

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

(Re)Mapping Peshawar: Palimpsest Preservation through Rhetoric of Walking

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Aroosa Kanwal: (Re)Mapping Peshawar: Palimpsest Preservation through Rhetoric of Walking -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(4). ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Peshawar, archaeology, social imaginary, terror, rhetoric of walking, palimpsest, 9/11

ABSTRACT

Literary representations of the city of Peshawar have continued to be shaped by fierce genealogical and political conditions, both nationally and globally. It would not be wrong to say that Peshawar has generally been depicted as a place of terror – a place taking shape according to changing civil and military dynamics following the post-9/11 geo-political discourse on the war against terrorism. In order to rebut the monolithic myths that largely define this city in terms of claustrophobia, terror and a threat to social order, I posit a nexus between De Certeau's rhetoric of walking and Jeffrey A. Kroessler's idea of 'the city as palimpsest' (2015: n.p.) to discuss the ways in which an English women's the act of walking in the streets of Peshawar becomes palimpsestic exercises that unveil Pashtun histories that have been erased and written over. I argue that Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* takes a more positive stance in providing a contrapuntal reading of Peshawar to enable the readers to recuperate the forgotten stories of Pashtun life and peaceful chivalry that are mysterious but far from orientalist notions of barbarism and uncivilisation, so conveniently associated with Pashtun culture.

1. Introduction

'The city is provisionally created as a patchwork quilt of individual viewpoints and opinions. The created order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order.'

(Michel de Certeau, 1984)

My interest in the literary responses to Peshawar was ignited by a celebratory representation of non-violent Pashtuns in Kamila Shamsie's novel *A God in Every Stone*, which provides a counter-discourse and a sharp contrast to the turbulent times in which we live in Pakistan today. Peshawar has generally been depicted as a place of terror – a place taking shape according to changing

civil and military dynamics following the post-9/11 geo-political discourse on the war against terrorism. In this post-9/11 world, cities are increasingly read as social imaginaries, and Peshawar is one of those cities that is imagined, (mis)understood, and experienced in such a way that it serves as a calling card for complex global economic and political purposes, most significantly the US governmental and military responses to this region in the past few years, something that Noam Chomsky refers to as ‘missions’ in Pakistan (2016: 109).

Given the extremely porous borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan (KPK), the freedom of cross-border movement was unfortunately exploited by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, criminals and terrorists, a situation which defined Pakistan’s KPK area a sanctuary or a safe haven for Islamic militants and al-Qaeda members ousted from Afghanistan due to its volatile nature (Burki, 2002; Kronstadt, 2007). Ignoring the fact that after 9/11 Pakistan was on the front line in initiating anti-terror military campaign against “turbulent tribes in Waziristan” (Ahmad, 2010: 105) that had affiliation with militants from Afghanistan, the US launched unbridled war on terror against militants in KPK which has continued to have negative economic, political and social repercussions, including thousands of civilian deaths in the region. However, the US never seems to realise the damage it has inflicted on Pakistan’s security apparatus. Chomsky’s comment on this international outlawry is pertinent here:

Since we can scarcely see what is happening before our eyes, it is not surprising that events at a slight distance are utterly invisible. An instructive example: President Obama’s dispatch of seventy-nine commandos into Pakistan in May 2011 to carry out what was evidently a planned assassination of the prime suspect in the terrorist atrocities of 9/11, Osama bin Laden. Though the target of the operation, unarmed and with no protection, could easily have been apprehended, he was simply murdered and his body dumped at sea without an autopsy—an action that was ‘just and necessary,’ we read in the liberal press. There would be no trial, as there was in the case of Nazi war criminals—a fact not overlooked by legal authorities abroad, who approved of the operation but objected to the procedure. (2016: 109)

This attitude encouraged anti-US sentiments not only among the Taliban in the Afghanistan but also among the Pashtuns of KPK and hence the region which resulted in a series of chaotic disturbances in KPK.

