

Fictionalized Worlds and the Politics that Inspired Them

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Introduction: Artistic and Political Movements as Literary Influences

No piece of fiction written exists in a vacuum. Every novel can exist as a “political novel,” or a fictional story that comments on the political actions or events of a certain decade. These events, such as the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 are the larger formative events that lead authors to write political novels. In this way, many artistic and political movements act as influences for what to write about, what to fictionalize, and what parts of the world to include in a novel. Through the four chapters of this project, I will analyze the influences, both artistic and other, that lead to the creation of the novels *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, published in 1924, and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, published in 2017.

There is quite a large gap, 93 years in fact, between the two novels and there are many aspects of society that have evolved in between the two novels’ publications. The technology of surveillance, as explored in Chapter I, has evolved massively over these 93 years, and thus, the novel’s depiction of a surveillance government and the morality of that surveillance has changed. In 1924, the concept of mass surveillance was a mostly theoretical idea and Zamyatin’s book served as a warning to Soviet and Western readers alike to not let any government attempt to control and monitor every aspect of a citizen’s life. The all-glass landscape in the novel is made by the fictional government to facilitate surveillance and the new technology is introduced in order to spread the message of uniformity and equality. This all-seeing government, only

referred to as OneState, acts as a satirical dystopian equivalent to Zamyatin's own Soviet government.

Likewise, Kamila Shamsie creates a fictional version of the United Kingdom's government in the 21st century in the aftermath of 9/11 in the United States and 7/7 in the United Kingdom. In this post-9/11 and post-7/7 world, the protagonists of *Home Fire* find that as Muslim immigrants they are subject to government surveillance more than non-Muslim British citizens. The characters in Shamsie's novel, thus, are aware, though critical, of the bias against them in a world full of cameras, mass media, and anti-Muslim prejudice. Both novels explore the notion that all countries in recent history have to monitor their citizens via mass surveillance as a matter of national and international safety and security.

I also explore how both Vladimir Lenin and the British government's attitude towards immigration influenced the creation of the antagonistic forces that harass the central characters in these novels. Additionally, I find that both texts also rely on personal antagonists— in addition to the oppressive institutions that allow both texts to personify their societal oppressors. In *We*, for example, Zamyatin creates the character The Great Benefactor as the leader of OneState and models his almost deification after the "Lenin Cult" that formed following the revolutionary's death in 1924. The often controlling OneState acts as a societal pressure that demands uniformity similar to the Soviet Union's own ideals of collectivism in their propaganda, but the protagonist, D-503, also has to deal with a controller at his apartment, U, who brings him official messages on behalf of the government. Similarly, Shamsie includes the character, Karamat Lone, the newly elected Home Secretary, with whom the protagonists, Aneeka, Eammon, and Isma clash on a personal level. Karamat executes the will of the often

Islamophobic British government. Karamat self-consciously embodies exclusionary ideals that use the notion of patriotic nationalism in order to articulate prejudice against British Muslim citizens.

I explore an aspect of the debate between the draw of nationalism versus commitment to individual independence in the third chapter of my project. In this chapter I ask: What is the difference between an individual and their value as a citizen? Both *We* and *Home Fire* explore that concept, though to different degrees. In Zamyatin's novel, a citizen's worth in OneState is directly tied to the citizen's benefit to the state. All members of OneState are given a number instead of a name (e.g. D-503, R-13, I-330), and their work is to aid in the spread of OneState's power and government. In that environment, there is no difference between personal desires and wants versus the citizen's worth. Shamsie's focus is more on Karamat Lone as he acts as an arm of the state and thus, erases his heritage as a Muslim immigrant. Karamat encourages fellow Muslim immigrants and his own family to assimilate as he did and it is not until his son, Eammon, leaves Britain to join his fiancée Aneeka Pasha, that Karamat remembers that his family life is separate from his political one.

The final chapter of my project discusses what happens when Karamat's son Eammon, and D-503 decide to leave these predetermined citizenships in England and OneState for love. In *We*, D-503 begins to see his own individuality when he meets and falls in love with I-330, a woman who eventually convinces him to join the rebellion group Mephi. In *Home Fire*, Eammon chooses to publicly denounce his father's Islamophobic policies and join Aneeka in Pakistan where she is protesting. Having fallen in love with her, he decides to identify as a British Muslim rather than follow the assimilation doctrine that his father preaches. Both Eammon and D-503

face consequences for joining groups that the governments describe as “enemies of the state” and both men are subject to either metaphorical or literal death. Both the novels I discuss ask: What does it mean to belong and how do these fictional societies respond to the rebellion created by love? Following the conclusion of both of the texts, the answer is not very comforting. The violence of these governments extends to the very last page, and unfortunately, love is collateral damage.

In my project, I also consider several political and artistic movements that have influenced Zamyatin and Shamsie. The Neo-futurist movement, for example, was an architectural movement of the early 20th century that emphasized a fascination with hyper-futuristic technology and building styles, in an attempt to push modern society into the future faster. Also, in the 20th century, the Lenin Cult was a semi-religious group that believed that Vladimir Lenin had not died, but rather gone to spread the message of Communism through the forests of Siberia. This deification of Lenin influenced Zamyatin’s creation of the Great Benefactor, whom he often describes in fantastical and grand terms. The October Revolution was the major political movement of Russia at the time of Zamyatin’s life. The creation of the Soviet Union and murder of the Tsar of Russia lead to great civil unrest and violence between different factions of political activists, some wanting the return of the Monarchy, and some praising Lenin’s revolution and institution of Communism. The egalitarian, oppressive society of OneState is a clear allegory for the budding Soviet Union and its policies. In *Home Fire*, we encounter England in the 21st century and see that it is plagued with issues surrounding immigration and Brexit in addition to the anti-Muslim sentiment generated by 9/11 and 7/7. Much of the growing nationalist movement is reliant on post-9/11 Islamophobia. Much of this

Islamophobic feeling is fed by the emergence of fundamentalist movements around the world. Groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS/IL (The Islamic State of Syria/The Levant) spread violence and hatred through the Western world creating a vicious cycle of hate and prejudice.

Thus, both *We* and *Home Fire* have themes and influences clearly similar to the problems and artistic styles that their authors observed in the world. *Home Fire* is clearly a novel written in 2017 following Islamophobia of the last almost two decades and *We* is a Soviet novel dealing with the ramifications of Communism and the influx of technological advancements. Through the works of several literary scholars and cultural studies theorists, I have studied how these authors created the worlds of the novels and what they chose to bring from their own worlds. The relationship between politics and literature is vast and I have only just scratched the surface of the varying connections between the two.

Chapter I: Surveillance and Technology

One of the many motifs that connect *We* and *Home Fire* is the protagonist's acknowledgment of the government's surveillance of its citizens. In *We*, every aspect of daily life, including the all-glass architecture of OneState, is made to facilitate this surveillance. The novel later inspired George Orwell's *1984*, which coined the phrase "Big Brother is Watching You." Likewise, in *Home Fire*, Shamsie creates a realistic depiction of England where the citizens are fully aware that they are being monitored by their own government's increasingly invasive technology. The protagonists in Shamsie's novel are faced with the reality that they are being monitored more specifically because of their religion and familial ties. The difference between Zamyatin's approach to surveillance and Shamsie's is that in *Home Fire* the protagonists use the surveillance and mass media of their world to further a message and see it as an unavoidable feature of the modern world, a tradeoff for the benefits of improved technology. Conversely, Zamyatin has his protagonists confront and challenge the government surveillance by acts of what OneState would call terrorism, notably the hijacking of the spaceship *Integral*. The protagonists in both novels are hyper-aware of government surveillance and often attempt to break out of their societies.

