

Constant Surveillance: Criticism of a 'Disciplinary Society' and the Paradox of Agency in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

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Abstract:

This paper uses the 2017 surveillance footage of the 42nd Street NYC subway bomber (Akayed Ullah), as a lens through which to challenge dominant literary scholarship concerning Foucault's social panopticon as represented in literature. The images serve as the platform to discuss the triangulation between power, agency, and surveillance, as portrayed in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* (2017). The paper questions whether agency is formed by one's resistance to surveillance by both the state and private corporations, or if agency is a mirage because opposition is written into the dynamics of power. The essay examines how agency is fashioned by the different ways that people interact with observation based on class, religion, and power. A person's position either coerces him or her into obedience as docile subjects, disillusioned him or her to the reality and consequence of constant surveillance, or the person chooses to disobey and manipulate the system. The dichotomy between those who observe versus those being observed questions the ways in which justice is described as either an ethical dilemma of one's conscious, or by legal ramifications for those labeled as transgressive subjects.

Keywords: Panopticon, *Home Fire*; Surveillance; Islam; David Rosen and Aaron Santesso