In fact, the city of Peshawar regained national and international public attention as the North Waziristan operation became the world’s focus against the backdrop of the 2014 Peshawar school massacre, which has been described as Pakistan’s 9/11 in the media. This horrible act of terrorism perpetrated by the Taliban, killing 141 people including 132 innocent children, testifies to the image of this region as a land of violence and terror – an image that characterises many western and non-western fictional/cultural engagements with the region.ⁱ Peshawar has featured not only in Pakistani writings, as a number of international novels and films are also set in Peshawar. Although, there exists a literary binarism with regard to the artistic representation of

Peshawar in these writings, as Claire Chambers observes, whereas writers such as Kipling have depicted Peshawar as ‘insalubrious city’ and ‘city of evil countenances’, poet Farid Gul Momand envisions Peshawar as a “‘city of flowers” – only to demolish [the epithet] ... as a metropolis in which “those who’ve monopoly over God | ... Could preach nothing | But hatred on your soil”” (2017: 89–90). A survey across various genres shows that cultural representations of Peshawar and Pashtuns are not only informed by the writers’ own experiences and pre-knowledge (largely based on the 9/11 rhetoric of the War on Terror) of the city but also hugely enriched with subjective interpretations which arguably affect readers’ understanding of the real world.

Such an understanding of the city of Peshawar has also constituted a powerful symbolic narrative of violent Pashtun identity over the years, one largely based on Pashtun cultural norms and conventions. Against this backdrop, I argue that the city of Peshawar also consists of, to borrow Italo Calvino’s words, ‘relationships between ... its space and the events of its past. As this wave of [past] memories flows in, the city soaks up like a sponge and expands’ (1997: 9). This is precisely what Shamsie does in her novel; through rhetoric of walking, she unfurls before her readers’ eyes a palimpsestic city of Peshawar, a panoramic view of the cultural pluralism of Pashtun life and peaceful chivalry under the city’s leaders. Michel De Certeau famously reminds us of the importance of ‘pedestrian speech acts’ (1984: 97) according to which every step taken by the walker is a ‘spatial acting-out of the place’ (1984: 98), which tends to form a palimpsest, superimposing a new ‘pedestrian enunciation’ (1984: 99) on old rigid ones. I posit a nexus between De Certeau’s rhetoric of walking and Jeffrey A. Kroessler’s idea of ‘the city as palimpsest’ (2015: n.p.) to discuss the ways in which the act of walking in the streets of Peshawar becomes palimpsestic exercises that unveil histories that have been erased and written over. In so doing, Shamsie’s novel reinvents the city of Peshawar for the non-indigenous reader, oblivious to the multiple facets and dynamics of the city of contradictions. I show that the city of Peshawar (one of the region’s first civilisations in the Indus Valley) cannot be understood in its entirety without delving into successive layers of past history and civilisation, informed by changing cultural and geographic politics both locally and globally. Only by taking into consideration this multiplicity of layers in the process of representing Peshawar, that turns a ‘city-text into a palimpsest-city’ (Spiridon, 2002: n.p.), can the sensitivity and openness of many Pashtuns to all that surrounds them be captured without bias.

In other words, literary responses to the city of Peshawar have profoundly conditioned the ways in which Peshawar has been perceived because of the matrix of stories they have previously heard about the region.ⁱⁱ I don’t intend to discuss those works in detail here but just to give readers some idea and context that motivated me to write about Peshawar, I name a few starkly different texts with contrasting worldviews and positionalities to emphasise the fact that Peshawar has continued to assume a form that epitomises terror, claustrophobia, and a threat to the region’s peace, which provided a

justification for US governmental and military responses in the region since 2001. For example, *Mud City* (Children's book), *In This World* (a film), and *The Wasted Vigil* (novel), all three fictionalise protagonists' efforts to change their predicaments in the city of terror; most of them, either living in encampments or refugee camps, continue to experience misery and suffering unless they are rescued by their white saviours. *Mud City*, the third novel in Deborah Ellis' Breadwinner trilogy about Afghan children, is a story of the survival of a 14-year-old *bacha-posh*,ⁱⁱⁱ Shauzia, who leaves Kabul with a dream to make her way to France. She starts her journey from the impoverished Widows' Compound within the sprawling Peshawar refugee camp, which promises nothing but boredom, hunger and terror to its inhabitants. Determined to earn enough money to cross the sea, Shauzia, manages to escape from the camp and her nemesis, Mrs Weera, a former gym teacher and camp's leader, whose responsibility is to keep everyone under her control. However, Shauzia is oblivious to the fact that an encampment is not the only kind of terror she must experience; her freedom on leaving the refugee camp is the beginning of another struggle. She faces the horrors of life in downtown Peshawar and it is precisely at this stage when readers are bombarded with disturbing images of a young Muslim girl, struggling for her survival by working as a cleaner in a butcher's shop, begging for money in the city's university district and picking up discarded food from rubbish dumps behind local hotels in Peshawar. In her efforts to find shelter in the dark alleys and doorways, on one occasion she only just escapes being kidnapped at the hands of some shadowy figures involved in the organ trade, she finally ends up languishing in jail. The series of events happening one after the other in the life of Shauzia aim to suggest that a Muslim girl is in dire need of rescue. Then comes the most significant and dramatic episode of the novel when Shauzia is rescued from the jail by an ex-pat American family. Appearing as an American *deus ex machina*, Tom, along with Barbara and their two sons, takes Shauzia into their home, thereby providing her with momentary relief from the miserable streets of Peshawar. Such a representation indubitably affixes the image of the white man's burden of saving an oppressed and marginalised brown woman from a patriarchal community, without delving into the US involvement and intervention in the region.^{iv} The post-9/11 era has been like a parchment from which the pre-9/11 civilisational history of Indus was effaced, leaving behind only traces of inscriptions overwritten by War on Terror rhetoric. This is clearly evident in the British film *In This World*.