In *We*, protagonist D-503's main goal, before getting lobotomized, is to escape OneState and the surveillance that prevents him from loving fellow citizen I-330. In addition, he chooses to help another character, O-90, leave OneState so that she can give birth to an illegal baby and not surrender it to the state. In OneState to live is to be watched. The only places that the

characters are not watched are beyond the Green Wall (the massive structure that surrounds OneState) and in the Ancient House (a derelict house full of antique furniture), both of which serve as symbols for the government about the savagery of the outside world. While OneState citizens are allowed to shut the blinds in their homes to have sex, they are watched at all other times. We see that it is not just the cameras and guards that watch them, but the citizens participate in surveilling each other as well. Fellow citizens and government agents alike maintain surveillance where the glass walls do not permit observation. S-4711, a government agent, is often seen shadowing D-503, but U, a desk clerk at D-503's apartment building, reports D-503 and monitors him, "for his own safety." When I-330 is attempting to visit him, U stops the woman. During this exchange, U says, "He *is* a child. Yes! That's the only reason he can't see what you're getting him into with all this... just to... that it's all... a farce. Yes! And it's my duty..." (Zamyatin 155). U, a teacher in OneState, infantilizes D-503. She is instantly afraid for D-503 and afraid *of* I-330, both as a romantic rival but more importantly, as a tool for D-503 to self-actualize and rebel. Though U often compliments D-503 when they interact, as soon as she confronts I-330, she makes him out to be a child to be protected. This is in contrast to how she treated her actual students. Earlier in the novel, the children made a drawing of U like a fish and she had them all removed by Secret Police. Therefore, this choice to protect D-503 instead of reporting him is even more baffling. In this interaction, Zamyatin shows that U is more than just a government agent; she is willing to "protect" him from the woman corrupting his mind and making his life more complicated. Because I-330 opens his mind up to the concept of beauty, he realizes that U is unattractive. Thus, U is not only protecting him because she does care for him

and does not want him taken away by the Police, but she is also making sure that D-503 stays in her life by preventing his self-actualization.

U and OneState's constant monitoring is similar to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a thought experiment/theoretical prison designed such that the prisoners could not know if they were being watched. In the design, Bentham includes a watchtower where none of the prisoners can see in. All of the prison's cells look directly towards the tower and it is unclear whether someone is actually watching the inmates at all. This uncertainty, Bentham theorized, would make the prisoners behave as if they were being watched regardless of whether they could see a guard in the tower or not. In the world of *We*, OneState uses the threat of observation to destroy an individual's personality and control them completely.

As we see throughout *We*, Zamyatin's attitude towards surveillance comes out of a time when technology was growing and expanding daily, as Zamyatin observed as an engineer for the USSR. In the early 20th century, Soviet Russia used its new technology as a strategy for the creation of one community of citizens rather than individual people. Zamyatin is clearly anxious about the invasive and dehumanizing potential of surveillance technology. Zamyatin's fear of surveillance comes out in the text as D-503 and the rebellion group Mephi view surveillance as invasive, unnecessary, and impersonal. D-503 is at first brainwashed to enjoy the watchful eyes of OneState, saying that "To the right and left through the glass walls I see something like my own self, my own room, my own clothes, my own movements, and all repeated a thousand times, It cheers you up: You see yourself as a part of an immense, powerful, single thing" (Zamyatin 34). D-503 is unable to separate himself from the collective. Thus, he views surveillance here as beautiful self-observation and continues to watch himself and fellow citizens

while getting ready in the morning as he aids in the subjugation and surveillance of the collective. Zamyatin seems to be satirizing D-503's lack of individual introspection and he has his protagonist strive to be like other perfect citizens rather than find his own flaws. Though everything is the same in all of the rooms, D-503 is subconsciously watching for any abnormality in his world which would disturb him enough to report the nonconformity to the Guardians. Commenting on D-503's behavior, Michael Amey writes: "It is not The One State, however, that has subjugated D-503, but rather his awareness that at any time The One State's vigilant eyes may be watching him. As a result, through his internalization of the power of the state, he has become the principle of his own subjection" (Amey 27). In D-503's internalization, we see how the power of the state controls citizens via their minds. Individual citizens like D-503 view themselves as arms of the state, one single collective, on account of their subjugation and brainwashing, which leads them to constantly monitor each other. In the novel's introduction, D-503 remarks, "I shall attempt nothing more than to note down what I see, what I think— or, to be more exact, what we think (that's right: we; and let this WE be the title of these records)" (Zamyatin 4). The records that make up this novel do initially act as a way of praising OneState and recording the building of the spaceship Integral, though D-503 meets I-330 soon after and his praise dies down. In the early parts of the novel, D-503 catches himself speaking as one person rather than as a collective and immediately corrects himself to reaffirm what OneState teaches him. Additionally, he points out that this might be strange to some readers: "that's right: we" (4).

When D-503 tries to do his duty and report I-330 for her crimes against the collective, he goes to S, the undercover agent of OneState. Unfortunately, D-503 cannot bring himself to report

her: “No, it is impossible to tell him, unthinkable. This was perfectly clear... I covered my face with the newspaper (I felt as if everybody were looking at me), and soon I forgot about the eyelash, about the little drills, about everything” (Zamyatin 36). In his attempt to report another Number, D-503 is aware of his own surveillance once again. Because he was able to find S so easily, he remembers that S is watching everyone equally, not just those that are seen as rebellious like I-330, but everyone. D-503 is just as susceptible to government surveillance as every other citizen. While writing *We*, Zamyatin was surrounded by his own form of surveillance in the early days of the USSR. Zamyatin’s critical view of technology and surveillance is influenced by his experiences of the rise of the Soviet Union’s use of technology to enforce the idea of one community and country rather than a country full of individuals.

Home Fire has the same issue with mass surveillance but under a new lens: post-9/11 Islamophobia. In the first chapter, we see Isma, the protagonist of *Home Fire*, trying to settle into a new life in America. When searching for an apartment, Isma notes that “the landlord had drawn attention to the skylight as a selling point to offset the dank built-in cupboard, and promised her comets and lunar eclipses. With the memory of the Heathrow interrogation still jangling her nerves, she had been able to think only of surveillance satellites wheeling through the sky” (Shamsie 9). The beauty of the night sky is ruined for Isma because of her fear of surveillance. We see a sharp contrast between the landlord, who sees the skylight as a window out to the world, and Isma, who sees only another way for the government to look in. Shamsie also uses the word “interrogation” here to describe what it felt like to be questioned so intensely, rather than referring to it as an “interview” or “security check.” The trauma of this interrogation affects even minute details of Isma’s life and her motivations for the remainder of the narrative.

Throughout the entire text, we find that Isma alters her behavior to lessen the chance of her being monitored. In this regard she is like the prisoners in Bentham's Panopticon who modify their behavior; both have internalized the condition of being watched. At the airport during her interrogation, Isma is shown overthinking in an attempt to not look suspicious. We are told, "Isma looked over at the suitcase. She'd repacked when the woman left the room and spent the time since worrying if doing that without permission constituted an offense. Should she empty the clothes out into a haphazard pile, or would that make things even worse?" (Shamsie 5). Isma jumps back and forth, wondering what the "right" thing is to do to avoid breaking any unknown rules. Instead of being angry or upset about being delayed and missing her flight, Isma worries about the Border Control agent viewing her actions as suspicious. The Panoptic idea seems to influence Isma enough that her thoughts are not even angry because she has practiced so much for a TSA interaction and is *expecting* to be pulled aside. While she does not self-surveil and report herself for possible crimes, she and D-503 both change their human instincts to avoid breaking an unknown law. The omnipresence of surveillance is a given in Shamsie's world, but there is still a mystery behind the rules and Isma seems to not quite understand what would constitute an offense in this situation. She is so afraid of committing an unknown offense that she empties her things and polices her own actions ahead of an authority figure telling her to do so.

The impact of Panopticism as it relates to *Home Fire* has been studied by Zachary Bordas, who writes: "A 'disciplinary society' will not eradicate the need for screening rooms; instead, the idea of a backroom intends to coerce people into acting a certain way. In Isma's case, she does not self-correct any deviant ideas or intentions; instead, she internalizes the likelihood of screening. Her precautionary actions are scripted because of societal prejudice" (Bordas 128).

Shamsie eliminates the guard tower of Panopticism and replaces it with the threat of backrooms. Her government watches even though she does not intentionally misbehave or act with malice. Since she is a Muslim woman traveling internationally, she is automatically flagged by her own government in the name of national security. The likelihood of her getting searched is so high that she is able to prepare for it due to her interactions and history with surveillance. The search makes her feel as though she will be caught doing something bad, even something as small as repacking her suitcase without permission.

