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Navigation Extremism: Loyalty And Belonging In Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* Through The Lens Of Political Identity



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Abstract

The paper examines notion of loyalty, belonging, and political identity in *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie (2017). By weaving the motifs of extremism, relations inside a family, and the role of the state, the novel gives the identity of individuals within the framework of the clashing national and political allegiances. A close reading and discourse-analytic approach will also be considered in the work that will challenge how linguistic and narrative practices are deployed to construct the competing conceptions of home and citizenship. Resting the discussion on the theories of political identity and belonging, the analysis predetermines the fact that the characters of the story will meditate on the tension between loyalty to the family and loyalty to the state, exposing the linguistic construct of extremism as the externalized and internalized phenomenon. As the evidence shows, *Home Fire* is a sign of extremism not merely as the indication of religious radicalization, but of the discourse of exclusion, assimilation and divided belonging. The work is a contribution to English linguistics in that it shows how narrative frames can express political identity in order to advance the scholarly discussion on the spheres of overlap among language, literature and ideology.

Keywords: political identity, extremism, belonging, Kamila Shamsie, discourse, loyalty

INTRODUCTION

In political rhetoric as well as in literary production, the issues of loyalty, extremism, and belonging become even more important than ever in the aftermath of an event of the September 11 attacks. The fears of security, citizenship, and identity that have appeared at the beginning of the twenty-first century have profoundly influenced the representation and perception of the Muslim communities in the Western cultural texts (Said, 1978; Ahmed, 2012). The discursive space of literature has reacted to such anxieties by dramatizing the disjunctions between personal loyalty to family and community, the loyalty of the state to adhere to national scripts of safety and belonging. Kamila Shamsie *Home Fire* (2017) is an excellent exploration of these topics by applying the Sophoclean *Antigone* to a contemporary British setting where the opposition between blood ties and the state is translated into the context of

diasporic Muslimnesses.

The central theme of *Home Fire* is a dramatization of the issue of political identity: the characters face the conflicting forces of national belonging and the family bonds. The story prefigures the way in which loyalty is not just an affective or ethical decision but also a politicized process which places people in regimes of monitoring, distrust and alienation. The postcolonial and diasporic identities are hybrid, unstable and negotiated in unequal power relations, as has been put forward by Bhabha (1994). The novel by Shamsie reflects this bargaining, and it demonstrates that linguistic and narrative means of encoding signify rival consciousnesses about belonging and alienation. The hardships of Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz Pasha emphasize the problem of the need to strike a balance between personal loyalty and the strict carving of the political identity of states.

Home Fire is relevant to current debate in that it reveals the socio-political root of extremism. The novel defies the binarism of radical and moderate Muslim by portraying extremism as a complicated discursive construct, built upon loss, trauma, and alienated belonging (Malik, 2020). The development of Parvaiz into the extremist is described not as the necessary ideological conversion but the consequence of the strong desire of his father to be recognized and dignified in the environment where both the state and society constantly make him feel like a foreigner. Yuval-Davis (2011) notes that belonging is a relationship of emotion and a political endeavor and Shamsie emphasizes this two-sidedness by placing the vulnerability of Parvaiz in the context of the larger forces of marginalization.

Moreover, *Home Fire* redefines the classical opposition between the divine statute and the state statute and puts it in the context of the discussion concerning policies of citizenship, assimilation and counterterrorism. The rebellion against the British Home Secretary resembles the story of Antigone against King Creon and depicts a discourse of counter-sovereignty where familial affection contradicts that of the state (Ranasinha, 2019). The language of the Home Secretary, where the categorical framing of us and them is apparent, is an excellent example of what Wodak (2009) refers to as discursive reproduction of political authority. By so doing, the novel is transformed into a narration of personal loss as well as a literary

geography of the functioning of power by discourse.