Directed by Michael Winterbottom, *In this World* (2002), filmed in a documentary style with voice-over narration and real refugees and locations, also features two young Afghan refugees, Jamal Udin Torabi and Enayatullah, who leave Shamshato refugee camp near Peshawar with the aim of travelling to London for a better future. Their illegal journey, fraught with danger and risk, is portrayed with all the usual clichéd images, ranging from the use of back channels and giving of bribes to smugglers, as the refugees work towards the achievement of their goal of finding sanctuary. In the film, Peshawar is imagined as a city affected by violence and unimaginable danger through a

dramatisation of the conditions of displacement which is also the construction of a mental space, a space of imagination and association, not only for the characters but also for the film's spectators. Using photographic close-ups of refugees' faces, *In This World* 'is packaged for consumption ... within a particular humanitarian frame of visibility' (Bennett, 2014: 176) to inspire empathy among an imagined European audience. Winterbottom's film too barely focuses on western governments' complicity and international political and economic (oil-centred) contexts which led to the crisis that engulfed the whole region.^v This imaginative exclusion of urban totality, which would have defined the city in its most intimate essence, has continued to form the basis for cliched and treacherous metaphors and symbols associated with Pakistan and Afghanistan that ultimately shaped the collective consciousness of western readers and audience. It is important to note that in *In This World*, the voice-over is not only male but English-accented, 'bestowing the film with authority from a particular and problematic English perspective' (Bennett, 2014: 175), rendering both Jamal and Enayatullah mute. This silencing of Jamal and Enayatullah, that reduces them to pure objects, is further strengthened by the extent to which both textual and visual aestheticisation of refugees dramatise the conditions of migration and dislocation more than their individual stories; Winterbottom admits that in 'casting the film he wanted two people who would be examples of, stand in for, all the refugees in Peshawar' (qtd. in Farrier, 2008: 225). Indubitably, such textual and visual representations seem to speed up the overgeneralisation and 'constitute spectacles that preclude the "involved" narratives and historical or political details that originate among refugees' (Malkki, 1996: 388). When considered in the context of Peshawar, the implication here is that the post-9/11 image of the city, with violence encoded within its fabric, continues to have a significant bearing on the present image of the city. Travellers and tourists are often warned against visiting Peshawar, suggesting a dystopian image of the city. Such representations not only refract the dynamism of the city space but also efface the fault lines that this entails.

The extent to which such a dystopian view of the city was imprinted on the literary consciousness is also evident in the novels by writers of Pakistani origin. For example, Aslam's novel *The Wasted Vigil* does not differ greatly from the works I have so far discussed when considered in light of how Peshawar is constructed against the backdrop of 9/11 attacks. It is a city that can simultaneously be described as a place of safety and terror, again hugely informed by the geo-political situation in the region. The landscape of Peshawar has also changed over the years as a result of a series of geo-political situations, in particular, in the aftermath of a series of migrations after the Soviet-Afghan War of 1979–1989. It has become a place of extravagant strangers, a land that is precociously multi-ethnic. Its social life has become impoverished and precarious. This is what Aslam's narrator refers to in *The Wasted Vigil* when he notes how the influx since 1979 of 'the millions of filthy Afghan refugees had ruined the once beautiful city of Peshawar. Had led to what he termed the "Kalashnikovisation" of his homeland.' He grumbles,

‘Look at the shapes of the two countries on a map and you’ll see that Afghanistan rests like a huge burden on poor Pakistan’s back. A bundle of misery’ (2008: 196). No wonder then that this state of ontological hysteria in the novel ultimately builds a tale of tension and complexity, fear and anger. This anger and confusion among local Pashtuns, due to the influx of strangers and newcomers in the wake of the Soviet occupation and the American presence in Afghanistan and linked territories, is manifested in the recurring images of destruction and ugliness that articulate a geographical and partial psychic space that dominates the textual and visual representations discussed so far.