Though *Home Fire* presents a universe where the characters are aware of the unfair process of “random” security checks and invasive surveillance, the Panopticon still functions and in this case, makes perfectly innocent characters doubt their actions. Isma’s sister Aneeka is also painfully aware of the government surveillance following her family and she tells Eammon about the term “GWM” or Googling While Muslim. Because Eammon is the privileged son of the Home Secretary, his actions are not as carefully policed, though his father’s family is Muslim. Karamat attempts to distance himself from his culture and religion, not only by marrying a white American woman but also by giving his children Anglo-Saxon names like Emily and Eammon. He becomes the Cosmopolitan that Shamsie critiques. Shamsie calls herself a “Critical Cosmopolitan.” This term has emerged as a post-colonial idea that does not erase individual cultural identity and difference in this interconnected world. Shamsie creates informed global citizen characters in *Home Fire*. Karamat Lone is not a “Critical Cosmopolitan.” He distances himself from his religion and thus the idea of GWM is completely foreign to his son. Aneeka is all too aware of her surveillance and what would trigger an investigation: “[Eammon] wanted to say something interesting so the girl would see that he might be the kind of person her sister

would choose to have coffee with... ‘Just search for ‘north circular canal bomb’ or something like that and it’ll come up.’ ‘Right- because that’s a good idea if you’re GWM isn’t it?’” (Shamsie 71-2). Because Eammon does not have to concern himself with the act of GWM, he brings up what he believes to be a safe conversation. Even though Eammon tells her to look up the bombing because it is interesting, Aneeka knows that an unjust system will flag her search as suspicious due to her family’s involvement in Islamic extremist groups. The two sisters are both aware of how their actions are viewed by the British government, but Aneeka is more cognizant and resentful of the government’s impact on her internet profile whereas Isma tends to self-police.

The characters in *We* and *Home Fire* both live their lives under constant surveillance. It is in showing how the characters react and internalize their reactions to that surveillance that the two texts differ. While both texts can easily be seen following Panoptic thought, D-503 turns against his fellow surveilling citizens to save someone that he loves, and Isma allows her actions and even her thoughts to be changed with the threat of surveillance and racist policies. As far as Aneeka is concerned, she does what she thinks is right to get justice for her dead brother by using surveillance technology. By protesting the British Government and Karamat Lone’s refusal to let his dead body be buried in the UK with the rest of his family, she intentionally exploits mass media by protesting silently in Karachi, Pakistan. This is in contrast to Zamyatin’s warnings visible in *We*. The government in D-503’s world is capable of monitoring every aspect of a Number’s life and the novel is a clear satire of Soviet politics of the early 20th century, as I will show in a later chapter.

OneState's response to unofficial information and rebellious behavior is a more extreme version, death. D-503 is in Bentham's perfect version of the Panopticon; the entire society is surrounded by glass to facilitate the surveillance, similar to Isma's dreaded skylight. Because he is placed in this perfect thought experiment, Zamyatin shows the fears of what could possibly happen if technology advances too far. While D-503 is the Panoptic ideal, and Isma is Shamsie's closest approximation to this experiment, Shamsie's world shows the reader the limited possibility of the surveilled turning surveillance technology against the one who surveils. We see Aneeka take advantage of this mass media, even as her family and other Muslim constituents are still suffering following the conclusion of *Home Fire*. They are still being unfairly watched, just as D-503 finally submits to full indoctrination at the conclusion of Zamyatin's novel.

Though the technology differs, through the bias of the surveillance and the indoctrination of the citizens of OneState and the United Kingdom, it exists to show how the two protagonists feel about that state-sponsored technology as a whole rather than just the surveillance itself. For Zamyatin, technology is his tool to show how an all-powerful government gets even more powerful, enough to fulfill Bentham's panoptic prophecy. The technology of the day to day life is the reality for Shamsie; it is not speculative like Zamyatin's, and in the real world, at least in the eyes of Shamsie and other immigrants, technology and surveillance are not the simple agents of a powerful government but societal constructs with an immense effect on daily life. Likewise, Shamsie is able to show how people like Karamat Lone are able to manipulate it for their own personal goals rather than an all-seeing government's oppression of individuals. The end of the novel, however, reverses the power of surveillance as Aneeka turns the spectacle surrounding her into her weapon against those who would watch her.

Chapter II: The Creation of or Influence from Antagonists

Home Fire and *We* both include primary and secondary antagonists that function differently in their respective texts. In *Home Fire*, Shamsie rewrites the original antagonist (Creon) from *Antigone*, now named Karamat Lone. In rewriting this ancient text, Shamsie includes the societal pressure of an Islamophobic British government. Karamat, the newly elected Home Secretary of Great Britain, acts as an arm of the state. In *We*, the antagonist is the Benefactor, another societal antagonist that vaguely threatens the main characters. The secondary antagonist, U, functions on a more personal level “protecting” D-503 from himself. In the two texts, the antagonists can be sorted into two categories: a more personal antagonist that the main character vehemently hates (U and Karamat Lone), and an antagonist that they have to deal with systematically (The British Government and OneState).

So, how do Zamyatin and Shamsie use real-life influences to create these antagonists? The two authors use these antagonists in two different ways. Though both are works of fiction, Shamsie uses a fictionalized form of the British government, and creates Karamat Lone, a high-ranking politician, as more of a personal enemy for the family. When Adil Pasha dies, Karamat refuses to tell Isma and her siblings where their father was buried and the incident surrounding his death. He later refuses to let Aneeka bring her dead brother home to be buried with his family and dismisses her as a young annoyance rather than an angry constituent, continuing to label her as the daughter of a terrorist years after her father’s death. Though Aneeka and Karamat only meet once, the animosity between them is on a more personal level than the hatred and Islamophobia the British government historically has toward immigrants in their country. For

example, when Aneeka begins her protest in Karachi, Karamat joins a parliamentary session to meet with his colleagues. There, the Prime Minister gives his first speech about the situation: “‘Heads impaled on spikes. Bodies thrown into unmarked graves. There are people who follow these practices. Her brother left Britain to join them.’ The PM rose above party politics; the leader of the opposition rose to join him. There were ‘hear, hears’ on either side of the aisle. The home secretary was lauded for the difficult decisions he had to make” (Shamsie 237). The Prime Minister, in an attempt to not seem xenophobic or racist, chooses to mention the barbaric practices of jihadists rather than attack Aneeka or Parvaiz directly. By doing so, the Prime Minister, and by proxy, parliament, chooses to associate Parvaiz with ISIS and other Muslim extremists. This group identity that Karamat foists onto Aneeka and Parvaiz works to dehumanize them and casts them in the role of faceless, unnamed antagonists. Ironically, the unnamed Prime Minister is just the head of government in Britain and acts outside of Karamat’s internalized vendetta against Muslim immigrants, choosing instead to make it a matter of national importance. By allowing Karamat to take the charge against religious extremists, the Prime Minister lets him use his own personal vendetta against non-assimilated Muslims as a reason for policy-making. At no point do any other members of British government speak to the Pasha family. Therefore, Karamat acts as an “unbiased” lens to show the Pasha family as the very type of immigrant that Britain should reject. Because Karamat himself is a person of color and has an immigrant family, he exemplifies the idea of what it *should* mean to be a Muslim in Britain and the PM and other white members of Parliament allow this narrative to be official government policy rather than the biased actions of one member.

In this way, Karamat makes Parvaiz and his sisters the scapegoat for all Muslim immigrants and gives the British government a reason to continue its Islamophobic policies. Once Aneeka confronts Eammon about his father, she says, “I never held it against your father that he said what he did about mine. He was right- we were all better off without Adil Pasha. But now I mind. Because when I think about it, he comes across as unforgiving” (Shamsie 82). It is important to clarify that Aneeka and her family disliked Adil Pasha because he was an absentee father, not because he was a jihadist. They were unaware of his fighting until Karamat Lone said that they were better off without him. The situation with Parvaiz is different. Aneeka begins to have a personal dispute with Karamat over Parvaiz because she knows Parvaiz intimately and knows that he is not a fundamentally bad person, but rather someone who has been led astray. In the eyes of Shamsie’s British government, Adil and Parvaiz are one and the same. As an adult, Aneeka now realizes how her government mistreats people in the Muslim faith and how Karamat continues to perpetuate racist ideas of his white counterparts, as a sort of internalization of his own experience being an assimilated immigrant.

