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**Visualising Otherness in *Maps for Lost Lovers* by Nadeem Aslam:  
Discussing Othering in and through Literature**

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## Introduction

The setting in Nadeem Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2005) may at first easily deceive the reader into thinking that the story takes place in a small community in Pakistan. However, one soon realises that this is clearly not the case. Instead, the setting is an unnamed British city, inhabited almost solely by Pakistani immigrants. In spite of the fact that the setting is England, there are few white people present in the story, and the ones who are mentioned are banished to the margins by the Pakistani society and simply reduced to a stereotyped image of white racists who, moreover, suffer from moral decay. Not only are the stereotyped whites excluded, but everything they represent, i.e. Western society, is alienated and thought of as foreign, not belonging to the desirable traditions and properties of the Pakistani community. Owing to this, white society serves the purpose of defining the main characters and their society.

The process of forming one's identity through the alienation and exclusion of another unit is represented in the postmodern concepts of "otherness" and "othering". In *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, Lawrence E. Cahoone gives an accessible definition of constitutive otherness as the strategy of maintaining cultural units by an active process of exclusion, opposition and hierarchization. Other units will be represented as "other" in a hierarchical dualism in which one of the units is "privileged" or favoured and the other is devalued (16). It is, as Cahoone metaphorically says, "the *margins that constitute the text*" (16). Whereas Cahoone discusses the term otherness, Ghil'ad Zuckermann brings forward the term of "othering" which is the process of "defining and securing one's own (positive) identity through (the stigmatization of) the 'Other'" (8). Even though the concepts of otherness and othering evolve around the same process, both of the terms are useful in a discussion in the sense that they complete each other.

I would like to discuss and define the social phenomenon of otherness in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, using the terminology provided by Cahoone and Zuckermann, and, furthermore, illustrate how "othering" develops from a beneficial function in forming a superior

unit/identity where the stereotyped Other,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the decayed white racist, remains in the margin, to a situation where the otherness symbolising the Western society, slowly infiltrates the Pakistani society and breaks down the boundaries between the two units. This development leads to the question of what happens when this kind of self-affirmation starts to fail.

Before venturing into this analysis, it is crucial to say something about the perspective on otherness in this essay. In the eyes of the Western reader, the implicit presumption regarding otherness has traditionally been that the Other may symbolise everyone or everything that does not lie within the frame of the white Western norm. This is due to the fact that the whole concept has sprung from the Orientalist and post-colonial discourse. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ ... as means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized” (168-169).

Richard Dyer proposes that although there has been a great deal of analysis of racial imagery in literature during the last decades, the study of white people as a racial image has been notably absent (9). Dyer continues to argue that white people are bound to function as a human norm as long as they/we are not racially seen or named, which leads to the assumption that “other people are raced, we are just people” (10). In other words, it is likely that a reader belonging to a white Western society, will naturally assume that any representation which is not white must constitute the Other in a text that somehow deals with racial imagery. Having this background in mind, the perspective that I will use in my analysis of *Maps for Lost Lovers* might provide a slight challenge as it is actually the white people and their society who constitute the Other.

In short, I would like to investigate how the concept of otherness is shown in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and what consequences the prospect of failure of such a self-affirmation might cause. To prove my thesis, these issues will be discussed mainly from Kaukab’s perspective, one of the most central main characters, but I also need to bring in the perspective of some of the other characters in the novel in order to build a solid argument. I will begin by illustrating the

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<sup>1</sup> Within some fields which deal with Freudian and post-Freudian theories, critics make a distinction between “the other” and “the Other”. The capitalization and the non-capitalization of the word are both used in the formation of identity but with different symbolic value (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 169-170). However, in this analysis I will not pay any regard to this distinction. The capitalization of the word the Other is in this context only for the purpose of clarification. In this essay I will be using the term when I am referring to a member or a property belonging to the excluded and devalued unit.

representation of the whites as being other, and also show how they define Kaukab and her fellow country-men. Adding to this, the white woman's role will be analyzed, as she seems to take most of the blame for the moral decay of the white society. Thereafter follows a discussion on how the otherness symbolising the Western society infiltrates the Pakistani community and threatens the boundaries between the two units. Shamas, another main character, plays a dangerous role of being in-between the two units and is thus interesting to bring up for discussion as he also poses a threat towards the Pakistani community. Furthermore, I will highlight the importance of Chanda and Jugnu's murder (the young murdered couple around whom the story evolves) and discuss the problems and consequences of failed self-affirmation (or at least the prospect of its failure) through othering. Finally, adding to this analysis of the novel, I shall lead a brief discussion on the relevance of considering otherness through literature, partly by making use of some reviews of *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

