



I (Don't) See You:

Absence, Omissions, and Spectrality in the Works of Ishtiyaq Shukri

By Iqra Raza | Peer Review

Abstract

This paper studies the representation of the Muslim body (within the context of the War on Terror) as an instance of disembodied subjectivity that haunts through the remnants of its presence, via a close textual analysis of Ishtiyaq Shukri's novels *The Silent Minaret* (2005) and *I See You* (2014). The paper examines the corporeal absence within the said texts as a template for understanding the modus operandi of the necropolitical regime and the extremities of state violence it implies. It explores

the implications of spectrality within texts saturated by instances of taxonomical categorisations of the body and examines spectrality alongside the implications of absences and omissions in order to reveal how the three interact and inform each other. Conceptualising spectrality as the dominant mode of writing for post-9/11 novels, the paper engages with Derrida's work on deferred mourning in relation to spectres, offering a new paradigm for an understanding of the post-9/11 Muslim experience.

Ishtiyaq Shukri, an award-winning novelist from South Africa, premises his two novels – *The Silent Minaret* and *I See You* – on the extremities of state violence and their impact on individual human lives. The global geopolitical concerns are fleshed out in both the novels through characters whose lives are directly affected by the said politics. The locus of all the violence is the human body, whose presence and the lack of it throughout the text have varied meanings for various contexts. While the literature responding to the War on Terror has thus far largely focused on visibility as a response to the misrepresentations of the Muslim experience, Shukri offers an alternative possibility in writing protagonists who are invisible, and who haunt the texts only through their absent presence (Raza, 2020: 1). While he largely focuses on spectrality as a condition of being, he inscribes it within the body of his works through absences. Hence, the texts are haunted by presences that do not correspond to corporeality in their immediate contexts but are alluded to and presented as memories. Shukri uses spectrality as a metaphor to allude to various kinds of absences including omissions from the public discourse and absence from within the body politic.

Nationality is another contested terrain while undertaking such an activity. Shukri's emphasis hence lies heavily on the transnational aspects of identity, presented less as a treatment for the illness that plagues the world today, than as a mode of diagnosis itself. His protagonists are not preoccupied by their 'ontology', which is not the same as saying that they are not aware of it. (Derrida in *Specters of Marx* uses the term 'ontology' to refer to an ontology reliant on and determined by topos and geographies.) While tracing their belongingness to the nations of their origin and being acutely aware of it, they not only lend solidarities to the oppressed across the globe, they also do not fashion themselves as located individuals. The writer highlights the limitations of such a transnational subject position by describing in detail their physicality which thwarts attempts at dislocation, tracing their origins to specific topos, which also anchors them to various other political or social subjectivities. Profiles and photographs provide the writer a window through which to further his point about spectrality.

Thus, it is no coincidence that Issa Shamsuddin in

The Silent Minaret is a research scholar while Tariq Hassan of *I See You* is a photojournalist. Shukri's most sustained commentary on the spectral, however, is contained in his second novel, *I See You*, where through the means of a war photograph captured by his protagonist, the fundamental ambivalence, characteristic of a spectre, is made apparent. Tying his commentary on spectrality together is the way the themes intersect with the style of the texts. *The Silent Minaret* is crafted as what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographical metafiction' to make apparent the absences and omissions from discourse and representations, historical and otherwise. *I See You* achieves the same through photographs, which are themselves spectral in their superimposition of the past and the present.

Shukri erases the material body from the space of his textual world. In doing so, he hints at a radical subversion made possible by turning to 'hauntology' especially within a context wherein taxonomy reigns supreme and the subject is construed as an object of knowledge. While this might be doomed by the possibility of labelling what is outside epistemology as 'dangerous', Shukri is cautious of the same and meticulously chooses to build the everydayness of the protagonists' lives (before their disappearance) with minute details, making them relatable and unrelatable at once (Raza, 2020: 1).

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In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida uses the term 'hauntology' to describe that which no longer corresponds to the 'essence of life or death', an element that 'is neither living nor dead, present nor absent' (1993: 63). For Shukri, spectrality within the scope of the texts is employed as a stylistic technique, an intervention at the level of style and structure. It allows the writer to operate within and beyond the co-ordinates he chooses to lay his work at. Thus, Dublin talks to London, talks to Pakistan, talks to Palestine. It allows anachronism without slipping into absurdity. It links the War on Terror to colonial violence at the Cape Colony, to the Palestinian occupation, to apartheid-era politics, and so forth. Spectrality for Shukri is less an ontological concern, and veers more towards social and political implications (Raza, 2020: 2).

