

**KAUKAB IN *MAPS FOR
LOST LOVERS*, BY
NADEEM ASLAM:
REPRESENTING AND
SUBVERTING THE
UNSPEAKABILITY OF THE
SUBALTERN**

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‘What do you want me to say to you?’
‘Nothing. I want you to listen to me’

(Kaukab answering Shamas, 40)

Abstract

In *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Kaukab is the mother of a Pakistani family living in a close-knit community of an English town. Although she feels isolated in the British society due to her poor knowledge of English, she is presented as a dominant woman in her household. Nadeem Aslam introduces an ambivalent character that must confront opposite discourses in the aftermath of the murder of her in-law and his lover. The aim of this article is to show not only how Kaukab fulfils the category of the subaltern proposed by Spivak but also how she subverts it. For such purpose, the context and the role of the reader will be key aspects to define in which way the unspeakability of the subaltern can be challenged and still remain a subaltern.

Resumen

En *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Kaukab es la madre de una familia que vive en el seno de la cerrada comunidad pakistani de una ciudad inglesa. Aunque se siente aislada de la sociedad británica debido a su escaso conocimiento del inglés, se presenta como una mujer dominante en su casa. Nadeem Aslam introduce un personaje ambivalente que debe encarar discursos opuestos después del asesinato de su cuñado y su amante. El propósito de este artículo es mostrar cómo Kaukab cumple con la categoría de subalterno propuesta por Spivak y cómo a la vez la subvierte. Por eso, el contexto y el papel del lector serán aspectos clave para definir cómo se puede cuestionar la incapacidad para hablar del subalterno y aun así, mantenerse en tal posición.

Keywords: Discourse, Kaukab, literal interpretation, metaphorical interpretation, reader, religion, representation, speak, Spivak, subaltern.

Palabras clave: Discurso, hablar, interpretación literal, interpretación metafórica, Kaukab, lector, religión, representación, Spivak, subalterno.

Probably, Spivak's best-known contribution to the Subaltern Studies is her assertive conclusion that the subaltern is unable to speak (1999:308). Indeed, the fame of her article can be partly attributed to the ambiguity of the term 'speak,' which has been interpreted literally even though Spivak meant it to be interpreted metaphorically. For instance, when she introduces Bhubaneswari –the girl who waited to have her period to commit suicide– as an example of the subaltern, Spivak stresses the fact that she actually speaks through her body but the problem lies in not being properly understood. As Spivak has stated in an interview, by 'speaking' she refers to "a transaction between the speaker and the listener" (in Laundry & MacLean 1996:289), not merely to the actual utterance of words.

However, if subalterns are defined only by their unspeakability (i.e. inability to speak) the concept is not productive anymore because they are condemned to be constantly misinterpreted and their access to representation is barred. Indeed, Spivak acknowledges that "[w]e are never looking at the *pure subaltern*. There is, then, something of a non-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity" (Landry & MacLean 1996:289; my emphasis). For this reason, I understand subalternity as a gradable category, not exclusively defined by its unspeakability although it might be an important feature.

The aim of this article is to show how the two different interpretations of the subaltern's unspeakability are represented by Kaukab, the mother in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*. In addition, the two versions of her unspeakability are related to the context she is in, so that the dichotomy between the public and the private space becomes crucial to understand this character. In fact, the novel is set in the year following the death of Jugnu and Chanda for honour reasons and Kaukab is placed in the predicament of condemning her brother-in-law for his unIslamic behaviour and mourning his death at the same time. In order to understand the logic of her reasoning, though, Aslam creates a third space in which Kaukab is eventually able to speak. Consequently, the conclusion will discuss in which way Kaukab not only represents the two interpretations of the subaltern's unspeakability (the literal and the metaphorical) but how she also subverts it.

1. LITTLE ENGLISH IN LITTLE PAKISTAN

Maps for Lost Lovers focuses on the ghettoised condition of the Pakistani community in Britain, whose successful integration in the public sphere depends to a great extent on *speaking* English. Bisin et al. (2008:447) observe that Muslim migrants are more strongly attached to their culture of origin, so that their educational levels (including English skills) are low and, consequently, the unemployment levels are higher, placing them in a precarious situation within the British society. Thus, language is a key element for a successful integration of the diasporic subject in the public sphere. Indeed, Kaukab highlights the alienation in which they are submerged, “what was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did back in Pakistan?” (Aslam 2004:35). The arbitrariness of language is pointed out by listing onomatopoeic sounds, “the heart said *boom boom* instead of *dhak dhak*; a gun said *bang!* instead of *thah!*; things fell with a ‘thud’ not a *dharam*; small bells said ‘jingle’ instead of *chaan-chaan*; the trains said ‘choo choo’ instead of *chuk chuk*” (*ibid.*:35-36). Therefore, Kaukab suggests that her aversion towards English is not merely superficial because she is defamiliarised even from those things that are apparently the same in Pakistan and England. True feelings, then, cannot be expressed through an alienating language, as Chanda’s mother declares