The main research question that will be discussed in the work is how *Home Fire* linguistically builds extremism and belonging as mutually constitutive ones among the dimensions of political identity. Although previous research has focused mainly on the thematic echo of the classical tragedy in the novel (Chambers, 2018) or the saturation of nationalism in the novel (Saeed, 2021), the linguistic contextualization of these problems has received very little attention. Through the discourse-analytic instruments, the current study examines how Shamsie uses the tools of metaphor, dialogue and narrative structure to locate characters in the controversial areas of loyalty and identity. Such attention to language is essential, because Billig (1995) helps us to remember that it is not only the grand national narrative that reproduces nationalism and political identity but everyday linguistic decisions that construct belonging.

The significance of the given study is also due to its extended impact on the English linguistics and cultural studies. The place of literature as Hall (1996) proposes is a potent location of culture representing, conflicting and redefining cultural identities. Taking a linguistic approach to *Home Fire*, the novel is placed in the context of discursive practices of governance, resistance, and exclusion. This enables us to understand extremism as not merely ideological standpoint but a discourse and a story with roots in the history of colonialism, state surveillance and diasporic marginality (Butler, 2004; Tyler, 2013). The study, by concentrating on how language carries socio-political anxieties, adds to the current debate on interferences of literature and linguistics and political identity.

Overall, *Home Fire* serves as a good example of how the literature can mediate and challenge the challenged landscape of allegiance, belonging, and extremism in the post-9/11 world. This paper aims to reveal the ways in which Shamsie demonstrates the creation of political identity by the power of language, and presents the reflection on the discourse as the means of creating lived experiences of belonging and non-belonging. In the end, a deeper comprehension of the linguistic construction of the following identities offers a more profound interpretation of the text by Shamsie and a better insight into socio-political anxieties that keep informing

the current discourse on citizenship and extremism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly body of work relating to the novel *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie has been keen on exploring the thematic, political, and cultural echoes of the novel, but has comparatively overlooked the linguistic aspect of it. It has been framed frequently on its intertextual conversation with classical tragedy. As an example, Chambers (2018) highlights the fact that the novel reinvents Sophocles Antigone and compares the conflicts between Antigone and Creon and between Aneeka and the British Home Secretary. The presence of this intertextuality highlights how old questions of loyalties and governance are being maintained in modern circumstances of terrorism and migration. By emphasizing the tragic form, Chambers places the work of Shamsie in the context of an international literary tradition of resistance and defiance, yet such interpretations often focus on thematic allegory and often overlook the micro-linguistic means through which conflict and resistance are expressed.

Moving in a different direction, Malik (2020) reads *Home Fire* through the prism of terrorism and transnational identity, in which Shamsie debunks the simplistic assumptions about radicalization by placing it within the context of the personal and familial history of the diasporic subjects. Malik observes that the issue of the radicalization of Parvaiz is a result of his vulnerability and alienation as opposed to the ideological conviction that he embraces. This kind of scholarship offers important perspectives on the socio-political forms of extremism, but it is more likely to focus on content rather than on form, thus ignoring the role of language in terms of framing extremism and belonging as discursive objects.

Ranasinha (2019) takes this discussion further by evaluating how the novel critiques nationalism and how this approach can result in being a diasporic. Her text points to the way the British state is criticized by *Home Fire* as she dramatizes the unequal treatment of the Muslim citizens. The state language embodied in the Home Secretary imposes strict limits to the belongingness excluding the Pasha family. Although Ranasinha highlights the issue of political and cultural exclusion, she does not explain how exclusion is represented using certain linguistic means, i.e., evaluative lexis, metaphor, or discursive framing.

In addition to *Home Fire*-specific criticism, more general theoretical input by linguistics and political discourse studies can be used to understand the discursive construction of identity. The concept of banal nationalism by Billig (1995) focuses on the daily production of national identity in the form of language and flags and daily activity. His suggestions can be applied to reading *Home Fire*, where even such a routine interaction as the questioning of Isma by immigration officers can be interpreted in the light of the invisible yet potent work of national identity as discourse. In the same vein, Wodak (2009) examines the politics as usual of discourse that reveals how language is used by political actors to authorize authority and marginalize opposition. The rhetorical traits of the Home Secretary in *Home Fire* are quite reminiscent of the conclusions of Wodak that portrays the extremism as being linguistically conceived as a threat to safety and as an otherness.