## **Hell is Other People**

The plot of the novel evolves around a crime, but more importantly the novel depicts the complexity of human relations. In an anonymous English city named Dash-e-Tanhaii (The Desert of Loneliness) by the inhabitants, the two lovers Jugnu and Chanda have enraged the larger part of the Pakistani community, by having an illegitimate relationship. Jugnu's relatives do not object to the relationship with the exception of his sister-in-law Kaukab, who strongly believes that they are sinners and wants nothing to do with them unless they become husband and wife. Chanda's family considers her a whore and a shame to the family. One day, the couple disappears without a trace and soon Chanda's brothers are arrested for their murder. This is where the story begins, as it tells the story of the next twelve months, interweaved with retrospective stories of past events, mostly from the perspective of Jugnu's brother Shamas, his wife Kaukab and their children.

As made clear in the plot review above, the novel deals with human relations above all and, in turn, with the process of othering through the contact with other social units. When Kaukab first arrives in England she is full of optimism for the future in the new country and has her mind set on learning the new language as quickly as possible. However, due to a lack of contact with English society, her efforts soon come to an end, as her language skills do not

progress. Nevertheless, in the midst of all the confusing Western phrases, she manages to register one of them correctly: “This last one she had heard and remembered correctly, *Hell is other people*, but she had later begun to doubt herself: surely no one – no people, no civilization – would think other people were Hell. What else was there but other people?” (32-33). This expression in connection with the context of the quotation may be associated with the concept of otherness in a somewhat ironic way. *Hell* is certainly a place with negative connotations and even though it would be too drastic to equalize the view of the Other with Hell, there is a certain similarity especially when we are speaking of the *demonized Other* which will be discussed further later on.<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, Kaukab is not aware of the fact that she and her neighbours actually are equalizing other people, i.e. the white Western society, with something quite similar to hell. For example, a woman living three streets away from Kaukab asks her to keep a watchful eye on her grandson from the window on his way to the mosque in case any depraved white men should appear in the street: “every day you hear about depraved white men doing unspeakable things to little children... We should never have come to this deplorable county, sister-ji, this nest of devilry from where God has been exiled. No not exiled – denied and slain. It’s even worse” (30).

Indeed, also Kaukab feels repulsion for the English society: “For once she would like to go from her house to, say, the post office without being confronted by the decay of Western culture” (269). Her representation of the Western society is undoubtedly an alienated and devalued one: “this immoral and decadent civilisation was intent on soiling everything that was pure and transcendental about human existence!” (293), and the aversion seems to be rooted in the mere soil of Western society as she frets over tropical plants not being able to grow in England, wondering “whether this country’s soil itself hadn’t been responsible for the failures” (95). The ruin of this “nest of devilry” must be emphasized, as that allows the Pakistani community to hold the moral upper hand and the hierarchy between the two units remains intact.

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<sup>2</sup> It might be worth mentioning that this simile was not what Sartre had in mind when he originally coined the expression but rather how we tend to mirror ourselves in the image of how other people see and judge us (Morgareidge, 2005).

The stereotyped image of the whites as violent racists is another example of the creation of a positive self-identity through stigmatization of the Other. The whites' position of being other reduces them to scapegoats, the receivers of unwanted properties. After it becomes common knowledge that Shamas has been beaten up seriously by unknown perpetrators, the guilt is quickly put on the Other: "I heard someone say only yesterday that our poor Shamas-brother-ji was beaten up by, who else but, white racist thugs" (272). The fact that it is more likely that the perpetrators are men with connections to the religious authorities in the community, as Shamas has recently discovered a child abuse scandal within the mosque, does not seem to matter significantly. Without doubt, it is preferable to put the blame on someone excluded from the Pakistani community.

### **The White Woman as a Scapegoat**

Even though the decay of the white society is apparent everywhere, it seems to above all be embodied by the white woman. On the few occasions when Kaukab actually is confronted with "the whites", it is almost exclusively when some of the male members of the family bring home a white woman with whom they have a relationship. This is of course something which distresses her enormously, as an intimate relationship with the Other could indicate equality between the two units. What is more, her self-image is defined by its absolute opposite, the white woman, and it is crucial that Kaukab belongs to the superior unit or the whole system of self-affirmation falls. Consequently, in order to maintain her privileged position, she must alienate the Other, if not in words, then at least in thought. When feeling furious at a dinner at home, as her brother-in-law Jugnu speaks of the prophet Mohammed in a scornful manner, she has no doubts about whom the guilt of this shameful utterance belongs to:

