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Engaging Politically from the Margin —Critical Cosmopolitanism in the Works of Kamila Shamsie*

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Abstract

This essay explores Pakistani British writer Kamila Shamsie's engagement in local and global politics, focusing in particular on her book-length non-fiction *Offence: The Muslim Case* (2009) and two recent novels, *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and *A God in Every Stone* (2014), which mark two significant temporal points in Shamsie's life: 9/11, and her acquisition of British citizenship. Bringing to the fore the impact of international events, immigration, and national allegiance on Shamsie's political engagement, I argue that these three books bear witness to Shamsie's critical cosmopolitanism, which is locally rooted, universally diverse,

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and essentially self-reflective. Shamsie's cosmopolitanism issues forth from the perspectives of silenced and marginalized Pakistanis, Muslims, migrants, and women, but it does not take plurality simply as the goal when challenging universal norms that are essentially ethnocentric, as exemplified by the global designs of British imperialism and American nationalism. At the same time as it addresses uneven international and cross-cultural relations, it also acutely discerns, from a micro-societal perspective, changes within personal, national, and other local identities. It reflects internally and reflexively on the problems of Islamic fundamentalism, divided loyalties and nationalism, as well as gender politics in Pakistan. Shamsie's works ultimately and paradoxically show that, rather than mobility across borders, reflexive self-understanding is a core component of cosmopolitanism, on the basis of which connection to the world is critically established.

Key Words: politics, critical cosmopolitanism, *Offence*, *Burnt Shadows*, *A God in Every Stone*