I wanted to ask my sons so many things today but my English isn’t very good.
That prison guard kept telling me not to talk to them in ‘Paki language’ each time
I felt like saying what I truly feel. ‘Speak English or shut up’, he said. (Aslam 2004:174)

The prison guard’s statement reveals that the only way to gain certain relevance is by speaking English. According to him, to keep quiet is preferable over speaking languages from the Subcontinent. In answer to his wife’s despair, Chanda’s father shows that unspeakability not only affects the gendered subaltern Spivak usually refers to, “Your English is better than mine” (Aslam 2004:175).

However, English is not the only language that is given a privileged position. Within the Pakistani community Arabic is valued as the language of Muhammad. Yet, Kaukab remembers a story of a pilgrim who went to Saudi Arabia and began to kiss the words on the walls because to him, Arabic was the language the Koran was written in –ignoring it is an everyday language as well. However, “what he took to be verses from the Koran was actually an advertisement for hair-depilatory cream” (Aslam 2004:291). Kaukab tries to prevent herself from such blasphemous thoughts since Arabic is deemed a sacred language. Towards the end of the novel, Kaukab is criticised by one of her sons because of her ambivalence since she feels alienated by English but not by Arabic: “I’ve read the Koran, in English, unlike you

who chant it in Arabic without knowing what the words mean, hour after hour, day in day out, like chewing gum for the brain” (*ibid.*:322). However, Kaukab values English and Arabic differently because the latter is a sacred language while the former is the language of the hostile society she is living in. Therefore, it is not simply a question of linguistic strangeness.

In addition, Kaukab’s social position keeps her away from contacting the ‘white’ world. In this sense, her neighbourhood is *the* space where she feels safe, ‘I don’t go there often –white people’s houses start soon after that street, and even the Pakistanis there are not from our part of Pakistan’ (Aslam 2004:42). For this reason, her chances of meeting English people are actually very low as she acknowledges when Jugnu brings his white girlfriend for dinner, “[s]he had never met a white person at such an intimate level as she would tonight” (*ibid.*:35). On the contrary, her interaction with white people is usually limited to the required formalities as when going to the doctor. Thus, it may not be a surprise that Kaukab says that “[t]he ‘thank you’ she murmurs to the flower-deliveryman is her third exchange with a white person this year; there were five last year; none the year before, if she remembers correctly; three the year before that; [...]” (*ibid.*:69). Not just the actual number of exchanges but simply the fact that she counts them makes the scarcity of them explicit. A second case of another woman of the neighbourhood reveals that Kaukab’s situation is not that exceptional:

[T]o call 999 in rudimentary English, speaking to a white person for the fourth time in her life, wondering whether she should add the word ‘fuck’ into her speech now and then to sound more like a person who belonged to this country, because she had seen her English-speaking children use that word with great confidence, whatever it meant. (Aslam 2004:262)

This quote shows that generational differences are crucial for linguistic competence, not just regarding fluency and grammar, but also register. Needless to say, language as alienating is a distinctive feature of the first generation migrants because their offspring, already born in England, do not experience any linguistic limitation in this sense. This generational difference is clearly stated when Kaukab’s abilities in English are mentioned: in a somewhat humoristic but also degrading tone Kaukab’s grandson compares her grandmother’s way of speaking to Tarzan’s (Aslam 2004:310). Although uttered by a little child, this remark is not entirely innocent and conceals the association of Kaukab to savagery. Her daughter Mah-Jabin also remembers when his brother Ujala was drunk and his “‘placement of words in each sentence in slight disarray – the way the drunks talk, the way their mother speaks English (once, when she had a headache, she had told the children, ‘Make noise silently!’)” (*ibid.*:300). Indeed, this is the function that Kaukab fulfils: she makes noise silently. Her claims are only noise in the English-speaking society, so that she is finally silenced.

This final remark, even when it is bracketed, echoes the notion of subalternity: claims can be made but only silently. This attitude is a consequence of Kaukab's self-realisation of her subaltern condition, as Moore states "due to her downwardly-scaled class position, unemployed status, limited English skills and visible religious identity, society was closed to her" (2009:10). Kaukab's optimism in enrolling an English-learning course to gain a voice of her own decays, leaving her isolated and alone when her children move out. She never took that language course and her rudimentary English is the result of watching children's programmes on TV with her own children. She was left behind with her grasp of English while her children moved on. It is in the discussion that takes place in the family gathering that Mah-Jabin recalls that there are reasons for her mother not accessing education. In addition, she adds "[s]he has little English and she feels nervous stepping out of the house because she is not sure whether she can count on a friendly response" (Aslam 2004:323). Ujala, though, intends to demystify this victimisation of the diasporic subject: "She would have been exactly like this if she weren't here in England. What were her achievements back in Pakistan, a country where she *can* speak the language and count on a friendly response [...]" (*ibid.*:323).