Kaukab knew that it was the white woman's presence that was really responsible for this utterance of Jugnu (she who herself didn't add anything disrespectful, just listened intently): he felt emboldened to say such a thing in her company – he may have thought these things before, but the white person enabled him to say them out aloud. (38)

The exclusion of the white woman becomes very evident as Kaukab goes on in her mind: "“What else have you learnt from her and her people’, she wanted to ask him, ‘what else do you plan to pass on to my children?’” (40). Years later, when she recalls that evening, she justifies herself by referring to higher powers: “it had been a sign from Allah for the

electricity to have failed the moment the white woman had stepped in, the house plunging into darkness” (47). Once again the white otherness is equalised with connotations of darkness and Hell.

Besides taking the blame for any religious opposition, the white woman also fails to live up to the traditional expectations of the duties of women according to the Pakistani community. When Charag, Shamas and Kaukab’s older son, who has a child with a white woman, announces that he has had a vasectomy since he does not want to raise any more children, Kaukab is devastated. The hope of remarrying him with a Pakistani woman is gone since he cannot be considered a man any longer. Conveniently enough, she holds his former wife Stella responsible. It is clear that she has not been taking care of their child properly: “If that white girl had done what a woman was supposed to do her son would still be a man” (58).

The sexuality and “lack of virtue” of the white woman play an important role in the distinction between the two units. After Shamas has been seen by some members of the community in the company of an unidentified Pakistani woman, the comments are harsh: “They can do what they like with white women – we all know the morals *they* have – but at least leave our own women alone. You would think it was their [Shamas and Jugnu’s] mission to corrupt every Pakistani woman they come across” (177). The speakers are referring to Jugnu’s former relationships with white women and then the illegitimate union with Chanda, and now they suspect Shamas of similar conduct. It is evident that, by pure contrast, the white women’s lack of morals is supposed to enhance the Pakistani women’s virtue.

Moreover, the alienation of white women seems to serve as the main element behind the othering of the white race in its entirety. When Jugnu contracts a sexually transmitted disease from the white woman with whom he has been having an on-and-off relationship, Kaukab, naturally, does not let such an opportunity pass her by. She believes that this disease is Allah’s punishment for this immoral behaviour and judges not only the white woman (who caught the disease while she was on holiday during one of their break-ups), but the whole white race severely: “That diseased woman, this diseased, vice-ridden and lecherous race!” (44). Yet, when it turns out that this “prostitute’s vileness” (44) has been contracted not in a Western society but in a Muslim one, her own positive identity is threatened. The only solution is to deny the truth and displace the unwanted property onto the Other: “‘She is lying’, she said firmly. ‘Tunisia is a Muslim country. She must have gone on holiday

somewhere else, a country populated by the whites or non-Muslims. She's trying to malign our faith" (44).

One may wonder why such a large extent of the process of othering evolves around the stigmatization of the white woman. Amir Hossein Kordvani states that female sexuality has in some Muslim societies historically been regarded as a "potential source of chaos, that is, social disorder" (4).<sup>3</sup> This is a remnant from the days of landlords and reproductions of kinship-ordered groups (6). Accordingly, women are still to some extent considered to be objects for men's sexual pleasure and the properties of the senior men of the family until marriage where the ownership shifts to the new husband. Virginity is the evidence that the woman has been held in firm control, away from men outside the domestic household (4). Thus, female sexuality is a matter of masculine power and the lack of control may have consequences for the male position in society. The purpose of this essay is not to give a satisfactory description of the relationship between men and women in Muslim societies as the extent of this essay does not allow for a fair representation. However, it is clear that female sexuality is important in the process of othering in *Maps for Lost Lovers* and therefore Kordvani's argument is relevant and useful in this context.

The stigmatization of the white woman is indeed vital, as her supposed lack of morals and virtue implies failure of the holder of power, i.e. the white male and thus the decay of white society. In "Muslims in the Hijra, facing a minority status: between religion and nationality, which identity for New York's Pakistanis", Héloïse Frollo de Kerlivio discusses the cultural gap which separates the American and Pakistani women. According to Frollo de Kerlivio, the Pakistani immigrants regard American women "as the first ones responsible for the collapse of the social order in the US", in their quest for personal fulfilment, rather than devoting herself to the family life (42). Even though this study was exercised in New York and not in England, both of these countries represent the West and owing to this, one may draw clear parallels to the process of othering towards the white woman in *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

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<sup>3</sup> Kordvani has written a text on the Middle East which is why he limits his statement to Muslims societies. Masculine control over female sexuality is also something which historically has been a social phenomenon in Western societies. One may, for instance, consider the gender hierarchy in England during the Victorian era. However, religion plays an important part in the novel and as the process of othering comes from a Muslim point of view, it is relevant to consider the social hierarchy of such societies in this context.

