

# Home Fire: An Evening with Kamila Shamsie

## A VISIONS AND VOICES SIGNATURE EVENT

Monday, November 5, 2018, at 7 p.m.  
Town and Gown  
University of Southern California



### ABOUT KAMILA SHAMSIE

- Kamila Shamsie (b. 1973) is a Pakistani-British writer and novelist. She was born and grew up in Karachi, studied creative writing in the U.S., and moved to London as an adult. She now lives in London and Karachi.
- She has been included in *Granta's* list of "Best Young British Writers" and has written seven novels, including *Burnt Shadows* (winner of an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award), *Kartography*, and *A God in Every Stone*.
- *Home Fire* was longlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Women's Prize for Fiction.
- Shamsie wrote her first novel, *In the City by the Sea*, while she was still in college. It was published when she was 25.
- She represents the fourth generation of women writers in her family.
- In addition to writing novels, Shamsie writes political commentary and poetry.
- She is also a former trustee of English PEN, part of a global literary network that aims to defend and promote freedom of expression, linking literature and human rights.

### HOME FIRE

Kamila Shamsie's 2017 novel *Home Fire* is a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, an ancient Greek tragedy in which a conflict between siblings raises sweeping questions about fidelity to family, the law, and personal values. Across centuries and around the world, *Antigone* has been adapted and interpreted to speak to legal, ethical, feminist, and other concerns. The story has been set in contexts from Nazi-occupied Europe to Apartheid-era South Africa.

Set in contemporary London, England; Amherst, United States; Istanbul, Turkey; Raqqa, Syria; and Karachi, Pakistan, *Home Fire* "plays freely with Sophocles' drama but hews to its themes: civil disobedience, fidelity and the law" (*New York Times*). *The Guardian* says "it is a powerful exploration of the clash between society, family, and faith in the modern world, while tipping its hat to the same dilemma in the ancient one."

Shamsie herself has said, "I wanted to look at a story that was very much in the news . . . and understand it at the human level, via the prism of a 2,000-year-old story of family and grief and love."

### KAMILA SHAMSIE ON HISTORY, FEMINISM, AND IMPERIALISM

Shamsie is interested in the intersections between individual lives and the wider context of history. "This notion that we are individuals who control our destiny is an absurdity if you grew up in a place like Pakistan," she has said.

"Wherever in the world you go, you're living in the world's oldest and most pervasive empire, which is the empire of patriarchy. I don't know a place I've been to where it doesn't exist," Shamsie told *The Guardian* in 2014.

Shamsie also views the world through a postcolonial lens: "I am deeply critical of American writers for their total failure to engage with the American empire. It's a completely shocking failure, not of any individual

writer . . . but it's the strangest thing to look around and say, 'Where is the American writer writing about America in Afghanistan, America in Pakistan?' At a deep level, there is a lack of reckoning."

## THE WOMEN'S PRIZE FOR FICTION

*Home Fire* won the Women's Prize for Fiction (formerly known as the Bailey's Prize and the Orange Prize), the UK's most prestigious annual award for fiction written by a woman. The prize was conceptualized in 1992 and first awarded in 1996, in response to the 1991 shortlist for the Booker Prize (the UK's leading award for fiction), which included not a single novel written by a woman, though 60 percent of novels published that year were written by women.

### RECENT WINNERS INCLUDE:

- 🕒 *The Power* by Naomi Alderman
- 🕒 *The Glorious Heresies* by Lisa McInerney
- 🕒 *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith
- 🕒 *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride
- 🕒 *May We Be Forgiven* by A. M. Homes

## THE ANISFIELD-WOLF BOOK AWARD

The Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, given to Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, recognizes books "that have made important contributions to our understanding of racism and human diversity."

### RECENT WINNERS INCLUDE:

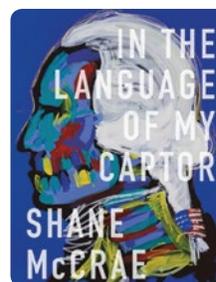
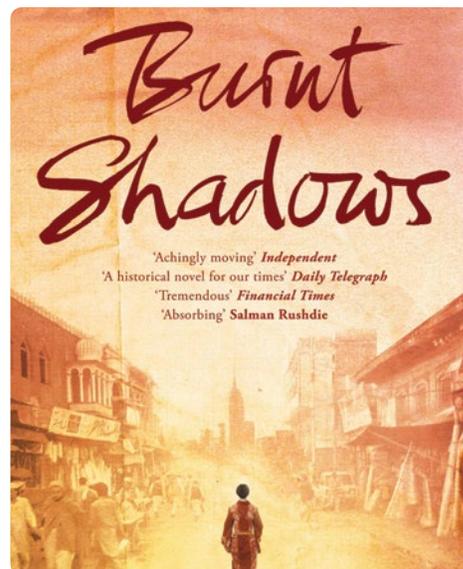
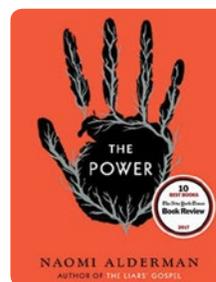
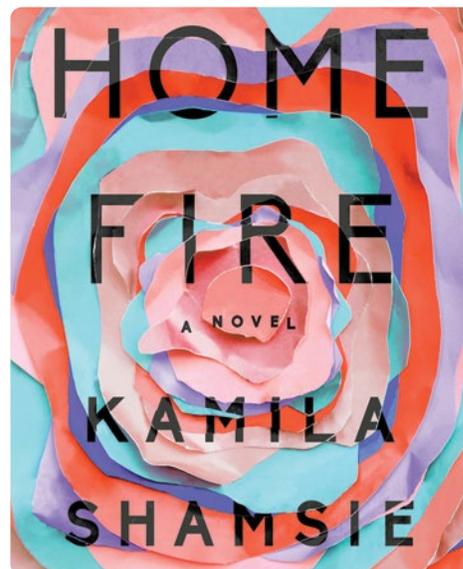
- 🕒 *In the Language of My Captor* by Shane McCrae
- 🕒 *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward
- 🕒 *The Fortunes* by Peter Ho Davies
- 🕒 *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly
- 🕒 *The Association of Small Bombs* by Karan Mahajan