The Silent Minaret is the story of Issa Shamsuddin's absence from within the space of the textual world. On a dark night, as he sits in Baghdad Café, watching images from Guantanamo and war-torn Iraq being projected onto the screen, Issa – as a History student conducting research on colonial violence in the Cape Colony – recognises the historical pattern of neo-colonial violence, and quietly 'slip(s) through the door into a dawn that is beginning to illuminate the devastation wrought by the violent night' (Shukri, 2004: 48). Shukri draws the reader's attention to Issa's absence from within the text by italicising his dialogues, which bring his absence to the fore by pointing to the fact that they do not exist within the linguistic registers of the novel's world. Issa's absence is hinted as being a deliberate act of disappearance consequent of the protagonist's acute awareness of his corporeality and how it serves the surveillance mechanisms of the necropolitical regime he is located in. In this context, it becomes an act of subversion, of defiance, of resistance. For Issa, who is a transnational at heart, for whom differences are mere conversation starters, the reality of his 'exceptionally good [Arab] looks' thwarts possibilities at subversion while being located and held down by his corporeal frame. He chooses to turn into a spectre, haunting through the remnants of his presence in the form of clues he leaves behind. These clues highlight, quite literally, the margins, the ones out of frame, as they present themselves mostly as scribbles at the margins of texts and newspaper reports.

Shukri's second novel, *I See You*, appearing ten years

after the first, is a story of its protagonist's abduction and disappearance. Tariq Hasan is an award-winning photojournalist, abducted by ZAR Corps, a mercenary organisation. Tariq is also an activist who criticises the involvement of nations in each other's affairs and, more specifically, territorial invasions such as that of Palestine. The two novels are set within different contexts with different power dynamics and socio-political milieus. However, what unites them is the necropolitical power both the texts assume at the helm of their affairs. These regimes locate the individual body as the site for enacting violence. The necrality of their power lies in turning a body into a corpse while controlling the socio-politics of its being. Therefore, the differences between concepts such as resistance and terrorism are eliminated. Tariq's absence, while creating a public hue and cry, does not therefore elicit a response from the state and the deep cabals of power. Derrida, in writing about spectres, says:

'...one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead.' (1993: 5)

The spectre remains outside epistemology and it is precisely this positioning which allows it to survey without being surveyed. It was once there but no longer is, which equips it with the tools of epistemology, while allowing it to escape the box altogether. This liminality becomes a powerful subject position in that it facilitates a diagnosis. The spectre, knowing the epistemological tools through and through and being able to survey the present while being both in it yet outside it, can spot the lacunae and point out the necrosis. Its location outside temporality also allows it to look for solutions from across time. In doing so, it poses questions of social, political, and ethical dimensions. The traditional ghost that has associations with the supernatural has often served a similar function in folklores, and later in magical realist texts. Commenting on this, Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren write:

'Their [the spectres'] representational and socio-

cultural functions, meanings, and effects have been at least as manifold as their shapes—or non-shapes, as the case may be—and extend far beyond the rituals, traditions, ghost stories, folktales, and urban legends they populate’ (2013: 9).

With the early twentieth century turn of the ‘spectral’, the spectre specifically served functions beyond its supernatural element and began to be incorporated within the scholarly and the theoretical. The ghostly at this moment had already shifted meaning from return from the dead to radical possibilities: economic, social, political, and ethical. At the peak of the World Wars, as death became common, the spectres haunting Europe in modernist writing (such as that by Yeats and Eliot) pointed to a lack of spirituality and a hollowness of being. Eliot’s work specifically highlighted the ‘wasteland’ created by the spirits of war whose prayers are uttered only to be aborted by nursery rhymes (Eliot, V: 68–98). Despite the obvious reference to spirits, the works were never classified as ‘ghostly’, the spirits serving to question the ethics of war instead. As the enlightenment came to be critiqued, so did the principles of reason and the insistence on empirical possibilities. The ghost therefore moved away from being a question of rationale to that of ethics. For Derrida as well, a ghost is not so much a return of the dead than it is a metaphorical signifier which exists to raise questions pertaining to justice in the radical possibility of its non-being.