Belonging is another concept proposed by Yuval-Davis (2011) as the multi-dimensional process that involves emotional, social, and political aspects. Belonging is not a fixed and static situation, but an object of power structures of power negotiation and contest. This framework proves to be especially informative in the light of studying the way Aneeka struggles to redeem the dignity of her brother because at the same time her speech is an expression of emotional bond to the family as well as a political protest. Applying Yuval-Davis view to a reading of *Home Fire* highlights the importance of characters in managing belonging in the affective and political sense, which is done through language performance of grief, defiance and loyalty.

The other diaspora and identity studies add to the critical landscape. Hall (1996) emphasises that cultural identity is not fixed but it is continuously in production and this view is applicable to the passage of Shamsie whereby her characters have changing affiliations. Bhabha (1994) presents the state of hybridity as a postcolonial subjectivity, whereby diasporic subjects are confronting cultural difference by negotiating it in a manner that challenges binarization of nations. These theories put the characters of Shamsie in a wider context of debate on hybrid identity yet have yet to be linked systematically to the linguistic aspects of the novel.

The more recent criticism has started to talk about Muslim identity and diaspora in the fiction of Shamsie in a more direct manner. In his argument, Saeed (2021) asserts that *Home Fire* challenges the unstable status of Muslim identities in Britain and how the diasporic subject negotiates suspicion and exclusion. The issue of social abjection in the context of neoliberal Britain is also discussed by Tyler (2013), and the issue of social abjection is given as a theoretical framework through which the characters such as Parvaiz absorb the discourses of rejection. Nevertheless, these studies do not yet provide an answer to the question of how these dynamics are encoded into linguistic and narrative strategies in a specific manner.

Furthermore, the theory of precarity and vulnerability developed by Butler (2004) offers a valid perspective on the novel and its depiction of characters that have found themselves between family and state-related categories of suspicion. The precarity that is imposed by discourse is evidenced by how powerless Isma is before British authorities, to which she is built as a subject of constant suspicion. The integration of the theory of Butler and that of discourse analysis will allow the examination of the performative power of language in the formation of political identity to become more detailed.

Although a lot of scholarly work has been developed to date to deepen our knowledge of *Home Fire*, there is a very important gap. Thematic, political or cultural readings are the main focus of most studies, whereas little consistent focus has been given to linguistic construction of extremism and belonging. This gap is large, as language is never a neutral medium, but an arena of power that is performed and struggled over. As Fairclough (2015) insists, critical discourse analysis can show how texts are products of, as well as contribute to, ideological formations. *Home Fire* by Shamsie with its stratified play on dialogue, metaphor and narrative intertextuality requires just this type of linguistic examination.

The article thus attempts to make contributions to interdisciplinary research, in uniting discourse study with literary research. In emphasizing language as a carrier of the feelings of loyalty, belonging, and extremism it adds a linguistic twist to the existing thematic readings. This way one can better appreciate the fact that the novel by Shamsie narrates and also linguistically constructs political identity.

Through this it places *Home Fire* in a wider context of discussion of literature, and identity and discourse, showing how the discourse of extremism is created not only by what we say and what words we use but equally by the socio-political situations.