In this argument between the siblings, the double meaning of 'speak' is used and confused. Certainly, the examples that have been given reveal that 'speaking' (literal meaning) is a requirement to gain a voice but it still might not be enough to gain it. However, even when language is perfectly managed, a friendly response cannot be guaranteed: the subaltern only tries to 'speak' (metaphorical meaning) because she is condemned to a failed communicative act caused by the misunderstanding of the message. Although Ujala correctly points to his mother's subalternity both in England and in Pakistan, her diasporic condition in England makes her a twofold subaltern: on the one hand, she is unable to speak English; on the other hand, she is unable to make herself understood and heard even in her native language. In addition, the public and the private spheres are also biased by the two different definitions of 'speak'. In the public sphere, English is spoken and Kaukab is a subaltern that literally cannot speak. The private sphere is a 'little Pakistan' that includes all of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, her neighbourhood. There, although she manages the language, she still remains a subaltern because she has no voice of her own and she is misunderstood.

2. HOME-MADE CLASH OF DISCOURSES

If Kaukab's poor knowledge of English makes her a subaltern in the public sphere, the next question is 'what refrains her in the private sphere?'. As it has been anticipated in the previous section, even though she manages the language in her household, she cannot participate in a successful communicative act because she is unable to make herself understood. It is there where we find her second kind of unspeakability, more faithful to the proposed model by Spivak. Therefore, we are dealing now with the metaphorical meaning of 'speaking.'

However, Kaukab is not portrayed as a powerless woman at home. Instead, she is presented as a strong and assertive woman who dominates her household and does not tolerate any questioning of her authority. Mah-Jabin defines her mother as "the most dangerous animal she'll ever have to confront" (Aslam 2004:111) as the daughter is the one that apparently takes the subaltern position. Firstly, Mah-Jabin represses herself and tries not to "hurt Kaukab by presenting herself to her in any capacity other than a daughter, *her* daughter" (*ibid.*:93). However, Mah-Jabin belongs to the second generation and she cannot avoid uttering certain things that are trivial within English society but censored by her mother. Then, Kaukab accuses her of breaking free from the constraints they had:

How your tongue has lengthened in the past few years. Is this what they taught you at university, to talk like this, your precious university far away in London that you had to attend because you wanted an education? If education was what you wanted you would have gone to a university within commuting distance and lived at home like decent girls all over these streets. Freedom is what you wanted, not education; the freedom to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smearred life. (Aslam 2004:111)

This long quote reveals that Mah-Jabin has overcome the voiceless condition she was condemned to while she was under her mother's control. After the boy she loved got engaged with another girl, Mah-Jabin asked to be sent to Pakistan in order not to see the boy again. Consequently, at sixteen she was sent to Pakistan to marry a first-cousin but she decided to divorce him after two years. Although she hides the truth from her mother (she was abused by her husband), Mah-Jabin accuses her mother of not having done anything to prevent her from the hardships a woman must suffer in Pakistan. Therefore, Mah-Jabin reaches the condition of a full member with a voice of her own who rebels against the oppressing forces, her mother in this case. This empowering lets her leave behind the girl she was when she asked to be sent to Pakistan:

She and he were born here in England and had grown up witnessing people taking pleasure in freedom, but that freedom although within reach was of no use

to them as a lamp with a genie was of no use to *a person whose tongue has been cut off, who could not form words to ask for the three wishes*. (Aslam 2004:117-118; my emphasis)

In addition, Mah-Jabin's accusation shows the real nature of Kaukab, oppressed by major discourses and enforced to follow them. She excuses herself for acting in such a way but at the same time she accuses Mah-Jabin of not understanding her: "Not everyone has the freedom to walk away from a way of life," Kaukab says quietly. "The fact that you have managed to do it easily has made you arrogant and heartless" (Aslam 2004:115). Some lines below, she makes her excuse even more explicit, "I did not have the freedom to give you that freedom, don't you see?" but she also reinforces her authority by accusing Mah-Jabin of being un-Islamic since "[y]ou [Mah-Jabin] may have divorced him under British law, but haven't done so in a Muslim court. My religion is not the British legal system, it's Islam" (*ibid.*:115).