Contrary to such representations in this brief overview, Shamsie emphatically focuses on dialogue between Peshawar’s civilisational past and present in her palimpsest decoding of the city which is quite the opposite of the Peshawar of *Mud City*, *In This World*, *The Wasted Vigil* and other such works in which Peshawar appears as a deeply fractured city – a city of immense and enduring inequalities, xenophobic intolerance, and frequent outbreaks of violence. Shamsie, in *A God in Every Stone* (2014), evokes radically different memories of Pashtuns’ behaviours and activities, from individual to communal, each with its own specific dynamics. By delving into the city’s past which, according to Calvino, ‘does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the street ... marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls’ (1997: 9), Shamsie critiques a monolithic representation of this region. Interestingly, Shamsie does not engage what is termed as postcolonial resistance per se. Instead of engaging an indigenous character to challenge or rebut a mental model of stereotypes (transforming Pashtuns’ humanism into utter barbarism) generated by western ‘imaginative geographies’ (Said, 1978: 54), she deconstructs and devalorises the totalising claims about Peshawar and Pashtuns through an English woman Viv’s experience of city strolling. Therefore, it is through the eyes of a coloniser that ‘The city, like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties’ (De Certeau, 1984: 95).

No wonder then that rather than featuring any refugee camps or horrors of the war-ridden city, Shamsie instead embarks on Peshawar’s archaeological riches that harbour love between an Englishwoman, Vivian Rose Spencer, and a Turkish archaeologist, Tahsin Bey, who travel together to Labraunda to rediscover the mythical circlet of an ancient Greek explorer called Scylax. Shamsie’s obsession with the archaeological history of Peshawar in the novel offers a very different take on the region; by taking her readers to the mythical world of Scylax, who received a silver scarlet as a token of honour from the Persian king Darius for exploring the Red sea, Shamsie delegitimises the imperial geopolitical imagination about the region. Rediscovery of the mythical circlet of Scylax, which he lost as a result of his people’s rebellion against the Persians, becomes Tahsin’s passion in the novel. Viv and Tahsin’s shared passion brings them to the epic city of Caspatyrus, the doorway to glory, (now

Peshawar), the centre of Gandhara culture and art. During their stay in Caspatyrus, the friendship between Viv and Tahsin blossoms into a love that is tragically curtailed by the outbreak of the First World War, so Tahsin returns to Turkey and Viv too very reluctantly returns to Britain to volunteer as a nurse during the Great War. The ‘grandeur that once was’ – mountains, temple, ‘the sweetness of figs’, ‘the scattered marble and stone blocks’ – make her think that she ‘never wanted to return to London again’ (9).^{vi} Viv not only takes in what is there as purely visual aura but is also lost in a cultural palimpsest built up over centuries, realising that ‘She has yet to become accustomed to the light of this part of the world – brilliant without being harsh, it made her feel she’d spent her whole life with gauze over her eyes’ (9).

In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin draw our attention to consequences of writing cities by erasing a layering of its history:

While the “layering” effect of history has been mediated by each successive period, “erasing” what has gone before, all present experience contains ineradicable traces of the past that remain part of the constitution of the present. Teasing out such vestigial features left over from the past is an important part of understanding the nature of the present. (2007: 158)

Any cultural experience is indeed in itself an accumulation of many layers of previous inscriptions that collectively play a significant role in developing cultural identity, something which Viv conveniently ignores while describing Peshawar to her English friends: ‘Unchanging Peshawar. That had been Viv’s mantra all through the previous year in London as Mary and her parents frowned at newspapers carrying stories of Gandhi and Civil Disobedience’ (220). This reputation of Peshawar finds expression in conversations of other English characters in the novel, whether it is Remmick or Mrs Forbes. Against this fragmentary nature of Viv’s and other English characters’ response to the city, Shamsie focuses on the non-violent Khudai Khidmatgar (Servant of God) movement against the British Raj in 1930s. This spectacular image of Peshawar and the symbolic dignity of Pashtuns challenge the present-day Peshawar known to the world as a region that, allegedly, has continued to be ‘the escape hatch for al Qaeda and the Taliban’ after 9/11 (Rashid, 2009: 268). Shamsie instead suggests an ‘alternative correlation between identity and location’ (Graham, 2008: 336) through the characters of Qayyum and Khan Ghaffar, who represent the non-violent Pashtun instead of the one who picks up a gun. As Shamsie says while commenting on Khan Ghaffar, popularly known as Bacha Khan:

in KP (the former NWFP) Khan is still widely revered --the most visible reminder of that was when Malala referred to him as one of her heroes while addressing the UN. In other parts of Pakistan, though, he’s largely absent from the collective imagination. But of course, he’s very relevant as a heroic figure who stood for non-violence, education for both men and women, and a resistance to damaging ideologies. (*Friday Times*, 2014: n.p.)