## **The Infiltration of the Pakistani Community**

The essence of the cultural identity of the Pakistani community is, as illustrated in the former section, maintained by the exclusion and devaluation of “the whites” and their entire society. The usage of othering as the means for self-affirmation is rather explicit. Nevertheless, as well as being the less valued counterpart, the white Western society poses a serious threat towards the Pakistani community, by not remaining in the margins, but rather infiltrating the text. By bringing up the example of Charag’s vasectomy and also Kaukab’s fear of what influence Jugnu’s radical opinions about Islam might have on her children, I have already touched some of the issues concerning the Western infiltration of the Pakistani community.

The clearest indication of this threatening infiltration can be identified in the gap between generations. The younger generation has an inclination to adapt to the Western society, which creates conflicts between the generations and a possible break-up within the community. It is among the children and the adolescents that the white culture tends to establish itself, threatening to disconnect them from their own unit, which certainly concerns the older generation:

One is cursing the inventor of the wheel and ruing the day she came to England, this loathsome country that has stolen her daughter from her, the disobedient girl who doesn’t want to go to Pakistan for a visit because males and females are segregated there, ‘Everything is divided into His and Hers as if anyone needed a reminder of what a great big toilet that country really is, Mother, no wonder you get the shits the moment you land’. (45)

The girl’s disinclination towards going to Pakistan is, according to her mother, without doubt a result of the decadent Western influence. Another girl is also considered disobedient and regrettably influenced by the white society when she falls in love with the wrong boy:

It was the girl from Faiz Street who had wanted to marry a Hindu boy but was made to see sense and married to a first cousin. Of course that didn’t work out because she didn’t get on with him – she was very young then and still influenced by the ideas she must have picked up from school and her teachers and friends, from life in general in this country, but she agreed to be married off a second time and is perfectly happy now. (97)

Kaukab and Shamas’s children form the strongest representation of the younger generation questioning the older one. The children’s rejection of the proper Pakistani values causes a crisis for Kaukab, as she is moulded to believe, through her culture, that her main purpose is

to transmit the values and social norms of the culture. This is clearly illustrated by her harsh critique towards Stella, Charag's white wife who has not raised Kaukab's grandson properly. Kaukab thus believes that she is responsible for what moral values her children have and that their manners mirror her qualities not only as a mother but as woman and a member of the community. As a result, she grieves over the fact that she faces the problem of losing her children to the West. For instance, she feels that she cannot move back to Pakistan since her children probably will not follow: "This accursed land has taken my children away from me... Each time they went out they returned with a new layer of stranger-ness on them until finally I didn't recognize them any more" (146).

Religion is another central matter that serves to distinguish the Pakistani community from the Other. Frollo de Kerlivio professes that religion is generally assumed to reinforce ethnicity of an immigrant group, if it is different from that of a receiving country. In other words, religion allows "an ethnic community to differentiate itself from others" (30). Having this in mind, one may observe that the distinction between Islam and Christianity is essential in the novel. Christian properties are associated with the Other and must be kept separate from Islam as well as the own unit. Although Kaukab's view on the Other's society seems to oscillate between the Western society as being Christian or simply atheistic, depending on what view is more beneficial at the moment. It is even possible that to her, being a Christian or an atheist may be considered the same thing as, according to her, Islam is the only legitimate faith. Either way, Christian or atheist, both properties are unwanted and transferred onto the Other.

Facing the threat of a possible Christian infiltration, Kaukab is obsessed by raising her children into good Muslims and not become influenced by their uncle Jugnu and through him, Western values:

Allah gave her everything, so how can Kaukab not be thankful... how could she have not tried to make sure that her children grew up to be Allah's servants, and how could she approve of Jugnu marrying the white woman, or later, approve of him living in sin with Chanda? For the people in the West, an offence that did no harm to another human or to the wider society was no offence at all, but to her – to all Muslims – there was always another party involved – Allah.  
(43)

However, she cannot prevent her children from coming into contact with the British community since they must attend British schools and as a result she does not succeed in shielding her children off, from what she believes, is sinister Western influence. The

vasectomy of Charag is considered a Western feature and what is more, a “Christian conspiracy to stop the number of Muslims from increasing” (59). She also resents her daughter for using “white expressions”: “do not try to sound white by saying things like ‘Oh Christ’, because you don’t impress me” (102).