These quotes let us draw two necessary argumentative lines in order to analyse this mother-daughter relationship. Firstly, Kaukab's subaltern position is revealed since she admits she had no freedom to make her daughter free. Secondly, Kaukab acknowledges that Islam is very important to her, to the extent that she will not have a voice of her own because she will limit herself to reproduce religious discourse. These two aspects are interwoven in Kaukab's following predicament:

The first two decades of marriage belong to the husband, the rest to the wife because she can turn her children against the husband while she's bringing them up, so when they are grown up they'll make him eat dirt while she reigns over them all for the rest of her days. (Aslam 2004:113)

However, these words are misunderstood by her daughter and Kaukab needs to clarify them:

When I said a woman's troubles are over within twenty years of marriage because now her grown-up children will defend her against the father and in-laws, I didn't mean you have to connive and tell your children certain things deliberately. You need someone to talk to, to tell your troubles to, and her children are the people closest to a woman. You don't connive to bring about that situation, it happens of its own accord. (Aslam 2004:115)

What this clarification shows is how Kaukab is constituted as a subaltern because she is misinterpreted. Indeed, the problem of Mah-Jabin's interpretation is that she took her mother's words literally and places Kaukab in a much more fixed position than her actual one. Moreover, it must be taken into account that although Mah-Jabin conceals from her mother the fact that she was mistreated, she has it in mind when she accuses Kaukab of beating her and imposing her religious discourse on her.

In fact, the cases of gender violence are of the utmost importance to see the power of different characters. Contrarily to what it may seem, Kaukab is the most liberated character in this sense since she was only beaten once and, paradoxically, empowers herself by playing literally the role of the subaltern, “I didn’t speak to him for many months afterwards” (Aslam 2004:116). Mah-Jabin, following her mother’s says, bears her situation for two years till she finally breaks away from it. It is noticeable that she subverts her alleged subaltern position by repressing her husband’s voice, “[s]he won’t unseal the letter as though it is a way of keeping his mouth shut” (*ibid.*:108). Finally, the third character is Suraya, an alter ego of Kaukab but with some differences, due mainly to her generational difference. The fact of being British born does not prevent her from being beaten and divorced. Later, she is even forced to look for an eligible man to remarry and divorce so that she can marry her first husband again.¹ Her action shows a deep disempowerment and her subjection to religious discourse. However, this categorisation should not conceal the fact that the two young women have a transnational experience that is blurred in Kaukab’s case, even though she talks about Pakistan most of the time. It must be highlighted that she remembers an ‘imagined Pakistan’ in the sense that she has idealised it. In addition, Shamas’s behaviour is a key factor for Kaukab’s successful rebellion: other men would not have respected their wife’s choice of remaining silent and, certainly, they would not have moved out as Shamas did.

In fact, Kaukab’s self-perception that she belongs to Pakistan is clearly stated when she expresses her distress for her diasporic condition and dismembers herself: “I won’t move to Pakistan. What would my life be then? My children in England, me in Pakistan, my soul in Arabia, and my heart –’ She pauses and then says: ‘And my heart wherever Jugnu and Chanda are’” (Aslam 2004:146). Kaukab perfectly summarises all her affiliations: Pakistan is her homeland but England is the country where her children live; Arabia stands for her Muslim faith; Chanda and Jugnu remain in an aporetic state that causes her even more distress. Moreover, it must be noticed that these affiliations are presented within dichotomies that show at the same time Kaukab’s ambivalence and priorities.

The first dichotomy embraces Kaukab’s disgust for England, a “country where sin is commonplace” where she should have never migrated since she considers it “the biggest mistake of [her] life” (Aslam 2004:324). However, she rejects the idea of going back to Pakistan when Shamas retires, “she would remain in hated England because her children are here” (*ibid.*:60). This ambivalence is supported by the words of an unnamed character, who reflects Kaukab’s thoughts about

¹ In Islam, only men have the agency to divorce. However, if one repents, he cannot remarry his former wife unless she is widowed or divorced from a second man.

England/Pakistan: “this woman’s neighbour wonders why her children refer to Bangladesh as ‘abroad’ because Bangladesh isn’t abroad, *England* is abroad; Bangladesh is *home*” (*ibid.*:46).

The second dichotomy confronts the heart and the soul, the worldly and the divine experiences, and more subtly, the body as the site of sin and the spirit as the site of piety. Therefore, Kaukab expresses her capacity of discernment since she keeps herself loyal to Islam but it does not imply that she merely condemns Chanda and Jugnu for having sinned. Instead, Kaukab is worried by what may have happened to them and wishes that a knock on the door or a call might be them, informing her that they are well. Thus, Kaukab’s ambivalence makes her a round character because although she is very orthodox regarding Islam, she can still distance herself from certain aspects (i.e. honour killing) and take a more comfortable position with her family.