The spectre, in colluding temporal frames, allows for a disruption along the said axis, offering alternative versions of history as well, the ones buried and whitewashed. It becomes especially potent in postcolonial texts where history suffers from omissions at the hands of the colonials. Therefore, the spectre presents a rejection of metanarratives in favour of fragmented versions of it. Del Pilar Blanco and Pereen write:

‘...spectrality is used as a conceptual metaphor to effect revisions of history and/or reimaginings of the future in order to expose and address the way certain subjectivities have been marginalized and disavowed in order to establish and uphold a particular norm, as well as the way such subjectivities can never be completely erased but insist on reappearing to trouble the norm’ (2013: 310).

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* come across as obvious examples of the same. In the former, the revenant is the murdered child of Sethe, who comes back to question her death and to seek answers, ones that in turn raise serious moral and ethical questions. In the latter, however, it is not a return from the dead that is a spectral figure, but an absence. The skeleton of the ‘Sailor’ serves to highlight the extremities of violence inflicted upon civilians by the state in Sri Lanka. Both reappear, one quite literally, the other through the remnants of its presence – a skeleton.

In Shukri’s works, the functionality of the spectre extends more towards the second kind of reappearance, or a presence anchored on to some remnants of their once-being-there. However, much like in *Beloved* and *Anil’s Ghost*, Shukri’s spectres critique the politics that have rendered them invisible and point to histories and geographies of violence to bring connections to the fore and hence offer a diagnostic. For Issa, the link between the War on Terror and the colonial violence is obvious. For Tariq, the absolute lack of ‘freedom’ in post-apartheid South Africa, in Palestine, in Libya, in Yemen, and in Afghanistan require the same cure and hence are part of the same necrosis. Both protagonists are pre-occupied by highlighting connections of violence and building solidarities across the globe. Responding to a question on what distresses him the most, Shukri in an interview said: ‘When this war... is over, we will stand back and say, “What have we done?” I say “we”, because it’s not Syria’s war, or Iraq’s war, or the DRC’s war. They are our wars, they brutalise all of us’ (Shukri, 2014; emphasis added). Shukri’s response highlights the need to be empathetic to others’ suffering by identifying with ‘the other’ as a human being, subverting the particularism of ethnocultural subjectivity. However, since such attempts are prevented from reaching fruition by the state’s insistence on corporeal taxonomy, it is the spectre which deftly fulfils this function in his works.

Hutcheon (2003) contends that ‘Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological.’ Derrida attests to this functionality fulfilled by the spectre in its being a catalyst in this process of opening up. Alternative historiographies

allow for attempts at ‘conjunction’, a process of ridding the space of the ghost by recalling it. *The Silent Minaret* not only does that, but also fashions itself as an alternate historiography with copious footnotes and bibliography. Issa, the spectre, leaves behind a thesis as well as scribbling at the margins of books that trace an alternative course of history, one that proposes a subaltern account of the historical events and their significance. Issa, through his thesis, is able to pick out the transcultural fusion ‘of both people and ideas, in a historical context that is situated contemporaneously. His historical research delves into the hybridity of South African culture, which he uses to comment on the roots of “global cross-pollination”, and how history has been whitewashed to ignore them’ (Frenkel, 2011: 131).

Disrupting the grand narrative of the European Historical discourse, Issa refashions Islam as a religion that played an indispensable role in the anti-colonial uprising at the Cape Colony. Shukri does both to probe the grounds as well as the processes of production of historical knowledge. He blurs the distinctions between history and fiction by imitating the style of a historical narrative for his fictionalised account of history. Absences also form a chunk of the narrative. On a visit to the British Museum with Katinka, Issa is quick to note: ‘*It (the exhibition) was as much about forgetting as remembering. Not a single thought spared for how the exhibits came to be here in the first place*’ (Shukri, 2004: 143; italics original). The absence of the historical records of violence unleashed by colonial expansion that has lent them the exhibits disturbs Issa as much as the exhibits themselves. The absence of the history of Dutch settlement at the Cape Colony, the cosmopolitan cultures of South Africa’s past, and the socio-cultural and intellectual history of Islamic expansions, are just some of the other absences that are rendered visible through the alternate historiography.