In *We*, D-503 is already indoctrinated into trusting and loving OneState and he begins to see the systematic oppression and tyranny of the government because he meets I-330, a woman he falls in love with. Both ISIS and OneState are negative, harmful figures in the worlds of the novels; they work by subjugating the societies they function in. So who is the personal antagonist for D-503? U, the clerk at D-503’s apartment building would seem to be one. While U is not an important character, she stands as an embodiment of what D-503 hates about living in OneState. She often attempts to separate and “save” D-503 from his irrational tendencies. Zamyatin writes that “She made a scratch with her pen and I saw myself on the page... I knew that the letter,

which she'd already read, still had to go through the Bureau of Guardians... But that little inky smile worried me" (Zamyatin 50). D-503 is very aware of how OneState works and that there is no privacy, even in his letters, but what makes him uncomfortable is that U is intimately entangled in his personal life. D-503 immediately notices that U marks down his name and that he is being monitored by the one person in OneState that he hates, contrary to his ideas of collectivism and unity. In this world of self-surveillance (as discussed in the previous chapter), he is suddenly uncomfortable with her watching. His discomfort grows after he starts to care for I-330 and begins to have his own personality separate from his Number. Since he now has something to hide, something to lose, he begins to hate U. When he meets with U before the Day of Unanimity, D-503 describes U: "I could see the brownish-pink cheeks trembling. Then they moved closer and closer to me, and I felt in my hands her dry, hard, even somewhat bristly fingers" (Zamyatin 118). This interaction is one of the many times that D-503 mentions her gill-like features on her face. The description is in complete contrast to how he describes I-330. Even though all of the Numbers are meant to look identical, he can tell that U is ugly and I-330 is breathtaking. U's ugliness marks her as his personal antagonist who oppresses him in addition to the systematic oppression of OneState.

To understand these real-world equivalents, some historical context is necessary. Prior to the writing of *We*, Yevgeny Zamyatin was an engineer for Soviet Russia right as it was created during the revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War (1917-23). Soon after the Russian monarchy fell and Communism was instituted, Zamyatin published his novel. I will explore the impact of this publication in the conclusion; for now, I will draw attention to the presence of this history in the novel. The Soviet system redistributed the wealth of the masses in an attempt at

egalitarianism. However, the system was immediately harmful due to the bloody civil war fought between the communist Bolsheviks and the Monarchist White Army. This war led to what was later dubbed the Red Terror which was an attempt to crush the anti-Communist political insurrection. Not only was there physical violence against revolutionaries, but all private property was also now owned by the state and positions were created to censor all types of anti-revolutionary media. Vladimir Lenin, due to his creation of the Soviet party and participation in the revolution, was seen as a Christ-like savior by revolutionaries and citizens alike. Nina Tumarkin writes on the rise and influences of the Lenin Cult: "Such declarations of Lenin's immortality have remained to the present day an integral part of the cult of Lenin, as attested by the ubiquitous banners and posters which read: 'Lenin is more alive than the living'" (Tumarkin 37). After Lenin's death in 1924, Tumarkin says that Lenin's most fervent followers refused to believe that the man had died and that he had finally risen above the selfish Bolshevik people that he was fighting against while alive. Paradoxically because he died, Lenin was able to fight a larger battle than against the Russian monarchy as a symbol of revolution. This was particularly true in the eyes of the Lenin Cult. The presence of his body lying in state, seeming to never decay, was a major reason that the man was seen as god-like.

In *We*, Vladimir Lenin, revolutionary and first leader of the USSR, served as an inspiration for The Great Benefactor. There are countless allegories to the Benefactor being similar to God in the novel. Zamyatin has D-503 describe The Benefactor during one of their elections: "It was He. He was descending from the heavens in His aero to be among us, the new Jehovah... a spiderweb in whose center the wise white Spider will now alight, the Benefactor, in white raiment, binding us hand and foot in his wisdom" (Zamyatin 135-6). Though this is a

political event to reelect The Benefactor again, and in spite of the fact that religion is viewed as ancient and outdated in OneState, D-503 is only able to describe him using the same capitalization that would be used to describe a God in religious texts. The use of the spider metaphor calls attention to itself. It seems to describe the Benefactor to reaffirm that the political figurehead does not even seem human. Significantly the chapter is titled “History’s Greatest Catastrophe,” which reveals Zamyatin’s clear disdain for the phony election process. At the level of plot, in D-503’s eyes, the great catastrophe is the protest in response to the Day of Unity but the dramatic irony is in D-503 not being able to see the obviously rigged election as I-330 and her compatriots do.

This passage, however, is not the only sign of when *We* was written. Following the introduction of Communism in the country and the influence of scientific discoveries being made every day, a movement labeled “Neo-Futurism” popped up. Neo-futurism was the artistic and architectural movement to reject art movements from years prior and produce hyper-futuristic and idealized art that looked towards a technologically advanced future. Though he was supportive of Neo-Futurism, Zamyatin was not active in it. At the time that Neo-Futurism was introduced, he was simply an engineer before breaking into writing and journalism. This movement inspired much of the plot of *We*. As William Hutchings notes in his article about the Soviet impact on *We*, “It became the function of twentieth-century artists (whether in literature or the graphic arts) to depict a newly perceived essence that their counterparts in earlier times could not have possibly known. This new obsession... is apparent throughout the art and literature of the opening decades of the century” (Hutchings 82-3). Zamyatin, though critical of the brutalist and cubist architecture and art of the new Communist nation, joined into the idea

that fellow Russian authors were sending a message from the future to shape what happened inspired by the newly made art forms and styles.

All of these contextual clues establish that *We* is a product of the country and the time it was written in. It is not *just* a Soviet novel, nor is it *just* a novel from the 1920s. The comparisons between Vladimir Lenin, the first leader of Soviet Russia, and the Great Benefactor are not incidental. *We* is a uniquely Soviet dystopia and Lenin is the perfect all-powerful, charismatic leader. The Benefactor in *We* is based on the deification of Lenin after the leader's death in 1924, as I have previously shown. Because of Lenin's powerful personality and quiet personal life, Zamyatin saw the demanding, yet still elusive and worshipped Lenin and was able to use him as a key influence for The Benefactor. Zamyatin's motivations in creating The Benefactor are visible through Lenin's rise to power. Hutchings writes, "Zamyatin soon became convinced that, by opposing the most advanced and innovative arts of the times, Lenin had himself betrayed the most vital principles of revolutionary energy and established himself as the virtual incarnation of entropy and stolidity and became the merciless Benefactor of the One State in *We*" (Hutchings 88). As noted above, Zamyatin was participating in the movement to look towards the future and explore past what our previous generations had understood; therefore, Lenin's god-like qualities and the suppression of this new futuristic art movement made him the perfect mix of omnipotence and rage visible in the Benefactor himself. Zamyatin requires the audience to recall these comparisons to Lenin and Russia as a whole to fully understand the allegories of mass surveillance, systematic oppression, and propaganda that Zamyatin modifies to fit OneState.

Nearly 100 years later and after the Soviet Union fell, the United Kingdom was facing a reevaluation of its own identity similar to the Soviet Union's own revolution. During the Brexit

referendum, most of the criticism around staying in the European Union focused on the lives of young immigrants of color and their place in 21st-century Britain. Shamsie published *Home Fire* in 2017, just a year after the referendum that was posed to the British public: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” The referendum concluded that the majority of the United Kingdom voted to Leave. The campaigning of both sides of the debate, labeled as “Remain” and “Leave,” was brutal and many groups that supported the Leave movement believed in Euro-skepticism and British nationalism. Euro-skepticism is the idea that Britain is an individual society that is too culturally unique compared to Europe and that the European Union as a structure did not benefit Britain. In a comparative political science journal, Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir explore the idea of Britishness and how Brexit impacted ideas of national identity: “Immigration, multiculturalism, race, and security were frequently conflated in public discourse during the campaign, most succinctly in the UK Independence Party’s notorious ‘Breaking Point’ poster depicting a massed column of mostly nonwhite, young male migrants in southeastern Europe. This played into the narrative that multiculturalism has damaged social cohesion, making Brexit part of a broader contest over national identity,” (Ashcroft and Bevir 37). Just as in Shamsie’s novel, most of the political discourse surrounding British identity focuses on the lives of young men of color, as Ashcroft and Bevir note. Though the original idea behind Brexit was focused on Britain’s economic independence, campaign groups and xenophobic constituents took the referendum as an opportunity to introduce more nationalist ideals into the debate. In Shamsie’s fictional world, the British government is constantly creating more Islamophobic legislation in response to globalization. As Karamat remarks on behalf of the British government, Muslim immigrants are

missing out on a “multi-national, multi-cultural” Great Britain. The burden is placed then, on immigrants, specifically Muslim immigrants in Shamsie’s text, to assimilate and identify solely as British rather than any other type of dual identity.