Yet, Jugnu and Chanda’s affair will become the triggering event that will make Kaukab explicitly a subaltern. The problem is that Kaukab’s ambivalence, perceived throughout the novel, is misunderstood by her family. In Gunning’s words, Kaukab is “an ageing Muslim mother who sees her faith as the purest expression of love, yet continually interprets its doctrines in ways that seem ungenerous or brutal to others” (2010:16). Even more, her family does not see Kaukab as a round character with inner contradictions. They take her as a fixed character, blindly obedient of religious discourse, with no space of her own to critically see what is wrong and what is right. Spivak warns of the danger of constructing the subaltern’s personality by what she says because her biography will stem from a misinterpretation of the actual utterance:

The actual fact of giving utterance is not what I was concerned about. What I was concerned about was that even when one uttered, one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself [...] would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything. (Landry & MacLean 1996:291)

This process shapes the perception that her family has of Kaukab. Hence, it should not be a surprise that Ujala sees his mother as a dominant woman who “won’t allow reason to enter this house” (Aslam 2004:302). Indeed, Kaukab is built as a strong character that reigns in her household, particularly in the kitchen. Her grandson’s remark proves it when he wonders “[w]hy is Grandma Kaukab always cooking?” (*ibid.*:314). Certainly, descriptions of meals and the way they are cooked are numerous throughout the novel, often of an exoticised nature. However, this comment should not prevent the reader from realising that every time the child goes to the house, Kaukab arranges everything as a feast. Indeed, Kaukab usually complains of her solitude, “Kaukab was alone in the house, alone in the house just

as she was alone in the world, alone to let out a noisy sob whenever she felt the need” (*ibid.*:35), and she feels happy when all the family gathers because “the kitchen is animated as voices rise and hang in the air for short periods” and “her cold cold house is full of her children again. There’s warmth in unexpected places” (*ibid.*:314-5).

Kaukab’s link to the household is justified by the patriarchal discourse that places the woman as a caring and loving wife and mother. Then, she wishes for a bigger kitchen so that it equals her all-encompassing maternal love and to prevent everyone from having to “sit cramped around the table” (Aslam 2004:301). Spivak warns of this discourse when she says that the diasporic woman “may also be the victim of an exacerbated and violent patriarchy which operates in the name of the old nation as well – a sorry simulacrum of women in nationalism” (1996:251). Tradition is followed as a way of keeping ties with the homeland and determines the role of Kaukab, so that it can be interpreted as a kind of nationalism. In fact, the space of the house is a copy of the house Shamas was born in: “One blue, one strawberry pink, one the yellow of a certain Leningrad exteriors [...] he had painted the rooms in this house with those three colours, surprising himself by reproducing the three shades precisely” (Aslam 2004:5-6). The simulacrum, then, also embraces space. With the advent of the second generation, though, transformation is allowed and Kaukab lets Mah-Jabin introduce some changes in the house, “many improvements were made to the interiors which until then had been seen only as temporary accommodation in a country never thought of as home” (*ibid.*:96). However, these changes are only superficial and Kaukab controls them at every moment. Yet, as has been shown at the beginning of this section, her control and power are just apparent, as the various instances of rebellious acts by her children prove.

In addition, the fact that Kaukab’s power even in her household is just a mirage is seen not in the utterances but in the actual facts. Except Ujala, the other members of the family try to avoid conflicts by repressing their own voice before Kaukab. For instance, Mah-Jabin avoids anything that may pose a threat to her mother’s mastery in the house, “[t]here is so much outside the house, and the mother is quick to construe any voicing of opinion or expression of independent thought by the girl as a direct challenge to her authority” (Aslam 2004:93), and she rebels only when Kaukab goes a step beyond the confidence space that is created between both of them and forbids Mah-Jabin to go to America. Mah-Jabin sees such an imposition as a breaking of the rules of their relationship, based on their equivalent positions, and starts an argument. Shamas acts in a similar way and tries not to offend her: “*She* is the reason why father won’t condemn the idiocies of Islam” (*ibid.*:302). In addition, the reader is provided with Shamas’s thoughts in other passages, so that his ideas are clearly seen as opposed to Kaukab’s.

Nevertheless, Shamas lets her speak on his behalf before the children just not to annoy her,

[s]he *wanted* him to be angry, she *needed* him to be angry. She had cast him in the role of the head of the household and he had to act accordingly: there were times when he came in to inform the young teenagers that something they had asked from their mother earlier [...] was an impossibility, and it was obvious from the look on his face that he personally had no problem with what the children wanted. (Aslam 2004:111)

However, the clearest example of the power Kaukab apparently has occurs when Jugnu brings a white girlfriend to Kaukab's house. In this context, Jugnu reveals that he objects to the idea that being born in a Muslim household makes you automatically a Muslim and Shamas claims his inclination towards science rather than religion. Kaukab does not say anything but her thoughts reveal her discomfort: "he may have *thought* these things before, but the white person enabled him to say them out loud. [...] the white woman's presence was just a catalyst for the two brothers to air their blasphemies" (Aslam 2004:38).

