures. The significance of this passage lies in the fact that Kim “hadn’t noticed any of the road signs […] But she’d noticed flags” (342). The idea of remaining blind to such explicit sign-posting,

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suggests a world in which the American citizen is able to remain wilfully ignorant of systems of violence via the attraction of nationalism.

Kim's failure to acknowledge the road signs appears as an ironic metaphor for the ways in which her American patriotism prevents her from questioning a system which puts the most vulnerable, the children and the elderly, at risk. Equally crucial is the way in which nonhuman animals are also put at risk. Placing warnings for deer and moose alongside children and old people implicitly connects the dangers facing human and nonhuman animals. However, we must question the divergent motivations of these signs. Whilst the old people and children are granted protection from oncoming traffic for the sake of their own lives, the warning of moose and deer crossings has more to do with preventing the damage to cars or passengers that might be incurred as the result of a collision. Indeed, these are animals typically hunted for sport. The repeated association of cars as predatory animals — for example, Raza's Humvee is described as a "beast" (262) and pick-up trucks racing across the desert are described as "a pack of animals" (331) — posits these emblems of modernity as exposing the predatory urges behind discourses of civilization.

The link between identity, consumer capitalism, and abuse of nonhuman animals finds expression in the emblem of soft toy animals. Kim's suspicion that Abdullah might have driven over "a big pile of blue and pink toy animals — rabbits and bears" (343), rather than swerving to avoid them, leads to her reporting him to the police on arrival in Canada. She acknowledges her own "misguided American empathy" during this journey as the free indirect discourse makes clear: "cluster bomb the Afghans but for God's sake don't drive over the pink bunny rabbits!" (343). Abdullah's relation to these symbols of absent referent capitalism holds more influence over Kim than the image of the dead moose carcass in the newspapers in the Adirondacks, a place she sees as a rural "retreat" (327) from global violence. Thus, the protection of consumer objects is seen to take precedence over human, or nonhuman, animal life. The toys can be seen as a symbol of both consumer capitalism and family values. Kim's Islamophobia means that she fails to take into account the reality of events in which Abdullah and the men had picked up the toys to send to their children. Instead, she assumes him to stand against the family values of American modernity. These toys can thus be seen as submitted to the familiar binary found within Western discourses of civilization: kindness versus barbarity to animals. They exemplify the notion that such kindness is applied only to the theoretical, absent referent animal.

Meat eating

The scenes in which meat eating is described expose the absent referent as embedded within symbols of human, specifically national, identity. During a trip to a fish market, Sajjad tells Harry that Hiroko will be making sushi for dinner. He shops for something else to eat instead of fish as he notes that even after "[t]hirty-five years of marriage […] she still hasn't convinced me to put it in my mouth" (162). This lies in contrast to "[a]ll her other Japanese food" (162) which he has learnt to appreciate. Positing the raw fish as "Japanese food" denies the absent referent of the dead fish in order to cast it as a symbol of national culture, and links to Ellen Messer's (2004) work on the centrality of divisions

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between the edible and inedible in the construction of national identities. This research emphasizes the significance of the role of consumption in defining cultural identity.

The absent referent of dead fish is foregrounded throughout this market scene. The fish are laid out as corpses fresh from the sea rather than indistinguishable cuts of meat. They are described as "huge great whiskered things with dinosaur-era jaws" and "flesh" (160). Sajjad's disgust at "raw fish" (162) can be read as an inability to consume dead animals still resembling their status as flesh. He relies on the culinary to obscure its origins. When he is offered "a fish the size of a man", he retorts: "[w]hat am I going to do with that? Sleep with it?" (160). This subverts the idea of a fish "market", by focusing on the fish not simply as food but possessing the potential to enter into sexual relations.

There is a parallel made between Sajjad's rejection of sushi and Kim's inability to appreciate the bitter taste of the Japanese fruit Harry and Hiroko eat with "the relish of nostalgia" (275–6). That Hiroko, born in Nagasaki, and Harry, a child born in imperial India and brought up in England, can relish in the nostalgia of the Japanese fruit presents a positive mode of cultural exchange that lies outside the realm of carnivorism. Whilst Hiroko examines the fruit of her childhood at the New York market, Harry is described observing three dead fish on the street which are being used as part of "some magic trick, some betting game" (275). Shamsie's decision to place the image of dead fish alongside this cultural exchange conjures up the previous fish market scene. The emphasis on the fish being dead, and their emplacement within a game reliant on the exchange of capital, highlights the disavowal of their subjectivity. In linking these two scenes together, it becomes difficult to talk of the importance of food and consumption to national heritage without maintaining a conscious awareness of the absent referents used in the process.

Conclusion

A vegan lens has been used here as a mode of analysis that seeks to expose the power of language and metaphor in cultural texts, in maintaining the absent referent of nonhuman animals, and in challenging the way we understand the construction of human and nonhuman animal identity. My principal aim has been to establish the potential of reading through a vegan lens for the theorization of Islamophobia in a contemporary Western context. Shamsie's novel is chosen not for its distinct vegan sensibilities, but simply as one example from a vast body of novels within the emerging category of Anglophone Muslim fiction. This is in order to demonstrate how we might use literature to explore the speciesist foundations of the growth of a distinct Muslim identity and a new wave of Islamophobia.

Veganism has been loosely theorized as a subjectivity that encourages a queer disruption to the boundaries of the human and thus requires a continual negotiation with the understanding of the self in relation to the Other. As an identity category which cannot be fixed but operates as a "series of responses" (Westwood, 2015: 2) veganism offers a way of engaging with the desire to respond to violence and oppression. Thus, by engaging with the speciesist roots of human identity, and the interconnections between Islamophobia and the binary division drawn between human and nonhuman animals, veganism offers liberatory potential to resist homogenization and embrace a queer heterogeneity. Vegan theory is here introduced as a way of negotiating how to respond to nonhuman animals in texts in order to expand upon discrete notions of human identity.

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