As Frolo de Kerlivo testifies, the Pakistani parents’ wish of educating their children in proper schools in the US and acculturate them, consequently results in difficulties in preserving cultural roots and preventing the children from integrating into the new society. In other words, these parents want their children to have a solid education in order to excel in their own society, and, in addition, to represent the own social group as superior or at least equal in comparison to other social units. Paradoxically, the young generation’s part taking in Western society also enhances the risk of losing them to the host culture. Similarly, Kaukab and the other members of her generation fear that their children’s adaptation to Western society threatens the hierarchical order between the two societies. The young generation seems to feel that the Western way of living is just as good as the Pakistani one, if not better. Moreover, this attitude may, with time, result in dissolution of the Pakistani traditions and norms, which hold the group together and form the Pakistani identity. That is to say, if the Western values are not rejected by all members in the own social group, the process of othering begins to fail. The stigmatization of the Other is highly obstructed by the fact that Kaukab’s children are more benevolent to white society, since they also are a great part of her identity. She feels she is left behind which is the reason for her desperate measurements as she is trying to force her children away from the Western values, back to the Pakistani community.

Not only does the white infiltration of Dash-e-Tanhaii lurk among the younger generation but also through Shamas’s character. By his position as the director of the Community Relations Council, he forms the link between the Pakistani inhabitants and the British society. He is “the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own, visiting his office in the town centre or bringing the problems to his front door” (15). Besides being in daily contact with the outside world through his work, Shamas has a much more benevolent attitude towards the white society, and, moreover, does not disapprove of his children’s Western lifestyle. In addition, he is, unlike his wife Kaukab, not religious and although he might not have a point of view on religion as radical as that of his brother Jugnu, Shamas is still critical to the severe influence religion has on the Pakistani people. As

mentioned earlier, Shamas is also the one who casts light upon a case of child abuse in the local mosque. This is something the local inhabitants have turned a blind eye to, as the exposure of one of the leading imams would compromise the superiority of the own unit over the devalued Other.

The benevolence towards the Other and the rejection of Islam, which is an important property of the Pakistani community, places Shamas in an in-between role which also makes him a threat. Whereas he is almost indispensable in his neighbourhood, he is also one of the sources in which the white society becomes visible. Consequently, he is most likely to become an easy target for frustration. Kaukab, for instance, blames him for the conflicts between her and their children: “You brought me here. To this accursed country. You made me lose my children... I hold you responsible for the fact that my children hate me” (328). Kaukab is indirectly referring to Shamas’s more liberal view on child upbringing, which in her mind has undermined her own methods and as a result, the children have rejected her. She also chooses to blame him for their daughter’s unfortunate and failed marriage with Shamas’s violent nephew, who could not endure a wife with Western views, even though, in reality, Kaukab herself was the one who prompted the marriage. As a consequence of his in-between role, Shamas finally suffers a blow when he is beaten up by a mysterious organization that specializes in bringing back runaway children and women to their Pakistani families. This beating is brought about when Shamas refuses their services of bringing his youngest son Ujala back, a service which has been requested by Kaukab. The organization has also found out that Shamas is having an unacceptable affair with a Pakistani woman, and accordingly believes that a severe reprimand is in order. The fact that Shamas’s communicative value to the Pakistani community overshadows his threatening disposition is probably the only thing that keeps him alive at this point.

### **Call your Dog a Name and Drown it: Murder and Removal of Otherness**

So far, the discussion has evolved around the fact that in order to create and maintain an identity based upon the concept of otherness, the self must act through the process of exclusion and opposition of the Other. Thus, any infiltration of an outside inferior unit threatens the whole identity of the self, as its mere existence depends on being separated from the Other. Kaukab and the other inhabitants of the Pakistani community face the threat of

having their identity questioned by the Western influence that has spread within the group. Due to this fact, it is crucial to keep the unit intact and the identity safe, i.e. not allowing the Western otherness to spread, and, accordingly, remove or conceal all trace of its existence, and indeed its influence, at least if it does not serve the purpose of fortifying the image of the devalued Other.

A clarifying example of this is illustrated through the opinions concerning the local prostitute: “Someone had once asked him if the prostitute was Indian or Pakistani. She is white: had she been Indian or Pakistani, she would have been assaulted and driven out of the area within days of moving in for bringing shame on her people” (16). It is certainly convenient that the prostitute is white, as it supports the image of the white woman as decayed and without morals. On the other hand, had the prostitute been a Pakistani woman, it would imply obscene Western influence or even worse, sinful and unwanted behaviour within the own unit; either way, it would have been unacceptable.