Therefore, the intrusion of otherness –the white world– in her household means the end of Kaukab's dominion and of a Muslim lifestyle. In this sense, Kaukab reinforces her Muslim identity and adopts the notion of *izzat* (personal honour) as her own. This concept becomes distinctive of the Muslim community in order to "keep their distance from a culture that seemed to have little sense of family, of sexual morality, of respect for elders or personal hygiene" (Ballard in Barker 2008:259). Kaukab's description of England confirms this idea of the maintenance of *izzat*:

England is a dirty country, an unsacred country full of people filthy with disgusting habits and practices, where, for all one knew, unclean dogs or cats, unwashed people, or people who have not bathed after sexual congress, or drunks and people with invisible dried drops of alcohol on their shirts and trousers, or menstruating women, could very possibly have come into contact with the bus seat a good Muslim has just chosen to sit on, or touched an item in the shop that he or she has just picked up – and so most Muslim men and women of the neighbourhood have a few sets of clothing reserved solely for outdoors, taking them off the moment they get home to put on the ones they know to be clean. (Aslam 2004:267)

In addition, Kaukab functions as a filter that prevents the second generation from hearing anything she considers blasphemous or disrespectful towards Islam or Pakistan, "once again concealing everything regarding the Pakistanis that the children might deem objectionable" (Aslam 2004:110). For this reason, she is always alert about what is said by Shamas to reproach him for it, "I knew you would find some way of badmouthing Pakistan in all this" (*ibid.*:238-239). In the

case of Jugnu, she conceals some of his acts while he is away, “[o]n the day she spotted a bottle of whisky in one of them, Kaukab had had all the photographs sent up to the attic, away from the impressionable eyes of the three children in the house” (*ibid.*:27). However, when he comes back to England, she cannot conceal his acts so easily and she must address him directly. Indeed, Kaukab uses her subalternity to create a space from where she can rebel as when she reproaches Jugnu for living with Chanda, “I may only be a woman and not educated as you, but I won’t stand by and let you damage further that already-damaged girl. [...] You men can do anything you want but it’s different for us women” (*ibid.*:61). It must be noted that Kaukab’s claim is feminist but only to the extent that the patriarchal system lets her, since she places herself in an inferior position as ‘only a woman.’ Kaukab’s warning is ignored and Chanda moves in with Jugnu a few days afterwards. Thus, Kaukab tries to convince Chanda that they have made a mistake and reminds her of the fatal consequences of it and that it is not late for repentance. Yet, Chanda’s answer appeals to their true love and the impossibility of marrying according to Muslim law because her husband did not divorce her nor can he be located. Kaukab’s assertive response shows her ambivalence regarding her affair with Jugnu, “I care about what it is, yes, but also about what it looks like” (*ibid.*:62).

The difference between being and seeming is in essence what defines the subaltern. No matter what one really says, one’s psychobiography will be finally produced by the way his/her words are interpreted. In the case of Kaukab, her sympathetic feelings towards the couple will be completely ignored because she condemns them as sinners. Regardless of the fact that she clearly acknowledges her sorrow for their death, she admits that they were sinners, “If you think I condone their murder, you are wrong” (Aslam 2004:323). Again, Kaukab needs to correct her children’s assertion in order to make her words understood. However, Ujala sees it as hypocrisy and ridicules his mother, “you are sorry they were murdered but they *were* sinners. It’s like a judge saying, ‘Let’s give the criminal a fair trial, and then hang him’” (*ibid.*:323). However, Kaukab never admits she was in favour of the honour killing and, indeed, just like Chanda’s mother, she focuses all her efforts on thinking that there may be another explanation for Jugnu and Chanda’s disappearance, “Kaukab is unshakeable that they have not been killed and that they will return one day, that to give up hope is a sin, that the brothers could not have murdered their own sister in cold blood” (*ibid.*:102).

Moreover, Kaukab expresses her wish for Chanda and Jugnu’s return from the space in which she feels more comfortable, her kitchen. Although at the beginning she resented Jugnu’s behaviour, “[i]t was a sin to offer food to a fornicator, and Kaukab [...] stopped soaking that third glassful of rice and peeled two aubergines instead of three” (Aslam 2004:62), she overcomes her initial rage and even makes an effort to include Chanda as part of her family,

[t]he food she is making is more than enough for six people, but, who knows, perhaps Allah has written in the Book of Fates that Jugnu and Chanda –safe and sound– are to walk in on the family just as it is sitting down to eat. (Aslam 2004:292)

Certainly, Kaukab finds herself in a real quandary, trapped between two sets of signifiers: on the one hand, the discourse of motherhood and love towards her family; on the other hand, religious discourse. Her agency is limited by these two discourses, which paralyse her ability to react. Young's comment on Spivak's work concerning sati may work for Kaukab as well: "she is a signifier, whose distinction is that she is shifted from one position to another without being allowed any content" (1990:164). At this point, Kaukab's remark about the importance of form is useful for this analysis. In fact, Kaukab just acts as a loudspeaker for the discourses that dictate her behaviour, so that there is no possibility of her having a voice of her own. However, it does not mean she cannot speak, as she certainly does. On the contrary, the problem is that these two discourses do not coincide on all occasions and Kaukab, as a medial figure between them, must make an effort to make them compatible. Yet, this compatibility is not understood by her children.