Shamsie's comment corroborates Kroessler's idea of 'palimpsest preservation' which according to him 'is essential for the health of the city, and the nation, for it preserves ideas, experience, and values no less than buildings and places. Maintaining a dialogue between past and present is essential for a citizen's sense of identity' (2015: n.p.). In *A God in Every Stone*, Shamsie situates the Pashtun national spirit and its most essential characteristics in a historical context, which projected it onto a much larger unorthodox canvas where the most ordinary reality encounters the most surprising phantasmagoria. As Kroessler usefully flags up, 'But no city without a tangible, tactile history, without the capacity for denizens and visitors to reach into the past while experiencing the present, can be truly vital. That experience would be closer to sterility' (2015: n.p.). The celebration of the non-violent Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) political movement in the novel is intended to show how 'that goes so against the grain of all stereotypes about Pashtuns and their guns' (*Friday Times*, 2014: n.p.). This transformation from a dystopian to a utopian image of Peshawar is reinforced in an episode when Kalaam advises Qayyum to join the 'peaceful *jihad*' against the British Empire, one which asks them to fight against their Muslim brothers. Here Shamsie's work pioneers a move beyond a stereotypical representation of Pashtun's violent identity through inversion of the neoliberal dialectic of 'Civilizationalism' through Qayyum's participation in Ghaffar Khan's non-violent independence movement.

Qayyum, who served as a Lance-Naik with the 40th Pathans on the Western Front and witnessed some unspeakable horrors of war, returns to Peshawar after losing an eye at Ypres. On his return, Qayyum participates in Ghaffar Khan's non-violent independence movement against the British Raj because the Empire's unpleasant treatment of Indian soldiers and brutal strategies during the war disillusioned him. Kalaam, while convincing Qayyum to join the Red Shirts movement, inspires him with the thought of an ethical community: 'Don't look indignant, Lance-Naik – you should be proud to belong to a people who won't kill their brothers at the command of their oppressors' (116). When Qayyum faces the red-shirted volunteers, he is convinced that 'non-violence is compatible with Pashtunwali' (198). Years earlier, when Qayyum heard Ghaffar Khan 'speak of the need for Pashtuns to break their addiction to violence and revenge he knew he has found a general he could follow into any battle' (207–8). Here, Shamsie alludes to the 1930 civil disobedience movement, which offers a valuable critical perspective on the fanaticism and violence that she seeks to denounce in her novel. The ironic contrast between the array of brutalities and devastating use of deadly weapons employed by the so-called civilised British empire and the patient and non-violent resistance of Pashtuns opens up possibilities of existence for profoundly different Pashtun social and political systems, compared to the one generally imagined by the western world. Shamsie, indeed, intends to mock the paranoid mindsets of her post-9/11 audiences across the globe by redirecting the artistic gaze from the topophobic city of Peshawar, largely perceived in terms of barbarism, conservatism and religious violence, to the faded splendour of its glory. The historiography of Pashtuns testifies to the fact that, for decades,

Pashtuns have lived peacefully and denounced the terrorism and violence imposed on them by European invaders in an attempt to stamp out their Pashtun identity (Lieven, 2011: 401, 432; Siddique, 2014: 132, 218). Since the post-9/11 era has been particularly pre-occupied with the notion of *jihadism* and religious violence, this reconfiguration of specific traits of a particular nation, in this case the non-violent trait of Pashtuns, is certainly an important representationalist feature of Shamsie's post-9/11 work. She is intent on subverting neo-orientalist thoughts about Pashtun Muslims and the notion of *jihad*, which is now conveniently associated with this tribal community.