Kamila Shamsie, a citizen of both Pakistan and the United Kingdom, writes the central conflict to be one of what it means to be British or Muslim in the eyes of the state. The novel also focuses on how a family of Dual-Nationals, the Pashas, reacts to this modern Islamophobia. In the novel, we see that it is the neoliberal Western government that acts as the systematic oppressor of the protagonists. The fear is not that ISIS is coming to hurt or harm Britain or the protagonists, but rather that the British government is watching Aneeka because her father and her brother have joined jihadist forces. This, as shown later in the novel, makes it extremely difficult for British Muslims in general and Aneeka, in particular, to have a private relationship or even travel internationally without government intervention. Because Eammon has never had to experience the fears of ISIS directly, perhaps because his mother is a white woman and his father is completely assimilated, he imagines the violence and fear that ISIS perpetuates while completely disregarding Aneeka’s fear of surveillance by British intelligence. Eammon and Aneeka have different perspectives that emerge from their different relationships with Britain, as discussed in the previous chapter. Eammon identifies solely as British, due to his father’s own assimilation. Eammon has a white girlfriend for a while and does not know traditional Muslim prayers until Aneeka shows him. To Aneeka, however, the personal antagonist is Karamat Lone, Home Secretary of Britain. Karamat has personally wronged the Pasha family, as noted above, and the British government observes her online behavior because of her family’s history with

terrorism. Karamat Lone, like U, acts as a tool of the British government's own Islamophobia and directly opposes the protagonists and their demands.

The similarities between the antagonists created by the authors (U and Karamat) is that they operate as hands of the state to try to oppress the protagonists while these antagonists also have their own personal stakes in the protagonists' histories and lives. In *We*, the use of U as a personal antagonist resembles the Secret Police (Similar to the Cheka in the USSR). U is acting as an arm of OneState in an attempt to limit free choice and control the population disguised as an ordinary desk clerk. Likewise, Karamat Lone is a single member of the British government. He uses the cultural heritage that he shares with immigrant citizens to get them to do what the British government wants: assimilate with Mainland Britain and disassociate from their original culture. Anti-Muslim prejudice and the context of Brexit dovetail in this agenda.

Another key feature that the personal adversaries in the texts share is that they both come from inside their governments. These governments demonize a specific group, or "Outsider"; the "Outsider" enemy, in the case of *We*, is the Mephi. In the text, the Mephi are animalistic freedom fighters trying to reunite the world and destroy OneState. They are scary to D-503, but even though he has been trained by OneState to be afraid of change and illogical things, D-503 defies the OneState and chooses to side with the "Outsider" enemy instead of his own country. Even the mere word "Mephi" is frightening and associated with sickness to D-503. After mysterious posters bearing the name pop up around the city, Zamyatin writes: "In the passage to the underground railway, under our feet on the clean glass of the steps, again a white sheet: 'Mephi' And also on the walls of the tunnel, and on the benches, and on the mirror of the car (apparently pasted on in haste as some were hanging on a slant). Everywhere, the same white, gruesome

rash” (Zamyatin 140). The papers are a plague infecting the city with a word that is unfamiliar and immediately off-putting to the citizens of OneState. The posters are covering the glass that makes up all of OneState, thus giving the citizens a glimpse into what privacy could be. The posters are spread like a disease, not just on walls, but on everything around in an attempt to garner attention and break up the monotony of OneState’s beautiful, perfect world.

Conversely, in *Home Fire*, Karamat Lone uses his position of power to attack the Muslim citizens of London by shaming them. Though in OneState the Outsider is literally outside of the border of the Green Wall, it is more often that these governments wish to assimilate the outliers into the culture. In the case of *Home Fire*, Karamat places immigrants, specifically those from the Muslim faith, as fundamentally different and separate from the other British citizens. Lone blames the immigrants themselves, for their mistreatment by white British citizens. He says: “Because if you [set yourself apart], you will be treated differently- not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multireligious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it” (Shamsie 90). Lone identifies non-assimilated Muslims as the outsiders that are ruining his country, though he is technically a part of that same cultural group. The use of the term “multi-” here is in an attempt to seem more liberal on Karamat’s behalf. The politician does not go so far as to claim that Britain must be entirely white or all Anglican, rather, he wants other immigrants to assimilate into the same vague “Britishness” idea that he himself joined as a politician. He uses the term “Ours” to describe the United Kingdom and conversely uses the direct address, “You” to separate and destroy any link between Britain and Muslim immigrants.

The creation of the demonized “Outsider” by these fictional governments is an attempt to divide and control the citizens of their countries and provide a way for the governments to place guilt by association on those that are not yet assimilated to those who have joined ISIS or Mephi. The primary and secondary antagonists of both texts have different functions as well: Shamsie in *Home Fire* uses ISIS as well as a xenophobic nationalist government operating in the wake of Brexit, as a secondary antagonist to provide cultural context for the stakes that a Muslim immigrant must face in modern Britain while also using a personal antagonist in the form of Karamat Lone. In *We*, Zamyatin writes OneState as systematic oppression and humanizes it with the introduction of U that D-503 sees as a personal attack to keep him away from the woman he loves.

Chapter III: On Citizenship and Personhood

In *We* and *Home Fire*, both authors explore themes of personal identity in relation to citizenship. Zamyatin and Shamsie are at odds with their own citizenship and the struggle of identity is visible through their novels. Zamyatin, through writing *We*, studies the conflict between a citizen's personal identity (or lack thereof) versus their benefit to their country of citizenship. This personal identity is often made up of relationships, hopes and dreams, and motivations. Unfortunately for those indoctrinated by propaganda, the personal and the public are one and the same. Zamyatin, a Russian citizen during the Communist Revolution in 1917, had to reevaluate his own personal identity, both as a Russian citizen and as an artist. Zamyatin wrote *We* as an attempt to critique the Soviet government in the form of a dystopian novel. Where Zamyatin and D-503 (the protagonist of *We*) differ, however, is their stance on citizenship. Joseph Stalin allowed Zamyatin to leave the USSR after *We* was published, and he relinquished his Russian citizenship. Conversely, D-503 lobotomizes himself and rejoins the collective soon after I-330 is captured by OneState. Zamyatin escapes from his own oppressive society, whereas D-503 sees no hope without his love and submits to OneState.

In the case of *Home Fire*, it is worth pointing out that Kamila Shamsie has dual citizenship in both Pakistan and Britain. Though the Pashas are not citizens of Pakistan, Shamsie and the Pasha family share hyphenated British identity being British citizens with Pakistani heritage. She shares experiences with her character Isma who is a student at Amherst just like Shamsie was. Similar to real-world conservative politicians in Britain, Karamat Lone, Home

Secretary of Britain, uses his Pakistani heritage to encourage other people of color in London to assimilate and avoid Islamophobia, as we have seen in previous discussions. The Muslim immigrant citizens of Britain have a fear of Islamophobia and Karamat's ethnic background allows him to speak from "within the fold," so to speak, and invite his fellow Muslim immigrants to place public citizenship over cultural belonging to Islam and Islamic culture.

Throughout *We*, D-503 is comfortable submitting completely to the will of OneState; he walks in a four-person line like he is supposed to, has sex with his assigned partner when he is supposed to, but his journey to understand himself on a personal level is what propels the narrative. Even the purpose of D-503's name is to have him be easily categorized into a group; His name and entire purpose was given to him by OneState. Under this extreme form of collectivism, every Number exists to serve the State, like the fingers on a hand that D-503 mentions earlier in the text. Because of this attitude of collectivism, there is no personal life in OneState, only a Number's benefit to the Benefactor and the State.

Through Zamyatin's prose, D-503's feelings begin to affect his own self-perception and lead to his discovery of a personal self, separate from his identity as a public citizen. In that way, his individuality comes out of his true sexual awakening where he chooses his object of desire rather than it being assigned to him by OneState. He describes this first sexual interaction with I-330 using animalistic terms, including his discovery that his hands are "ape-like" (49). The separation from his public identity as a Number is discomfiting, and he chooses to compare his own individual, sexual body to that of a violent, irrational animal rather than the perfect Number that belongs to OneState. As he watches the "ape-like" D-503, he says: "It was that other me. He suddenly jumped out and started screaming: 'I won't stand for it! I don't want anyone but me

to... I'll kill anyone who... because I lo... I...' I saw it. I saw how he grabbed her with his hairy paws" (Zamyatin 56-7). Since this separation is so distinct, he continues to disassociate and watches this animalistic being yelling at the woman that he both sexually desires and loves. Later in the text, his repression back into that perfect Number happens because of I-330's torture and presumed death. He returns to being an assigned Number as he has lost the object of his desire that he found naturally, rather than having it given to him mathematically.