There are indeed some occasions when family and religious discourses cannot be conciliated. This is the case when her own family gets involved in some act she considers un-Islamic. Therefore, she must take sides and her choice, incomprehensibly to her family, is religious discourse. For instance, she feels the obligation of calling her in-law to warn him about the true nature of the relationship of their guests in Pakistan, Jugnu and Chanda. Afterwards, she is extremely worried that she may be somehow responsible for their disappearance. There are other cases, though, in which Kaukab is seen privileging religious discourse over her family's welfare but her actions are due to her lack of knowledge. For instance, Kaukab's ignorance regarding the allegedly sacred salts she was administering to Ujala is clear: "It was just some *salt* over which the cleric-ji had read sacred verses,' [...] What's a libido? What's a bromide, Mah-Jabin?" (Aslam 2004:304). Kaukab's ignorance is evident but the legitimacy that the cleric and, especially, the sacred verses give to this salt prevents her from any kind of questioning. Concerning Mah-Jabin's marriage, Kaukab's pressure on her daughter to go back to her husband is due to Kaukab's ignorance that Mah-Jabin was abused. Kaukab is a very orthodox character and, recovering the dichotomy discussed at the beginning of this section, the divine is over the earthly. Thus, Kaukab's loyalty to Allah is higher than to her family, who offends her by not following Islam as she wishes.

Therefore, Kaukab's self-perception situates her in an isolated position, separated from the rest of her family: she is a pure Muslim while her family has an un-Islamic behaviour. In this way, Kaukab contributes to her subaltern state

because she distances herself from the rest of society. In fact, it is her religious orthodoxy what makes her remain misunderstood.

If the woman/black/subaltern [...] continues to exercise a self-marginalized purism, and if the benevolent members of the man/white/elite participate in the marginalization and thus legitimate the old bad days, we have a caricature of correct politics that leaves alone the field of continuing subalternization. (Spivak 1987:253)

In Kaukab's case, however, it is hard to say that her subalternisation is caused by a caricature of correct politics. On the contrary, her self-marginalisation comes from the symbolic value that religion rewards her with. Kaukab questions that a religion that has given dignity to millions around the world could be considered barbaric (Aslam 2004:321). Indeed, the symbolic value overcomes the material value and Islam provides all spaces considered Muslim with it, "[c]ompared with England, Pakistan is a poor and humble country but she aches for it, because to be thirsty is to crave a glass of simple water and no amount of rich buttermilk will do" (*ibid.*:70). Thus, Pakistan also incorporates the symbolic value of purity, closely linked to the idea of *izzat*.

Moreover, the image that Kaukab has of her homeland connects with a wider concept of an imagined community, the *ummah*.² Thus, Muslim countries are perceived positively, as spaces free from the decadence of Western culture. For this reason, she accuses Jugnu's white girlfriend of being a liar because she says she has picked up a venereal disease in Tunisia, "She must've gone on holiday somewhere else, a country populated by the whites or non-Muslims. She is trying to malign our faith" (Aslam 2004:44). Other examples are the sacred status that she gives to Arabian dates or the incredulity that something bad may happen in a Muslim country like Turkey, where several British-Pakistani men have been killed for their passports (*ibid.*:264).

The notion of difference, again, plays a major role and is extended beyond the white world. Apart from the process of westernisation in which most of the members of the second generation are involved, a paradigmatic case concerns Shamas and Jugnu's ancestry. Their father was born in a Hindu household and, during a colonial bombing, he lost his memory and his family and was brought up by an adoptive Muslim family. This fact should not have any further consequences because, since he was somehow converted, he should be considered a full member of Islam. However, Kaukab blames her father for having married her to a half-Hindu and her husband for having transmitted such godless ideas to her children

² *Ummah* is a concept that refers to the Muslim community which "has played a unique role in uniting the Muslims all over the world under a single Islamic umbrella" (Gautam 2002:351).

and having brought her to an equally godless country, “this nest of devilry from where God has been exiled. No, not exiled – denied and slain” (Aslam 2004:30).

Therefore, Kaukab is placed and places herself in a differentiated position. This double process, active and passive, is facilitated by her diasporic condition. Dasht-e-Tanhaii is a third space, alien and subjected both to Pakistan and England. In this context, the clash of two legitimate discourses takes place: modernity and orthodox Islam. Although Kaukab takes the second option of the dichotomy, she is also subjected to family discourse. This fact makes her remain misunderstood even by those who are subjected to religious discourse like her, “how did you, Kaukab, manage to tolerate it [Jugnu and Chanda’s affair], you who are a cleric’s daughter – born and brought up in a mosque all your life?” (Aslam 2004:42).