Similarly, in another episode, Shamsie rebuts the familiar trope of the white man's burden through the leitmotif of two English characters, Viv and Remmick, who are shown to be on a 'civilizing mission of the Empire' in Peshawar. For example, the enchanting multi-layered history of Peshawar – a region predominantly imagined as unrealized and a failed community – is explored in the novel by Najeeb with the help of Viv, 'the prototype of the benevolent Orientalist' (Ghoshal, 2014: n.p). This is demonstrated in the novel through a conversation between Viv and Remmick, 'political agent[s]' of the Empire (83). Remmick and Viv inhabit a position of relative privilege as carriers of the 'universal' civilisation; Remmick reminds Viv of the 'mission' that they have come to achieve in Peshawar, 'some of us in large ways, and some of us in small' (144). The idea of a 'civilising mission' is focalised through the figure of Najeeb, who Viv meets in Peshawar and nicknames 'the Herodotus of Peshawar'. Here, Shamsie again inverts the conventional patterns of oriental and occidental behaviour and the story that revolves around Viv and Najeeb can be seen as an alternative map of the city and Pashtun community. Shamsie presents Najeeb as a dreamer obsessed with exploration of the history of his region and past excavations. His obsession to become a national assistant in the local museum brings him close to Viv, whom he asks to return to Peshawar to help him find Scylax's silver circlet. However, it is interesting to note that Najeeb, who is 'grateful to the English for putting this spade in [his] hands and allowing [him] to know [his] own history' (181–82), is criticised by his brother Qayyum, who once served as a loyal soldier of the British Empire. Qayyum criticises Najeeb's naive praise of the so-called benevolent mission of the Empire with cynicism:

Of all the fantastic tales you've ever told none is more fantastic than that of the kindly English who dig up our treasures because they want you to know your own history. Your museums are all part of their Civilising Mission, their White Man's Burden, their moral justification for what they have done here. As for the spade they place in your hand. The honours they shower on you – the English are too few, we too many and so they see that it is necessary for there to be a class of Indian who will revere them, feel honoured by them, benefit from their presence and, ultimately serve them because if our numbers turn against them to say 'Leave' there is no way for them to stay. (185)

Of course, the ironic contrast between Najeeb's dependence on Viv to know the history of his own land and Qayyum's cynical remarks about the civilising mission is profound, and it gestures towards a significant narrative device of the novel – the drastic inversion of conventional patterns of oriental and occidental behaviour. The potential for violence and danger associated with Pashtuns is necessarily averted. In fact, the alleged qualities, such as violence, tribalism, savagery, barbarism and a lack of understanding, usually attributed to 'the orient' in colonial discourses are associated in the novel with the Empire. It is the British army that brutally tries to suppress unarmed demonstrators during the 1930 massacres in the Street of Storytellers, while Khudai Khidmatgar activists remain peaceful.

Similarly, Najeeb, even in the midst of the massacres in the Streets of Storyteller, is preoccupied with his excavation adventures with Viv and with Peshawar's ancient history. During the protests, he regrets missing a 'chance to bring Miss Spencer from the train station to the Street of Storytellers where 'Darius and the Betrayal of Scylax' is now a familiar and well-loved tale' (273). Neither Najeeb nor Qayyum shows any antagonism towards the British and they mobilise their individual subject positions by negotiating their identities beyond a narrow idea of the nation. Most importantly, Qayyum's allegiances in the wars, first with the British Army and later with Khan Ghaffar, have been 'shaped by human rather than patriotic values' (Ghoshal, 2014: n.p). Only after having witnessed British atrocities in India does Qayyum opt to fight with the unarmed Khudai Khidmatgars of Ghaffar Khan seeking the expulsion of the British army that he had previously defended at great personal cost. He clearly writes of this to Najeeb:

I bear no hatred for the English. It is our weakness that is responsible for the state we are in. How dishonoured a people we were to allow the men of a small island who burn at the touch of the sun to come here and be our masters. And when the English leave, as they must, I will welcome them back into our house as visitors and show all the courtesy and hospitality of the Pushtuns. (185)

Qayyum's comment not only gestures towards the self-interest of the British colonialists within the subcontinent but is also suggestive of the dominant role they have played in articulating and legitimizing the fearful spatial imaginary of this region. It is precisely this parochial discourse surrounding the harsh socio-spatial reality of the Peshawar that Shamsie rebuts in her novel.

In his memoir recounting his boyhood in Istanbul, Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk describes the power of visual images in shaping his sense of his city's history. 'To see the city in black and white,' he explains, 'is to see it through the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world' (2003: 39-40). Shamsie's itinerary too into historical Peshawar not only extends beyond this narrower time- or event-bound focus but also stresses the possibility of unleashing endless unexpected inscriptions of past and present in the city that are waiting to be read. Here, I find De Certeau's theorisation of 'walking in the city' useful to highlight the

gap between what English characters, in particular Viv, think about Peshawar according to the blueprint in their minds and what their actual experience of walking through the streets of Peshawar offers them; I suggest that the paroxysmal spaces of the city not only invite Viv but also the reader to imagine the city differently.