As mentioned earlier, Kaukab despairs over how influential the Western ways of living have been on her children. For this reason, she has on several occasions during their up-bringing tried to conceal from them every trace of behaviour which does not conform to the Pakistani way of life. Nevertheless, her fanatic ways rather push the children away and as a result they grow up to be highly influenced by the British society. Even though Kaukab continues to hope that she might bring the children back, she also feels the need of concealing their shameful behaviour to her own community. For instance, when Mah-Jabin has been to a local shop while visiting her parents, Kaukab is immediately concerned: “You went into a shop? She knows the women of the neighbourhood know the girl is divorced, and is sure they would have made comments about her to each other – comments about her character, about her Western dress and cut-off hair” (311). On another occasion when the oldest son Charag brings his white ex-wife Stella and their son for a visit, Kaukab insists that Stella remains in the house as much as possible so that the neighbours will not spot her.

Not only is it essential to hide all Western traces, but also to reject unwanted properties, properties which should belong to the Other. According to Cahoon, the privileged group must actively maintain their position by not assuming the properties of the under-privileged group, i.e. the Other (16). When Chanda returns from Pakistan after two failed marriages, her father and brothers are ashamed, as her existence is a reminder of their failure. They have

failed in providing a home for her, and their masculine power is diminished in the eyes of the Pakistani community. A twice divorced woman is not a desirable quality within the own unit, but is regarded as an outcast and should therefore be concealed. Chanda's male relatives finally come up with what they think is a grand solution: "Chanda had been asked ... to consider wearing the all-enveloping *burka*. The men said they felt awkward and ashamed when they were with their friends on a street corner and she went by... if she wore a *burka* no one would know it was her as she went by" (342). Of course, it is not enough that just she disappears, but also everything that might remind people of her:

The shop was named after her – Chanda Food & Convenience Store – but the sign was over after she came back trailing the stink of failed marriages. The old name, it was felt, would needlessly remind people of the girl... *I feel I am being erased*, Chanda wrote in her diary angrily. (342)

Chanda refuses to wear the *burka* and her father and brothers must bear the shame as best they can. However, when she decides to enter an illegitimate relationship with Jugnu, they believe she has gone too far. Chanda and Jugnu's love affair is considered by most of the inhabitants of Dash-e-Tanhai to be a result of Western influence and moreover it is a violation of all of their moral values. Consequently, they are as good as excluded from the community and by most of the inhabitants, only referred to as sinners, and Chanda, who seems to take most of the blame, is reduced to being called a whore. Owing to this, Chanda and Jugnu suddenly fill the position of the Other. In *Racial, ethnic and homophobic violence: killing in the name of otherness*, Mari-Claude Barbier, Bénédicte Deschamps and Michel Prum explain that "Naming the Other is often a way of obliterating their identity as... a member of the family" (1). In other words, it is a metaphorical murder of people who are marginalised in society which boils down to exclusion. Furthermore, with naming the Other, killing soon follows, as naming and killing are "two sides of the same coin" and thus the proverb goes, "Call your dog a name and drown it" (1). Indeed, "the two sinners" are eventually killed by Chanda's brothers.

One may ask the question what makes the image of the Other change from being a somewhat beneficial function, separating two objects in a hierarchy, to viewing otherness as the intrusion of fundamental evil. This latter posture towards the Other is far more aggressive than the method of using otherness as the mere basis for self-affirmation. Calvin O. Schrag argues that the belief that the Other constitutes a threat to one's personal, social and national interests, to the extent that it must be annihilated, forms the underlying reasoning behind

genocide (151). Having Schrag's theories in mind, Chanda and Jugnu would accordingly be regarded as the *demonized* Other since their actions represent the Western values. As the alienation of the lovers becomes increasingly intensified, it is finally not enough that they are kept at a distance as outcasts but actually "the [O]ther [must] be exterminated like a virus infecting an alienated corporate body" (151). It is essential for the preservation of the cultural way of living and for the power structures within the Pakistani community that the demonized couple is removed. Even though the novel does not deal with genocide in the sense that an entire population or a larger ethnic group is exterminated, it deals with the annihilation of the Other and thus allows for drawing clear parallels between the contents of the novel and Schrag's theories. The murder is a conscious statement on the behalf of Chanda's brothers, as the means of reclaiming their hierarchical position in the Pakistani community. According to Schrag, the perpetrators of genocide are subjected "to a mania of purification" (151-152). The silent approval of the majority of the social group testifies that order within the group is restored and the purity of their form of life is saved from the infected lifestyle of the demonized Other.