Therefore, Kaukab is a character destined to be misinterpreted. Her distress is so high after the family reunion that she tries to commit suicide. Shamas prevents her from doing something that according to Kaukab’s cosmogony would have condemned her soul because self-killing is a sin. It is remarkable how Kaukab’s subalternity is unravelled in her suicide attempt: Shamas remembers a case in which someone had boiled coins and drunk the water, just as Kaukab has intended, but his death turned into his subalternisation, “his relatives mistaking his broken footsteps for alcohol and putting him to bed so he could sleep it off” (Aslam 2004:328). However, a few pages afterwards, the reader is provided with a piece of information that questions the possibility that Kaukab’s death could have been interpreted in the same way: “He had once overheard Charag say to Stella that he was glad Islam forbade alcohol ‘because otherwise I am sure both my mother and my father would be alcoholics’” (*ibid.*:330).

3. THE SPEAKING SUBALTERN

Spivak envisages the possibility of a speaking subaltern when she says that “[w]hen the subaltern ‘speaks’ in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual” (Landry & MacLean 1996:271). Contrarily to what it may seem, Kaukab does not only represent the two versions of the subaltern’s unspeakability but she subverts this condition without escaping the dominant discourses. Instead, although she might blindly obey these discourses, she also contrasts them so she gets the most out of them. Kaukab has experienced the Islamization that took place in Pakistan cultural life in the 70s and early 80s,

The alliance with the Saudis brought a vast increase in the number of Wahhabi mosques and madrasas: these preached a puritanical version of religion at odds with the Sufism that had traditionally been the dominant expression of Islam in much of the subcontinent. (Shamsie 2010:201)

Although Kaukab's tendencies seem to be very orthodox as a way to keep her faith and her tradition in a hostile environment as England, she still follows the Sufi interpretation since what the sacred texts say is above the teachings of the ulama.³ As Ramadan states, in Sufism "the Text is the ultimate point of reference, because [...] it is the only path to the experience of closeness to God" (2004:28). Therefore, she uses her knowledge of the sacred text to establish a dialogic relation with it and, consequently, recovering her agency. For instance, she rejects the idea that Islam forbids music by remembering that when Muhammad migrated to Medina, "the girls there had welcomed him by playing the *duff* drums and singing" (Aslam 2004:290). However, there is another example that portrays Kaukab's manipulation of the discourse in a clearer way. She is supposed to be fasting because it is Ramadan but she tastes the food she is cooking for Shamas. However, she justifies her action, condemns it and finally re-justifies it again:

Allah –ever kind, ever compassionate– says that if you are a slave, a servant or a wife, and your master, employer, or husband is a strict man, you are allowed to taste the food you are cooking for him during your Ramadan fast to see that the salt and spices are according to his preference, to prevent a beating or unpleasantness. Shamas doesn't mind but –since he is not too well– perhaps her violating the fast would fall into the category of wifely devotion and love, and be excused. (Aslam 2004:261)

Her action can be seen positively as an empowerment technique used to make her subaltern condition more bearable. Moreover, she questions Islam's patriarchy and allows herself the possibility of seeing an angel:

She is not sure she would be able to see them because some clerics maintain that angels or the spirits of holy figures cannot be seen by women who are inferior to men, but then she remembers that the Koran plainly states that Moses's mother had received a divine message from Allah, a revelation, just as all the prophets had, who were all male. (Aslam 2004:333)

It should be pointed out that all these subversive examples occur in a third space which is neither the public nor the private but the intimate stream of consciousness. Thus, the reader has access to her inner thoughts and must use this privileged position in an attempt to understand her. The reader can see the whole

³ Muslim scholars recognised as an authority in Islamic sacred law and theology.

network in which Kaukab is inserted and this knowledge gives him/her the power to comprehend the character:

Whatever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability of attempting to ‘identify’ (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity. What is known is always in excess of knowledge. (Spivak 1987:254)

This excess of knowledge is complemented by the fact that *Maps for Lost Lovers* is categorised within the literary field. This label is crucial because ‘the effect of the real’ is not a given feature and lets the author create a plausible world in which the subaltern does have the option of expressing her own thoughts. Allegedly, these are not addressed to anyone but the truth is that the reader is the final container of this information. With it, the reader has the tools to make an effort and try to comprehend the subaltern from a holistic perspective that those around her cannot access. The voice of Kaukab is not based on her utterances, which reproduce the dominant discourse. On the contrary, her voice lies in the fact that she cannot speak, neither literally nor metaphorically, but she still gives a message that, implicitly, brings the warning that it is misunderstood. Thus, it is precisely in the conscience that the actual subaltern voice is heard, without any mediator involved in the process of decoding. The reader, with such an intimate knowledge about Kaukab’s context and thoughts, can judge her behaviour in a more far-reaching and comprehensive way.

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