De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* offers an interesting theoretical framework for understanding how urban space is experienced and written through everyday experiences of the city's inhabitants, in particular through physical acts of walking. De Certeau frames walking as a productive, albeit relatively unconscious, speaking and writing of the city. It is through this everyday act of walking in the city that walkers' 'words become the outlet or product of silent histories' (1984: xxi). The most interesting fact about this act of 'reading' the city space is that the walkers whose bodies 'follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" [in fact] write without being able to read it ... [making] use of spaces that cannot be seen' (De Certeau, 1984: 93). Viv's experiencing of the city of Peshawar also occurs at the street level, through which she encounters a world that is constantly exploding. For example, despite receiving serious warnings about 'Murderous Pathans Awakened' and entering the Walled City, Viv pedals down the road to Shahji-ki-Dheri to visit the excavation site, conveniently dispelling any thoughts that 'Pathan men would attack a woman in a crowded bazaar' (221-22). Since there are no Victorias who can drive Viv to the excavation site, she decides to go by herself on a bicycle, unhesitatingly telling the 'startled gardener' that she will return it unharmed 'in a couple of hours.' Her 'movements were unhurried as she descended into the maw of the site' (222-23). Viv's unwavering courage to head towards the Walled City, despite the presence of Murderous Pashtuns, destabilises the myths surrounding the city as a place of terror. Therefore, Viv's walking turns the city space into a kind of argumentative performance that 'affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc. the trajectories it "speaks"' (De Certeau, 1984: 99). The way Viv feels at home in the Street of Storytellers suggests that she follows what De Certeau calls 'the thicks and thins' of the city text that she unconsciously writes.

Similarly, on her way back, when she comes across a funeral procession, 'a small group of men dressed in the white of mourning making their way from the Walled City towards the graveyard' (223), Viv jumps off the bicycle to run into fields with the intention to escape the grieving 'Murderous' Pashtuns. However, an unconscious thought crosses her mind that, 'By the laws of Pashtunwali you may not attack a woman' (224). And then she is immediately reminded by the Pashtun men that 'We know you're here ... We've come to bury our dead, not to attack a woman. Please don't believe what your people say about us' (224). They tell Viv that they will accompany her to "ensure [her] safety" (224). If analysed from De Certeau's rhetoric of walking, it would not be wrong to say that by walking in the city as a flaneuse, Viv 'individuates and makes ambiguous the legible' (1984:156) image given to Peshawar over the years. The way Viv unconsciously reflects on incidents, happening in the Street

of Storytellers between 23–25 April 1930 accords with what Nicolas Waybrow calls ‘walking and wandering’. Viv, being a flâneuse, renders ‘visible various tensions in the city – its “growing pains” – as it undergoes transformation’ (2005: 77). It is interesting to note how Shamsie uses an English woman’s excursions into a new terrain to dismantle the western mainstream narratives that largely define this city in terms of claustrophobia, terror and a threat to social order. De Certeau famously reminds us of the importance of ‘pedestrian speech acts’ according to which every step taken by the walker is a ‘spatial acting-out of the place’, which tends to form a palimpsest, superimposing a new ‘pedestrian enunciation’ (1984: 97-99) on old rigid ones. Viv’s walking movements in the Streets of Storytellers, as a result of ‘immense social experience’ as well as of ‘relationships and intersections ... intertwine and create an urban fabric’ (103) that overwrites her preconceived notions about the city and its community. However, it is not a complete erasure of past or present history, but it does become one of many layers of a dynamic urban palimpsest that helps to contextualise the monolithic image of the city.

Therefore, Shamsie’s strategy of situating Viv as a walker within the historical city of Peshawar serves to dismantle what Edward Said has termed ‘imaginative geographies’ in his phenomenal work *Orientalism*. Said’s concept of ‘imaginative geographies’ is helpful in teasing out the tensions between what a German scholar Andreas Mahler, in his anthology *Stadt-Bilder* (1999), terms *Stadttexte* (a text about a

city) in contrast to *Textstädte* (a literary city). Pointing out the difference between the two, Mahler defines *Stadttexte* as texts in which the prime focus is on urban space and in which the city does not merely function as a backdrop, but is a core theme of the