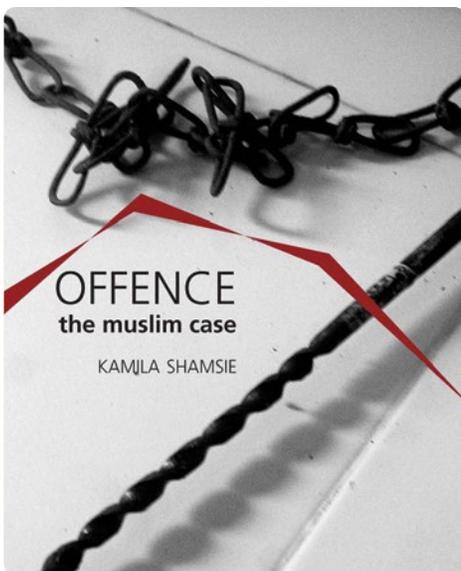
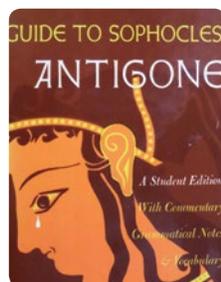
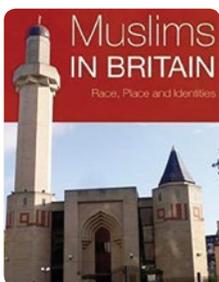
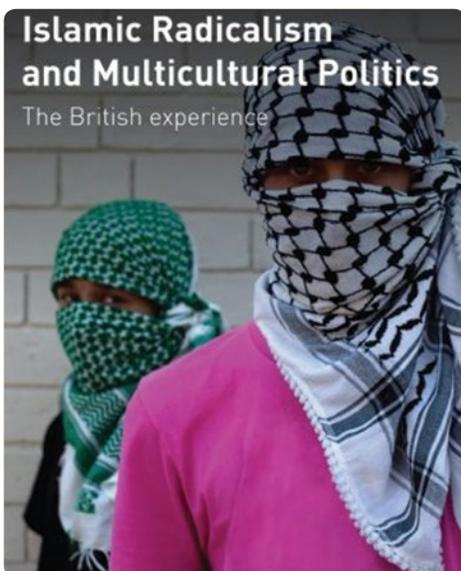
## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- 🕒 Do you agree that "the world's oldest and most pervasive empire . . . is the empire of patriarchy"? If so, why is this the case?
- 🕒 What do you think Shamsie means by "This notion that we are individuals who control our destiny is an absurdity if you grew up in a place like Pakistan"?
- 🕒 Why do you think *Antigone* is so frequently adapted, over centuries and across cultures?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- 🕒 Kamila Shamsie on Twitter  
[twitter.com/kamilashamsie](https://twitter.com/kamilashamsie)
- 🕒 Kamila Shamsie's articles and interviews at *The Guardian*  
[www.theguardian.com/profile/kamilashamsie](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/kamilashamsie)
- 🕒 PEN America  
[pen.org](http://pen.org)





## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**TIFFANEY VALENZUELA** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Kamila Shamsie and tonight's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

- Abbas, Tahir. *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: the British Experience*. London: Routledge, 2011.  
**VKC Library: DA125 .M87 A33 2011**
- Hopkins, Peter, and Richard T. Gale. *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.  
**Doheny Memorial Library: DA125 .M87 M89 2009**  
**Also available online via Ebook Central Academic Complete database**
- Kanwal, Aroosa. *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.  
**Doheny Memorial Library: PR9540.4 .K36 2015**
- O'Brien, Joan V. *Guide to Sophocles' Antigone: A Student Edition with Commentary, Grammatical Notes, & Vocabulary*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978.  
**Grand Depository: PA4413 .A7 O2**
- Shamsie, Kamila. *Offence: The Muslim Case*. London: Seagull Books, 2009.  
**VKC Library: BP167.3 .S53 2009**

### ARTICLES

- Armitstead, Claire. "Kamila Shamsie: 'We Have to Find Reasons for Optimism'." *The Guardian*. June 8, 2018. Accessed October 4, 2018.  
**[bit.ly/homefireguardian](http://bit.ly/homefireguardian)**
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 766-775.  
**Doheny Memorial Library: GN1 .A5 (JRNLSTACKS)**  
**Also available online via ProQuest Arts & Humanities database**
- Samaie, Mahmoud, and Bahareh Malmir. "US News Media Portrayal of Islam and Muslims: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 14 (2017): 1351-1366.  
**Available online via Taylor & Francis Social Sciences and Humanities Library database**

### DATABASES

- **JSTOR** – A comprehensive research database for social sciences, humanities, and more. Contains millions of academic journal articles, books, and primary sources.
- **ProQuest Arts & Humanities** – A contemporary database that focuses on interdisciplinary topics such as art, anthropology, history, philosophy, religion, politics, and economics.