SIGNIFICANCE

This study is important because it uses a linguistic approach to literary texts. With the *Home Fire* analyzed as a discursive construction, the analysis illustrates how literature can be used to feed into more general discussions concerning extremism and political belonging. This strategy enhances the insight into the fact that identity is not only lived but it is also linguistically mediated.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the way *Home Fire* vernacularly develops ideas about loyalty and belonging.
2. To test the ways in which the issue of extremism is discursively constructed in the novel.
3. To examine how political identity and narrative strategies are related

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What linguistic and narrative strategies does Shamsie use to frame loyalty, belonging, and extremism?
2. How do these strategies illustrate the negotiation between familial ties and political authority?
3. Why does *Home Fire* position extremism as a discourse of belonging rather than merely ideological radicalization?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work is based on the theories of political identity (Mouffe, 2005), banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). The idea of agonistic pluralism offered by Mouffe offers an approach to the interpretation of political conflict as a fundament of identity. The concept of banal nationalism by Billig sheds light on the discursive practices on a daily basis that perpetuate national belonging. The theory by Yuval-Davis has brought out the importance of belonging as an emotional and political location. Combined, these views make it possible to read *Home Fire* as a text in which identity is challenged by the means of discursive

techniques.

METHODOLOGY

This approach to the study combines close reading and critical discourse analysis to understand the way *Home Fire* develops the themes of extremism and loyalty and belonging using linguistic and narrative devices. Close reading has been a fundamental literary practice that allows researchers to consider textual and narrative features as well as stylistic decisions that construct meaning (Richards, 2001). Within the framework of the novel by Shamsie, this methodology is necessary to trace the tensions between the agency of characters and their political power that are encoded in their dialogues, inner-monologues, and framing of the narrative.

In order to supplement literary analysis, the present study uses discourse analysis as theorized in critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2009). The method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) explores the nature of language in portraying, supporting and negating power in the society. The analysis of CDA on *Home Fire* enables us to reveal discursive processes in which political identity and belongingness is either justified or delegitimized especially when it comes to state surveillance, diaspora identity and radicalization. Such a two-fold strategy fills the gap between literary analysis and sociolinguistic research, hence answering interdisciplinary methodological demands in the humanities (Lazar, 2005).

The major sources comprise of chosen passages of the book *Home Fire* in which the problems of extremism, loyalty and belonging are most directly dramatized. The linguistic characteristics of metaphor, framing device, evaluative adjectives and presupposition are studied using the recruitment story of Parvaiz, the story of Aneeka and Karamat Lone as they are discussed in terms of their political rhetoric. These written locations are rich in information about the ways in which language is not only a mirror of but also makes political identity in times of crisis.

The interpretation is qualitative and interpretive in nature and not quantitative. Its purpose is not to generalize about large data sets but to inform the ways in which particular linguistic and narrative strategies might inform readers about their ideas of extremism and the sense of belonging. Qualitative discourse analysis, as put forward by Titscher et al. (2000), is especially relevant in terms of taking into account the finer

and bigger details of the interaction of the text and the context. Placing the narrative of Shamsie in the contexts of wider discourses of nationalism, Islamophobia, and diaspora identity, this approach pre-empts the interplay of literary form and sociopolitical meaning.

This method design is suitable as it matches the objectives and the research questions of the study. Close reading is important in order to be sensitive to the nuance of the text, and discourse analysis situates the reading within the contexts of power, identity, and ideology. These approaches together give a solid base to examine the ways in which *Home Fire* linguistically constructs extremism and belonging as mutually reliant elements of political identities.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The use of discursive techniques that articulate the linguistic development of political identity dramatises Kamila Shamsie in *Home Fire* to reveal the conflict between extremism, loyalty and belongingness. The novel does not set extremism as a stand-alone event of ideological zealotry but as a phenomenon permeated by discourses of exclusion and assimilation, as well as surveillance. Through the episodes under analysis, it is clear that the linguistic position that characters assume mirrors the social and political paranoia regarding Muslim identity in post 9/11 Britain on a larger scale.