When he is caught in self-division, D-503 begins to "wake up" and begins to form his own personality. Because OneState has encouraged uniformity, D-503 immediately hates this new change and takes himself to a hospital, as he thinks that there is something wrong with him. Once there, the doctor decrees that "You're in bad shape. It looks like you're developing a soul" (Zamyatin 86). The doctor, a fellow Number, is able to determine just from a physical examination that D-503 is "broken." The interaction reveals the fragility of individuality in OneState and how easily it is identified and removed. As we see later in the text, the personality is surgically removed. Zamyatin injects satire into the situation to further illustrate how absurd D-503's fears are. D-503 is so concerned at the possibility of a regular human occurrence, a soul, that he thinks that there is something literally wrong with him, in accordance with OneState's teachings. The inner conflict weighing on D-503, however, makes him feel as though he is being a bad Number, a defective cog in the state, though he still continues to lust after I-330 and dream nightly. Nonetheless OneState's indoctrination is so powerful to D-503 and other Numbers that they believe that any sign of human personality and identity separate from other Numbers is inherently wrong, and it eliminates their citizen's desire for things like love, power, and other

human desires. This internalized condition allows OneState and the Benefactor to stay in power for longer.

Zamyatin's use of the motif of self-realization comes out of a time where all Soviet citizens were expected to merge their goals and desires for themselves with their goals and desires for the state. Russian novelists were often categorized as radical troublemakers by the Soviet government and were often encouraged to make communist propaganda. As Phillippe D. Radley says, "[Novelists] are enemies of the state, as is any nonconformist. To the centralized Soviet Marxist mind, conformity is the order of the day. Some writers do conform. But those who are at home with censorship are considered toadies and inferior creators, even by their colleagues" (Radley 203). It can be said that that in opposition to the Soviet Marxist perspective as delineated by Radley, the role of an artist is to create art for a greater philosophical purpose, and not use art as propaganda. Art, as explored thoroughly in the Neo-Futurist movement, is inherently individual and in turn, clashes with the Soviet drive for collectivism and uniformity. Through different means, the Soviet Union "encouraged" artists to make propaganda, like making their colleagues "vanish." Many Russian novelists broke conformity by writing about the bad deeds of the government, just as Zamyatin did by secretly smuggling out and publishing *We*.

Pivoting back to *Home Fire*, we see that Kamila Shamsie gives a voice to the oft-vilified enemy of Western politicians: the vulnerable, angry Muslim boy turning to extremism. But a story that is even less prevalent in the modern era is the story of a family of a terrorist trying to distance themselves while still having respect for their now-dead relatives. This is a reflection of the reality of Muslim families in England who live with Islamophobia ingrained in society. These families and communities not only have to deal with the constant surveillance and

Islamophobia, but the rising threat of fundamentalism from within their own culture. The characters of *Home Fire* are the people that just happen to get caught in the middle. Just as *We* is a clearly Soviet novel, *Home Fire* is a novel for anti-Muslim, post-Brexit Britain. The issue is that with an increase in violence in the Middle East, the question that Karamat Lone posits is all too real. Karamat suggests that the Muslim immigrant families of Britain, like his family, should assimilate to avoid confrontation and harassment. This politicization of the English identity has become a hot topic for debate amongst Western Political Science studies and the concept is sure to arise out of the increase in immigration from East-Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Brexit was, for some conservatives, an attempt to limit this immigration and refugee crisis prevalent across the entire EU. As Michael Kenny notes, “a potentially fundamental shift within the character of English national consciousness... depicts politicization in terms of the purported advent of a mass English nationalism. This has grown out of what was once a stable, primarily cultural, vein of patriotism. Some researchers indeed suggest that the English are beginning to envisage their own national-political community as disaffection grows with the terms of the Union” (Kenny 329). Throughout the 20th century, particularly during global conflicts, the United Kingdom would unite as a force against their aggressors. What would happen then, if Britain’s own immigrant citizens became the aggressors? At least in the eyes of British Nationalists, this is the reality of the 21st century. The rise in nationalism comes at a time when the rate of immigration is at its highest from these countries, and at its heart, *Home Fire* tells the story of an immigrant family dealing with the rising nationalism in the only home they have ever known.

Shamsie, in multiple interviews, does not necessarily call herself a political writer, but does note that engagement is a human duty rather than a duty of a writer. She uses the globalist idea of interconnecting the world to allow other ignored voices, including those similar to her own, to speak for the first time. In this vein, Shamsie is able to use the personal struggles of her characters as they continue to deal with imperialist governments. Using personal stories like that of Isma and her family dealing with the consequences of their father's actions and their governments response, Shamsie is able to have her novels make comments on political movements with subtlety rather than be deemed a "political writer." Shamsie uses her novels—clearly written for a particular time—to insert female, immigrant, and other disenfranchised voices into the cosmopolitan conversation.

As for Karamat Lone, he struggles with this dual identity, as a high ranking British official and as a citizen of color. When Eammon forces Karamat to confront this identity at the end of the novel, he must choose between these two identities. Eammon makes a speech labelling himself as a British Muslim, and Karamat must choose how to deal with the situation. Will he deal with the situation as Eammon's Muslim father or as Britain's Home Secretary? After Eammon gives his speech Karamat says, "He's, excuse the expression, digging his own grave... Let's go to the office and watch it unfold... Until this thing is over I don't have a son and I don't have a wife. I have a great office of state" (Shamsie 259). In order to deal with the conflict in his identity, Karamat, similarly to D-503, chooses to shut down one side of his identity completely and align with his (literally) elected identity. It can be assumed that because Karamat rejects this side of his identity, he inadvertently causes Eammon's death. He faces the consequences of leaving his son to his own devices with what Karamat sees as the antithesis of

British identity, Aneeka, and his son dies on international television. I will explore the impact of Eammon's death in the following chapter, though it is important to note that Karamat actually does not witness his son's death, but misses it because he is hidden away by his bodyguards who hear word of an imminent attack. He is unable to escape the role that he has chosen for himself and is unable to see his son for the last time. Ultimately, Karamat dooms both himself and his son by limiting himself to one identity.

Karamat shares many of the same qualities of self-indoctrination as D-503, albeit less severe. Both men are at odds with their personal and public lives; D-503 meets I-330 and realizes that he does not have a personal self like her, and Karamat Lone distances himself from his family and culture while using the culture for his job as Home Secretary. Since Karamat is a Muslim by birth and culture, he is the only Member of Parliament who is "allowed" to tell fellow Muslim citizens to assimilate as a sort of Uncle Tom character. But the two men differ in how much power and influence they have over other citizens. Karamat, a powerful politician in the country, feels the pressure of needing to be like his white colleagues and thus, begins to encourage other Muslim and non-white citizens to assimilate in order to prevent hate crimes and other types of Islamophobia. D-503 is the person assimilating in *We*. It is his struggle to break away from his indoctrination that drives Zamyatin's novel. It can be said that *Home Fire* gives us Aneeka and Eammon's fight against assimilation while *We* gives us D-503's acceptance of assimilation, however delayed. Karamat, the "villain" in *Home Fire*, does not really get the chance to change himself even when his son is the actual victim

We and *Home Fire* are the most similar in what causes these indoctrinated individuals to "break out": their love for other people. Karamat and D-503 begin to change and be affected

when they remember or first encounter love; Karamat remembers the love of his family and culture in spite of radical extremism, and D-503 is finally able to experience love with someone OneState has not chosen for him. Both Karamat and D-503, albeit through different methods and in very different books, experience the discovery of individuality beyond citizenship. But both men have begun the journey of self-actualization through a fundamental truth that they can comprehend: For Karamat, it is the love of his son, and for D-503, it is the concrete reality of math and statistics. Each method is reflective of the time. With the breakthrough of new theoretical math and physics in Russia and around the world, Zamyatin uses these new theories to show the rigidity and formality of OneState. Likewise, Shamsie utilizes the very real London political scene and world to place Karamat as a citizen of Britain first and a member of his family second.