It is the work of mourning that allows for a rewriting of some of these discourses. The ‘traces’ left behind by the protagonists are read as an expression of a mourning of their absences. In these ‘traces’ lie the potentiality for subversion. While the politics of mourning of itself offers subversive potentiality, according to Derrida, the ‘traces’ left behind are subversive in their scope, the two protagonists being activists. In an interview, Derrida said of death and mourning:

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‘In my anticipation of death, in my relation to a death to come, a death that I know will completely annihilate me and leave nothing of me behind, there is just below the surface a testamentary desire, a desire that something survive, get left behind or passed on—an inheritance or something that I myself can lay no claim to, that will not return to me, but that will, perhaps, remain....’ (quoted in Naas, 2015: 113)

Both of Shukri’s protagonists, though not dead but ‘disappeared’, leave their ‘traces’ behind, in the form of words and pictures, which are revived in the wake of their disappearance. Though what is mourned is not the protagonists themselves, since as Derrida says, death annihilates the self, the subject to whom memories are attached, the ‘traces’, imply the existence of heirs who inherit them and mourn. However, as Derrida says, it is not only the work(s) left behind which double up as ‘traces’ but ‘everyday gestures’ as well. Hence, the two novels are saturated by instances that build up the everydayness of the protagonists’ lives, which are mourned in the absence of the protagonists themselves. In *The Silent Minaret*, Issa’s friends and family often recall and mourn him through their memories of him. The trace, argues Derrida ‘must continue to ‘act’ and to be readable even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead’ (quoted in Naas, 2015: 116). It must be readable even in the absence of the producer, the interpretation of the trace must not be contingent upon the presence of the producer, as he further adds ‘a writing [or any trace] that was not structurally readable—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing’ (ibid). Issa’s writings,

as well as those of Tariq, are read and understood by people, long after they are gone. Some of Issa's texts, which were earlier thought of as overstatements, in fact start making sense when he is gone:

'At the time she thought it might be overstated, but he wouldn't change it. Now she thinks he was right and sends a text message to his mobile number, as she still does from time to time: Im by da wal@qalqilia. Wen jan landd @cape he plantd a hedj 2 sepr8 setlaz frm locls. Da histry of erly urpean setlmnt @da cape is unversly&eternly pertnt x' (Shukri, 2004: 182).

The same happens with Tariq's photographs. In his absence, they are widely circulated over the media, along with his writings as a symbolic gesture of public mourning. For Derrida, mourning is always caught in a 'double bind', it is both 'within us' as well as 'beyond us'. While the absent subjects are incorporated into our psyche, because they must be in order to make mourning possible, their 'infinite exteriority' remains, marking them as the Other. So, one has to appropriate, in that one has to not leave the dead over to indifference, as well as not appropriate in order to respect their individuality, making mourning always unsuccessful. In *The Silent Minaret*, Issa is caught in this double bind of mourning just before he disappears. He recognises the precarity of the lives of victims of the War on Terror, sees a pattern in their deaths, and thinks immediately of the violence at the Cape Colony. However, he acknowledges the individuality of the chained men in 'orange overalls' and disappears. The aporia of mourning leaves him befuddled. He recognises his own death at the hands of the same power, in his awareness of how power structures operate in the necropolitical regime. In what I call here the moment of successful mourning for Issa, the moment of his realisation of his own death while keeping those of others' distinct, and not entirely incorporated into his psyche, he vanishes. Shukri writes:

'Blurred pictures on the giant screen of heavily shackled men in orange overalls behind high-security fences, their arms chained behind their backs to their feet, sent an ominous hush through the room [...] Issa leaned back into his seat and watched as history rose up from the open manuscript on his table and came to hover between him and the images on the screen' (2004: 53).