The importance of the murder of Chanda and Jugnu is of considerable weight. As mentioned earlier, Shamas's role of being in-between the two social units and also his benevolence towards the Western society place him in a somewhat hazardous position. However, his value to the inhabitants of Dash-e-Tanhaii, as a communicator between the Pakistanis and the Western society, clearly overshadows his threatening disposition. Thus, he need not be dealt with by murder but a good beating seems to be sufficient. However, the young couple poses too large of a threat and consequently must be erased. The difference between Shamas and the young couple, regarding their function in the community, is that whereas Shamas only shows benevolence towards the Western society, he does not openly reject all of the moral values belonging to the Pakistani culture. Jugnu and Chanda, on the other hand, not only openly ignore and reject the proper lifestyle of the Pakistani community but, moreover, threaten to undermine it. By displaying an alternative way of living, Jugnu and Chanda's actions could consequently imply that the Western lifestyle might be just as good as the Pakistani one, or, even worse, superior.

## The Problems of Othering

To affirm one's identity by imagining oneself superior in a hierarchical duality may be rather problematic, since, inevitably, there is always the difficulty of maintaining superiority. As illustrated in the earlier sections, Kaukab basically relies on her image of herself and her fellow countrymen as having the moral upper hand as the West is decadent and Godless. Still, through Kaukab's limited interactions with white people, mostly Stella, one may at times detect an underlying fear of exposing herself to a position where she would appear inferior in any way. She is appalled when her husband Shamas, at a visit to the hospital, unintentionally reveals to the doctor that he is unaware of the fact that it happens to be Kaukab's birthday: "she's hot with shame at what the white doctor would now think of Pakistanis, of Muslims – they are like animals, not even remembering or celebrating birthdays. Dumb cattle" (65). In her meetings with Stella she is self-conscious and contemplates every move she makes:

Kaukab unknits the thread, remembering the first time she had made a knot in something in Stella's presence: she had suddenly gone numb, wondering if there was a *Western* way of tying a knot – more sophisticated, *better*. Perhaps the way she tied was an *ignorant* way of tying a knot? (318)

In addition to the social mechanisms that cause Jugnu and Chanda's murder which was discussed earlier, Kaukab's fear of being inferior demonstrates how essential it is to her to maintain the superior image of the own identity. Having this in mind, Kaukab must firmly hold on to the values according to which she has chosen to live.

Kaukab's uncompromising ways when it comes to religion and lifestyle lead her into a helpless situation. She tries by every means to force her children back to her life and the Pakistani culture but, instead, she ends up driving them away. It is impossible for her to accept their Western assimilation without separating herself from them, which in turn would be devastating since they form the result of her accomplishments in life. Consequently, she reaches a crisis when her children confront her, accusing her of everything that has gone wrong in the family, trying to get some kind of acknowledgement that her fundamentalist reasoning is wrong. Kaukab, feeling just as helpless as the children and also bitter at Shamas for being let off the hook, due to his tolerant mindset, cannot give the children what they so desperately want, as a rejection of the values rooted a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam would be to deny her own existence at this point. Facing the ultimatum of either losing her

children or herself, Kaukab, in her despair, sees no other solution than to try to commit suicide, but is prevented from doing so by Shamas. After having spitted out all of her desperation and rage onto Shamas in a fight, Kaukab illustrates her helplessness to the reader by ending her part in the novel with the Koran in her hands thinking that “it’s not our place to say ‘Why?’ or ‘How?’ to Him; we can only say ‘Help!’” (333).

I believe that it is absolutely vital to Kaukab, as well as to many other members of her social group, to retain the boundaries between her own community and the West, since her own identity totally depends on the existence of the Other and the superiority of her own values. If the properties of the white Other should influence her own community and be accepted among her group, then, suddenly, there would be nothing left to define her own existence. It could even be argued that in a nightmare scenario, all she would be left with might be that Other’s image of her as inferior and as a consequence, *she* would become the Other.

### **Visualizing Otherness and Othering through Discussing Literature**

*Maps for Lost Lovers* was first published in England, facing a premier audience with Western values. As discussed in the Introduction, studying white people as a race has not been a common theme in literature. Thus, the challenge of publishing a novel where the white population represents the Other through a Pakistani perspective, must have been something that Aslam has been aware of. Still, the novel has from the start been well received both in the UK and in the US and reviewers and critics in general seem to agree on the importance and relevance of the novel in today’s society.