Chapter IV: Rebellion, Death, and Belonging

Eammon Lone of *Home Fire* and D-503 of *We* are both hesitant members of rebellious groups or organizations. As far as Eammon is concerned, he follows his fiancée Aneeka all the way to Karachi, Pakistan, and speaks against his father's Islamophobic policies on television. D-503 quite similarly finds himself swept up in revolutionary activities after falling in love with the mysterious I-330. The men are subject to what I have labeled "death by belonging" where those who wish to belong to a new group or separate from their existing groups often die, either literally via violence or emotionally, in the case of D-503's lobotomy. D-503 and Eammon choose to join forces with or against their society, and it eventually leads them to their doom. These revolutions and protests make for the background of *We* and *Home Fire*, so how do the societies featured in the novels react to the rebellion?

In the novels, OneState and the British government are massive entities that surveil their citizens, distribute propaganda, and quell revolutionary or radical thoughts. In an attempt to gain control of their citizens, these governments and their law-abiding citizens react harshly. When D-503 and other numbers begin to show emotions and dreams after the Mephi invade, OneState lobotomizes their citizens, in an attempt to get them closer and closer to being the robotic citizens that the state desires. After D-503 is lobotomized successfully, he speaks to the leader of OneState: "I, D-503, reported to the Benefactor and told him all I knew about the enemies of happiness. Why could this have seemed hard for me before? I don't understand. Only one explanation: my former illness (soul)" (Zamyatin 224). Not only does the Great Operation (as OneState refers to it) remove the ability to dream and have imagination, it makes D-503 and

other numbers report outliers and enemies of the State without hesitation. Though OneState had tried previously to control nearly every aspect of a Number's life, including their sexual partners and how they spent nearly every minute, this last scrap of privacy and individuality, their mind, is finally taken from them in a mass movement that claims to save the Numbers and make them even more perfect. This falls in line with every piece of propaganda that OneState gives the Numbers encouraging them to strive to be a part of the collective and be proud of their uniformity. The Operation finally does what OneState strived for: protect the state from future revolutions by making the Numbers into working robots.

In Shamsie's novel, we see Karamat Lone choose to collectively victim-blame Muslim citizens of his country rather than those who harass the Muslim citizens. Shamsie writes: "Sources in the Home Office say the Immigration Bill... will introduce a new clause to make it possible to strip any British passport holders of their citizenship in cases where they have acted against the vital interests of the UK" (Shamsie 205). Instead of a massive operation to literally suppress rebellious citizens, the United Kingdom's government, through the initiative of Karamat Lone, use this new clause as a punishment for unseemly behavior. This law acts as discrimination under the guise of national security and safety. Though it is marketed to protect against terrorists and those who have left Britain to join ISIS, what constitutes "acting against the vital interests" in Karamat Lone's eyes could be something as simple as non-assimilation. Karamat specifically targets his Muslim constituents' passports. Those with dual nationality who do not follow the "rules" of Karamat's assimilation could find themselves without their British citizenship even if they were born in England, as in the case of Parvaiz. The message shared by the Home Office is that citizens must do what the government says or face drastic consequences

and be abandoned by the UK government, a metaphorical death. These citizens would be completely abandoned. They would no longer be true citizens, as Parvaiz is when he is discovered to have joined ISIS. They revoke his citizenship immediately, even before he dies. While both figureheads attempt to calm their rebellious or non-assimilated citizens, OneState literally forces a state-wide Operation and succeeds whereas Karamat persecutes his Muslim constituents and causes them to turn against him. He and the government simultaneously designate Muslim citizens like Aneeka and Parvaiz as enemies of the state. By choosing to vilify his son and separate himself from his family, he dies a metaphorical death and throws himself into his work.

Both Eammon Lone and D-503 join or choose to break away from their given path; as far as D-503 is concerned, he goes to meet the Mephi outside of the borders of OneState. In Eammon's case, he allows himself to be changed by Aneeka so that he may help return Parvaiz to England. In both cases, Eammon and D-503 purposefully chose to identify with their lovers and against their governments. After D-503's visit with the Mephi and his self-actualization, he becomes disillusioned with the core of OneState's main propaganda and the idea that it shares with the USSR's form of Communism: The idea of the collective being greater and more powerful than one singular person. As D-503 writes in his diary: "Imagine this: a human finger, cut off from the whole, from the hand—a separate human finger, stooping, bent down, skipping, running along a glass sidewalk. This finger is me. And the strangest, most unnatural thing of all is that the finger doesn't want to be on the hand, with the others, at all" (Zamyatin 100). This analogy shows D-503 that since he has been a part of the collective for his entire life he cannot fathom the idea of rebellion. He, therefore, provides an analogy that shows him to be attached

even though he rebels, like the finger that is still attached to the hand, no matter how hard he tries to break free. Every citizen of OneState is organically connected in his eyes. D-503 uses his violent imagery to explain why even though he feels the need to leave, he will not be able to separate from the collective.

In addition, there is no point at which D-503 is by himself in the world, an independent finger, rather he immediately joins Mephi and returns to OneState with little consequence. Zamyatin writes *We* in direct response to the collectivist movement that the communist revolution was based on. In the words of Douwe Fokkema, “Zamyatin’s *We*... engages in an ironic polemic against the proletarian poets, notably A. A. Bogdanov, founder of the Proletkult in 1917... The Proletkult aimed at the training of new literary cadres from among the workers” (Fokkema 310). The Proletkult was created in tandem with the Russian revolution in 1917 and strove to create art that reflected the new Soviet society and communist ideals. The creation of a state-sponsored organization to create art was upsetting to Zamyatin and this “state-approved poet” can be seen in the character of R-13 who is eventually *still* killed at the hands of OneState. Zamyatin’s choice to kill off the approved poet and artist suggests that even state-sponsored art cannot flourish in Soviet society and that any attempt at creating art cannot be in the hands of an all-powerful government. The novel, thus, closes off the possibility of all separation including individualist artistic expression.

In the case of *Home Fire*, because Eammon feels guilt and shame for abandoning Aneeka, he faces his father and England while recording a message for the media. In doing so, he places himself as a separate entity away from his country. During his speech, Eammon says, “The woman you’ve been watching on your TV screens is a woman who has endured terrible

trials, whose country, whose government, and whose fiancée turned away from her at a moment of profound personal loss... Is Britain really a nation that turns people into figures of hate because they love unconditionally?" (Shamsie 258). Eammon uses the same tactic that his father used, choosing to refer to England as "You" and he and Aneeka as "Her." Because Eammon is still in conflict and has not joined Aneeka in Karachi yet, he does not feel like he is a part of something else, but that he is *not* the type of British that his father wants. He has begun to question, as has Aneeka, if love can even flourish in this version of England, where there cannot be a person with a hyphenated identity, like a British Muslim. Before the conclusions of the novels, both D-503 and Eammon feel separated from their respective cultures and their romantic interests push their transition into another group, Mephi, and the British Muslim community. What happens when they join these groups?

Once D-503 and Eammon feel separated from their citizenship, they eventually meet and connect with their loved ones, however briefly. These men have periods of time where they are not really a part of any group and spend time waxing poetically about their love interests. Whenever they do join, there is a fear, and for both men, it is completely foreign. D-503's interaction with the Mephi, for example, establishes himself as a part of the rebellion, but as his own person, not as a collective. I-330 exalts his arrival: "He has left walls behind, he has come here with me, to be among you. Long live the builder!'... It was totally strange, intoxicating: I sensed myself above everyone; I was... myself, something separate, a world; I stopped being one of many, the way I'd always been, and became just one" (Zamyatin 151). Because he is welcomed as I-330's lover and as a builder rather than by his number, D-503 is immediately thrust into the opposite of what he is used to, a place to be free amongst other free people instead

of copying every action and acting as hands on a finger, moving in tandem. D-503 describes the world as intoxicating and unlike anything he has ever been a part of. While he is still in a group of people, because he is introduced to and joins the Mephi of his own free will, he finally becomes a true individual. D-503's own self-actualization and rebellion from the state echo the novel's author. In the USSR, Zamyatin finds himself unwillingly a part of the Soviet Union's workforce. He is both asked to create art for propaganda *and* is a civil engineer who is tasked with building for the State. Because he published this book, he chose to show off the horrors of a Soviet-like society and all of its flaws. He separates himself from that society, just as D-503 allows the Mephi to hijack the Integral. Zamyatin was eventually given permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union following the publishing of *We* in Russian and he manages to escape where his protagonist does not.