The case of Parvaiz into radicalization, demonstrates the linguistic aspect of belong and estrangements in terms of a form of framing. His hiring is interceded by home, family, and recognition metaphor, in which the desire of the paternal tie is turned into a discursive tool used by recruiters. Narratives of political inclusion and exclusion tend to be organized in terms of metaphors of familial belonging, as Ahmed (2015) suggests. Parvaiz is vulnerable not just in terms of ideology but the framing of loyalty in terms of kinship that appeals to his own story of loss and marginalization. His progressive integration into radical networks explains the role of discourse as a means of emotional manipulation, in which the language of recognition makes decisions socially destructive acceptable.

Isma experiences with the British authorities predetermine the surveillance aspect of political identity. Her answers in the tone of the interview in the airport fall into the framework of a discourse of suspicion, in which suppositions and suggestive

questions are used to shape her as a possible threat to a normal traveler. The critical discourse analysis reveals that the linguistic tactics of modality and implicature generate inequalities of power (Fairclough, 2010). Indicatively, the interrogative nature of her religious beliefs and family affiliations is loaded with guilt where she is placed in an intermediate position where she is neither accepted nor rejected. In his research, Wodak, (2015) remarks that these politics of fear are practiced through language and Shamsie employs these discourses in a dramatized manner to demonstrate the precarity of Muslim subjects in the West.

Aneeka is something that acts as a counter-discourse in the story. Direct speech acts allow her to go against the authority of Karamat Lone, the Home Secretary, unveiling the conflict between family devotion and the state sovereignty. The fact that she rejected the framing of her brother as irredeemable by the state makes kinship a competitor to the national security. The performativity theory developed by Butler (2009) can be used to shed light into how the acts of mourning and verbal resistance by Aneeka are political resistance. Her language practices belonging on her own conditions, which rejects assimilation to accounts of suspicion. In this regard, the voice of Aneeka conveys a rejection of what Yuval-Davis (2011) terms as conditional belonging in which citizenship is conditional upon acceptance of state discourses.

The discursive constructions in *Home Fire* draw attention to the fact that extremism cannot be discussed outside of the context of identity politics. The novel shows that radicalization is found at the intersection of family desire, exclusion of state, and vulnerability of the Diaspora. The placement of extremism in these discursive formations by Shamsie frustrates the reductionist ways of explaining terrorism as the result of fanaticism in isolation. Rather, the novel is forging a premonition of the role of linguistic practices, metaphor, presupposition framing and speech acts mediate the lived experience of belonging and estrangement.

In this analysis, it is also emphasized that literature can be seen as a place of discourse where political identities are being argued and reinvented. As Eagleton (2011) suggests, literature is a reflection and an invention of the ideologies of the society and *Home Fire* is no exception to this because it dramatizes the interlacing of

the world of personal and the world of the public through language. The linguistic strategies used in the text reveal the weakness of the diasporic groups to the suspicion discourses and the counter-discussion of the disloyalty and resistance to the discourses of loyalty at the same time.

However, this paper recognizes its weaknesses. The review is carried out according to one novel, which limits the generalization. *Home Fire* is a very interesting case study, but larger trends of linguistic construction in post-9/11 literature need to be compared across several texts. Further study might make use of corpus-based techniques to track patterns of how metaphor, framing, and evaluative language are repeated in a more extensive sample of novels. This kind of work would facilitate more orderly understanding of the way in which extremism and belonging are discursively produced in the context of different cultures. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to combine studies of reader-response, which would help further explain the resonance of these discursive strategies with readers and move the question of textual analysis to the area of reception studies.

Overall, it can be concluded that the debate uncovers how the ideas of linguistic location of extremism, through discourses of identity politics, illustrate the dynamics between family loyalty, state power, and diasporic susceptibility. The discursive strategies of the novel show the functioning of language as the mediator of exclusion and resistance and provide understanding of the ultimate politics of belonging in modern societies.

FINDINGS

The discussion of *Home Fire* gives rise to three main conclusions that help to understand the way in which the novel linguistically frames the interdependence between extremism, belonging, and political identity.