It is immediately after this moment that Issa decides to walk into the night and disappear hereafter. Derrida argues: 'the mourning of the Other as such ... has to be incorporated ... But the incorporation should not be total, and in that case, of course, the Other remains foreign in myself, it remains Other, it doesn't become part of myself. I cannot appropriate the Other in myself so it is a failure in a work of mourning, but it is the only way of respecting the Otherness of the Other' (2001: 66). In this aporia, Derrida envisages the politics of mourning. Aporia, for him, becomes the 'provocation to think new paths, new ways through apparent impasses', as Issa does, and thus holds subversive power. Mourning allows us to engage with the (former) subject and puts one on a trail, as we attempt to remake ourselves, enabling a resistance of 'totalizing gestures'. Mourning gives the Other a 'sort of survivance, a kind of living on' (Derrida, 2001: 23). As the protagonists are surveyed by their survivors, they are in turn surveyed from the place of their 'infinite alterity' (Kirkby, 2006: 471) in their being spectres. The protagonists are offered readings, re-readings, analysis, and questioning of their 'traces' that open up space for subversive politics. The mourning does not cease as long as the 'traces' are kept open and the engagement with the dead continues.

As stated, Shukri's concern for allowing space for a subversive politics to emerge is also located within his characters' 'traces', the works and 'gestures' they have left behind. Spectrality of certain communities as a political reality is conveyed through his portrayal of the precarity of the lives of Muslims in the face of the War on Terror in his first novel (including that of the protagonist) and most potently in his second novel through the victims of the Kasalia civil war (and through the portrayal of Palestinian lives, and lives of people like Tariq Hasan). Both Issa and Tariq are deeply concerned about visibilising the invisible. Issa, as well as Shukri, addresses this by fashioning an alternate historiography, while Tariq and Shukri do this by capturing gaps and silences within their works which imply a depth discernible only when one scratches the surface. As Minesh Dass writes:

'Tariq's career as a photojournalist has been driven by his desire to make people see the suffering and humanity of those deemed "beyond the frame." What most interests me, however, is how his photographic work is described, as an endeavour that posits the still

as a surface that is capable of capturing depth' (2017: 3).

The photograph described by Dass is of the Kasalia war, which sits at the heart of the novel. Photographs are spectral in nature in that they superimpose the past onto the present. This characteristic of photographs elicits a bodily reaction from viewers, akin to the enactment of physical violence that the photograph embodies. The picture of a young girl who has been raped looks like 'at first sight, the kind of idealized depiction of rural privation so indulgently romanticized in banal watercolours and sentimental greeting cards' (Shukri, 2014: 41). The moment, a thing of the past being witnessed in the present and lending meaning to the present, has 'women cross their legs as the realization of what has befallen the girl dawns' (Shukri, 2014: 42). This spectral potency of the photograph is what gives it power, and makes Tariq's works 'powerful', so much so that 'with one photograph, he did more to stop it [the war] than UN did with a hundred toothless resolutions' (ibid).

Shukri's focus on spectral subjectivities, however, extends beyond the War and Tariq. He uses the themes of absence, silence, and omissions to further his point. While *The Silent Minaret* is saturated with omissions that Issa takes upon himself to make apparent, *I See You* comments more on the former two aspects. Recent theorisations of spectrality have seen scholars write about how certain subjects are prone to forms of erasure and hence omitted from the public sphere and discourse. Issa sets out to correct this by attempting an alternate historiography of South Africa: not through a process of destruction of the current history, one in favour of another, but rather through locating the aporia in the existing narrative and offering radical possibilities. In *The Silent Minaret*, Issa makes astute and pertinent comments on the totalizing tendency of European historical discourse, and addresses the fissures created by a quite literal 'whitewashing' of history. Issa is acutely aware that historical discourse is made intelligible by structuring events (which entails omissions) into a coherent narrative, subject to power structures in place at a given time (Raza, 2020: 7).