Since Eammon's experience in joining Aneeka is far shorter, we are only given a glimpse of his experience being a part of Karachi's environment. As he arrives in Karachi, Eammon is immediately noticed by journalists and other citizens of Karachi partly due to his father's notoriety and partly due to his own speech. His arrival and the fact that he is recognized leads to his doom. Upon his arrival in Karachi, Shamsie writes: "The journalists race forward, he holds up his hand to them, calls out the name of the woman he's come for... Into this path step two men in beige shalwar kameezes. 'At last you're here,' says one, and opens his arms wide. The man in the navy blue shirt looks over to the woman, but he's in a new place, he doesn't want to offend, he allows himself to be embraced" (Shamsie 273-4). When the local men come up to greet him, Eammon becomes a part of the fold if only for a second. His choice to allow the men to hug him is in an attempt to feel as though he is a part of Karachi and it is implied that he believes that this

will be something that Aneeka wants: for him to finally join her world and separate from his father's shadow. Aneeka's staging of her protest in Karachi to make a point about England and Karamat's Islamophobic policies beckons to him. He sees her stuck, with her brother's body, in an unfamiliar place, far from home and she speaks on his behalf as a fellow British Muslim. At this moment we see that Eammon and Aneeka desire to occupy both of those identities and their desire is intertwined with their tragic love story. Both characters find themselves in these new group settings because they both choose to join, not by propaganda or familial pressure, but because the people that they choose to care about pushing them out of their comfort zones, while simultaneously forcing themselves to reevaluate their individual relationships with their countries.

Both Eammon and D-503 either literally or emotionally die at the conclusion of the texts. Eammon dies in the arms of his fiancée and D-503 kills his function to love. Where the two men differ is whether or not they choose to die by belonging. Both characters face a crucial moment in the conclusion of the novels to belong to a certain group which leads to their doom. D-503, in his depression, chooses to resubmit whereas Eammon is condemned to death because he chooses to stay with Aneeka. Though D-503 does not physically die, he essentially kills what separates him from any other robot Number: his love for I-330 and his empathy. When I-330 is sent away for good, it breaks D-503 down and he feels true depression for the first time in the novel. In response to this newfound feeling of hopelessness, he does not choose to kill himself, but instead he prepares for the Operation to remove imagination, love, and the human soul that he has gained through loving I-330. Zamyatin writes: "Tomorrow morning *I would do it*. It was the same thing as killing myself-- but maybe that's the only way for me to be resurrected. Because you can't

resurrect something unless it's been killed" (Zamyatin 218). The only way that D-503 sees a way out is to forget what he has experienced and submit to OneState. Though he experiences true freedom, he also realizes that freedom comes with pain. The loss of I-330, the woman who inspired this awakening, is enough to convince D-503 to completely give up and become the robot that OneState wants him to be.

Eammon dies a literal death soon after joining Aneeka in Karachi. We see that after he comes to the park where Aneeka is protesting, he is quickly embraced by two strange men and has a bomb-belt strapped to his waist. When Aneeka sees him standing there frightened, Shamsie writes: "The man with the explosives around his waist holds up both hands to stop her from coming to him... And run she does, crashing right into him... At first the man in the navy shirt struggles, but her arms are around him, she whispers something, and he stops" (Shamsie 274). In his attempt to belong and fix his relationship with Aneeka, he dies alongside her when the belt detonates. She calms him in the same way that he is put in danger, by being embraced and given affection, something that Karamat never shows towards him in the novel.

While both men experience rebellion firsthand, through the women they love, they ultimately succumb to death by belonging. These men, in their desire to break away from state-sponsored life full of assimilation, find themselves dying because of their rebellion. This resembles both Brexit era Islamophobic policies in England and the Soviet Union's state-sponsored artistic movements made to create propaganda for the communist country. Both D-503 and Eammon are witness to the propaganda, though they do each break away from either familial connections to their governments or indoctrinated assimilation from fellow citizens.

Conclusion: Contemporary Reception and Thematic Evolution

Political literature is never just a book, never just a piece of fiction. Both *We* and *Home Fire* have many levels of allegory, metaphor, and characterization that are influenced by real people, scenarios, and motivations. We also cannot forget the implications of publishing these novels. For example, Zamyatin fought hard to get *We* smuggled out of the Soviet Union when it was originally published in English in 1924. It was then secretly published in Russian and passed in secret. Thus, Zamyatin was banned by the USSR from publishing anything in the Soviet Union ever again. It took more than 60 years for the novel to be *officially* published in Russian in 1988, 51 years after the author had died. In his lifetime, Zamyatin was eventually granted permission by Joseph Stalin to immigrate to Paris where he died in relative poverty. In his own words in a letter written to Stalin requesting to leave he says, “I do not wish to conceal that the basic reason for my request to go abroad with my wife is my hopeless position here as a writer, the death sentence that has been pronounced upon me as a writer here at home” (Zamyatin par. 19). Zamyatin was clearly aware of how his illegal publication of *We* affected the Soviet Union’s citizens. It was influential and dangerous enough to have death threats made against him and his wife. Instead of trying to smuggle himself out, he chose to go above ground in this letter to Stalin perhaps in an attempt to visibly follow the appropriate laws after breaking through the USSR’s publishing censors, unlike his protagonist’s involvements with rebellion. *We* both made Zamyatin famous and ruined his life. It is also said to have inspired the works *A Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *1984* by George Orwell, and *Player Piano* by Kurt Vonnegut. This was a new type of literature for the 20th century, the “dystopian novel.”

Kamila Shamsie, author of *Home Fire*, has written eight novels, including *Home Fire*, which is to-date her most recent work. She won an award for this novel in 2019 but it was rescinded after the award committee discovered that she was supportive of a pro-Palestinian movement for human rights in Israel. Shamsie also actively writes journalistic pieces in England, including a piece on the fragility of what it means to be “British” as a person of color from Pakistan. Any quick view onto Shamsie’s Twitter shows that she is an activist who uses her platform as an award-winning author to draw attention to causes that are often left ignored, quite similarly to her protagonist Aneeka. Shamsie uses her social media platform Twitter to respond to controversies and draw attention to political situations: “Last year on @BBCr4today - as mentioned here - I asked @sajidjavid about the Home Secretary's responsibility re: paedophiles who the UK deports to countries where they have no criminal record. He seemed to think no responsibility exists” (Shamsie). As mentioned previously, Aneeka in *Home Fire* uses the mass media during her protest to direct attention onto an unjust situation. After Shamsie’s most recent award was rescinded, she took to social media and made a statement about how her free speech had caused the award to get taken away and her voice “silenced.” Her voice, however, was not silenced because just like her heroine, Aneeka, she was able to utilize media and direct attention against her detractors. Both Zamyatin and Shamsie caught trouble for publishing or saying controversial things after they became well-known. Both *We* and *Home Fire* changed their authors’ lives, in the case of Zamyatin for the worse, and in Shamsie’s case, for the better.

In this project, I have explored how different movements in art and politics inspired the authors in how to tell their politically charged stories. I have also explored the creation of the antagonists in the novels and how they come from people or governments that actively oppress

artists and people of color. In addition, I have examined how those citizens of oppressive governments feel about their identity as a British citizen and a Number in the collective. Finally, I explored how these fictional governments responded to the rebellion that the protagonists joined and how these governments used mass surveillance to monitor their rebellious constituents. All of these elements combined in both *We* and *Home Fire* made environments that were frightening and served as a warning yet still reminded readers of actual political environments and situations that killed and hurt thousands of people around the world.

I am eager to see how political literature evolves in the future, when the world is post-Brexit and post-Trump. There are constant rebellions and insurgencies happening in the world that are shared and constantly improving technology could lead to facial recognition and more to suppress any revolutionary action. Following the death of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi Arabian journalist, we are seeing more and more protests and unrest surrounding the first amendment. We constantly and consistently ask if it is safe to critique unjust governments, even in fictional literature.

I would have loved to discuss broad themes in the 20th century more in-depth, including the works of Salman Rushdie, George Orwell, and Chinua Achebe to get a better sense of how the transition between *We* and *Home Fire* happened through the 20th century and how the influence of Zamyatin's works affected literature both in Russia and internationally with the creation of the dystopian genre. I want to still think about the consequences of political literature as I graduate and hope to enter the publishing industry as an editor. The political novels of the world must continue to be published and as I-330 from *We* says, "'And why then do you think there is a last revolution ... their number is infinite'" (Zamyatin 162).

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