However, while some reviewers, like for instance Kamilla Shamsie, Akash Kapur and Soumya Bhattacharya, all find Aslam’s language and metaphors beautiful, poetic and rich, others like David Robson and Timothy Peters have the opinion that it is “irritating over-writing” (Robson par. 6) and “underplotted” (Peters par. 13). It is interesting to see that some reviewers with a Western background object to Aslam’s language (although it is important to mention that a substantial part of reviewers with a Western background do find Aslam’s language extremely pleasurable). One might wonder whether it has anything to do with the fact that his language has sprung from a different cultural tradition, considering Aslam did not move to England until he was a teenager (Brace par. 3). To generalize, a carefully ornate

language full of metaphors might perhaps not be what characterizes the contemporary literary ideal in the Western world today.

Furthermore, just as Akash Kapur, who writes for the *New York Times*, states, “Aslam will inevitably be compared to Monica Ali” (par. 4), which is exactly what may be found in, among others, a review by David Robson in the *Daily Telegraph*: “At the most superficial level, [*Maps for Lost Lovers*] recalls [*Brick Lane*] by Monica Ali. Its theme is the cultural gulf between modern Britain and some of the immigrant enclaves within it” (par. 1). Kapur himself would rather want to compare the novel to Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* considering both novels are about tight-knit communities soaked in violence (par. 4). To necessarily draw parallels between two authors with a similar cultural background, writing about immigrants in England might not seem very remarkable, but still, it could also be a process of categorizing them into a compartment where the Other writes back, so to speak. In other words, the Western audience unconsciously finds a way around the fact that the white population is treated as a race in the novel, by instead viewing the author, who is not himself part of the white norm, as the Other.

Gabriele Schwab states that the cultural function of literature has the power to affect and change us and to intervene in cultural practices (10). Accordingly, it is exactly discussions like the one above that brings an additional level of complexity to the discussion surrounding the novel. Regardless of the fact that Aslam might be categorized as an immigrant who gives “voice to those whose voices are seldom heard” (Bhattacharya pars. 7), his novel still visualizes the process of othering and the awareness of the illusion of the white race as a norm, not only through the story itself but also through the reception of the book. It is with such basis that we may in time “sharpen and change our own patterns of relating to otherness” (Schwab, preface: xi).

## **Conclusion**

*Maps for Lost Lovers* is a novel which deals with human complex phenomenon such as identity and social hierarchy. The novel makes visible the forming of identity through the process of othering and consequently deals with the problems which concern this issue. Kaukab forms the core of the novel to some extent, and has created for herself an identity

based on the existence of the white Other, represented by the white decadent population. The moral decay of the Western world is above all symbolised in the white woman whose supposed lack of virtue demonstrates the failure of the white man.

Although excluded from the Pakistani community, the white otherness finds its way in, through the younger generations who are more eager to assimilate and live after Western ideals. Threatening to dissolve the boundaries that hold the group together, the white traits must be concealed at least if they cannot function as a warning example. The young lovers Jugnu and Chanda, who have enraged the entire Pakistani community, are alienated and finally murdered as they represent the white otherness and threaten to undermine the proper Pakistani values.

Kaukab faces a personal struggle, trying to hold on to her children as well as rejecting the Western values they have chosen to adopt. Kaukab considers their adaptation to the British society a failure on her part as she has proved to be unsuccessful in carrying on the proper values. Due to her fear of feeling inferior, Kaukab must, in spite of the danger of losing her children, uphold the boundaries and reject all that has to do with the Western otherness, in order to maintain superiority over the Other.

Discussing otherness through literature has many benefits as it may increase the awareness in people of the attitudes concerning race and othering and gradually influence different social structures between cultures. What is more, there is a vast spectrum of different fields to which this novel introduces entries. For this essay I have mainly focused on otherness through an ethnic and religious perspective. However, it would be equally relevant to dig further into the feministic aspect and study the woman functioning as the Other. Moreover, one could follow up on some of the central matters, presented in the section about how to visualise othering through discussing literature. For instance, having Richard Dyer's theory regarding whiteness as a norm in mind, which is mentioned in the introduction, one could study more closely what affect Aslam's Pakistani roots might have had on the reception of novel in the Western world, changing the focus from the plot of the novel to the author. In other words, how does the Western reader's perception of Aslam affect the reception of the novel?

There is no shortage of possible focal points in this novel due to Aslam's success in pointing out several current problems in today's society. Naturally, I believe it is important to discuss

these issues concerning the formation of identity and different social hierarchies.

Furthermore, literature is definitely a valuable instrument for reaching a larger audience, through its capacity of engaging the reader but at the same time allowing a certain beneficial distance, resulting in a well-balanced combination that might, in turn, offer the possibility of self-revelation.

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