Issa does not just discreetly maintain an alternative account of history, but also once confronts his history teacher at school with another version of the history of the Anglo-Boer War, only to have the latter retort: 'History cannot be re-written [...] History is, and at St

Stephen's we accept only the thorough, rigorous and sanctioned historical versions outlined in the syllabus' (Shukri, 2004: 16; italics original). However, these 'thorough, rigorous and sanctioned historical versions' do not account for the omissions presenting a discord between history and memory. Kagiso's grandmother, commenting on the Anglo-Boer War and the involvement of Baden Powell (who was painted as a national hero) says: 'The only reward our people received for their sacrifice, was more death – more than, 1 000 of our people died of starvation. So, your Boy Scouts' Baden-Powell may be a national hero in Jo'burg and London, but here, among our people, he's a lying thief' (Shukri, 2004: 22). This discord between history and memory is highlighted further by the writer's frequent use of the motif of remembering and forgetting which comes across in his commentary on religions as well. Frances, an Irish Catholic lady enforcing an overlap between Islam and Christianity portrayed as entirely distinct religious civilizations, argues for the Arabic heritage of Jesus, which she thinks the Bible has forgotten: 'And don't you think it peculiar, Father, how one religion remembers things another doesn't?' (Shukri, 2004: 17). While *The Silent Minaret* in addressing these omissions fashions itself as a historical text, *I See You* also presents the novelty of form and fuses it with content in its subversive intertextuality which requires the readers to fill in the absences and silences. As Dass puts it, *I See You* achieves this by enforcing a link between seeing and reading:

'In fact, the ekphratic aspects of the novel suggest a close link between the processes of looking and of reading. As readers, we are asked to imagine an image that we are not shown, and therefore, reading it "simply for what it says" is very complex, given that "what it says" is heavily mediated' (2017: 4).

Absence and silence are referred to time and again in the novel. Both are posited as states of being that further trauma. Leila is asked to maintain silence after Tariq's disappearance, lest it compromise with his safety. This only makes her more traumatised and she decides to contest the elections to be able to speak. However, this leads to her house arrest. Leila's absence from the scene of Tariq's kidnapping also furthers her trauma as she is not able to wrap her head around the fact: 'And the word 'kidnap', an act so alien, so seemingly irrelevant to my life, added yet further to

the absurdity of the announcement such that at first I wondered why this man thought the information pertinent to me' (Shukri, 2014: 105).

In so far as hauntology is described as a disruption occurring along ontological and temporal axes, the Opera scene in *I See You* is important for its temporal deviations. The Opera presents a series of looping scenes, inundated by the refrain: 'Forget about beginnings. All we have is messy middles confused as twisted guts and eternal as the long intestine' (Shukri, 2014: 128). This reference is furthered by Tariq's kidnapping scene recurring and Tariq losing sense of time in the cell, as he says: 'I look to my body as a measure of time [...] But how reliable a measure of time is the male body? A woman would know a month' (Shukri, 2014: 136). This theme recurs in all of Tariq's accounts as he struggles to keep track of minutes, hours, days.

Spectrality is also foregrounded in Shukri's use of the imagery of mashrabiya screens in both his novels. As Yahya explains to Leila in *I See You*, commenting on the spectralised subjects, in this case quite literally through the metaphor: 'The idea [behind mashrabiya screens] is that the women of the house could look out on to the streets without anyone looking at them – they could see without being seen' (Shukri, 2014: 165). Spivak, in her criticism of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, talks about his 'how-to-mourn-your-father book' that fashions haunting as an entirely male-driven economy and ignores the exploitation of subaltern women in its commentaries on the new world order. She argues about the disservice done to the women by assimilating all marginalised groups into a mass of spectral entities. Mashrabiya screens are also a metaphor in *The Silent Minaret* as Issa's favourite spot, linking him with the spectral. Issa in the text is fashioned as a spectral subjectivity, shifted out of the political discourse, who turns himself into a spectre for the subversive potential of a bodily disappearance in a necropolitical regime that has built itself on the premise of surveillance. Thus, Shukri's works skilfully explore the potentialities of spectrality and offer an astute commentary on it for Muslim bodies subjected to surveillance and violence under the neo-colonial US Empire. In commenting on the spectral subjects, Shukri, unlike Derrida, does not portray them as an undifferentiated mass of spectral entities but focuses on each individual subjectivity, and how they are

affected in different ways by the same mechanisms of power. Therefore, Leila, as a woman, has to undergo a different trauma than Yahya as a Palestinian; like Issa as an Arab African Muslim undergoes a very different experience from that of Frances, an Irish Catholic woman. However, Shukri makes sure to portray how geopolitics and necropolitics affect all, even if they are in positions of privilege. In doing so, Shukri calls for an empathy towards the suffering and an awareness of self and how it is intricately involved in global politics and holds potential for change and subversion.

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