text. *Textstädte*, on the other hand, are not about real-world cities; they in fact create fictional cities with their own intra-textual reality. It is important to note here that not every fictional city has a real-world equivalent, but many literary texts bear referentiality to real-world cities. As Calvino also says, ‘The city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection’ (1997: 53). So, when does city representation become problematic? It is when cities are constructed as ‘imaginative geography’ of ‘our land’ vs ‘barbarian land’, which gestures towards a ‘practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs”’ (Said, 1978: 54). In so doing, ‘actors with territorial ambitions reinvent meanings about the landscapes they covet and frame discourses justifying why they belong to, and are entitled to take control of, the landscapes they reinvent’ (Al-Mahfedi, 2011: 21), something which I pointed out earlier with reference to the representations of Peshawar in *Mud City, In This World* and *The Wasted Vigil*. These representations have a tendency to become blueprints of actual cities because the fictionalising act ‘crosses boundaries of reality while at the same time making the imaginary appear real’ (Loffler, 2017: 34, also see

Berensmeyer 200:202f).^{vii} Shamsie's fictionalising of the city moves beyond the oriental voyeuristic activity to create a dynamic interaction between Viv and her spatial surroundings, which serves to rebut the static and clichéd perceptions of her English friends and colleagues. Therefore, instead of Peshawar's lawlessness and violence, Shamsie's novel features the city's rich history and its entrancing museum with Gandharan art and previous inscriptions, which are indubitably meant to generate certain meanings and associations, meanings associated with particular places.

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ⁱ In addition to the one that I briefly mention in my paper, other works include Eugenia O'Neal's *Jessamine*, Inoue Yasushi's *The Blue Wolf*, Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, S M Sterling's *The Peshawar Lancers*

ⁱⁱ Sonali Kolhatkar, vice president of the Afghan Women's Mission, and Mariam Rawi, a member of the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan), write, '[t]his isn't the first time the welfare of women has been trotted out as a pretext for imperialist military aggression' (2009). Kolhatkar and Rawi's observation with regard to teaching these texts in schools is pertinent: 'On one level these texts are part of a larger public pedagogy in which the United States and its allies are framed as fighting a good fight in Afghanistan and other regions of the Middle East. Readers are encouraged to continue to empathize with the lead character and the ideas that are associated with her: saving wounded children rather than critiquing U.S. policy, 'pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps' rather than organizing together, fighting against all odds — ideas firmly rooted in mainstream U.S. ideals of exceptionalism and Western values of individuality.'

<http://www.muslimahmediawatch.org/2010/03/24/save-the-muslim-girl-part-iii/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bacha posh is a cultural practice in Afghanistan and some parts of Pakistan according to which, in the absence of a son, a girl child is dressed up like a boy, which provides opportunities for girls to perform the duties which a son would do, such as to earn money for their family, to escort female members in public spaces and to protect the family in general. Depending on the region, these cross-dressers have different names, for example, in *Pushto* they are called *Alakaana*, in Iran they are called *Pesar Posh*, in Albania they are called *Burnehas* or *Sworn Virgins*, in the Middle East they are referred to as *Boyah* and in Afghanistan they are known as *bacha posh*.

^{iv} Can we ignore the clear political agenda of the US, the manipulation of women's rights as a justification for the War on Terror? With global terrorism becoming a key objective of US policy

after 9/11, Pakistan joining the US-led coalition seeking to eliminate al-Qaeda networks from South Asia has had long-term repercussions in terms of the deteriorating security situation in the whole region and the country. Peshawar endured the brunt of reprisal attacks in 2009; indeed, out of 87 suicide attacks, 20 took place in Peshawar.

^v For details, see Kleveman who, in *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia*, points out how ‘untapped’ fossil fuel resources ‘in one of the world’s most inaccessible and unstable regions’ have resulted in unresolved political tensions in the region due to fuel-hungry countries, such as France and America, and ambitious Asian powers such as China and Russia. He also discusses the problems faced by Afghanistan, a country through which pipelines from the Caspian Sea pass, with Russia desiring the oil to flow north to its borders, Iran wanting it to go south towards Tehran and the US expecting the pipes to go west, to its collaborator Turkey. This “international attention on the Caspian region’ is not only making the region another Middle East but also resulted in the invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, which has had serious implications for Pakistan as well.

^{vi} Subsequent references are to this (2014) edition of Shamsie’s *A God in Every Stone* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

^{vii} ‘His rhetoric makes any logical American agree that terrorist groups in the Middle East are the Global Enemies, and our number one priority as a responsible world power is to take out this radical faction’ (Stiner, 2013).