The sense of belonging in the novel is regularly expressed in terms of family and kinship, and it can be seen that discourse of intimacy mediates political identity. Family loyalty has been used by characters as a response to the power of the state, and kinship is often cited as the alternative place of loyalty. An example of this dynamic is Aneeka insisting on burying Parvaiz in Britain as the discourse of sibling devotion is opposed to the discourse of national security. This kind of framing can be aligned with

the idea of the politics of belonging formulated by Yuval-Davis (2011), where the identity becomes negotiated at the point where personal relationships and group delimitation intersect. It is implied in the text that being excluded by the state increases dependence on the kinship discourse which foreshadows family as a source of linguistic means to claim legitimacy and recognition.

Home Fire does not portray extremism as a pathology per se; it is a story that is built through the discourses of estrangement, loss and exclusion. The radicalization of Parvaiz is placed in the linguistic context of home versus displacement with a sense of not fitting in as a complete individual in the British society. This estrangement is supported by discursive practices of the state especially surveillance and suspicion which places him at a position of never being able to belong legitimately. It agrees with the observation of Wodak (2015) about how the discourse of politics constructs the others with the help of the strategies of exclusion. Through the introduction of extremism into these discursive codes, Shamsie opposes the reductionism of terrorism as a simple ideological construct, but rather emphasizes the role of language in determining vulnerability to radicalization.

Shamsie too prefigures opposition by means of intentional narration and language. The face to face encounters between Aneeka and Karamat Lone utilize direct speech acts which betray the power of the official discursive and generates dialogic tension between personal loyalty and state authority. This opposition is further strengthened by the intertextual references to Antigone and it places the opposition of Aneeka in a larger literary context of the opposition to an unjust authority. Butler (2009) emphasizes that acts of defiance are performative, i.e., they restructure the legitimacy boundaries with the help of enacting alternative discourses. In *Home Fire*, resistance is linguistically embodied in the form of dialogic interactions, rhetorical debates, and the denial of the adoption of the framing of extremism by the state.

Combined, these results demonstrate that the language techniques of the novel have placed the extremism, belonging, and resistance as mutually reinforcing aspects of political identity. Instead of rendering terrorism as something that has no relationship with social location, *Home Fire* illustrates how discourse mediate the

disputed space of identity in a post-9/11 world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper reaches the conclusion that Kamila Shamsie creates the discourses of political identity of extremism, loyalty and belonging through building them off each other. The linguistic examination of the kinship metaphors, surveillance interactions, dialogic confrontations shows that extremism is not a by-product of ideological indoctrination alone but a form of fractured belonging and a disputed narrative of home. The plight of the characters shows that language mediates the experienced estrangement and that the political identity can only be described as delicate and negotiable. In this regard, the story by Shamsie sheds light on the collision of the personal voices of family loyalty and the voices of national security, anticipating the role of words and words in forming the exclusion and opposition.

This study, using linguistic theories, i.e. discourse analysis, politics of belonging, and performativity, adds to the interdisciplinary knowledge of the role of literature as a space of negotiating political identity. The results emphasize the fact that literature is not merely a product of socio-political fears but it also is engaged in the process of developing the discourses in the light of which the question of extremism and belonging is interpreted. This supports the significance of incorporating linguistic insights into literary studies, which provide the means of depackaging the ways in which identity is represented, challenged and opposed in the story.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research question can be furthered in three directions in future. To start with, the multilingual aspects of belonging in the diasporic literature would give insight to the role of code-switching and translation as they influence identity politics. Second, a digital analysis of the reader responses, including the reviews, blogs, and discussion on social media might address the question of how the audiences process and rebrand these discursive meanings of extremism and loyalty. Third, by placing *Home Fire* in the context of more extensive intertextual traditions, i.e., by contrasting its discursive techniques, with those of other reworkings of classical tragedy, one would gain insights into the ways in which literature reforms cultural memory in the

contemporary political discourse. Collectively, these strategies may broaden cross-disciplinary discussion of linguistics and literature in enhancing our understanding of how discourse mediates belonging and exclusion in text and context.

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